

**Exploring the Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Inclusive Practices of Staff Supporting
Children with Autism, Speech, Language and Communication Needs
in Private Day Nurseries**

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Abstract

Self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997) have the potential to positively influence pupil performance and teacher engagement – but are rarely researched in early years inclusive contexts. Under this premise, a mixed methods design was used to explore the self-efficacy beliefs of 15 early years practitioner (EYP) staff working in England – specifically in relation to practices concerning autistic children and children with speech, language and communication needs (ASLCN). Participants were sampled conveniently and purposively, and data were drawn from an online questionnaire (n = 15) and semi-structured interviews (n = 5). Staff practices were solicited through open-ended questions, whilst self-efficacy beliefs were captured with open-ended questions and an original 16-item Likert scale. The data suggested that inclusive practices were predicated on a goal of participation and engagement and underlined by a philosophy of differentiation and equality. This interpretation was manifest in accounts of staff planning, teaching and assessment – and in the adoption of specific or general methods, tailored to the child and the class. Self-efficacy beliefs were universally high (ranging from 67% to 96% of the maximum possible scale score) and most certain in tasks relating to the environment. EYP judgements were typically based on experiences of mastery and on their interactions with colleagues and children – and these findings validated the addition of a new efficacy source, Visual Feedback on Performance, to the theoretical framework. Whilst the extent to which beliefs influenced practice could not be gauged robustly, there was evidence to suggest that characteristics associated with high levels of conviction had aided EYPs' work. Considered overall, the findings implied that staff practice and their views of this were affected by their interpretations of success and their relationships with children and, therefore, that an understanding of EYP self-efficacy beliefs should be a necessary part of understanding and developing inclusive nursery practices.

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List of Abbreviations

APA	American Psychiatric Association
APPGA	All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ASLCN	Autism and Speech, Language and Communication Needs
ASSET	Autism Self-Efficacy Scale for Teachers
BERA	British Educational Research Association
ChASE	Childhood Autism Self-Efficacy
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DoH	Department of Health
EHCP	Education and Health Care Plan
EYEC	Early Years Education and Childcare
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYP	Early Years Practitioner
EYTS	Early Years Teacher Status
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GTE	General Teaching Efficacy
IDP	Inclusion Development Programme
MES	Ministry of Education and Science Spain
NAS	National Autistic Society
NDNA	National Day Nurseries Association

OOR	Objects of Reference
PACEY	Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years
PDN	Private Day Nursery
PECS	Picture Exchange Communication System
PLA	Pre-school Learning Alliance
PTE	Personal Teaching Efficacy
PVI	Private, Voluntary and Independent
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
RAND	Research and Development
RCSLT	Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
SCT	Social Cognitive Theory
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SEN(D)Co	Special Educational Needs (and Disability) Coordinator
SLCN	Speech, Language and Communication Needs
TEACCH	Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped CHildren
TEIP	Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice
TSED	Teachers' Self-Efficacy Scale Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VFP	Visual Feedback on Performance
WHO	World Health Organization

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Inspiration for the Research

Before I started my PhD, I worked as an advisory teacher supporting families, schools and private nurseries across a borough in Northwest England. In this role, I managed referrals for pupils with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and provided advice and training for parents and practitioners. The majority of referrals were for children under 5 who were being assessed for autism – and many subsequently received this diagnosis around the time they started school. Indeed, the number of autism diagnoses seemed to increase year on year – creating challenge for practitioners reporting little to no experience of autism training, but required, nonetheless, to fully cater for every pupil's needs. These circumstances are not unusual and are evident in the literature. First, research has already referred to the increasing presence of autistic children in early years settings and the requirement for staff to have an understanding of the condition (Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF], 2009). Second, studies probing issues related to funding (Ingleby, 2018) and the availability of specialist staff (Letts and Hall, 2003; Scheuermann et al., 2003) suggest why training is difficult to access in preschool environments (Elfer and Dearnley, 2007; Crellin, 2017). This research, however, does not explain the variations I saw in situ. Despite the fact that I was a specialist providing free training and advice, nurseries differed in how they accessed support. Not everyone felt the need to ask for training. Some occasionally requested help, whereas others repeatedly sought advice. I thought this curious and wondered if the differences were attributable to structures within the nurseries and/or consonant with variations in practice.

1.2 The Study Domain in Brief

For more than 15 years, early years education and childcare (EYEC) in England has been a source of intense debate (Lightfoot and Frost, 2015) – scrutinised in terms of the quality and variability of its provision (Sylva et al., 2004; Griggs and Bussard, 2017) and the status and effectiveness of the workforce (Nutbrown, 2012; Department for Education [DfE], 2017a). These debates have grown from political agendas focussed on parent employment and children's development (Blanden et al., 2017) – and been underlined by initiatives relating to affordable childcare (Tickell, 2011) and early intervention (Rallings, 2014). In part, the initiatives have manifested

as government subsidies for 2 to 4-year-olds (Blackburn, 2016) and precipitated changes in both the proportion of children attending nurseries (DfE, 2018a) and the number of providers available (National Day Nurseries Association [NDNA], 2018e). These changes are not necessarily measures of success. Providers have been constrained by the funding arrangements and many are either facing closure or limiting the number of childcare places they offer (NDNA, 2018d). Access to places is further uncertain in the context of children with special educational needs (SEN) – in the sense of less choice (Blackburn, 2016; Hodkinson, 2016) and fewer pupils accessing their hours of entitlement (Contact a Family et al., 2014). Children under 5 are not universally in receipt of the EYEC they are entitled to. An entitlement which is meant to provide *all* children with skills that prepare them for school (Truss, 2013), and reduce the potential impact of disability (Contact a Family et al., 2014) on their outcomes as adults.

The discovery of issues concerning placement and funding in my initial review of the literature were not entirely unexpected. I encountered them in my role as an advisory teacher and most often in the context of autistic children requiring 1:1 support. What has been more surprising to learn, is that the practicalities of running a private nursery, and the impact of government initiatives on these, are not well-documented in the literature. Despite growth in the number of providers (McGillivray, 2008) and the size of the early years workforce (DfE, 2019b), we still have relatively little understanding of how private nurseries operate (Rumbold, 1990; Boyer et al., 2013) and how practitioners perceive their role (Guo et al., 2014; Crellin, 2017). Although inclusive education is embedded within the early intervention agenda (Blackburn, 2016) and the prevalence of autism (DCSF, 2009) and SLCN (Cross, 2011) is discussed, few studies examine inclusion in preschool settings (Theodorou and Nind, 2010) – and only a handful consider how staff support children with autism (Dimopoulou, 2012; Dawson and Scott, 2013) or language difficulties (Guo et al., 2014). Where early years research exists, it is more often concerned with sector inequalities (Crellin, 2017), professional status and workforce reform (Osgood, 2009; Tickell, 2011). Studies of SLCN tend to highlight issues relating to the accurate identification of children's needs (Cross, 2011; Blackburn and Aubrey, 2016), whereas studies of autism typically focus on interventions concerning school-aged children (Dillenburger, 2011; Crosland and Dunlap, 2012) – and are drawn from small samples (Bond et al., 2016), which are difficult to generalise.

1.2.1 Children with Autism

Autism affects 1.1% or 700,000 people in the UK and is said to be three times more common in males than females (National Autistic Society, 2018a). It is characterised by impairments relating to social communication and repetitive sensory-motor behaviour (Lord et al., 2018) and can be identified more reliably around the age of 2 (Zwaigenbaum et al., 2013), when difficulties typically heighten or skills regress. At this age, difficulties may present as poor eye contact, reduced joint attention and limited communication skills (Chawarska et al., 2007) – though it is widely acknowledged that expressions of the condition vary amongst individuals (Bond et al., 2016; Masi et al., 2017) and throughout the age ranges. The clinical criteria have evolved since their first official publication in 1967 (Ousley and Cermak, 2014) and are now separately defined in manuals produced by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The current editions are known as DSM-5 (APA, 2013) and ICD-11 (WHO, 2020c) and both are significant, for they brought previously discrete subclassifications of the condition together under a single category (Bond et al., 2016) called autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (WHO, 2020c). It should be noted, however, that this umbrella term is not consistently applied in the literature, as some researchers prefer to use labels such as *autistic* spectrum disorder, *autistic* spectrum condition, autism, or Asperger’s syndrome. For clarity, I have chosen the word autism as the generic label (rather than the diagnostic label of ASD), because this is the term I used in my work as an advisory teacher and is the one adopted by the UK’s National Autistic Society (NAS).

1.2.2 Children with SLCN

Like autism, the clinical criteria underlining a diagnosis of SLCN are listed in DSM-5 (APA, 2013) and ICD-11 (WHO, 2020b). SLCN are characterised by receptive and/or expressive difficulties, which may include unclear speech, absent speech, poor attention skills and limited understanding of speech (Blackburn and Aubrey, 2016). This definition, though, obscures the fact that ‘SLCN’ is an overarching term for a variety of conditions that occur in isolation or concurrently (Cross and Hartshorne, 2010) – and that terminology regarding these conditions has changed over time (Reilly et al., 2014). Developmental language disorder, for instance, was previously known as specific language impairment (Beard, 2018) and can be co-diagnosed with autism (Schachinger-Lorentzon et al., 2018). Most SLCN are usually

detected by the age of 2 (DCSF, 2008c) and thought to affect boys to girls in a ratio of 2.5:1 (Dockrell et al., 2014) – although ratios vary between studies. Prevalence is reported as roughly 10% of the UK pupil population (Cross, 2011) but hard to determine, because the SLCN label encompasses multiple areas of need (Mroz and Letts, 2008) and can be described as either a child’s primary or secondary need (Cross, 2011). Another complication is that SLCN can be hard to discern from the language delays (Blackburn and Aubrey, 2016) that correct themselves over time (Nicholson and Palaiologou, 2016), or are associated with autism (Cross, 2011).

1.2.3 Inclusive Education and Self-Efficacy in the Early Years

So far, the discussion has revealed a need to conduct EYEC research in the domains comprising private nurseries, autism and SLCN. What is perhaps less clear, is the need to address the paucity of research that covers the three domains in a single study. More often, the focus appears to be singular or on schools. Some academics, for example, argue that research concerning autistic *school* children does not necessarily generalise to infants and toddlers, because social relationships, cognitive development and communicative processes vary (Zwaigenbaum et al., 2015) across the age ranges. To understand the requirements for very young children with autism should mean researching autism in this age group specifically. Plus, the frequently placed emphasis on failings for school-aged children with autism (All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism [APPGA], 2017) or SLCN (ICAN and Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists [RCSLT], 2018) ostensibly overshadows the quality concerns historically noted in early years settings (Rumbold, 1990) – and implies that inclusion does not apply to nursery-aged children. This is obviously incorrect, as early years staff in England are just as responsible for inclusion as school staff; they need to seamlessly cater for the children who do not have SEN, as well as the average of 1-4 children per nursery who do (DfE, 2018c). Whilst they do not seem to be well-represented in research, early years staff responsibilities and practices are at least set out in the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) (DfE, 2017b) and the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25* (Department for Education and Department of Health [DfE and DoH], 2015).

The Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2015) has been described as a cornerstone in the reforms on special education (Blackburn, 2016) but offers little insight into how inclusion should be realised in practice (Lehane, 2017). Thus, in its efforts to centralise

families in processes that affect their children (Hellawell, 2018), the Code has dedicated more space to legal procedures for parents (see Norwich 2014) than to the strategies that practitioners should use – even though that focus might obviate need for such proceedings in the first place. Plus, in paying comparatively little attention to classroom realities (Lehane, 2017), it has failed to acknowledge the doubts that staff have regarding their capacity to support children with autism (McConkey and Bhlirgri, 2003) or SLCN (Letts and Hall, 2013) – and that these apprehensions increase as the perceived severity of conditions increases (Barned et al., 2011). The issue is not an attitudinal one, though, for it seems that staff apprehensions link with a desire to do their job well (Vaz et al., 2015). Rather, the problem is knowing the extent to which practice will be affected if staff lack faith in their competencies, i.e., if their self-efficacy is low. Relatively few self-efficacy studies have been conducted in preschool settings (Guo et al., 2011; Trivette et al., 2012) and this is surprising, given the projected benefits in school contexts. In school environments, high levels of self-efficacy positively affect pupil performance (Kotaman, 2010), encourage persistence in the face of challenge (Bandura, 1993; Kelleher, 2016) and enhance teacher responsiveness to pupils' needs (Dimopoulou, 2014).

1.3 Designing the Research

Learning that self-efficacy beliefs affect practice in mainstream environments and have relevance in special education (Allinder, 1994), it seemed likely that they would be pertinent in inclusive EYEC contexts. This, coupled with the realisation of gaps in the literature, suggested that my intended research efforts would be worthwhile. Before the fieldwork began, however, it was necessary to think about how it would be structured within a particular research design. Cohen et al. (2008) imply that the design of educational research stems from an initial problem that the associated literature is unable to answer or answer in full. That problem is translated into specific research questions, which guide the design of the study and are addressed through the methodology that ensues. In my case, the initial problem concerned the question of why some practitioners sought advice more than others. It subsequently progressed as need to answer research questions focussed on inclusive practice in private day nurseries, and on self-perceptions of competence related to autistic children and children with speech, language and communication needs (ASLCN). The emphasis on private settings and this specific cohort of children was logical, as it made the

fieldwork more relatable to my experience and the problem posed at the outset, and made it more manageable. The emphasis on self-efficacy also seemed reasonable – not only for its relevance in special education and impact on pupil outcomes (Dimopoulou 2014), but also for its scope to acknowledge the diversity of human competencies. As self-efficacy can additionally explain differences in people’s behaviour (Bandura, 1997), it resonated with the range of staff experience and skills I had encountered as an advisory teacher.

1.3.1 Research Purpose

The research was situated in the private nursery sector and focussed on staff supporting children with ASLCN.

Table 1: Research Motivations and Aims

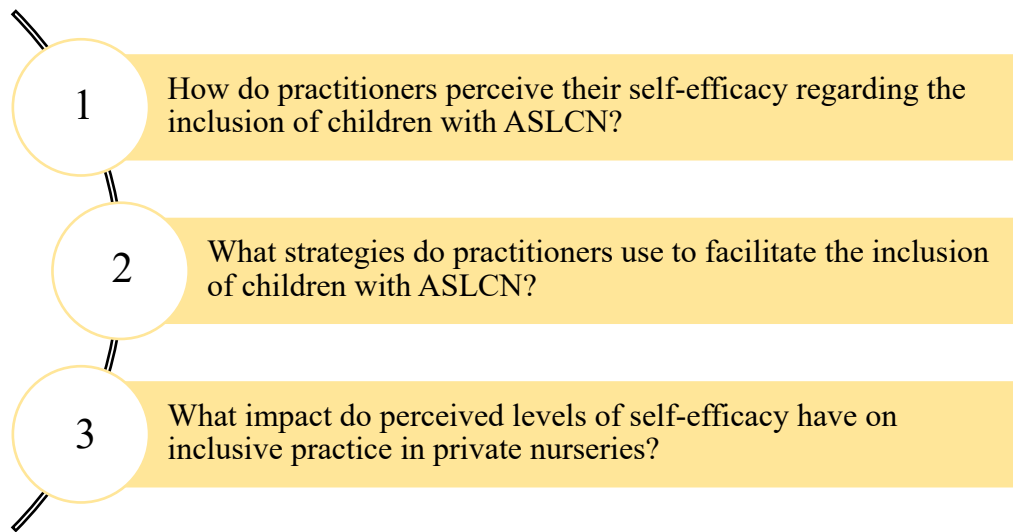
Personal Motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My experience as an advisory teacher and interest in EYEC • The question as to why some early years practitioners requested support more often than others
Academic Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create new knowledge concerning EYEC, inclusion in the context of children with ASLCN and self-efficacy • Gather practitioner views on the inclusion of children under 5 with ASLCN, nationally • Describe examples of inclusive strategies in private nurseries • Explore the relationship between EYP self-efficacy beliefs and inclusive practice in private nurseries • Conduct innovative research through the medium of Photovoice

Essentially, it had one core purpose: to determine whether there was a relationship between perceived self-efficacy beliefs and inclusive practice. This purpose is marked in blue in Table 1, which in itself sets out the motivations and aims underpinning my research. Some of the motivations have already been established within this chapter. Those highlighted in red relate to the methodology underlining the research and the outcomes are reviewed at the end of the thesis, in Chapter 10.

1.3.2 The Research Questions

The study was guided by three research questions, shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Research Questions



1.4 Key Terms

The literature review contextualises the research and its principle constructs and is presented across three chapters representing three themes. These themes cover definitions and descriptions that typically vary according to the researcher recounting them, or the period they originate from. For the purposes of orientation, they are briefly defined here – and then explicated in Chapters 2-4.

Private Nurseries

Private nurseries may be described as businesses that provide education and care for young children (NDNA, 2018c) up to the age of 5 throughout the year (Crellin, 2017). As businesses, they operate ‘for profit’ or ‘not for profit’ and can thus be divided into two subtypes. These subtypes are sometimes labelled, respectively, as ‘private’ and ‘voluntary’ (West and Noden, 2019), meaning that the word ‘private’ can be used as both a superordinate and a subordinate label. In the study, the word ‘private’ will be used in its superordinate form.

Early Years Practitioners

Early years practitioners are defined as the adults involved in the care and education of young children (Brock, 2013; Waters and Payler, 2015) aged birth to 5, regardless of their role. They are not, in the context of my research, portrayed solely as a Level 3 practitioner (DfE, 2017a) – a title linked to specific qualifications.

Autism and Speech, Language and Communication Needs

For the purposes of the fieldwork, children with autism and children with SLCN are referred to as a single group, which is abbreviated in name to ASLCN. This accommodated commonalities between the two diagnoses (see Chapter 3), extended the number of children that participants could refer to during the research phases and corresponded with the cohort I supported as an advisory teacher. Throughout the thesis, references to autism and SLCN will relate to the diagnostic characteristics introduced in sections 1.2.1 and 1.2.2, and the discussions in Chapter 3.

Inclusion

In the study domain, inclusion is regarded as a multidimensional entity, whose success is determined by multiple factors. These concern the suitability of the educational placement (Blackburn, 2016), flexible pedagogy (Thornton and Underwood, 2013), participation and achievement (Anderson et al., 2014). This definition assumes that inclusion is not a vehicle for treating every child in the same way (DCSF, 2009), but the means of enabling all children in variable ways.

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

Special educational needs are defined as learning difficulties or disabilities that necessitate additional or different provision to that usually provided for children (DfE and DoH, 2015). In the Equality Act (2010), disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that significantly affects a person's ability to carry out his/her daily activities. The two terms are often combined to form a broader category of need, which is abbreviated to SEND. In the study, I have largely opted for the term SEN, with the understanding that this could involve individuals who are disabled.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is described as a perception of competence (Dimopoulou, 2016), which relates to a specific task and context (Pajares, 1996) and which affects the course of actions people take in a given situation (Williams and Rhodes, 2016). It is not a judgement of actual competence, but one that is inferred (Bandura, 1986b) and future-oriented (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998), i.e., a judgement that references something not yet accomplished or yet to happen.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis consists of 10 chapters, collectively presenting a review of the literature (Chapters 1-4), the methodology (5-6), the data analyses (7-8) and my interpretations (9-10).

Chapter 1

This chapter introduces the reader to the study, defines its principle terms and explains why I pursued research in this particular sphere. It articulates the purpose of the research and indicates how this is underlined by three specific questions.

Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, the research domain is formulated through a discussion of sources covering 30 years of EYEC in England. It shows how political agendas prioritising maternal labour and early childhood development have transformed public and private sector provision, and ultimately transformed the way that nurseries are organised, run and staffed. Specific attention is given to private settings – to analyse some of the core issues affecting early years practitioners and to narrate the work context of the study participants.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 reviews the literature on inclusion and early years children with ASLCN and explains how inclusive education has developed since the 1990s. This development is charted as shifts in socio-political perspectives on a global and national scale, and linked to emphases on either mainstream or specialist provision. The analysis highlights the diversity of needs associated with children with ASLCN – and shows how these needs are inadequately researched in the field and experienced as challenge by EYPs. Reasons for practitioner views are considered and foreground the potential for competency doubts to affect practice.

Chapter 4

The focus of this chapter is on self-efficacy and Albert Bandura's (1997) *Self-Efficacy Theory*. The theory is expounded in reference to key terms, principles, dimensions and sources, and then regarded amongst a backdrop of academic concerns. During the discussion, the work of Evelina Dimopoulou will also be repeatedly cited,

owing to the (rare) emphasis on self-efficacy in the context of autism and the UK. The critique provides a platform for considering ways in which the theory can be applied to EYP practice and ASLCN – and confirms the importance of research in this arena.

Chapters 5-6

The methodology is described in Chapter 5, which begins with a discussion of the philosophical stance I assumed and then progresses with explanations of its aims, objectives and mixed methods design. The three research questions are restated, and the exposition traces my plans to carry out two phases of fieldwork. Phase 1 is presented in Chapter 6 and covers the design of the instruments, sampling, data processing and ethical practice. Phase 2 is revisited in Chapter 10.

Chapters 7-8

For reasons of transparency, the data from Phase 1 are examined in two chapters – separated according to the two research instruments. Chapter 7 attends to the questionnaire data, whereas Chapter 8 focusses on the interview data. Qualitative data are interpreted with Nvivo 12 and thematic analysis, whilst the quantitative data are examined statistically, using Microsoft Excel and SPSS 26.

Chapter 9

In this penultimate chapter, findings from the fieldwork and observations from the literature are integrated to answer the research questions. The discussion is divided into three main parts – to review the strategies that EYPs use to include children with ASLCN, the nature of their competency beliefs and the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and inclusive practice. Inclusive strategies are interpreted and reframed as a system of structures and processes, whilst the competency judgements are probed within Bandura's (1997) *Self-Efficacy Theory*. Their influences are attributed to five domains of information.

Chapter 10

The thesis ends with my reflections on the study and an appraisal of my work as an early career researcher. I draw attention to the strengths and limitations of the results and thus clarify both their contributions to the research domain and the extent to which the study objectives were achieved. Just as crucially, I acknowledge how the

outbreak of coronavirus prevented the administration of the Phase 2 fieldwork and consider what the photovoice data would have added to the research. In all, these reflections indicate the relative success and significance of the study and serve as a signpost for future research concerning collective efficacy beliefs.

Chapter 2: Early Years Education and Childcare (EYEC)

Chapter 2 examines the research base on early years education and childcare and shows how provision in England has been shaped by socio-political and educational initiatives since the late 1990s. This timeframe captures the most significant changes occurring in the governance of EYEC to date and contrasts with earlier periods largely unmarked by political intervention. The breadth and complexity of the literature has been distilled into three parts – covering the development of EYEC, private sector provision and the early years workforce. Within the analyses, it will become clear that many of the challenges facing early years settings stem from tensions associated with childcare funding, school readiness and practitioner status, and that these all have direct implications for early years practitioners.

2.1 Developing Early Years Education and Childcare

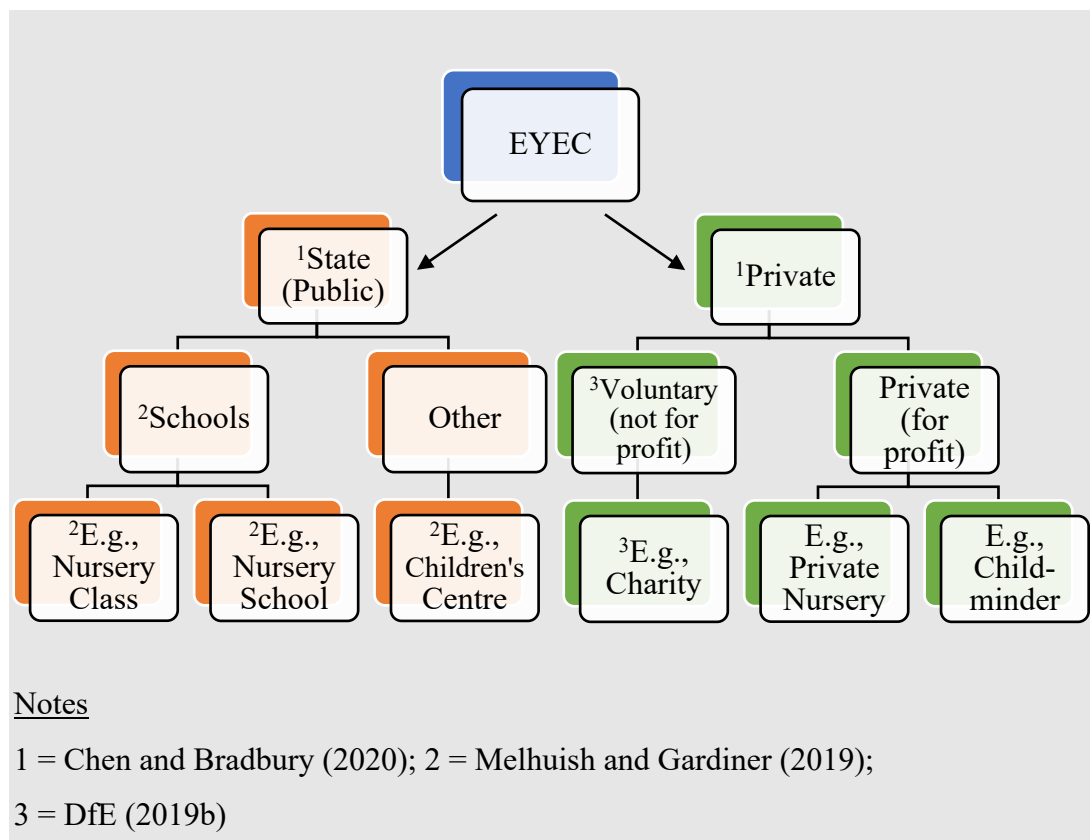
Over the last 30 years, EYEC in England has experienced a “quiet revolution” – where it has become customary for more than 90% of 3 to 4-year-olds to attend an early years setting (Rallings, 2014, p.3) and for mothers to have opportunity to return to work (Blanden et al., 2017). During this period of immense change (Taggart et al., 2015), development in the sector can largely be attributed to the evolving policies of three successive governments: the Labour Party (1997-2010), the Coalition (2010-2015) and the Conservative Party (2015+). These policies are specifically an English party expression, because the devolution of EYEC governance to the countries making up the UK (Campbell-Barr, 2017) has allowed each nation to regulate and fund their services in their own way (Peter et al., 2014). When considering programmes of teaching (Bradbury, 2019) or approaches to childcare (Blanden et al., 2016), this has rendered England as something of an international outlier or late starter – and it is evident that policies have not necessarily secured the improvements desired (Lewis and West, 2017). Instead, they have tended to spotlight workforce inequalities and the diversity of provision within the sector (Blanden et al., 2017; Elwick et al., 2018).

2.1.1 The Mixed Economy of Providers

The EYEC sector in England is built on a mixed economy of providers who serve children of different ages below 5 (Chen and Bradbury, 2020) – and may additionally provide ‘wraparound care’ for older children, e.g., in breakfast clubs or

after-school clubs (DfE, 2019b). The majority of settings register with Ofsted – a body that inspects education and care services for children and young people of all ages (Ofsted, 2020) – and their details are kept on either the *Early Years Register*, which covers provision for children below the age of 5, or the *Childcare Register*, which covers children aged 5-8 or older (Hevey, 2018). Categorising providers is difficult, however, because of the many ways in which they are reported (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: Nursery Education and Childcare in England: Provider Types



Some researchers distinguish between public, private and voluntary provision (West et al., 2010) – using the word ‘public’ to include nursery classes in a school, nursery schools and *Children’s Centres* (Melhuish and Gardiner, 2019); the word ‘private’ as an umbrella term meaning ‘for profit’ and ‘not for profit’, and the phrase ‘not for profit’ to mean voluntary settings (Crellin, 2017; West and Noden, 2019). The word ‘private’ can also be shorthand for ‘PVI’ provision (Blanden et al., 2016), where PVI stands for private, voluntary and independent (Roberts-Holmes, 2012; Martin, 2014). To add to the complexity, the DfE (2019b) alternatively gathers private and

voluntary settings together as ‘group-based providers’ – uniting those offering full day and sessional care for children under school age and wraparound care for children under 8 (DfE, 2018d). In the research context, I have opted for a simple public / private sector split and for this to mean school nursery classes and private nurseries.

2.1.2 Defining the Sector

To analyse the development of provision in England, it is first important to clarify the terminology. This is because the sector comprising education and childcare is differently entitled amongst researchers. Some, like Van Belle (2016), use the heading ‘early childhood education and care’, whilst others truncate the label to ‘early childhood education’ (e.g., Bradbury, 2019). Still others use the term ‘childcare’ or ‘daycare’ as shorthand for settings that provide care and education (like Boyer et al., 2013; Peter et al., 2014), or prefer the term ‘early years’ to ‘early childhood’ (e.g., West et al., 2010). ‘Early childhood’, moreover, can encompass different age groups, referring to preschool or primary school children. In the study domain, I will use the term *Early Years Education and Childcare* (EYEC), so that the two fields are discernible – but occasionally abbreviate this to ‘early years sector’, for the sake of reading variety. The term ‘early years’ will mean all children aged birth to 5 and complement the nomenclature used elsewhere in the thesis, i.e., regarding staff titles (Early Years Practitioners) and their framework (the *Early Years Foundation Stage*).

2.1.3 A Sure Start

The need to develop EYEC provision has become a government mantra in English politics, oft repeated in parallel or successive drives – where society’s problems are revisited, preceding efforts are criticised and further improvements are sought. In the late 1990s, the problems causing the most concern related to the number of single parent families, levels of poverty (Blackburn, 2016) and existing systems of care for young children (Grover, 2005). At that time, families living in the poorest wards were reliant on benefits for 60% of children, and their neighbourhoods were marked by vandalism, vacancy and dereliction (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001). Childcare provision was often too costly for parents and – with only 830,000 registered places – not plentiful enough to accommodate the 5.1 million children aged below 8. When options were available, e.g., as family centres, preschools and childminders, these varied in terms of what they could offer and were not responsive to the needs of

individual families (DCSF, 2004). The way forward was delineated by the (then) Labour government in a report called *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* and plans were formalised in the ensuing 1998 *National Childcare Strategy* (Grover, 2005). This was to be supported by the *Sure Start* programme, which would initially target families living in the 20% most deprived wards (Bouchal and Norris, 2014) and aim to halve the numbers of children experiencing poverty by 2010 (Sawyerr and Bagley, 2017).

At the heart of Labour's manifesto were pledges to integrate education and childcare services and to raise the quality of their provision (Grover, 2005). In this, they were influenced by research revealing the long-term impact of early years programmes on disadvantaged children (Melhuish et al., 2010) – including their potential to moderate the risk of poor employment and poor mental health (DCSF, 2008c). Disadvantage is variably constructed in the literature but often in conjunction with SEN (Chen and Bradbury, 2020), low levels of income, socioeconomic status and qualifications (Melhuish et al., 2019). Labour committed to their promises by adding two other national programmes over the next seven years – expanding the childcare sector with more than 100 *Early Excellence Centres*, 45,000 full daycare places (Smith, 2007) and 524 *Sure Start* centres (Melhuish et al., 2010). *Early Excellence Centres* were inspired by the *Excellence in Schools* paper and began as a pilot in 1997 (House of Commons Library, 2017) – issuing support for parents, childcare for their children and training for adults (Smith, 2007). Full daycare places, in contrast, grew out of the *Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative*, which was introduced in the year 2000 and concentrated on childcare provision in the poorest regions of the country (Melhuish et al., 2010). These initiatives were short-lived and essentially scrapped after 2004, due to the severity of failings reported in childcare services.

Choice Matters

In 2004, a report entitled *Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children* (HM Treasury, 2004), commented on developments in the childcare sector and outlined government proposals for the coming decade. It explained that patterns of provision had been transformed across the country, but that this was still unable to offer parents the choice, affordability and quality they needed. *Sure Start* was included in the scrutiny of provision and problematic in that services were not robustly integrated, nor universally available to meet popular demand (Bouchal and Norris, 2014). Efforts to streamline education and childcare services were thus seen as an urgent priority – and

particularly in view of Victoria Climbié's death, in 2000. Her mistreatment and abuse had been repeatedly missed by a range of agencies and offered a terrible example of what could go wrong when services did not work together. To reduce the likelihood of circumstances repeating, the coordination of education and childcare services was reconceived as a new framework of universal services and written into the 2003 Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (DCSF, 2003). The two policy documents had implications for provision throughout the EYEC sector and specifically for the *Sure Start* programme, which was subsequently transformed from a series of area bases to a network of *Children's Centres* (HM Treasury, 2004; Bouchal and Norris, 2014).

The Rise and Reduction of Children's Centres

The transformation from *Sure Start* to *Children's Centres* was broken down into three waves over the next six years (Rallings, 2014). After the re-designation of the *Sure Start* programmes, the *Neighbourhood Nurseries* and the *Early Excellence Centres* (Bouchal and Norris, 2014), provision was first extended across the regions representing the bottom 30% of the deprivation scale and then across areas of affluence. Though the changes were swifter to realise in some parts than others (Smith, 2007), 3500 *Children's Centres* were created by 2010 and alternatively established as new builds, on existing sites or school grounds (Bouchal and Norris, 2014). Funding approaches differed between the centres (Rallings, 2014) as control passed from central government to local authorities (Cheater, 2019), but cross-centre objectives were ostensibly common: to improve children's outcomes, reduce social inequalities and help end child poverty (Bouchal and Norris, 2014). To deliver these objectives, *Children's Centres* were expected to work with partners across the early years sector and, together, issue services entailing: education, training and employment for adults; support for health; advice on parenting skills; childminding and nursery education (Cheater, 2019). The programme and the pace of change were obviously ambitious (Bouchal and Norris, 2014) and not without flaws.

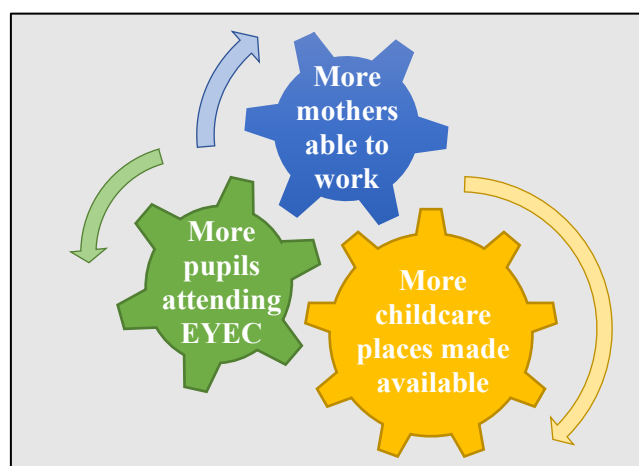
Early judgements of the changes were less than complimentary. A national evaluation had been ongoing since 2001 (Melhuish et al., 2010) and the first major piece of work began with the experiences of 15,000 families and their children across 150 *Sure Start* centres – to understand the services being provided and their impact (Sawyer and Bagley, 2017). Practitioners were interviewed and observed and settings were rated using different scales. The quality of educational provision was only

deemed adequate (Melhuish et al., 2010) and findings suggested that it was the ‘intact’ families living in deprived areas who were gaining the most benefits, since they were using support networks inaccessible to deprived mothers. Further concerns emerged during the second evaluation spanning 2009 to 2017, when it became apparent that funding reductions had forced many of the centres to close or to reduce their services (Sawyerr and Bagley, 2017). In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, which hit the UK particularly hard in terms of the levels of public debt and the ensuing period of austerity (Richardson, 2010), local authority budgets were cut and *Sure Start* funding fell 28% between 2010 and 2013 alone (Sawyerr and Bagley, 2017). As such, the evaluations tested the government’s vision of centres being at the heart of every community and of *every* child having the best possible start in life (Rallings, 2014).

2.1.4 Attending to the Business of EYEC

The need to give children the best possible start in life was a focal point in the 1998 *National Childcare Strategy* and implicit in initiatives aiming to expand the quantity and quality of childcare provision. This aspiration was formulated by the Labour government as a social investment (Adamson and Brennan, 2014), which would tackle social inequalities (Campbell-Barr, 2012) and strengthen the economy in the short and long-term. By expanding the supply of childcare, for instance, mothers could earn an income that would benefit the family (Lewis and West, 2017), whilst children would receive an education that could improve their potential earnings (Taggart et al., 2015) and quality of life (Lewis and West, 2017) as adults.

Figure 3: The ‘Virtuous Circle’ of Provision and Employment



The state would profit through their employment and independence from welfare support, and the nation would develop as a population with better health and lower rates of crime (Van Belle, 2016). It meant that childcare provision and maternal employment were not just crucial elements in the economy, they were also virtuous elements driving it (See Figure 3). Yet, the notion of social investment was highly contentious, even with its potential rewards. It made parents the source of poverty-related problems (Simpson et al., 2015) without addressing the variables that perpetuate disadvantage (Sims, 2017) – and substituted moral arguments for economic reasoning (Powell and Gooch, 2015), by viewing people as human capital (Ang, 2014) and EYEC as a market product (Adamson and Brennan, 2014).

Neoliberalism in the Context of EYEC

During the late 1970s, a French philosopher called Michel Foucault ran a series of lectures on the subject of neoliberalism – a mode of reasoning which emerged as a way of understanding how people and systems are governed in society (Savage, 2017). Although neoliberalism can be applied to multiple domains of life, it is particularly relevant in the context of EYEC because this can also be described in economic terms – not only as a social investment (Adamson and Brennan, 2014), but also as a form of commoditised childcare (Boyer et al., 2013) and a market. Indeed, market structures have literally gained currency in recent decades, growing seven-fold between 1980 and 2008 (Cooke and Lawton, 2008), faster than the economy overall in 2011 (Powell and Gooch, 2015) – and recently estimated in worth as £5.5 billion (Penn, 2019). For researchers like Savage (2017), neoliberalism is especially significant in today's education systems, as it provides a platform for understanding the forces that shape them. It reframes education as an economic good that produces human capital and gauges human capital as the value of an individual's skills, knowledge and experience. This educational good is delivered as a service within a competitive market, which gives consumers more choice (Adamson and Brennan, 2014) and connotes better quality (Lewis and West, 2017). Interpreted in the nursery context, it positions parents as consumers, who choose the provision most appropriate for their family (Chen and Bradbury, 2020) and by doing so, proactively invest in themselves, their children's future and the economy (Savage, 2017). Providers thus compete for parents (Crellin, 2017) in the EYEC marketplace and are expected to cultivate the quality and affordability of their product, in a way that makes them the most attractive option.

Market Forces, Links and Cogs

Neoliberalism was initially embraced in the UK during the era of Margaret Thatcher and led to reforms centralising the role of markets and the privatisation of government services (Savage, 2017). Until 1998, this meant that there was relatively little state intervention in the context of EYEC (Lewis and West, 2017) and provision for the under-5s was largely a private concern (Rallings, 2014), privately funded (Cooke and Lawton, 2008). The Labour government, however, made EYEC a public sector matter during its period of administration and instigated a number of supply-side (Lewis and West, 2017) and demand-side (Cooke and Lawton, 2008) funding reforms, to strengthen the childcare expansion. Demand-side funding is a source of financial aid for parents that, in the form of vouchers, tax relief or subsidies, allows them to choose and pay for the EYEC they prefer. Supply-side funding is also a measure of financial aid, but allocated to providers or programmes – helping them cover the costs of their operation (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2005).

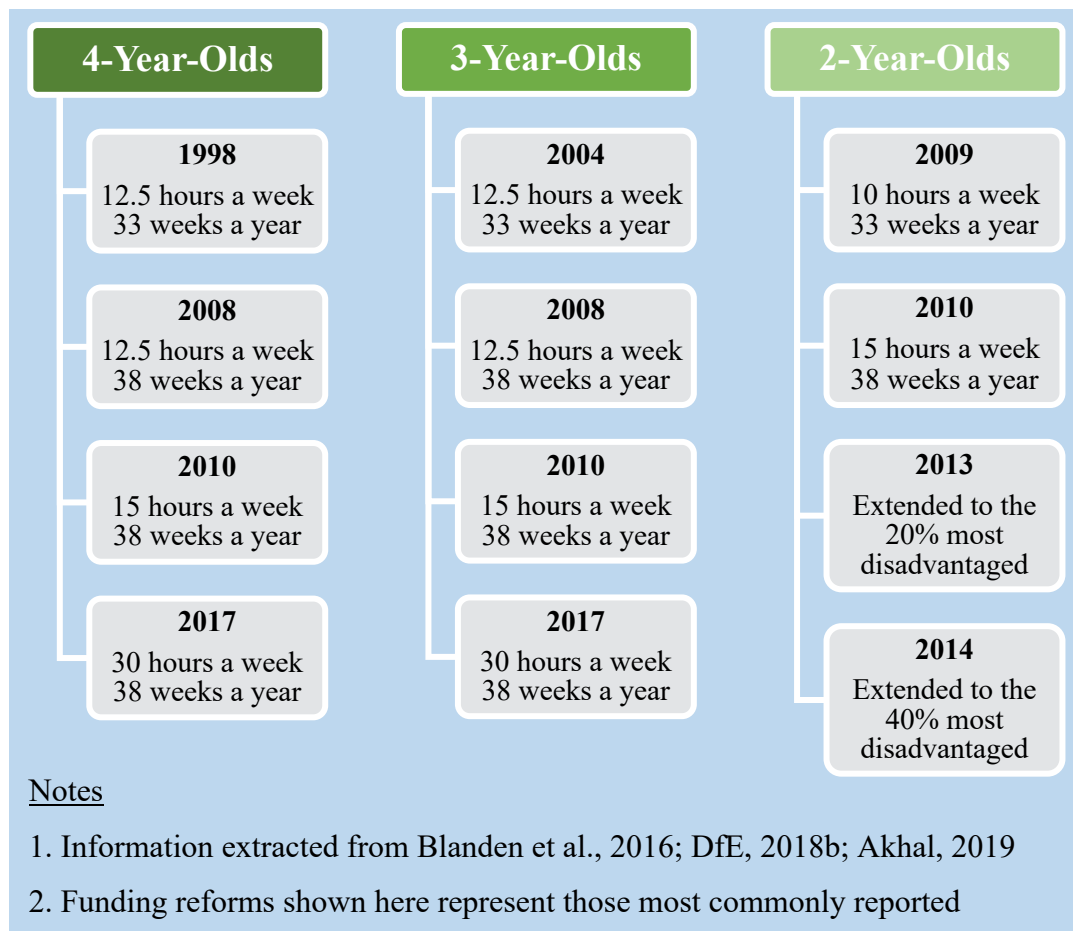
Over time, the funding reforms propagated economic shifts in the childcare market. Substantial growth occurred in the PVI sector, whilst *Sure Start* – a supply-side funded scheme (Lewis and West, 2017), contributed as another source of EYEC. Financial aid for parents also increased (Cooke and Lawton, 2008) and funding for childcare places began to roll out (Blanden et al., 2016). This funding source gradually extended down the age ranges – to the point at which it now potentially entitles children aged 2-4 to freely access up to 30 hours of EYEC per week, 38 weeks a year (Akhal, 2019). The free entitlement was hugely significant, since it finally brought England in line with European neighbours already providing free childcare (Blanden et al., 2016) – and radically transformed how provision was regarded and purposed in the sector. Neoliberally speaking, EYEC was no longer just part of an agenda linked to an economic market. Rather, education (Savage, 2017) and childcare became central cogs *in* the market – and the market became an agenda in its own right (Lewis and West, 2017).

The Price of Entitlement

Transformations within the field of EYEC *were* radical but neither swift nor equitable. It took more than 10 years for the provision to become freely available to children aged 2-4 and, to date, entitlements remain limited in the number of hours and weeks that they cover. Plus, some are only issued to families that meet certain criteria

and prioritise the needs of some children over others. When the scheme launched in 1998, the Labour Party initially focussed on 4-year-old children and subsidised 12.5 hours of their childcare, for 33 weeks of the year. Children aged 3 had to wait until 2004 for the same allocation (Campbell-Barr et al., 2018) – though funding for both age groups was evenly matched in time and quantity after this period (See Figure 4). In 2010, the newly established Coalition government endorsed Labour’s intention to increase the allocation (Lewis and West, 2017) and this was designated the *Universal Funded Early Education Entitlement*, covering 15 hours of childcare a week, 38 weeks of the year. In 2017, the *Extended Funded Early Education Entitlement* – or 30-hours of free childcare – also became available (DfE, 2018b), but was specifically designed for working parents, whose weekly earnings were minimally equivalent to 16 hours *National Living Wage* (Lewis and West, 2017; Akhal, 2019).

Figure 4: Key Reforms in the Funding of Free EYEC Places



Funding for 2-year-olds followed a slightly different trajectory and largely targeted disadvantaged children – reaching out to the families lowest on the deprivation scale in 2009, in the lowest 20% in 2013 and in the bottom 40% in 2014 (Akhal, 2019). Over time, however, additional 2-year-old groups have become eligible for free childcare, including children in local authority care, children with SEN and disabled children (DfE, 2018b). Funding for these latter groups has similarly been made available for children aged 3-4, but via different streams with separate eligibility criteria (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2018). These streams, together with the entitlements, are not merely a demonstration of the complexity of financial structures (Lewis and West, 2017) that must be negotiated in securing funding. They are also at the heart of the provision anxieties asserted by private providers (Hevey, 2018).

Funding Limitations

The funding anxieties predominantly involve the 30-hour entitlement for 3 to 4-year-olds (NDNA, 2018d) and have led many nurseries to increase their fees and restrict the number of childcare places they offer (NDNA, 2018e). This is because the money, which is distributed to settings via their local authorities (Campbell-Barr, 2012), is not necessarily the full amount issued by central government. The amount is based on an hourly rate set out in the department's *Early National Funding Formula* (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2018) and multiplied by the number of 3 to 4-year-olds in each nursery setting (West et al., 2010). Providers say the arrangements are not realistic (NDNA, 2018e) and the issue is compounded by the fact that local authorities are allowed to retain 5% of the allocation to support specific groups of 3/4-year-olds more flexibly (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2018). In theory, it means that nurseries face shortfalls that are the difference between the recommended hourly rate and the money they actually receive. In practice, the shortfalls intensify the financial pressures that nurseries are facing (NDNA, 2018b) and jeopardise their profit margins (Lewis and West, 2017). The magnitude of the problem was recently illustrated by the NDNA (2018e), through a survey documenting an annual shortfall of £958 per child under the universal entitlement and £2166 per child under the extended entitlement.

Free but Not Free

Amidst the complexity and confusions regarding EYEC funding, one thing is clear. Free childcare is not free and comes with a price. Despite the government's promise of affordable childcare (Truss, 2013) and their annual spend of roughly £2 billion on the 3/4-year-old entitlements (Blanden et al., 2017), providers and parents have to subsidise children's places, and costs averaging £200 a month (NDNA, 2018e), remain prohibitive for many families (Penn, 2007; Adamson and Brennan, 2014). They have to do this, moreover, within an economy previously affected by the recession of 2008 (Crellin, 2017) and the cuts associated with the Coalition leadership (Lewis and West, 2017) – and in one more contemporarily affected by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, which forced nurseries to close to the majority of children (Penn et al., 2020). Plus, whilst funds distributed from central government may provide settings with an income stream (Hevey, 2018), this is both reliant on and reduced by children's attendance. Even without the pandemic, which saw 0 to 4-year-old attendance rates fall from roughly 1.4 million to below 250,000 (Blanden et al., 2020), take-up of children's places through the entitlements was not assured.

Take-Up Issues

Take-up, in the context of entitlements, is a relatively new research subject (Campbell-Barr et al., 2018) and has implications for children as well as providers. Children might be entitled to a free place but will not benefit from EYEC if their families do not use it – and 10% of parents applying for the 30-hour funding in 2019 *did not*, according to the DfE (2019c). Furthermore, whilst the number of children accessing a place is cited as an 11% increase from the year before and suggests that more families are making use of free childcare, this does not necessarily mean there has been an increase in the total number of 3/4-year-olds using EYEC. Despite the fact that the UK has one of the highest enrolment rates (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019), some researchers believe that the entitlements have served more as a reduction in the fees that parents are already paying for childcare (Penn, 2019), rather than as an incentive for those who are not currently using it. Increasing rates of take-up, therefore, are perhaps more striking in the sense of those using it for free than those who pay. A study documenting the rising number of 3-year-olds accessing free childcare between 1999 (37%) and 2007 (90%), (Blanden et al., 2016), for example, contrasts with research questioning the nature of this growth – in

respect of the take-up amongst 2-year-olds (58% in 2015) (Lewis and West, 2007), the lower rates amongst disadvantaged children (Penn, 2019) and the 41% take-up of children with SEN (Contact a Family et al., 2014). These rates are significant because it has been suggested that EYEC can narrow the achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their peers (Melhuish et al., 2019) and decrease the risk of pupils developing learning difficulties from 1/3 to 1/5 (Taggart et al., 2015). If children are not taking up their place, then the full extent of these benefits may not be realised.

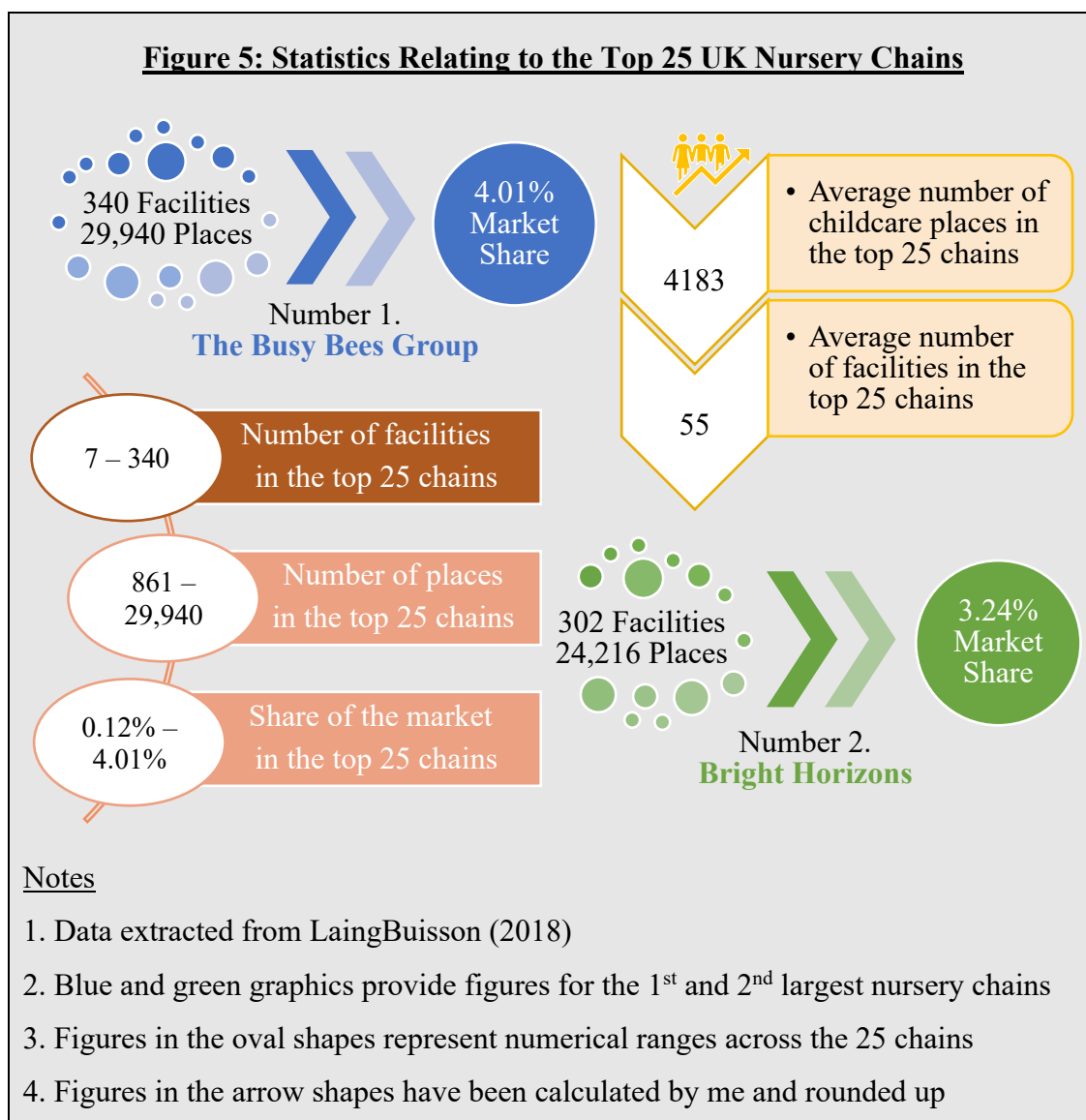
2.1.5 Conceptualising Quality in EYEC

One of the advantages of providing EYEC is that it can serve as a medium for early intervention, which focusses on the needs of children aged birth to 3 (Allen, 2011) and thus has specific import for children with autism (Zwaigenbaum et al., 2015) and SLCN (ICAN and RCSLT, 2018) (See Chapter 3). Its success, however, is dependent on the quality of provision, which can differ in its practice and conception. Interpretations of quality, for instance, vary from one country to another (Van Laere et al., 2012) – but are usually analysed in terms of processes and structures (Blanden et al., 2017; Melhuish and Gardiner, 2019). Process qualities are inherent in the practical elements of EYEC (like the curriculum and pedagogical practices), whilst structural qualities are associated with the organisation of the provision (like staff-pupil ratios or staff qualifications) (Paull and Popov, 2019). Structural qualities are supposed to be easier and cheaper variables to measure in the field (Blanden et al., 2017) but are nonetheless meaningful, due to evidence suggesting that improvements made to structures like staff qualifications can positively influence the process qualities of provision (Melhuish and Gardiner, 2019). As such, the workforce is often implicated in discussions of quality (Elwick et al., 2018) – albeit in ways that tend to accentuate differences between EYEC provision in the public and private sectors.

2.2 Divisions Within EYEC Provision

Contrary to the dearth of research exploring work in a private day nursery (Crellin, 2017), growth in the number of providers during the last three decades (Campbell-Barr, 2018) means that the majority of provision for children under 5 is now in the private sector (Martin, 2014; Hevey, 2018) – and that the day nursery is considered to be the most common type of childcare setting (Boyer et al., 2013). In 1989 – the year before the first government review of provision for 3 and 4-year-olds

in England was completed – there were 1696 private nurseries providing 45,026 childcare places (Rumbold, 1990). In 2019, there were 23,300 private providers offering more than a million places (See DfE, 2019b). Yet, even these impressive figures do not entirely illustrate the picture of expansion in the private sector, or indeed, beyond the UK. Whilst roughly half of EYEC providers are standalone settings (Spielmann, 2020), takeovers are common (Penn, 2019) and many operate as part of large international chains. This is because the childcare market has attracted investors from countries around the world and now includes ‘super groups’ and small to mid-sized groups of nurseries (LaingBuisson, 2018), who supply 47% of all nursery places (Spielmann, 2020).



The largest chain, *Busy Bees*, offers nearly 30,000 childcare places across 340 facilities (LaingBuisson, 2018) and has been top of the provider groups for more than a decade (Gaunt, 2018). This international chain serves eight different countries in four continents (Penn, 2019) and continues to grow – aiming for a further 32 nurseries in China over the next five years (Gaunt, 2018). The second largest chain is an American-based company called *Bright Horizons* (Penn, 2019) and is comparable to *Busy Bees* in the number of facilities it owns and the places it provides.

2.2.1 Private Day Nursery and School Nursery Structures

Using the data in Figure 5, we can deduce that the average number of childcare places in the nurseries run by the *Busy Bees* or *Bright Horizons* chains, is in excess of 80. This figure is not unusual, for it sits within the range of children usually accommodated by a nursery, which is 15-150 (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years [PACEY], 2020). It is, however, greater than the average of 45 (NDNA, 2018a) and much larger than the average number of 34 in a school nursery (DfE, 2019b). This contrast is one of many examples of how a private day nursery (PDN) can differ from its competitors. As an illustration, PDNs can provide full-time or sessional care for children throughout the year (West et al., 2010; Crellin, 2017), between the hours of 7/8am to 6/7pm (PACEY, 2020), whereas public providers tend to offer 3 hours of education (Chen and Bradbury, 2020) in school hours, over five mornings or afternoons a week (Blanden et al., 2017). PDNs are also more flexible in terms of the age range of children they admit – able to accommodate those from the age of 6 weeks to 5 years (Crellin, 2017; PACEY, 2020), in contrast to school-based nurseries who cater for children aged 2-4 (Chen and Bradbury, 2020). Additional differences can be found with regards to staff structuring – and are important to consider, as they affect the way that settings are run and how children are supervised.

Private nurseries function as businesses and may be managed within a hierarchy involving directors and shareholders (Crellin, 2017), a manager and a deputy (DfE, 2017b). Premises have traditionally included homes, tailor-made properties or community centres (Penn, 1995), but regulations are such that providers now have scope to occupy shop fronts, warehouses or industrial workspaces (Penn, 2019). By way of comparison, school nurseries are led by a headteacher and a governing body (Paull and Popov, 2019) and typically function within a school or specially-built building (PACEY, 2020). The number of staff on the respective teams varies according

to the type of provider but is usually larger in the private nurseries, than in the school nurseries, comparing an average of 11 staff (NDNA, 2018a) with 6 (DfE, 2019b). Teams also vary by their teacher leadership, for teachers are only a legal requirement in the public sector and this has implications for the ratios of support that must be provided for children (Blanden et al., 2017). Nursery classes in schools, for example, must work on an adult-to-child ratio of 1:13, be managed by a qualified teacher and be supported by at least one member of staff with a Level 3 qualification (DfE, 2017b) – which is broadly equivalent to an A-Level (DfE, 2019b). PDN ratios are more complex because they cater for a wider age range of children and may or may not include a teacher. In the context of children aged 3 and above, this can be the difference, respectively, between a ratio of 1:13 and 1:8. With or without a teacher, however, there must be at least one member of staff with a Level 3 qualification and at least 50% of the remainder qualified at Level 2 (DfE, 2017b). Level 2 is equivalent to at least four GCSEs, graded A* to C or 4 to 9 (DfE, 2020d).

2.2.2 The Nursery Framework

The qualifications and ratios that distinguish private nurseries from nurseries in schools are a product of the safeguarding and welfare requirements set out in the EYFS framework. This must be followed by all early years providers in England (Blackburn, 2016; Bradbury, 2019) and primarily defines what children should be learning and achieving at different stages, from birth to 5 (DfE, 2017b). The framework has been updated several times since it was first introduced in 2008 (Crellin, 2017), with the most recent edition applicable from September 2021 (DfE, 2021) – but still retains some of the legislation that prefaced it in the *Childcare Act 2006* (West et al., 2010). From the outset, there were two principle aims: to combine aspects of education and care within a single programme (Roberts-Holmes, 2012) and to standardise learning experiences for all children, so that these were consistently high in quality, irrespective of the setting (Tickell, 2011; Campbell-Barr et al., 2018). The aims and scope of the framework were bold, for they confronted the status quo and had implications for providers throughout the sector. Political agendas merging education and care services were in process but had not yet been translated into instructional practices, across settings. Plus, existing teaching programmes were divided across the age ranges. The *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* covered the educational needs of children aged 4 and over, whilst the *Birth to Three*

Matters document covered care and education for the younger children (Crellin, 2017). Some settings also had to comply with the *National Standards for Under 8s Daycare and Childminding*. The 2008 EYFS framework replaced all three (DCSF, 2008b).

In its present form (preceding September 2021), the EYFS framework consists of seven areas of learning. These are divided into three prime areas (Communication and Language; Physical Development; Personal, Social and Emotional Development) and four specific areas (Literacy; Maths; Understanding the World; Expressive Arts and Design). Each area is accompanied by 2-3 early learning goals, which specify the knowledge and skills that children should acquire. There are 17 goals in total and assessments determine whether children are meeting, exceeding or not yet reaching them (DfE, 2017b). Timewise, assessments are summed on a 6-weekly basis (Bradbury, 2019) and at two key phases – first when children are aged 2-3 and then in the year that they turn 5, i.e., before the first year of compulsory schooling (DfE, 2017b). This end of stage assessment is moderated by the DfE’s Standards and Testing Agency and finalised as the child’s *EYFS Profile*. It indicates the characteristics of a child’s learning in three dimensions (e.g., regarding how they play and explore) and describes his/her overall attainment in relation to each of the 17 learning goals (Standards and Testing Agency, 2019). These learning goals and statutory outcomes have spawned tensions through concern that they conflict with the ethos of a child-focused framework (Lightfoot and Frost, 2015). Practitioners in particular have commented on the difficulty of making such judgements (Bradbury, 2019) – and the burden of paperwork is well-established. This was already apparent in the first independent review of the framework, which called for a reduction in the number of learning goals from 69 to 17 and for the requisite 117 pieces of evidence to be limited to 20 (Tickell, 2011).

Taking Care of Education

It is obvious from the design of the EYFS framework that assessments of pupil learning are deemed vital from a very young age and specifically in the year before compulsory schooling. In effect, the final *EYFS profile* is more than just a record of children’s progress during their nursery years: it is a measure of readiness for school in Year 1 (DfE, 2017b). School readiness has attracted a lot of attention in the research domain and manifests in studies stressing the importance of children successfully transitioning (Ashton et al., 2008) from the nursery environment to the school setting.

Many researchers, though, are critical of the way in which school readiness has been interpreted in practice and suggest that it has detrimentally reversed the pedagogical relationship between nursery and school. Rather than seeing the EYFS profile as the determinant of what children are taught in school, it seems that the didactics of schooling are determining what children learn in their nursery (Van Laere et al., 2012), i.e., that the nursery classroom has become a place where children must act out school to get ready for school. Rehearsal for school in itself seems a useful endeavour, but not when it runs counter to opinion that education and care should be regarded equally (Roberts-Holmes, 2012) in the delivery of the EYFS.

Educational skills are often debated as being more important (Van Laere et al., 2014) and separate to care skills or practices that meet children's basic needs (Van Laere et al., 2012). Indeed, these perspectives are imbued in references to the 'schoolifying' of the EYFS and its alternative description as "a national curriculum for under-fives" (West et al., 2010, p.156). So, where opportunities for play-based learning are supposed to be embedded in the EYFS (Roberts-Holmes, 2012), these tend to be supplanted by adult-led activities that group children together by ability and accentuate subjects like maths and English (Bradbury, 2019). Tickell (2011) foresaw the risk of young children being taught to read and write too early and thus encouraged practitioners to think instead in terms of school *unreadiness*. Unhelpfully, her explication of 'unreadiness' was just as confusing, for its presumed focus on developing children's existing skills (rather than schooling those desired), was still used in the context of being ready for school. The confusion continues and intimates a great need to clarify what school readiness means for nursery practitioners trying to make sense of their duties in the classroom. At the very least, it should not mean taking more care over education but a genuine focus on care *and* education alike.

2.3. The Early Years Workforce

So far, the divide between education and care has been discussed as a matter of integrating services in the sector and as a pedagogical dilemma intensified by an agenda on school readiness. Yet, it would be wrong to assume that the subtexts of value and status are only relevant in terms of the settings that children attend and what they learn. They are also highly significant in discussions pertaining to the workforce – particularly when trying to reconcile the low status usually afforded to the profession (Simms, 2006; Lightfoot and Frost, 2015) with the value attributed to staff roles

(Nutbrown, 2012; DfE, 2017a). In fact, the significance of status and value cannot be underestimated in workforce narratives because they affect practitioner perceptions and conduct (Brock, 2013; Lightfoot and Frost, 2015) and impinge on almost every research avenue. As such, they have featured in studies of nomenclature (Stonehouse, 1989; McGillivray, 2008), the workforce profile (Van Laere et al., 2014; Peeters et al., 2015), professional identity (Osgood, 2010; Lightfoot and Frost, 2015), working conditions (Boyer et al., 2013; Crellin, 2017), workforce reform (Nutbrown, 2012; DfE, 2017a) and professional development (Waters and Payler, 2015; Ingleby, 2018).

2.3.1 Early Years Practitioners

Owing to the late development of formal EYEC provision in England (Thane, 2011), conceptions of an early years workforce with a body of staff were little more than a reference to nannies and teachers, until the 1960s. Since then, as the workforce has developed, so too has the confusion regarding the multiple roles and job titles of the staff (McGillivray, 2008) – who are perhaps as diverse as the field they work in (Dockett, 2019). The confusion over job titles is unique to the sector (McGillivray, 2008) and borne out by local (Crellin, 2017) and global variations (Peeters et al., 2015). In the UK, non-qualified teachers may be known as nursery nurses, *Early Years Educators* or room leaders (Crellin, 2017), whilst qualified teachers are known simply as teachers if they work in the public sector, or early years teachers, if they work in the private sector (See DfE, 2017a). Internationally, the seemingly predominant research focus on teachers means that this title recurs as a generic label with only minor modifications, e.g., as studies of early years teachers or early childhood education teachers (Happo et al., 2013). When references are made to other roles, these are often suggestive of the education-care divide – exemplified in name as early childhood professionals, childcare workers and “[n]ice ladies who love children” (Stonehouse, 1989, p.61), or as advocates, caregivers and specialists (Harwood et al., 2013).

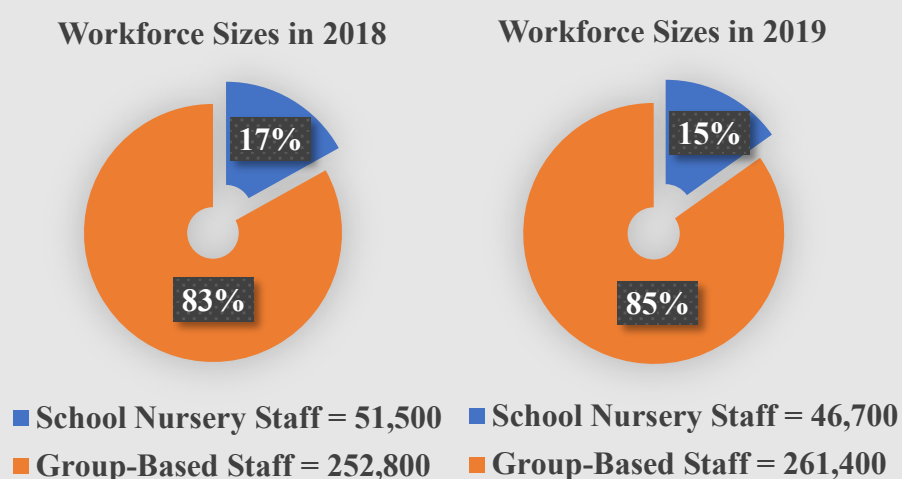
Titles for practitioners have arguably cultivated a stereotype of expectations – presuming that the job involves a certain type of work for a certain type of person (Osgood, 2009; Peeters et al., 2015), with a particular set of skills or qualifications. The stereotype, moreover, seems to have grown internationally, exemplified by a study debating the perceived status of the Australian profession (Stonehouse, 1989). ‘Early childhood professionals’, for instance, are likely to invite different presumptions regarding their work and capabilities than those for ‘caregivers’ – despite the similarity

of their tasks and skill sets. The argument is relevant to the English context because entrants to the sector currently train to become early years *teachers* and early years *educators* (DfE, 2017a) and this has overtones of the school readiness agenda, with its emphasis on education. To maintain a neutral position throughout the thesis, I have adopted the term ‘early years practitioner’ but aligned it with that generically used by other researchers. That is to say, it will mean any adult who works with children aged birth to 5 in an early years setting, regardless of their role or qualifications (Lightfoot and Frost, 2015; Waters and Payler, 2015).

2.3.2 The Workforce Profile

Throughout the public and private sector, the expertise of early years staff is known to be wide ranging (Martin, 2014) and most likely a consequence of the multiple entrance routes to the profession (DfE, 2017a). Though there are some broad trends, a definitive picture of the early years workforce is hard to establish, due to differing patterns of employment (Hevey, 2018) and the way they are described.

Figure 6: Public and Private Sector Workforce Sizes, 2018-2019



Notes

1. Data extracted from DfE (2018d) and DfE (2019b)
2. School nursery staff represent the public sector and group-based staff include those from the private sector
3. Although the year totals suggest that the workforce has grown (from 304,300 to 308,100), this rise is only true of the two types summed here

The DfE's annual survey of childcare and early years providers, for example, provides a breakdown of the number of staff working across the sector and their qualifications, but employed different calculations during the years of 2018 and 2019. The 2019 breakdown was more specific in terms of the staff groupings, but less specific in terms of the qualifications (compare DfE, 2019b with DfE, 2018d). The full size of the workforce was calculated as 430,500 in one year (DfE, 2018d) but 363,400 in the next (DfE, 2019b), which was a concern because it seemed to 'confirm' that staff retention is a problem in the field (DfE, 2017a; Hevey, 2018). It is hard to judge the true scale of the problem, though, when the DfE (2019b) newly refers to private sector staff, omits reception class staff and leaves out the number of staff involved in wraparound care. Using Figure 6, the firmest conclusions to be made, size-wise, are that public sector staff form a body much smaller than those who are group-based, and that there have been decreases in the former and increases in the latter.

Gender Preferences

The workforce comparisons are striking in their indication of roughly five times as many staff working in the private sector than in the public sector. However, this difference is not as stark as that involving gender, where women are repeatedly prominent – in research (see Kilgallon et al., 2008; Ingleby, 2018), in practice (Simms, 2006; McGillivray, 2008) and in most European countries (Peeters et al., 2015). Across more than half the countries of the European Union, less than 1% of the early years workforce is male (Van Laere et al., 2014) and England fares little better, with an estimate of 1-2% (Nutbrown, 2012). This relative absence of men (Hevey, 2018) has generated unease amongst policymakers arguing that children should spend time with male role models (DfE, 2017a) and that men can positively influence their gender socialisation (Van Laere et al., 2014). Yet, efforts to recruit men have traditionally proved unsuccessful, due to perceptions of the job as work for females (Beltman et al., 2019), i.e., as the realm of women dealing with children's "inherent mess and chaos" (Manning-Morton, 2006, p.46), "changing nappies and wiping noses" (Nutbrown, 2012, p.15). Unfortunately, this attribution overlooks the impact of the myriad policies focussed on maternal employment, which have allowed nurseries to employ women and encouraged women to work (Osgood, 2009) – and ironically, created situations where working women pay other women to tend to their children (Cooke and Lawton, 2008). It also overlooks research positing female attitudes and practices as male

recruitment barriers – with examples of women questioning the motives of men wanting to work with young children and doubting their contribution (Stonehouse, 1989), or through their feminisation of the workplace – in terms of its design, the materials and the activities undertaken (Peeters et al., 2015; Tennhoff et al., 2015).

2.3.3 Conditions of Service

One of the biggest problems associated with the gender-stereotyping of EYEC is the stereotyping of its discourse. This is because debates that consider the roles and perceptions of men and women lose sight of what the job actually entails and the contexts in which it operates. Unless they acknowledge the complex and multiple roles that early years practitioners must assume (Harwood et al., 2013), or until attention is devoted to the wider issues of pay and contracts (Hevey, 2018), professional development and career progression (Nutbrown, 2021), it is difficult to see how recruitment patterns can change. As such, there is a distinct dearth of research respecting the work of early years personnel (Kilgallon et al., 2008; Pre-school Learning Alliance [PLA], 2018) and few beyond the profession who understand the challenges (Brock, 2013) and demands that come with the job (Boyer et al., 2013; Lightfoot and Frost, 2015). These demands are amplified by the stress of accountability for heavy workloads, high standards and the latest political developments (PLA, 2018) – which must all be managed in noisy and unpredictable environments (Beltman et al., 2019).

Inclusion Barriers Affecting Provision

The unpredictability and pressures of working in a private nursery cannot be fully understood without attention to the instability and pressures facing EYEC as a whole. It is obvious that issues regarding pay, professional development and workload are “troubling features” (Archer and Oppenheim, 2021, p.21) – and manifest in high rates of turnover (Cameron, 2020), the 48% of leavers preferring a job in retail (NDNA, 2019a) and the 45% of childcare workers claiming state benefits to supplement their wages (The Social Mobility Commission, 2020). However, these are not the sum of the problems rendering the system “a failure on many counts” (Moss and Cameron, 2020b, p.10) – one that is falling short of its aims and failing those “that need it most” (Archer and Oppenheim, 2021, p.3). Efforts to prevent poverty have not worked and decades of neoliberal governance (Moss and Cameron, 2020a) have

arguably run counter to an inclusive vision (see Chapter 3), which values all children equally and overcomes access and participation barriers (Booth and Ainscow, 2002). One in 23 children is homeless in England (Rosenthal and Lakhanpaul, 2020) and almost 1 in 3 live in poverty across the UK (Lloyd, 2020). Approximately one third of 2-year-olds are not accessing the 15 hours of free EYEC they are entitled to and access is particularly difficult for children with SEN (Archer and Oppenheim, 2021). The number of those waiting for a place has more than doubled over the last decade (Rosenthal and Lakhanpaul, 2020) and funding for their places does not reflect the cost of providing specialist SEN services (Lloyd, 2020). High-quality EYEC is vital for all children and yet it seems that children's experiences are extremely varied and unequal – determined by where they live, what they need and what their parents can afford (Archer and Oppenheim, 2021).

Funding Barriers Affecting Provision

For researchers like Moss (2020, p.59), the inequalities and inconsistencies of provision are a sign of how an agenda seeking education “for all” has transformed into *childcare* “for some”. This agenda relates to the 30-hour funding entitlement, which was highlighted in section 2.1.4, for both its selectivity and inadequacy. These issues are not merely theoretical. They are detrimentally impacting on provision throughout the sector – threatening the livelihoods of every practitioner, the sustainability of smaller and rural providers, and the education and care of the most vulnerable families. Nurseries may only be receiving 2/3 of the money they need to function (Early Years Alliance, 2021) and the chains they belong to are continually at risk of collapse (Penn, 2018). Sector-wide, the rate of closures has increased by 153% since the extended entitlement was introduced in 2017 and many of the closures are occurring in areas of deprivation (NDNA, 2019b) – making it even more difficult for children from low-income families to access the high-quality EYEC they need (Archer and Oppenheim, 2021). This access difficulty is being exacerbated on two further counts. First, by the rise of the bigger nursery chains and their preference for setting up in areas of affluence (Penn, 2018). Then second, by the terms of the entitlement, which reach out to working and higher-income families (Lloyd, 2020). In essence, the best of provision is currently limited to the wealthiest (Penn, 2018) – providing them with double the amount of free childcare (Archer and Oppenheim, 2021) than that available for unemployed and disadvantaged families. It is in these conditions of service that EYPs are expected to

provide high quality EYEC (DfE, 2017a) and to cater for the needs of every child (DfE and DoH, 2015).

General Duties

Within the nursery, the duties of the staff are many and varied. As an example, they must write reports and prepare food, partner with professionals and communicate with parents, care for children and educate them (Crellin, 2017). They must foster strong relationships with children (Boyer et al., 2013) and create environments that simulate aspects of home (Elfer and Dearnley, 2007) – without eclipsing the eminence of parents (Boyer et al., 2013) and whilst evidencing effectiveness (Osgood, 2010). All of these responsibilities, furthermore, are subject to the toll of an invisible type of labour (Crellin, 2017) known as an emotional labour (Beltman et al., 2019). Within EYEC contexts, this can be defined as the effort needed to manage the dissonance between the positive outward responses shown to children and how a practitioner actually feels (Boyer et al., 2013). In research, many staff cite their relationships with children (Brock, 2013) and sight of their progress (PLA, 2018) as key rewards of the job, but some also view children as “barometers of the emotional climate of the nursery” on which they are judged by parents (Boyer et al., 2013, p.533). EYPs have to cope with the pressure of managing children’s well-being until they are received by parents, regardless of how they themselves are coping. This emotional labour is neither measurable nor remunerated (Crellin, 2017).

Problems with Pay

During a two-phase study exploring the complexity of roles in early years settings, 12 practitioners shared information about the core issues and policy changes impacting on their working lives (Brock, 2013). Representing different levels of leadership in different educational phases – and recruited via the recommendations of local authority managers and university lecturers in three West Yorkshire authorities, participants were given opportunity to engage in a questionnaire, interview, video dialogue and focus group meeting. Participants shared a belief that early years work was physically and mentally more demanding than that of primary schools – but were less united when contemplating the sufficiency of their pay. Some viewed the salary as secondary to the vocation itself, whilst others were concerned by the limited scope for pay rises. The opinion split is interesting because practitioners were drawn from

the public sector and not the private sector – where pay and working conditions are generally worse (Lightfoot and Frost, 2015) and staff admit that they do not choose the job for its pay (Elfer, 2007). Contrary to public sector employment, staff are more likely to work shifts, do not usually have non-contact time and their average rates of pay are lower (Hevey, 2018). The lack of pay parity is particularly acute amongst the teachers (Beltman et al., 2019), since those in the private sector with *Early Years Teacher Status* (EYTS) are paid much less than their public service colleagues with *Qualified Teacher Status* (QTS). In 2020, the difference equated to more than £9000 – with starting salaries for EYTS staff quoted as £16,000 – £18,000 (Swain, 2020) but £25,714 – 29,915 for QTS staff (DfE, 2020c). The disparity prevails because there are no agreed pay scales for EYTS teachers and pay capacity in private settings is affected by the amount of funding received via the free entitlements (Hevey, 2018).

2.3.4 Professional Identity

If low rates of pay (Hevey, 2018) do not reflect the value or importance of an EYP (PLA, 2018), then it would be reasonable to deduce that higher rates of pay do. In consequence, this would bestow public service practitioners with a higher degree of status than those in the private sector. Flawed as this reasoning may be, early years staff in the private sector *are* typically associated with lower levels of status (Lightfoot and Frost, 2015) and these are not just the perceptions of observers (Beltman et al., 2019). They are also inherent in practitioners' beliefs of how they are viewed by others, e.g., “as babysitters” (Irvine et al., 2016, p.3), and in the comparisons they make with their public sector peers; it is hard to retain a sense of worth in contexts of poor pay and working conditions (Manning-Morton, 2006). In the literature, status is discussed as a matter of professional identity, which is a thorny construct to define (Lightfoot and Frost, 2015) and certainly complicated in the early years domain by intersectionality. Multiple interrelated elements of EYP identity ostensibly diminish their status from the outset, such as working as a ‘carer’, being female and earning a low wage (Boyer et al., 2013). A few researchers have also applied intersectionality to the professional identity of men working in EYEC (Tennhoff et al., 2015), but it seems that much of the status-based research emphasises the division of education and care (Manning-Morton, 2006) and attributions of expertise (Nutbrown, 2012).

“We Don’t Care”

Early on in the establishment of the early years workforce, references to its credibility could be found in reports explaining how staff working with young children acquire less status than those working with older children (Rumbold, 1990), or in articles disputing the idea that the job requires neither skill nor expertise (Stonehouse, 1989). Those references were presumably founded in belief that nurseries are places where children are looked after, whereas schools are places for learning. That staff who care require no skills, but those who teach, do. Why these misguided presumptions have persisted is not easy to ascertain, though it is somewhat unfortunate that the implicitly higher regard for education has undertones of the EYFS school readiness goal. In fact, this may have made the status problem worse – according to the way in which school staff regard nursery practitioners and how nursery practitioners respond to the caring aspects of their work. In the first instance, studies of the interactions between school and nursery staff have found that school teachers recognise the value of nurseries but do not support their belief in practice (Sisson et al., 2018) – ascribing greater importance to their own judgements of children than to nursery staff (Ashton et al., 2008). In the second case, hopes of education and childcare duties being seen as equal (Nutbrown, 2012) have been thwarted by findings of staff distancing themselves from physical care tasks (Elfer and Dearnley, 2007), or of teachers delegating these to support staff (Van Laere et al., 2012). Staff want their expertise to be acknowledged and valued (Beltman et al., 2019) but struggle to relate this to the affective nature of their work (Osgood, 2010). Perhaps this is why authors like Stonehouse (1989) have suggested that the status of the profession rests on the ability of the staff to see the status in themselves, or why Osgood (2010, p.119) later posited the idea of developing “professionalism from within”.

2.3.5 Workforce Reform

Professionalism is a major topic of debate in the UK and largely documented as speculative articles or policy analyses, rather than empirical studies (Hevey, 2018) directly engaging with EYPs. Staff are rarely consulted in the decision-making processes that affect their practice, so when their views of identity and challenges in the sector *are* sought, expressions of disempowerment come to the fore through words like “they” and the “powers that be” (Osgood, 2010, p.124), as do contemplations of leaving the profession (PLA, 2018). These views should be a worry for policymakers,

since they imply that efforts to professionalise the workforce in the last decade (Boyer et al., 2013; Lightfoot and Frost, 2015) have been fundamentally flawed – unable to instil practitioners with feelings of status, power and vocation (Brock, 2013), or the commitment and enthusiasm that are supposed to define professionalism (Osgood, 2009). Indeed, given the sector’s ongoing issues of recruitment (Nutbrown, 2012; PLA, 2018) and retention (Crellin, 2017; Beltman et al., 2019), it would appear that government reforms are yet to deliver on their promises of attracting and retaining EYPs (DfE, 2017a) – or to establish a workforce whose professional identity is robust and valued (Nutbrown, 2012).

Overhauling the Qualification System

Reforms concerning the early years workforce have their origins in a report that was commissioned by the Coalition government in 2011 (Elwick et al., 2018) and which examined the current EYEC qualification system. The *Nutbrown Review* (Nutbrown, 2012) celebrated the dedication of practitioners working in the sector but was chiefly concerned with the realities of staff being insufficiently prepared for their role and unable to progress. The qualification system was found to be complex (Osgood, 2010), career paths unclear and training quality inconsistent. Nineteen recommendations were set forth (Nutbrown, 2012) and the government responded in the following year, with the publication *More Great Childcare* (Truss, 2013). Many of the proposals were rejected, though (Elwick et al., 2018) – including one related to graduate leadership (Hevey, 2018). Graduate leadership had already been a priority for the preceding Labour government, motivated by belief that having a graduate in every early years setting (Waters and Payler, 2015) improves the quality of EYEC provision (DfE, 2017a). This practice, however, was not fully endorsed in the research field or nursery domain – according to its low impact on children’s outcomes at age 5 (see Blanden et al., 2017) and accounts of graduates hiding their qualification, unable to convince colleagues of their value (Osgood, 2010). Instead, the Coalition attended to the entry requirements for Level 3 qualifications and to teacher statuses (Lewis and West, 2017).

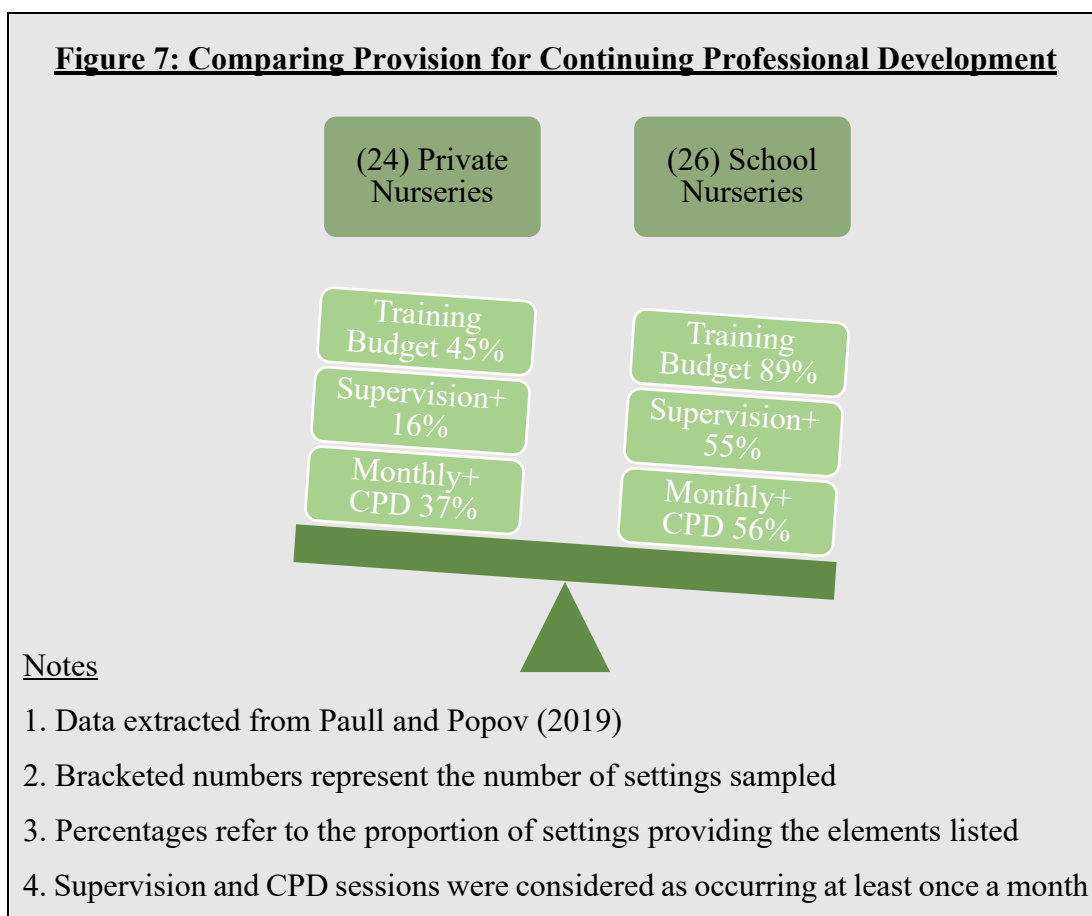
Nutbrown’s (2012) report crucially gave voice to the practitioners whose professional standing was inequivalent with those acquiring QTS – and appealed for parity through a new initial teacher training pathway. To some extent, her idea was realised in 2013 – replacing the *Early Years Professional Status* title of 2007 (Osgood,

2010) with a programme leading to a certificate of EYTS (DfE, 2017a). Though entrance to this programme requires a degree and parallels that for primary school teachers (DfE, 2020a), the title did not allow its graduates to enjoy the benefits associated with QTS (Lightfoot and Frost, 2015) – not least by omission of the word ‘qualified’ – and the sector’s response was tepid at best (Elwick et al., 2018). To add to the problem, changes were made to the entry criteria for staff wanting to pursue a Level 3 qualification, so that they would now need to have at least grade C GCSEs in English and Maths (DfE, 2017a) in order to secure the title of an *Early Years Educator* (Lightfoot and Frost, 2015; Hevey, 2018). In theory, it was meant to ensure that staff would be equipped with the knowledge needed to build children’s literacy and numeracy skills (Nutbrown, 2012) but in reality, served as a deterrent for potential candidates and proved an enormous challenge for providers trying to recruit staff with the requisite qualifications (DfE, 2017a). These issues were picked up in the *Early Years Workforce Strategy*, which followed in 2017 (Elwick et al., 2018).

2.3.6 Professional Development

When the *Early Years Workforce Strategy* was launched in 2017 (DfE, 2017a), under a Conservative government, its mission was to remove the barriers affecting the recruitment, retention and development of EYPs. This meant addressing the preclusion of EYTS teachers in school settings and the workforce gender imbalance (Nutbrown, 2012); tackling an average rate of turnover of 11% (see DfE, 2014a); improving career advice and opportunities; and enabling access to good quality, affordable professional development (DfE, 2017a). In fact, professional development – defined as a suite of formal or informal activities that advance a person’s skills, knowledge and expertise (Cooc, 2019), was a primary concern for Nutbrown (2012), who wanted to improve its availability and manifold pathways. Yet, research following the release of the strategy served only to highlight the intractability of issues – and continues to do so. For practitioners, the training landscape is “the most cluttered and confusing it ha[s] ever been” (Elwick et al., 2018, p.515), whilst for private providers, a “business-facing agenda” (Ingleby, 2018, p.22) has made continuing professional development (CPD) low on their list of priorities. School nurseries are not exempt from the challenges either. They may appear to have a greater commitment to CPD than private day nurseries (see Paull and Popov, 2019) but their responses are still little better than half (see Figure 7) – and unsurprising in the context of the DfE’s (2019b) annual survey.

This revealed that early years training accounts for only 2% of budgets in schools and just 1% of budgets in the private sector.



Investing in CPD

Low level investment in training raises the question of how staff can be expected to comply with the latest government requirements and standards. Changes in the sector might be commonplace (PLA, 2018) but CPD must be ongoing in order to equip EYPs with the knowledge and skills they need to keep up to date (Dockett, 2019). That securement of expertise, moreover, is based on the assumption that training programmes are relevant to individual staff (McGillivray, 2008) and will enhance practice in their nursery (Nutbrown, 2012). The assumption may be an indelicate one, though, because the accent on high-quality provision suggests that an investment in CPD is more to do with the development of children than the development of staff – especially when knowing that the DfE recently promised £20m to CPD but £100m to children’s outcomes (DfE, 2019a). The assumption is also dubious by virtue of the fact that the expertise deemed necessary by the government

or providers might not be aligned with the priorities held by practitioners. Providers, for instance, may be reluctant to promote CPD if the acquisition of qualifications prompts people to move on to another job with better pay (Beltman et al., 2019). Practitioners, in contrast, may be ‘resistant’ to the CPD on offer if the programme is seen only as an exercise for Ofsted (Ingleby, 2018) or an addendum to already long hours of work (Osgood, 2010). Staff might also be frustrated by prescriptive approaches that reduce their autonomy (Dockett, 2019) and prevent them from personalising their CPD (Ingleby, 2018) – or by training that is out of touch with the demands of the classroom (Das et al., 2013). This is particularly the case in the context of understanding and meeting the needs of children with ASLCN, where training might be run by non-specialist staff (Letts and Hall, 2003; Scheuermann et al., 2003). Resolution of these problems obviously remains a knotty task. Early years children have a wide range of needs and it is vital that EYPs have the skills to meet them. Provision for staff, however, should be just as important as provision for children, because support affects how they think about and commit to their work (PLA, 2018).

Chapter 3: A Review of the Literature on Inclusive Education

Chapter 3 presents a review of the literature on inclusive education and draws attention to the profiles and needs of children with ASLCN. It will show how conceptions of children's difficulties have evolved over the last 30 years and discuss some of the problems associated with diagnostic labels. The analyses will additionally reveal tensions regarding the types of provision that pupils with special educational needs receive and outline ways in which legislation has helped or hindered practices. Issues concerning inclusive practice will be discussed as part of the global agenda on inclusion but ultimately highlight the diversity of opinions and challenges that face EYPs, here in England. Overall, research gaps in the sphere of inclusive early years education will be identified and justify the need to explore educator/carers practices and beliefs, which relate to nursery-aged children with ASLCN.

3.1 Conceptions of Special Educational Needs (SEN)

The debates surrounding inclusion and inclusive education are, in many respects, rooted in an understanding of what is meant by the term 'special educational needs'. This understanding is a matter of debate in itself. Although interpretations have changed over time, opinions regarding the SEN label remain contentious (Hellawell, 2018) and divisive – not only amongst the people using the term, but also amongst the individuals it might apply to. The intensity of arguments is particularly noticeable in the field of autism, where there tends to be a split between those who adopt identity-first language and those who prefer person-first language, e.g., referring to either 'autistic' people or people 'with autism' (Ravet, 2011). Kenny et al. (2016) further explain that expressions can be attributed to the way in which autism affects people's lives, i.e., that preferences differ according to whether autism is experienced by a parent through his/her child, relates to the individual or is encountered through work or research. In the realm of SLCN, agreement of terms proves an equally complex challenge – but perhaps more in relation to the heterogeneity and inconsistency of labels (Law et al., 2017), than the language per se. To navigate these challenges in the text, I have decided to alternate between identity and person-first language. This approach has been styled by researchers elsewhere (e.g., Ravet, 2011; Conner, 2016) and should be advantageous in its scope to accommodate different reader preferences.

3.1.1 Historical Interpretations of Educational Needs

The use of labels and the contentions they generate are not only features of modern times. Descriptions of children's needs have changed throughout history (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006; Hodkinson, 2016) – revealing not only the concerns relevant to a specific era, but also the nature of the terminology that was accepted in its day. A prime example of this is found in *The Warnock Report* (Department of Education and Science [DES], 1978), which reviewed educational arrangements for children with SEN in Great Britain and reflected on more than a century of changes. The review drew attention to labels like *defective* and *handicapped* and the word *handicapped* itself was central to the full title of the report – representing 11 subcategories of need that included support for the *maladjusted*, *delicate* and *educationally subnormal* (Hodkinson, 2016) – and which persisted until the late 1970s. During the 1970s, children's needs were defined in medical terms according to the *1944 Education Act* (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006) and the labels implied a certain level of educability or type of education. Pupils expected to benefit from schooling could attend mainstream schools but only if their education did not compromise that of their classmates (DES, 1978). Children with complex needs were separated from mainstream peers and sent to special schools (Hodkinson, 2016). After the Warnock report, this practice was perceived differently, underscored by argument that it was no longer appropriate or acceptable to view children solely in terms of a handicap and that the word 'handicapped' offered little indication of the support an individual might need (DES, 1978). Opinion was such that new, more child-centred terminology was required, which recognised the breadth of children's difficulties: *special educational needs*.

3.1.2 Categorical Criticisms

With the introduction of the term SEN in 1978, came a societal shift in perspectives of disability. The notion of identifying needs within a medical model of disability was superseded by the idea of examining them within a social model – to focus on how society creates disability rather than on ways of treating or curing disability within the person (Conner, 2016). In this, there was a move away from the genericism of needs to the uniqueness of them. The assumption of children falling into neat categories with identical needs was now erroneous. Their needs were to be understood on an individual basis and as part of a continuum, ranging from mild to

severe; children would no longer be defined by a subcategory or classed as either ‘handicapped’ or ‘non-handicapped’ (DES, 1978). Unfortunately, the term SEN just became another label (Conner, 2016) and, ironically, has since permitted a distinction to be made between children who have SEN and those who do not (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006). More ironic than this, however, was the DfE’s (2011) later exposition of SEN as an overarching label for 11 types of need, i.e., contradictorily separating children into multiple categories and paralleling the previous delineation of the word ‘handicapped’.

The current definition of SEN comprises only four categories of need (See 3.1.3). Yet, these too have courted negative attention as part of a wider debate on the rationale for labels or diagnoses. Some individuals argue that different types of need should be recognised, but through the lens of *neurodiversity* – where conditions are viewed as natural variations in the population, rather than a list of impairments and deficits (Silberman, 2015). Others, though, are concerned that the ‘normalising’ of difference underestimates a person’s difficulties (Ravet, 2011) and overlooks the fact that individuals with the same condition have very distinctive needs (DfE, 2011). For families, these issues are exacerbated by belief that some labels are more assistive and less prejudicial than others. Indeed, research has shown that parents are increasingly seeking labels for their children that compel schools to issue the help they feel is required (Conner, 2016) – but with the proviso that the labels are not stigmatising or suggestive of parent shortcomings (Tomlinson, 2012). For staff in the classroom, these tensions are borne as responses to statutory demands – meaning that educators must identify children’s SEN (DfE and DoH, 2015), worry about their capabilities and experience criticism, regardless of their stance (Hellowell, 2018).

3.1.3 How SEN are Currently Defined in England

The DfE and DoH (2015) use the term SEN to describe individuals who have a learning difficulty or disability that requires special educational provision. This provision is deemed additional or different to that generally provided in schools and early years settings. Within this construction, it is understood that children’s needs can be represented within or across four main categories, which comprise communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, emotional and health; sensory and/or physical needs. It is further understood that children with SEN may or may not have a disability – defining disability as a physical or mental impairment significantly

affecting a person's capacity to carry out his/her daily activities (Equality Act 2010). Though they are often considered together in the literature and under the acronym of SEND, disability and SEN are separate constructs (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006), which carry distinctive sets of rights, written in law. Disability is one of nine protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act (2010), whilst SEN are enshrined in the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 Years* (DfE and DoH, 2015).

3.1.4 The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice

The SEND Code of Practice relates to part 3 of the *Children and Families Act 2014* (Blackburn, 2016). Produced in 2014, but revised in January 2015 (House of Commons Library, 2019), it sets out the statutory framework of SEN provision for children and young people up to the age of 25 and specifies the organisations to which it applies (in England). These include early years providers in the PVI sector, schools and local authorities – who must all ensure that children's SEN are identified and catered for at the earliest points possible (DfE and DoH, 2015). This currently means support for 14.6% of pupils in schools and an average of 1-4 children per early years setting (DfE, 2018c). The support is classed according to one of two tiers, which are called 'SEN Support' and 'Education and Health Care Plan' (EHCP) (DfE and DoH, 2015). An EHCP – previously known as a 'Statement of SEN' (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2001) – is a legal document issued by the local authority, but formulated in consultation with parents, multi-agency professionals and the individual (House of Commons Library, 2019). It is issued when there is clear evidence that the child is not making progress under SEN Support and indicates the extra aid that is needed. According to the DfE (2018c, p.8), 12% of 3-year-olds and 17% of 4-year-olds required SEN Support in 2018, whilst 1% of 3-year-olds and 3% of 4-year-olds received an EHCP.

3.1.5 Increasing Emphasis on Early Years SEN Practice

When the SEND Code of Practice was published, it was the third in a succession of Codes and hailed as a pivotal point in the history of special education (Blackburn, 2016). As such, one of its aims was to centralise children and their families in processes (Hellawell, 2018) that would finally be less confrontational and more effective (DfE and DoH, 2015). This emphasis was likely motivated by issues

previously raised by parents and professionals (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006) and part of efforts to ensure children with SEND receive the support they need (DfE and DoH, 2015). These motivations and efforts, however, have not been documented equally in the Code, since more than 3/4 of the content is devoted to statutory assessment, tribunals and disagreement resolution (see Norwich, 2014) and, in line with the two previous SEN Codes, offers comparatively little advice for the classroom (Lehane, 2017). The Code's predecessors were published in 1994 (DfE, 1994) and 2001 (DfES, 2001) and are worth mentioning because of the observations that can be made when comparing some of their features. First, that the needs of children with ASLCN have gained greater status in the last quarter century (mentioned more often in the text) and second, that the amount of guidance issued to early years providers has more than doubled in the most recent version (by my count, from 28 paragraphs to 60). These changes are salient for their consonance with the expansion noted in the sector (Peter et al., 2014) and with the increasing need to include children with autism (DCSF, 2009) and SLCN (DCSF, 2008a) in early years settings.

3.2 The Inclusion Agenda

Underlining the statutory duties of the current Code of Practice, is the belief that the majority of children with SEN will be educated (included) in mainstream settings. This belief has roots in *The Warnock Report*, which stated that only 2% of children with SEN would require support more specialist than that provided in mainstream (DES, 1978). At that time, however, the policy of placing children with SEN in mainstream came with the caveat that it did not place a burden on school resources or interfere with the education of children without SEN (Hodkinson, 2016). In essence, it was an integrative practice that did not involve schools making any adjustments to accommodate children's SEN. If the child could not fit in with his/her peers, s/he could not attend the school. Today, schools are not allowed to discriminate against children on the basis of their disability, according to the Equality Act 2010 (DfE, 2014b). Yet, this Act does not specifically state that schools cannot discriminate on the basis of a special educational need, nor does it guarantee that discrimination will not happen. Indeed, the rising numbers of children with SEN being excluded from settings (Spielmann, 2020) or segregated from their peers because they are presumed difficult or unable to reach a desired level of attainment (Tomlinson, 2012), suggests that there are circumstances where it still does.

Integrative practices continued until the early 1990s, when they were replaced by a global framework of provision ultimately redressing disability discrimination. This was conceived as part of an international agenda and endorsed by 92 governments and 25 organisations during a conference in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] and Ministry of Education and Science Spain [MES], 1994). The framework still expressed a desire for all children to receive a mainstream education but was underlined by a new, inclusive philosophy – one embracing pupil diversity and calling for more flexible, differentiated pedagogies. Schools would now be expected to adjust to the needs of the child, rather than the other way around. This philosophy was an advancement on the Warnock report but, without sanctions, essentially reliant on governments voluntarily acting on statements of intention (Conner, 2016). In England, these intentions were absorbed into the Green Paper *Excellence for All Children* (Department for Education and Employment, 1997), which aspired to practices enabling children with SEN to be active participants in the life of their school, not just attendees. Unhelpfully, it offered little advice as to what those practices would involve (Norwich, 2014) and seemed to overlook very young children with SEN – whose importance in founding inclusive societies (UNESCO and MES, 1994) had been asserted in Salamanca.

3.2.1 The Elusiveness of Inclusiveness

As studies began to document increasing numbers of young children with SEN (DES, 2004) and to predict how effective early years education might reverse this trend (Sylva et al., 2004), greater attention was devoted to the under-5s and early intervention was championed. Inclusion in the early years thus became part of the early intervention agenda (Blackburn, 2016) discussed in Chapter 2 and was underwritten with policies concerning school readiness and workforce improvements (Melhuish and Gardiner, 2019). This emphasis on reducing the risk of SEN and effectively preparing children for school resembled a return to the treatment and cure model of inclusion – and implied that teaching approaches should be geared towards conformity (Elwick et al., 2018) not diversity (Petriwskyj, 2010). It was therefore difficult to make sense of, given the government's SEN strategy *Removing Barriers to Attainment* (DES, 2004), which referred to personalised learning and educational adjustment, as well as higher levels of expectation and achievement. More significantly, the strategy recognised

physical and human resource failings in the system and outlined future areas of development. These developments were still focussed on the needs of school-aged children, not the very young. Further, the discursive demarcation between SEN and general education seemed antithetical to the concept of inclusion – and continued to offer little clarity as to what inclusive education should look like. Inclusive education nominally remained an elusive education.

3.2.2 The Rights and ‘Wrongs’ of Mainstreaming

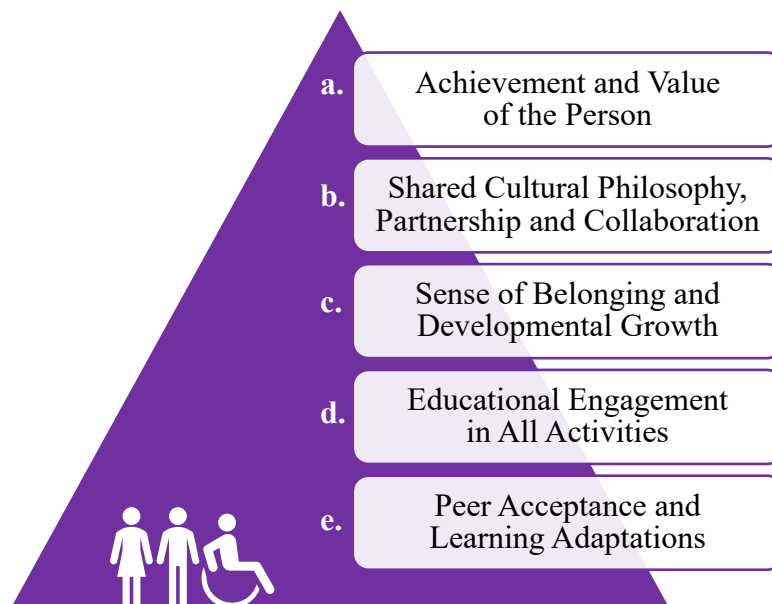
Confusion regarding conceptions of inclusion and inclusive education persisted as a criticism in the wake of inquiries and initiatives during the next 10 years – unaided by publications alternately focussed on reducing (DES, 2004) or embracing (DfE, 2011) specialist provision. This somewhat narrow view of inclusion (by location) continued under the auspice of debates concerned with either the rights or the needs of the child. A rights-based position advocates for mainstream schooling (Ravet, 2011) and views special schools as a method of segregation contrary to the philosophy of inclusion (Conner, 2016). In this vein, mainstream schooling nurtures positive attitudes (Noggle and Stites, 2018) and has social benefits for children with and without SEN (Thornton and Underwood, 2013). A needs-based position, however, advocates for different types of provision (Ravet, 2011) and argues that special schools employ more specialist teachers and approaches than those in mainstream (Conner, 2016). Mainstreaming in this instance poses concern, since it can lead to situations where children are left without the support they need (Norwich, 2014) or are excluded from the setting (Ravet, 2011). These arguments are interesting in their emphasis on the education of school-aged children because similar debates appear to be absent in the early years sector. As such, early years settings are not theoretically divided in the same way, nominally being providers of *both* mainstream and specialist education – in keeping with the expectations of the SEND Code of Practice.

3.2.3 Defining Inclusion and Inclusive Education

When the new SEND Code was introduced, the UK government essentially adopted a rights-based position, committing itself to the “inclusive education of disabled children and young people and (...) learning and participation in mainstream education” (DfE and DoH, 2015, p.25). In the literature, definitions of inclusion and inclusive education are less prosaic – enduringly characterised by dissension and

confusions (Petriwskyj, 2010; Bryant, 2018) and a known lack of consensus in England (Norwich, 2014). Agreements concerning definitions of inclusion seem only apparent in opinion that they have evolved over time (Odom et al., 2013; Conner, 2016) and are numerous and variable (Hilbert, 2014; Hodkinson, 2016). Different researchers describe inclusion in different ways, depending on the focus of their work (See Figure 8). Some concentrate on the qualities of programmes that make inclusion successful and refer to multiple themes (Odom et al., 2013) – and this is the course I have chosen as best fit for the definitions in my research.

Figure 8: Variably Reported Characteristics of Inclusive Education



Notes

1. Characteristics are listed in alphabetical order, according to their author sources
2. Sources: a = Anderson et al., 2014; b = Booth and Ainscow, 2002; c = Noggle and Stites, 2018; d = Norwich, 2014; e = Thornton and Underwood, 2013

Inclusive Education in the Early Years

In the study domain, inclusive education will be characterised by an appropriately differentiated curriculum (Soukakou et al., 2018), which is responsive to the needs of children with and without SEN and which is effectively delivered (Petriwskyj, 2010) wherever the child attends daycare. For it to be effective, though, it should ensure that every child can participate in all aspects (Norwich, 2014) of

nursery life; that s/he is valued by others (Anderson et al., 2014) who have appropriately high expectations of her/him; and that progress is evident in the targets that are set and achieved (Thornton and Underwood, 2013).

Inclusion in the Early Years

Inclusion will be understood as a dynamic and multi-dimensional entity, whose success is determined by a variety of factors: the culture of the setting (Booth and Ainscow, 2002) and the suitability of the placement, the flexibility of the pedagogy and the suitability of resources (Thornton and Underwood, 2013). Suitability of placement is pertinent because a third of families are not presently accessing childcare (Contact a Family et al., 2014), but when they do, may be subject to local authority will (Blackburn, 2016). Effective and differentiated programmes are necessary elements because staff are not always adequately prepared for their role (Nutbrown, 2012) and children with SEN are statistically less likely to reach their EYFS targets (30%) than children without SEN (72%) (DfE, 2017a). The culture of the setting, though, is perhaps one of the most critical factors (Booth and Ainscow, 2002) because it symbolises staff attitudes as a whole – and negative attitudes are known barriers to inclusion (Cullen et al., 2010; Dawson and Scott, 2013).

3.3 Autism Spectrum Disorder (Autism)

Research exploring attitudes towards inclusion has highlighted a potential relationship between perceptions of pupil need and levels of support for mainstreaming. This is because educators tend to be more in favour of inclusion when the child's disability is mild (Akalin et al., 2014) and when his/her behaviour does not disrupt the class (Thornton and Underwood, 2013). Behaviour is especially voiced as a concern in the field of autism (Barned et al., 2011; Dimopoulou, 2016) and ostensibly justified by the enunciation of children's difficulties in the literature. As an illustration, various authors note that autistic children "are not easy to teach" (Scheuermann et al., 2003, p.201), "present great challenges to the educational system" (Crosland and Dunlap, 2012, p.252) and are "three times more likely to be excluded from school" (APPGA, 2017, p.13). In isolation and without recognition of the history that underlines changes in our understanding of autism (Maich et al., 2019), these phrases are highly problematic. First, they do little to cultivate positive attitudes towards autism or to the inclusion of autistic children. Second, they preclude efforts to

understand children's behaviour and imply that this way of describing or viewing autistic people is standard and generalisable. It is not. Autism affects people in different ways at different times and in different situations (Happé and Frith, 2020). To fully gauge the needs of someone with autism necessitates consideration of multiple, individualised sources of information. As Oliver Sacks (1995, p.238) once remarked: "if we hope to understand the autistic individual, nothing less than a total biography will do".

3.3.1 Historical and Contemporary Conceptions of Autism

The word *autism* comes from a Greek word meaning 'self' and was first employed by the psychiatrist Paul Eugen Bleuler in 1912 (Blake et al., 2013). It is currently categorised as a type of neurodevelopmental disorder and more fully termed autism spectrum disorder in DSM-5 (APA, 2013) and ICD-11 (WHO, 2020c). These manuals are globally used to diagnose a range of diseases, health conditions and mental disorders (APA, 2020; WHO, 2020a) – and have included reference to autism since 1967 (Ousley and Cermak, 2014). When these references are viewed across time, it is apparent that: classifications of autism have changed in both name and category over the last 50 years; that it is no longer restricted to children (Happé and Frith, 2020); and that it was once associated with schizophrenia (Donvan and Zucker, 2016; Maich et al., 2019). What is not evident, is the richness and complexity of the history underlying the changes, or the rise and expansion in research interest (Wolff, 2004). By way of example, when Happé and Frith (2020) studied three decades-worth of changes to the autism diagnosis, they deduced seven diagnostic developments, highlighted diverse areas of investigation, and noted a corpus increase from 190 to 68,000. Moreover, that this corpus of research encompasses branches of neurology, genetics, cognition and behaviour, can involve tens of thousands of participants and be led by consortia. When autism research began in earnest in the 1940s, conceptions were largely grounded in psychoanalysis and linked to the work of two Austrians and 15 children (Blake et al., 2013).

Kanner, Asperger and Wing

In 1943, Leo Kanner published a study of 11 children who shared a preference for sameness in the environment and being alone (Kanner, 1943). They seemed unable to relate to others, had limited speech and had shown these difficulties throughout

infancy (Masi et al., 2017). In the following year, Hans Asperger published his thesis portraying the behavioural characteristics of four boys (Lyons and Fitzgerald, 2007) – boys who were described as clumsy and sensitive, with limited social relationships (Wolff, 2004), but also verbosity and high levels of intelligence (Donvan and Zucker, 2016). Whether the two researchers knew of each other’s work at the time, is still under debate (Silberman, 2015), but for a while, Kanner’s version in English earned the greater exposure (Lyons and Fitzgerald, 2007) and their accounts seemed to chronicle two different syndromes (Silberman, 2015). Similarities between their studies were not discovered until 1981 (Lyons and Fitzgerald, 2007) when they were reported by Lorna Wing (Silberman, 2015). During her research with Judith Gould (Wing and Gould, 1979), she had observed patterns of behaviour in children with SEN that were reminiscent of those reported by both Kanner and Asperger. Wing subsequently believed that the diagnosis of autism should capture an array of impairments and a broader range of individuals. This line of inquiry inspired several key developments in the field, encompassing: the notion of a spectrum, a triad of impairments and the additional diagnosis of Asperger’s syndrome (Silberman, 2015).

The Autism Spectrum

The view of autism as a spectrum was widely accepted by the mid-1990s (Bond et al., 2016), but only explicitly endorsed as such when DSM-5 was published in 2013 (Baker, 2013). This more recent explication of autism has caused a great deal of controversy, because it removed the diagnostic category of Asperger’s syndrome (Kenny et al., 2016; Masi et al., 2017) and underscored a prevailing debate as to where the diagnostic boundaries should rest (Baker, 2013). Asperger’s syndrome had been recognised as an autistic subcategory since 1993 (Ousley and Cermak, 2014) – in an effort to explain the variations in people’s language and cognitive skills – but was eventually absorbed into DSM-5, due to the confusion it had caused amongst clinicians trying to distinguish it from a higher functioning form of autism (Happé and Frith, 2020). The new classification of ASD thus involved a number of changes aiming to define (Baker, 2013) and diagnose (Masi et al., 2017) the condition more precisely. The three dimensions previously coined as the ‘triad of impairments’ (social understanding; social communication; flexibility of thought and behaviour) (Bond et al., 2016), for instance, were reduced to two – essentially merging the two social domains into one. The second domain became known as restricted and repetitive

patterns of behaviour, interests and activities (Ousley and Cermak, 2014). Two other features were additionally written into the criteria for the first time – to acknowledge that autism can co-occur with other conditions and may not manifest early in life (Happé and Frith, 2020).

3.3.2 The Heterogeneity of Autism

Descriptions of autism usually refer to the heterogeneity of the condition (Blake et al., 2013; Masi et al., 2017), explaining that it affects each person differently (APPGA, 2017). These differences may be gender specific, for autism is more common in males (Cumine et al., 2010) and may present dissimilarly in females (Hendrickx, 2015), e.g., more subtly or via more complex needs (Happé and Frith, 2020). Phenotypic differences can relate to learning difficulties or language delays (Bond et al., 2016) and, depending on the demands of the environment, seem to “come and go” (Happé and Frith, 2020, p.11). The notion of autism *coming and going* is contentious but exemplifies the potential invisibility of the condition (APPGA, 2017) and the vulnerability of individuals (WHO, 2013), whose needs may be overlooked or underestimated. These observations are crucial because they have implications for rates of prevalence that already appear to be increasing (Brodzeller et al., 2018; Maich et al., 2019). What was once diagnosed in 4 of every 10,000 children (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985) is now attributed to 1 in 100 across the age ranges (APPGA, 2017). This increase has been matched by efforts to explain the rise (Maich et al., 2019; Happé and Frith, 2020) and by global demand for early intervention (WHO, 2013) – not least because children with autism become adults with autism (Happé and Frith, 2020) and without the right support may each engender a lifetime care package costing \$3.2 million (Dillenburger, 2011). For families, this financial cost in care is dually challenging, as expenses averaging £430 per month (Barrett et al., 2011) are in tension with their need to leave work or reduce working hours, i.e., to be at home with their child (Houser et al., 2014).

Characteristic Behaviours

From the discussions so far, it is obvious that children’s needs must be recognised and understood early in their life. One crucial time for identifying autism is said to be around the age of 2 (Zwaigenbaum et al., 2015), when the heightening of symptoms (Chawarska et al., 2007) or regression of skills can be more robustly

identified (Zwaigenbaum et al., 2013). This developmental trajectory is not inevitably global, though, as children can demonstrate skills in one area but not another (Guldborg, 2010). Sources tend to focus on different behaviours in descriptions of autism in the under-5s but, under the dimension of social communication and social interaction, often mention difficulties with intentional communication and the use of speech (Chawarska et al., 2007), eye gaze, joint attention (Hart Barnett, 2018) and responses to their name (Cumine et al., 2010). Within the dimension of restricted and repetitive activity, descriptions note that children may be fascinated with the detail of objects rather than their use (Chawarska et al., 2007), enact sensorimotor play beyond their developmental level (Hart Barnett, 2018), and engage in repetitious movements like rocking, finger flicking (Brodzeller et al., 2018), tapping and spinning (Zwaigenbaum et al., 2013). This profile of behaviours has particular implications in the early years because social interaction and communication skills are prerequisites in play (Moor, 2008) and play has traditionally been embedded in the early years framework (Jones et al., 2014). Play can be used to teach autistic children important social skills (Theodorou and Nind, 2010) but might involve specific resources (Hart Barnett, 2018) and specialist approaches (Jones et al., 2014).

Autism and the Theory of Mind

Play is a known area of difficulty for young autistic children – particularly when this involves interactions with others or pretending – and is significant because the skills involved in play are precursors to the skills involved in communication and social interactions in adulthood (Hart Barnett, 2018). One of these later skills pertains to something known as *Theory of Mind*, which allows us make inferences about what other people are thinking and feeling and to predict how they will behave (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985). It also helps us understand that people have thoughts that are different to our own (Korkmaz, 2011) and that these may not be an accurate interpretation of a given situation (Milligan et al., 2007). Whilst *Theory of Mind* has relevance in diagnoses like developmental language disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Korkmaz, 2011), it has specifically been studied in the context of autism to explain the different ways in which autistic people understand social situations (Murray et al., 2017) and process abstract language (Norbury, 2005). These studies have roots in the ‘false belief’ tests run by Baron-Cohen et al. (1985), which are presented as a play scenario involving two dolls, a marble, a basket and a box.

In the original study, 80% of children with autism got the answer wrong – tending to report their own perspective, rather than Doll A’s, but these results have not proved reliable across the age groups. Studies involving autistic adults have since demonstrated higher rates of success (Murray et al., 2017). However, this need not mean that autism has little impact on a person’s *Theory of Mind* or that the faculty develops later in life. Autism does appear to have a bearing (Korkmaz, 2011) on rates of success when more advanced and realistic tests are employed (Murray et al., 2017) – and *Theory of Mind* usually emerges around the age of 4 (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985). Age in itself is not the determining factor, as *Theory of Mind* can be seen in children younger or older than 4; it is the fact that its emergence coincides with the maturation of several cognitive skills that is important (Milligan et al., 2007). More simply, researchers believe that *Theory of Mind* is a mechanism that only works after certain skills have been attained in development. These skills comprise joint attention, imitation, empathy, non-verbal communication (Korkmaz, 2011) and aspects of spoken language (Norbury, 2005) – as well as pretend play (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985).

3.3.3 Autism Practice

Given the potential complexity and diversity of autistic children’s needs (Masi et al., 2017), opinion is such that their educators should be specially trained (DCSF, 2009; Theodorou and Nind, 2010) to deliver specialist programmes and specific interventions (Dillenburger, 2011). ‘Specialist’ approaches, however, do not have to mean specialist qualifications. They can equally relate to practices that are autism-friendly. What these involve is open to discussion. In the field, best practice remains an ill-defined pedagogy – hindered by research unable to identify a universal approach (Parsons et al., 2011) but capable of describing a multitude of possible interventions (Cumine et al., 2010). Yet, the argument seems redundant in many respects, because the heterogeneity of autism is one of its hallmarks (Masi et al., 2017) and surely contrary to any notion of standardisation. It is perhaps more important that staff have a basic understanding of autism (DCSF, 2009) and can interpret this in the context of each child’s strengths, interests and needs. In fact, this would be more in keeping with the spirit of inclusion and social models of disability – less focussed on interventions aiming to treat or fix the person, and more focussed on adjustments making teaching and the environment accessible or responsive to all (Brodzeller et al., 2018).

The Importance of Structure

In the classroom, accessible teaching and responsive environments should ideally be characterised by ‘structure’. Notwithstanding confusion over interventions of choice (Moor, 2008), structural practices have long been valued for their potential to make situations more predictable – reducing children’s anxiety and increasing their independence (Erbes, 2010). Realised in various ways, structure is often associated with visual aids, as these capitalise on the fact that many autistic people are visual learners, i.e., that they can process visual information more effectively than auditory information (Rogers, 2013). Visual aids, moreover, are an important feature of inclusive practice (Devine, 2016), in that they are beneficial to all children (Rogers, 2013) – helping them access the environment and interact with others in a purposeful manner. Typical visuals comprise sand timers (Devine, 2016; Brodzeller et al., 2018) to indicate turns or when an activity is to end; timetables and schedules (Erbes, 2010; Rogers, 2013) to prepare children for changes and help them understand what they must do; picture cards or photographs (DCSF, 2009) to communicate choices and make requests; and social stories, to promote understanding of social situations and encourage appropriate behaviour (Gray, 2010).

Structure can additionally involve attention to the physical layout of a room – labelling and decluttering areas, so that children can locate them more easily (Devine, 2016), or creating quiet spaces where individuals feel more comfortable and can retreat to (DCSF, 2009). Structure is further applicable to the teaching of skills – breaking activities down into smaller steps that are easier to process (Moor, 2008), and/or presenting them in a particular way. As a teacher, I also made use of a work station, which comprised a plain table located in a place free of distractions. This particular method is associated with an American programme called TEACCH, which was adopted in the UK in the 1990s (Mesibov and Howley, 2003) and still considered suitable for young children. The National Autistic Society, for example, has endorsed the approach by making it part of their Earlybird programme (NAS, 2017), which supports families of autistic children under 5 (NAS, 2018d). TEACCH stands for Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped CHildren (Mesibov and Howley, 2003). Although the word ‘handicapped’ is now outdated, continued use of the approach today shows how principles of structure have endured as a key element in the design of enabling environments.

Legislative Challenges

Enabling environments, as a feature of inclusive practice, have political origins in the *Inclusion Development Programme (IDP)* – a four-year initiative that began in 2008 (DCSF, 2009) as part of the government’s SEN strategy (DES, 2004). Guidance was issued to schools and early years settings and concentrated on a different type of need each year. The first year was devoted to children with SLCN (DCSF, 2008a), and the second to children with autism (DCSF, 2009). The programme ultimately hoped to facilitate inclusive practice in education settings by raising awareness of children’s needs and increasing practitioners’ knowledge of relevant strategies. Practices, though, were not mandatory and it is difficult to conclude from the research that followed, whether or how the IDP was effective. In 2008, for instance, the IDP’s attention to SLCN coincided with the release of *The Bercow Report* (DCSF, 2008c), which had reviewed SLCN provision in England and found gaps relating to staff training and professional development. These issues had not been adequately resolved by the time of the follow up report *Bercow: Ten Years On* (ICAN and RCSLT, 2018). In 2009, when the IDP spotlighted autism, its emphasis was somewhat diminished by the passing of the first *Autism Act* (NAS, 2018b), since the Act was formalised in a strategy that did not consider children until 2018 (NAS, 2018c) – and their inclusion in it only became official in 2021 (NAS, 2021).

3.4 Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)

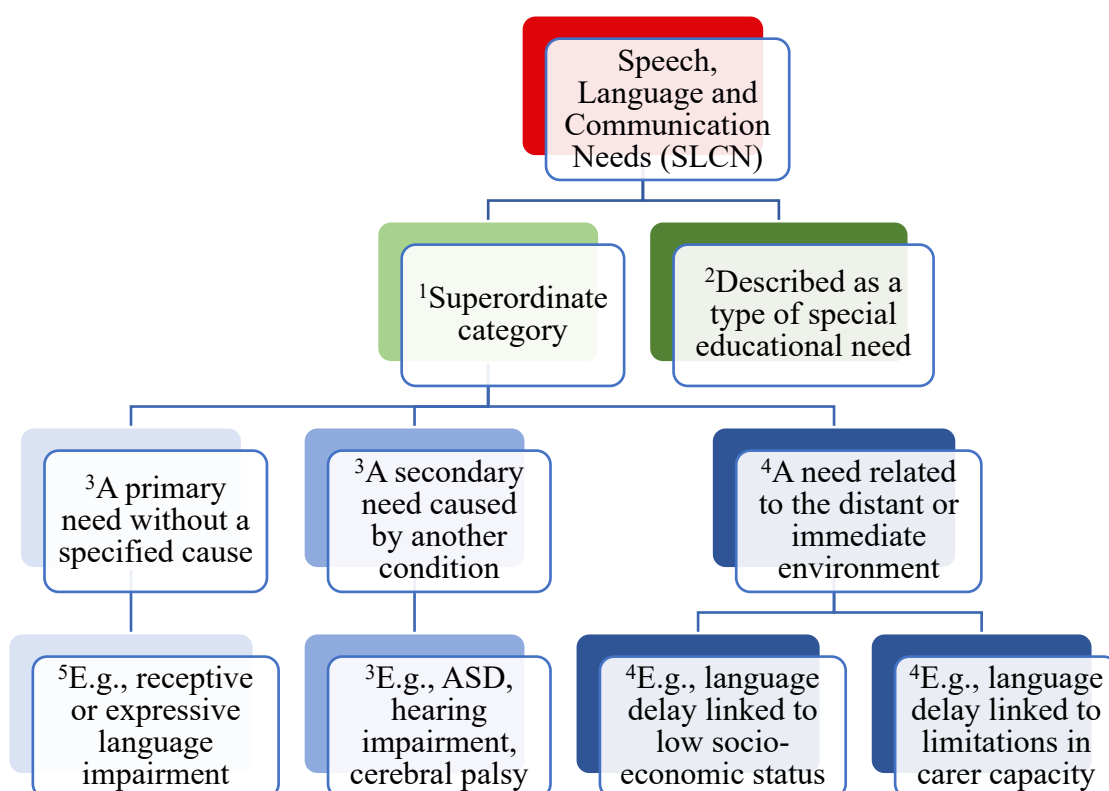
Whilst the IDP was not without flaws, it is still considered important in the study domain. This is because it is the only national initiative to date, that has focussed on the inclusion of children with SLCN *and* autism in the early years. It is significant in the fact that it drew attention to both conditions and implicitly showed that the needs of children in each cohort are equally important. In this respect, it stands in contrast to more recent research suggesting that children and young people with SLCN receive less campaign attention than other conditions (ICAN and RCSLT, 2018). The observation is pertinent too, as communication skills are vital (Bain et al., 2015) in the determination of life courses (Reilly et al., 2014) and were previously headlined by programmes such as the *Sure Start* programme (Bain et al., 2015) in the late 1990s. *Sure Start* had particular implications for children with SLCN due to its focus on families living in the poorest regions of the UK (Rallings, 2014). Social disadvantage is a risk factor in the onset of speech, language and communication difficulties (Beard,

2018) but can be tempered with early intervention. Early intervention, therefore, was/is just as important for children with SLCN (ICAN and RCSLT, 2018), as it is for children with autism (Zwaigenbaum et al., 2015). Without it, children with SLCN become adults more vulnerable to mental health problems, poor employment opportunities and criminal behaviour (DCSF, 2008c).

3.4.1 A Study Definition of SLCN

Relative to the research domain, my overall interpretation of SLCN is summarised in Figure 9. This acknowledges the terminology used in *The Bercow Report* (DCSF, 2008c) but predominantly reflects a distillation of opinions voiced in more contemporary sources.

Figure 9: Categories of Speech, Language and Communication Needs



Notes

1 = Lindsay, 2011; 2 = Cross, 2011; 3 = DCSF, 2008c; 4 = Law et al., 2017;

5 = The Communication Trust, 2012

Whilst some authors discuss SLCN in the context of special educational needs (Cross, 2011; Lindsay, 2011), I have depicted this as a separate entity because the two are not necessarily entwined. SEN and SLCN can present in nursery-aged children (Pickstone et al., 2009) but their difficulties may not involve SEN Support or an EHCP. Here, SLCN will be viewed as a multi-dimensional term, broadly characterised by difficulties in the domains of speech, language and communication, but more specifically explicated as particular patterns of behaviour, within a variety of named conditions. These conditions can co-exist or occur independently (Cross and Hartshorne, 2010) and are numerous in name. This breadth and range arguably make study of every condition unfeasible in the study domain. The task of prioritising and profiling multiple conditions is complicated too, as a consequence of terminological and diagnostic variations in the literature. In DSM-5, SLCN are listed as communication disorders with five distinctive categories (APA, 2013). In ICD-11, they are known as developmental speech or language disorders and listed as two main categories, subdivided into a range of different conditions (See WHO, 2020b).

Different Types of SLCN

For the purpose of the study, it seems logical to provide a summary of the difficulties typically characterising children with SLCN and to then refer to some of the SLCN I encountered as an advisory teacher. These descriptions are given in recognition of the many more possible and equally of those that may not be recognised. SLCN, for instance, can be simply defined as problems with the production of sounds or concern conversation skills, age-appropriate language and eye contact (Cross and Hartshorne, 2010). Preschoolers who struggle with the social use of language, moreover, may engage in solitary play, react impulsively (Stanton-Chapman et al., 2007) and have fewer friends (Chen et al., 2018). Yet, as with autism, some children's difficulties might not be immediately obvious (Beard, 2017) and lie dormant until the demands of the environment exceed their capacities (DCSF, 2008c). My own experience of SLCN is of non-verbal children, children with developmental language disorder – previously known as specific language impairment (Beard, 2018), and children with language delay. Non-verbal children do not use speech to communicate and their condition may either stem from a motor disorder or be associated with profound and multiple learning difficulties (The Communication Trust, 2012). Children with developmental language disorder, in contrast, struggle to understand or

produce language. These problems are not attributed to a specific cause but pervade all aspects of daily life (Beard, 2018). Language delay, on the other hand, can be attributed to genetic, physical or environmental causes, which can be separate in causation or linked together. Children follow usual patterns of language development, but more slowly – and possibly with other SLCN (The Communication Trust, 2012).

A Note on Environmental Factors

A range of environmental factors have been investigated in relation to SLCN – with some researchers arguing that they may be explained as a result of poverty (Beard, 2018) or qualitatively poor interactions with key adults (Nicholson and Palaiologou, 2016). Children who live in areas of deprivation and receive free school meals, for example, are more likely to develop SLCN (Lindsay, 2011; Dockrell et al., 2014) and when they do, tend to have comparatively lower levels of language and behaviour competence than their peers with SLCN living in affluent areas (Stanton-Chapman et al., 2007). Not all researchers agree, however, that affluence is a reliable predictor of difficulties. SLCN are experienced in children across socio-economic strata (Reilly et al., 2014) and can be influenced by the richness of language modelled in their immediate environment (Nicholson and Palaiologou, 2016). Indeed, before the age of 7, the language that children use is generally determined by the language used by their parents (DCSF, 2008a) so, depending on the nature of parent-child interactions, it is possible for children in less affluent families to have greater language skills than those with greater affluence (Nicholson and Palaiologou, 2016).

SLCN in the Under-5s

In typical patterns of development, children will experience a language boom between the age of 18-24 months, which equips them with a vocabulary of more than 50 words and enables them to create and experiment with two-word phrases (Beard, 2018). Perhaps this is why most SLCN are usually detected by the age of 2 (DCSF, 2008c); children identified with SLCN will not be following this expected course of development (Beard, 2018). That said, every child develops differently (Nicholson and Palaiologou, 2016) and his/her needs may not be determined until after the age of 3 (Mroz and Letts, 2008). In addition to this, language difficulties or delays can be explained in multiple ways (Nicholson and Palaiologou, 2016) and will vary in their trajectories – possibly persisting throughout childhood and into adulthood (DCSF,

2008c) or resolving naturally with age (Beard, 2018). In fact, some suggest that recoveries in delays may apply to more than 50% of toddlers (Usyal et al., 2019). Gender-wise, SLCN appear to be more prevalent in boys than girls, though the documented ratios vary between studies, across the age ranges and between specific types of need. These rates may also be influenced by an individual's birth date. Dockrell et al. (2014), for instance, document a ratio of 2.5:1 (boys to girls) and a greater occurrence of SLCN in autumn-born children, than in the summer-born. These seasonal affects could be a consequence of the differences in age and maturation, as children born in the summer are the youngest in their year group.

Problems with Prevalence

Prevalence rates concerning children with SLCN are not easy to determine (Blackburn and Aubrey, 2016) because SLCN encompass a wide range of different conditions (The Communication Trust, 2012) that are interpreted differently amongst personnel and variably reported between areas. Lindsay (2011), for example, in his review of the national statistics supplying the Bercow report, found high rates of prevalence in some local authorities but not in others. This was true of his data relating to the county where the study participants worked and the region relating to my PhD (i.e., Leeds). In the former, the percentage of children with SLCN was 8.8%, whereas in the latter, it was 33.7%. Of further complication in the determination of prevalence, is the belief that many children with SLCN are being missed (Beard, 2018) during assessments, where screening tools may not be sensitive enough (ICAN and RCSLT, 2018) to identify children whose difficulties are less visible (Holland and Hosforth, 2017) or below a specified threshold (Norbury et al., 2016). In all, it means that the number of children and young people with SLCN could be higher than the current estimate of 1.4 million (ICAN and RCSLT, 2018).

3.4.2 Provision for Children with SLCN

In the classroom, the status of communication and language skills was nominally unclear until the publication of the Bercow report in 2008. Speech and language (DfE, 1994), communication and interaction (DfES, 2001) were already established as categories of SEN in the Codes of Practice – but had not been prioritised in the curriculum. The Bercow report acknowledged this curricular need and referred to structures in the upcoming EYFS (DCSF, 2008c). Communication and language

thus became one of three prime areas of learning in the EYFS curriculum (Bain et al., 2015) and then a key component of new assessment and monitoring procedures. A progress check for 2-year-olds was introduced in 2011 and then revised in 2015 (Nicholson and Palaiologou, 2016). This was and remains a statutory duty, compelling practitioners to review and report on children's strengths and needs at age 2. It should identify areas where progress is less than expected and engender further action if there are concerns regarding a possible SEN or disability (DfE, 2017b). Encouragingly, research suggests that practitioners' ability to do this has improved over time (Holland and Hosforth, 2017), although this progress has brought new challenges by way of identifying more children with complex SLCN (Mroz and Letts, 2008). This progress has also been compromised by statistics revealing that only 1 in 4 children with SLCN met their EYFS targets in 2017 (ICAN and RCSLT, 2018).

Interventions

The EYFS emphasises the importance of play (Roberts-Holmes, 2012; DfE, 2017b) and the progression of communication and language skills through play-based activities. Whether play is the best vehicle for learning language is uncertain, though, in light of earlier studies scrutinising approaches across European countries and advocating for more structured teaching activities (Locke et al., 2002). As an approach, it is also problematic by virtue of the fact that children with SLCN can find the social demands of language difficult to manage in play scenarios – causing them to withdraw or be isolated from peers (Stanton-Chapman et al., 2007; Chen et al., 2018). That said, the notion of any ideal is problematic, due to the many approaches and interventions available (Law et al., 2017) and the uncertainty surrounding their effectiveness. Design differences and variations in findings also make comparisons difficult (Pickstone et al., 2009) and it is evident that not all interventions are efficacious. In a review of interventions nationally, 57 types were identified but only 5% were backed with strong evidence of their value (according to the researchers' criteria) (Dockrell et al., 2014). Maybe this is why practitioners are advised to adopt approaches that are more concerned with the individual child and his/her particular SLCN (Cross and Hartshorne, 2010), than a specific programme per se. These approaches recognise that communication is not one thing to be taught and should be embedded in multiple areas of learning (Bain et al., 2015). One way of managing this is through a communication-rich environment (Beard, 2018).

Communication-Rich Environments

According to the literature, communication-friendly or enabling environments are bi-dimensional – comprising both the physical and the emotional environment (DCSF, 2008a). They are also dynamic, modified where necessary (Dockrell et al., 2014) and based on an understanding of several principles: that children need to feel confident and secure; that communication methods vary in form amongst individuals; and that the methods can change as children develop (DCSF, 2008a). Unsurprisingly, enabling environments are as crucial for children with SLCN as they are for children with autism – and not only because the conditions are characterised by communication difficulties and their boundaries are not always clear (Cross, 2011). Given that children with SLCN also have their own visual strengths (Law et al., 2017), visual aids like symbols and timetables (Wellington and Stackhouse, 2011) are valued once more as features of communication-rich environments. What is perhaps more distinctive in the realm of SLCN – but no less relevant to autism – is the advice pertaining to how practitioners themselves should communicate. This means using simple language and short sentences (DCSF, 2008a); communicating with children at eye level (Bain et al., 2015); augmenting speech with gestures (DCSF, 2008a) or signing (Cross, 2011); using children’s name at the start of instructions and allowing individuals extra time to process information (Cross and Hartshorne, 2010).

3.5 Supporting Children with ASLCN

It is clear from the literature that advice concerning strategies for children with SLCN has features in common with those recommended for autistic children. In fact, by studying specific themes in the research domain, I have realised that there are many similarities between children with autism or SLCN (see Table 2), which not only add weight to my argument for studying the two cohorts as one, but also have specific implications for the practitioners supporting them.

3.5.1 Implications for Practice

Whether the similarities concerning presentation and intervention facilitate the practice of supporting children with ASLCN is hard to determine, because studies specifically studying both conditions are relatively scarce.

Table 2: Comparing Findings in the Fields of Autism and SLCN

Theme	Statement	Sources
Diagnosis	Terminology and labels used to describe the same groups of children have changed over time	Dockrell et al., 2014; Happé and Frith, 2020
	Recent additions to DSM-5 have been controversial (re: the omission of Asperger's syndrome and specific language impairment)	Reilly et al., 2014; Kenny et al., 2016
	Diagnoses are potentially underrepresented	Beard, 2017; Happé and Frith, 2020
	Twin studies have suggested genetic underpinnings	Law et al., 2017; Happé and Frith, 2020
Conceptions	Lack of public awareness or understanding of the condition	APPGA, 2017; ICAN and RCSLT, 2018
	The research field has identifiable gaps concerning preschoolers / early years practitioners' beliefs	Stanton-Chapman et al., 2007; Dimopoulou, 2014; Dockrell et al., 2014; Maich et al., 2019
	Practitioners have doubts in their capacity to support children	APPGA, 2017; Holland and Hosforth, 2017
Presentation	Both conditions can co-exist with others	Cross and Hartshorne, 2010; Masi et al., 2017
	The condition can be recognised in the second year of life	DCSF, 2008c; Zwaigenbaum et al., 2015
	Difficulties present heterogeneously in each person	Mroz and Letts, 2008; Masi et al., 2017
	Children's difficulties are not always visible and may only present themselves when demands exceed capabilities	APPGA, 2017; Holland and Hosforth, 2017
	Children are at risk of developing mental health problems	ICAN and RCSLT, 2018; Happé and Frith, 2020
	Children are thought to have visual strengths	Rogers, 2013; Law et al., 2017
Interventions	Enabling environments are vital	DCSF, 2008c; DCSF, 2009
	Early intervention is crucial in reducing risk of poor outcomes	ICAN and RCSLT, 2018; Maich et al., 2019
	Interventions are numerous but difficult to compare or prioritise	Pickstone et al., 2009; Cumine et al., 2010
	Interventions may involve the use of alternative and augmentative communication systems	DCSF, 2008c; DCSF, 2009

What is more certain, is that the commonalities position EYPs with great responsibilities – having to recognise the characteristics of different conditions (Sanz-Cervera et al., 2017) and to respond to children’s needs promptly (DfE, 2017b). To know what features of the environment will be the most enabling (DCSF, 2008c; DCSF, 2009) and to decide which of the many interventions is the most appropriate (Pickstone et al., 2009; Cumine et al., 2010) – without necessarily having the training (APPGA, 2017; ICAN and RCSLT, 2018) or confidence needed to do so. (Michel and Kuiken, 2014; Brodzeller et al., 2018). Plus, they must meet these responsibilities under constraints of time (Holland and Hosforth, 2017) and within time, ensuring that all children acquire the communication skills they need ready for school (Beard, 2018; ICAN and RCSLT, 2018).

3.5.2 Practitioner Beliefs

One final area of note from Table 2, is that concerning conceptions. The lack of research focussing on early years children with autism (Maich et al., 2019) or SLCN (Stanton-Chapman et al., 2007) and the dearth of research examining staff beliefs, knowledge and practices (Dockrell et al., 2014; Dimopoulou, 2016), for example, make it difficult to ascertain the extent to which early years practitioners can and do fulfil their responsibilities. Research typically focusses on staff attitudes towards inclusion (Dias and Cadime, 2016) but rarely considers the impact of practitioner beliefs on practices concerning young children with ASLCN – nor does it explore the factors contributing to those beliefs. This is vital because there are indications in the literature that perceptions of disability have an impact on inclusion and inclusive practices (Barned et al., 2011; Akalin et al., 2014) and that these can be influenced by, e.g., the qualifications that educators have and where they work. Thornton and Underwood (2013), for instance, found that educators with higher level qualifications, working in schools, tended to define disability within a medical model (i.e., were focussed on children’s attributes rather than the environment). Petriwskyj (2010) discovered that inclusive practices were affected by attitudes in schools, but confidence levels in nursery settings. To determine their relevance to children with ASLCN, these factors arguably warrant further consideration.

Chapter 4: Self-Efficacy Theory

This chapter explains why there is need to study self-efficacy in the context of early years practitioners and children with ASLCN. The discussion begins with a review of two of the social theories traditionally used to describe human behaviour and shows how these are linked to the development of Albert Bandura's (1997) *Self-Efficacy Theory*. Self-efficacy is defined with reference to its dimensions and sources and then scrutinised against a backdrop of criticisms questioning the completeness of its theory. The chapter continues with a commentary on the literature regarding teacher efficacy and considers how features of this should be interpreted in early years settings, where children with ASLCN are educated and cared for. Within this interpretation, I will posit the importance of visual feedback in the formulation of competency judgements and conceptualise this as a new domain of self-efficacy.

4.1 Social Learning Theory

Of the many characteristics associated with human nature, the need to understand how people behave is perhaps one of the most enduring. In situ, this need is certainly practical, as interpretations of behaviour play a vital role in determining how we effectively navigate social situations. In academia, the need has spawned multiple areas of research and led to multiple explanations as to why people behave the way they do. This trend was noted by Albert Bandura (1971), who was himself concerned with people's constructions of their social experiences and their influence on behaviour and development. His work began in earnest in the 1960s with what was initially called *Social Learning Theory* (Grusec, 1992). Bandura (1971) used the theory to argue that new behaviours are learned not only through direct experiences of phenomena but also through observations of others. Observational learning was salient because of its efficiency – allowing people to see the rewards and consequences of peer behaviour, without having to test the behaviours for themselves. This did not mean that new behaviours were immediately and blindly adopted on the basis of what was observed, he explained. Rather, that they are strengthened or weakened by attention to positive or negative outcomes, i.e., differentially reinforced and used as a source of information for predicting outcomes. Attention in itself was regarded as a vital cognitive element and the role of cognitive functions in determining behaviour

became an increasing concern for him. This cognitive focus was made clearer in 1986, when Bandura recast the theory as *Social Cognitive Theory* (Grusec, 1992).

4.2 Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

One of the first observations that can be made regarding the research on SCT, is the vastness of publications that have been produced over the last 30 years. Though this means that sources are plentiful, the continuity of information is often obscured by structural or terminological developments – and complicated further by variations in the explanations proffered. Different researchers conceptualise the theory in different ways and examine different features. That said, it is still possible to extract a number of key concepts. These concepts are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Key Concepts in SCT

Statement	Source
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals are endowed with a self-system of cognitive structures 	Pajares, 1996
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive structures include symbolization, vicarious learning and self-regulation 	Dimopoulou, 2016
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People consciously contribute to their behaviour and development. They are not shaped by environmental factors or controlled by inner forces • Inner forces relate to a person's needs, impulses and desires 	Bandura, 1989b Bandura, 1971
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCT is grounded by a perspective accentuating human agency 	Bandura, 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency is characterised by intentional acts or deliberate efforts to make something happen 	Bandura, 2001
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human agency can be described within a model containing three interactive and interdependent elements. These concern personal, behavioural and environmental factors 	Bandura, 1997

4.2.1 Processes of Learning

SCT asserts that patterns of human behaviour are learned through specific cognitive processes, which include symbolization, vicarious learning and self-regulation (Dimopoulou, 2016).

Symbolization

Symbolization refers to the process of transforming lived experiences into verbal and imaginal symbols (Bandura, 1989b), which give experiences structure and meaning and make it easier for people to understand and regulate their environment (Bandura, 2009). It also provides a medium for conceptualising multiple solutions to problems (Dimopoulou, 2016) – allowing individuals to predict (Bandura, 1971), rather than laboriously trial, a range of outcomes (Dimopoulou, 2016).

Vicarious Learning

Vicarious learning is a core theme in SCT (Bandura, 1989b) and entails the processing of information sourced from observed and modelled behaviours. This approach is more profitable than trial and error, because the selection and rejection of favourable or desirable outcomes could be costly (Bandura, 2009). Trial and error would be a dangerous strategy for learning to cross a road, for example. Vicarious learning, moreover, has scope to manage the constraints of time and resources that would otherwise limit what people can experience directly (Bandura, 1989b).

Self-Regulation

The capacity to regulate behaviour means that people can control how they react to different situations (Pajares, 1997) and be mindful of internalised standards of conduct (Grusec, 1992). This is because individuals do not just absorb information and produce actions (Bandura, 2009). They also appraise their performances and modify their behaviour in efforts to achieve a desired result. That is to say, judgements of competence play a role in the self-regulation (Grusec, 1992) and control of behaviour.

4.2.2 Human Agency

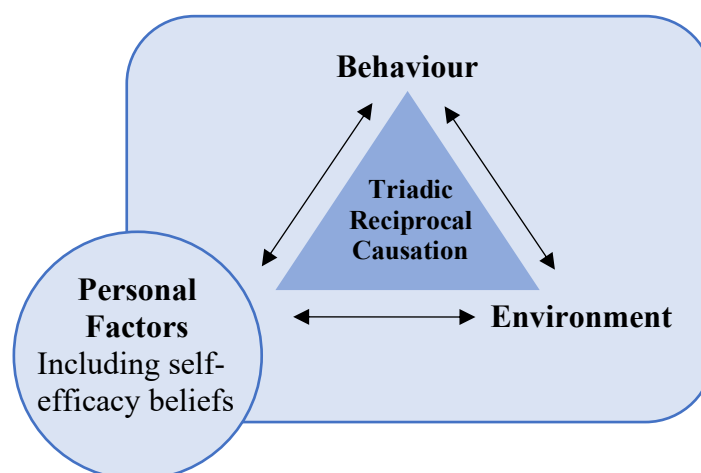
The ability to exercise control over thoughts and actions is a defining feature of what it means to be a human being (Bandura, 1989a). People are “not just reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by environmental events or inner forces” (Bandura,

2009, p.94). They can wilfully employ their efforts to actuate change in themselves and their environment (Bandura, 1989a). These efforts are inherent in human agency and underpinned by multiple cognitive operations that include forethought and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2001). The capacity for forethought means that people can foresee possible consequences of their actions, set goals and plan courses of action to achieve them (Bandura, 1986a). People are then able to reflect on the accuracy of their predictions by comparing them with the ensuing outcomes (Bandura, 2001). Human agency is therefore affected by people’s self-appraisals (Pajares, 1996).

4.2.3 Reciprocal Relationships

Within the constructions of human agency is the notion that people have some degree of cognitive control over three elements: their thoughts, their behaviour and the environment. This control is not unidirectional. Indeed, SCT posits that human agency is determined by interactions between the three elements (Bandura, 1997) – and that these are governed by reciprocal (Dimopoulou, 2016) and interdependent relationships variably influencing or exerting influence over one another (Bandura, 1997). Bandura diagrammatised these relationships within an equilateral triangle, which he referred to as a model of *triadic reciprocal causation* (Dimopoulou, 2016). The presentation of the model changed over time, but its main features are shown in Figure 10. I have created this figure using an early (Bandura, 1986a, p.24) and later (Bandura 1997, p.6) version of the model – and added self-efficacy to emphasise its importance in human agency (Bandura, 2001).

Figure 10: Bandura’s Model of Triadic Reciprocal Causation (Adapted)



An Example of Triadic Reciprocal Causation in Early Years Contexts

Mechanisms within Bandura's model can be uniquely applied to different people to explain their agency in a variety of situations. Consider, for instance, an EYP leading a circle time activity. Her interest in the task and belief in her ability to engage the children would be indicative of personal factors. Support from her colleagues and available resources would be considered as environmental factors. Her behaviour could manifest as levels of effort and persistence. In all, the strength of these elements and their interactions could determine how successful she will be in that situation. High levels of persistence (a behaviour factor), for example, might be influenced by high levels of self-belief (personal factor) and counteract the quantity of resources (environmental factor). In another scenario, the same practitioner may exert more effort in the activity (behaviour) in response to the guidance she receives from a colleague (environmental) and gain a stronger sense of conviction in her ability to succeed (personal).

Human Agency and Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Beliefs regarding our capabilities are one of the most significant types of thought affecting our behaviour (Bandura, 1989b). They are crucial determinants in human agency because people need to believe that their actions will lead to favourable outcomes (Bandura, 2009; Shelton, 2013). Without conviction, incentivisation to act or to persevere in challenging situations is low (Bandura, 2001). In fact, self-efficacy beliefs are significant in challenging situations, for they operate as indicants of motivation, emotional responses and behaviour (Bandura, 1989a). This suggests that actions, drives and feelings are governed more powerfully by beliefs than objective truths (Bandura, 1997), which is in itself significant, because self-efficacy beliefs are not necessarily accurate and may have harmful consequences (Bandura, 1989b). Those thwarted by a particular problem, for instance, may dwell on their deficiencies and thus heighten the perceived severity of the task and feelings of stress (Bandura, 1993). The point is made, since it relates to areas of special education (Ruble et al., 2013) and has a connection with the study context. In this particular context, the capability doubts relate to staff perceptions of their ability to teach autistic children (McConkey and Bhlirgri, 2003) and to support children with SLCN (Letts and Hall, 2003). It intimates that self-efficacy beliefs are of consequence in the area of ASLCN.

4.3 The Theory of Self-Efficacy

Broadly speaking, self-efficacy is an indication of “what you believe you can do with what you have under a variety of circumstances” (Bandura, 1997, p.37). Whilst interpretations are variable (Lombardi, 2016), most tend to emphasise how people perceive themselves and their capabilities (Dimopoulou, 2016). They also appear to make several important distinctions. First, self-efficacy is not a global personality trait (Bandura, 1986b; 2006) – something that people do or do not have. Second, it is conceptually different from constructs like self-esteem (Bandura, 2006; Roof, 2015) and self-confidence (Bray-Clark and Bates, 2003), because these are general qualities and self-efficacy beliefs are task specific (Kelleher, 2016). For similar reasons, it is also unequal to notions of self-concept, as this involves broad evaluations of actual competencies (Pajares, 1996) and self-efficacy does not. Instead, self-efficacy is concerned with perceptions of competence (Dimopoulou, 2012), which relate to specific contexts (Pajares, 1996) and specific tasks (Bray-Clark and Bates, 2003), not yet in actuality. This means that the judgements are inferential (Bandura, 1986b) and future-oriented (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998), featuring early in the cognitive chain of processes influencing behaviour (Williams and Rhodes, 2016).

4.3.1 Defining Self-Efficacy in the Study

In the research study, self-efficacy is regarded as an assessment of perceived competence relating to a certain task and context (Pajares, 1996). It is also understood as a set of differentiated beliefs (Bandura, 2006; Dimopoulou, 2016) – to acknowledge both the multiplicity of appraisals temporally arising from innumerable tasks, and the fact that different situations invoke different types of self-efficacy beliefs (Pajares, 1996). Self-efficacy beliefs, therefore, are not static, immutable, finite (Bandura, 1997) or universal. They are idiosyncratic. People have unique thoughts, ideas and skills (Dimopoulou, 2016) and these underline differences in the areas where efficacy is developed and their self-beliefs fluctuate (Bandura, 1997). Just as the same individual can perform inconsistently in different situations (Bandura, 1993), so people with equivalent skills can perform dissimilarly in the same situation (Bandura, 1997). *Self-Efficacy Theory* attempts to explain these variations by referring to expectations underlining different parts of the process – starting from the person’s self-efficacy beliefs and ending with the outcome of their actions.

4.3.2 Efficacy Expectations and Outcomes

The theoretical emphasis on expectations has positioned *Self-Efficacy Theory* within a wider group of theories known as the ‘expectancy theories’ (Shelton, 2013; Dimopoulou, 2016). These explore the extent to which expected outcomes are reinforcing and how expectations lead to certain behaviours (Dimopoulou, 2016). In *Self-Efficacy Theory*, one of the key premises is that people develop expectations regarding the outcome of future behaviours, which are based on their self-efficacy appraisal. This expectation is known as an *efficacy expectation* and defined as the belief that one can effectively execute the behaviour to produce the desired outcome (Bandura, 1977). It is an indication of what the person feels s/he can do (Dimopoulou, 2014). These judgements (Bandura, 2006) and expectations have a direct and indirect impact on behaviour, which manifest through their influence on people’s motivation to act (Roof, 2015), the activities they choose (Bray-Clark and Bates, 2003), their effort (Schwarzer and Hallum, 2008) and their persistence (Bandura, 1993; Kotaman, 2010). People typically avoid situations they feel unable to cope with, but actively engage with those deemed manageable (Bandura, 1977; Escartí and Gusmán, 1999) – like an EYP asking a colleague to lead a class activity because she feels more comfortable with smaller groups. This means that the decisions people make regarding their behaviour are also influenced by their expectation of what it will lead to. This expectation is called an *outcome expectation* and defined as an estimation that a certain behaviour will lead to a certain outcome (Dimopoulou, 2016). Bandura (1977) illustrated the two types of expectation in a model (See Figure 11).

Figure 11: Efficacy Expectations and Outcome Expectations



Notes

1. Reproduced from Bandura (1977, p.193)
2. Green and red colours added

4.3.3 The Three Dimensions of Self-Efficacy

It is clear that self-efficacy beliefs are wide-ranging and mutable in their construction, and equally wide-ranging and mutable in their impact on human agency. In *Self-Efficacy Theory*, explanation of this mutability is based on the assumption that self-efficacy beliefs can vary in three dimensions: strength, magnitude and generality (Bandura, 1997; Lombardi, 2016).

Strength

The strength of an efficacy expectation is characterised by those that are either weak or strong, or some measure in between. When beliefs are strong, individuals are more able to visualise success (Bandura, 1989a), persist with their goals (Schwarzer and Hallum, 2008) and can perform well (Malinen et al., 2013). When beliefs are weak, expectations of mastery are low and easily invalidated (Bandura, 1997).

Magnitude

Magnitude concerns the level of perceived difficulty involved in a task and is notable in the meaning it confers to the subsequent experience of success or failure (Bandura, 1997). The mastery of something considered difficult has more value than one judged as easy. These perceptions of difficulty are further salient when the tasks are multiple, as people tend to focus their attention on the one that they feel most capable of dealing with (Bandura, 1977).

Generality

Generality is associated with an appraisal of both the task domain and context (Bandura, 1997) and recognises that it is possible for a person's self-efficacy beliefs to extend or generalise to other activities and areas (Bandura, 1977). This allows individuals to exercise control over circumstances that are novel but reminiscent of others – or even greatly different to them.

4.3.4 Sources of Self-Efficacy Information

The three dimensions provide a framework for exploring how efficacy expectations can vary and what the consequences might be. What they do not do, is identify the origins of those beliefs. In fact, these origins are delineated in Bandura's (1997) theory as a repository of information, that individuals can access and interpret

(Pajares, 1997) in the process of making their judgements. This repository has four domains: *Enactive Mastery Experience*; *Verbal Persuasion*; *Vicarious Experiences*; *Physiological and Affective States*.

Enactive Mastery Experience

Like the development of skills (Bandura, 1997), efficacy expectations are developed and revised within a perpetual cycle of self-appraisal, that does not begin and end with the success or failure of one activity. They are constructed and re-constructed in reference to multiple performances separated in time, usually marked by peaks, troughs and plateaus. This multiplicity of experiences creates a genuine source of evidence on which to reflect on one's capacity for success (Malinen et al., 2013) – and success is demonstrative of mastery (Dimopoulou, 2012). Mastery is typically the most influential of all the domains (Escartí and Gusmán, 1999) as it boosts feelings of efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and tends to elicit an expectation of triumph in the future. These feelings, however, must be linked to tasks that are sufficiently challenging (Kelleher, 2016) and mastered with effort and persistence (Malinen et al., 2013). If mastery is only experienced in contexts of quick (Bandura, 1977) and easy wins, then perceptions of competence can weaken in the face of obstacles (Malinen et al., 2013) and be accompanied by expectations of failure. Interestingly, the extent to which this diminishment and negative anticipation holds true, seems to depend on the variable ways in which people interpret failure and their efforts (Bandura, 1997). Some, for example, may equate high levels of effort with mastery but others may view them as a sign of incompetence. Failure will undermine self-belief in some individuals but not in others (Bandura, 1989a).

Verbal Persuasion

The second self-efficacy domain, known as verbal persuasion (Ruble et al., 2011), assumes that the judgements individuals make about their capabilities are partially rooted in the opinions of others or in reference to significant role models (Bandura, 1997). This source lacks the authenticity of mastery experience, being conferred second-hand – but is used nonetheless, due to the ease and readiness with which it can be provided (Bandura, 1977). That is not to say people will be entirely persuaded of their competence or that they will subsequently perform well (Bandura, 1997). Verbal persuasion is not sufficient in its own right to enhance and maintain

levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986a). Criticisms, for instance, tend to subvert self-perceptions of efficacy (Ruble et al., 2011) and lead people to eschew or quickly abandon difficult activities (Bandura, 1986a). The framing of the feedback is therefore significant – and its influence largely depends on how it is interpreted (Ruble et al., 2011) by the individual. In this respect, the communicator must be credible and suitably skilled in order for the recipient to have faith in his/her comments (Bandura, 1997). Their appraisal must be realistic (Bandura, 1986a) and confer little difference between the judgement offered and the self-judgement made (Bandura, 1997). If the disparity is great or beliefs are unrealistically high, then the person is likely to experience failure, lose confidence in the persuader and be further undermined in his/her beliefs (Bandura, 1986a).

Vicarious Experiences

Self-efficacy beliefs are additionally influenced by vicarious experiences, i.e., the experiences gained by watching the results of other people's actions (Ruble et al., 2011; Lombardi, 2016). In daily life, individuals become un/willing participants in social interactions (Bandura, 1997) and have opportunity to observe people's behaviour. This allows them to learn from other people's successes and mistakes (Bandura, 1986a; Dimopoulou, 2016) and provides a benchmark from which they can judge their own capabilities (Bandura, 1993). These social comparisons are part of a continuous process and the degree of influence again depends on the profile and effectiveness of the demonstrator. When s/he is perceived as being similar to the individual, e.g., in terms of age, gender, educational level (Bandura, 1997) or ability (Bandura, 1986a), his/her command is stronger, because the observer can relate to his/her successes (Kelleher, 2016). The context in which the behaviour is modelled (Bandura, 1986a) and aspects of the observation process itself are also crucial – allowing a person to act on something they have been shown (Bandura, 1997). These parts are described as functions of attention, retention, production and motivation (Dimopoulou, 2016) and, respectively, involve the determination of precisely what is observed, remembering what has been modelled, converting learning into action and the consideration of incentives (Bandura, 1997).

Physiological and Affective States

Attention is also salient in the fourth self-efficacy domain, i.e., physiological and affective states – due to belief that the more attentive we are to a task, the less mindful we will be of our physical and emotional responses (Bandura, 1997). This matters in the context of self-efficacy because our interpretation of those responses has the potential to change levels of competency belief. Judging an elevated heart rate or sweating as a sign of inability, for instance, is likely to reduce a person’s self-efficacy beliefs (Schönfeld et al., 2017), but viewing these as normal is not. Similarly, teachers who interpret their responses to a task as symptomatic of stress and anxiety are more likely to lack conviction in their competency, than teachers who are energised by them (Ruble et al., 2011). Indeed, stress and anxiety are recognised as physiological and affective indicants affecting self-efficacy beliefs (Kelleher, 2016) and have additional import in discussions of avoidant behaviour. This is because stress and anxiety can be experienced in situations perceived as threatening and levels of self-efficacy might determine whether a situation is avoided or faced (Bandura, 1989a). In this context, stress is defined as a physiological reaction to demands in the environment that have been interpreted as possible threats (Schönfeld et al., 2017), whereas anxiety is a psychological state of fear or feeling that something bad will happen (Demir, 2018). People with high self-efficacy coping beliefs are less likely to be upset by perceived threats and believe that they can impose control over them (Bandura, 1993).

4.3.5 Criticisms of Self-Efficacy Theory

One of the notable assets of *Self-Efficacy Theory* is its sphere of application – accommodating the heterogeneity of human competencies (Dimopoulou, 2012, 2016) and able to interpret these in a range of fields, like sport, mental health (Bandura, 1986b) and teaching (Park et al., 2014). Some researchers, however, have contested the integrity of the theory and a triad of criticisms are discernible in the commentaries.

a) The Terminology

The distinction between efficacy expectations and outcome expectations has become a matter of semantic controversy in the literature (Lombardi, 2016), through concern that Bandura’s definitions were not precise enough for the constructs to be viewed as discrete and successive steps in the cognitive process. To begin with, Eastman and Marzillier (1984) posit that the use of the word ‘outcome’ in the

explanation of efficacy expectations is confusing, because it recurs in the definition of *outcome* expectations. They also argue that efficacy and outcome expectations operate in tandem, not separately, as people simultaneously think about the outcomes of their behaviour as they appraise their competency. Yet, this view ignores the fact that people must think about what they are doing and how well they are doing before they visualise expected outcomes (Bandura, 1977). It is equally problematic to assume that the constructs work together, given that the two types of judgement are not always consistent (Pajares, 1996) and that convictions do not automatically lead to the behaviour being performed (Bandura, 1977). Self-doubts can easily undermine self-belief (Bandura, 1997) and impede subsequent behaviour (Schwarzer and Hallum, 2008; Kotaman, 2010).

b) The Self-Efficacy Scales

Criticisms surrounding the precision of terms have also extended to the design of the self-efficacy instruments or scales. These scales represent efforts to measure perceptions of competence in different realms and are typically rendered as novel or modified versions of those created by Bandura (e.g., Sharma et al., 2012; Ruble et al., 2013). The main issue is to do with their construction (Pajares, 1996) and labelling. Eastman and Marzillier (1984) asserted that each point along the scale should be equally differentiated and assigned a specific label – and that their numerical values should start at zero. Exactness is critical, as it has implications for the accuracy of reported measurements (Roof, 2015; Burrell et al., 2018) and the correctness of interpretations (Beauchamp, 2016; Williams and Rhodes, 2016). However, this problem is not limited to scales measuring self-efficacy, since the equivalence of intervals, together with their ascribed numerical values and meanings, are widely known as factors to consider in rating scale designs (Cohen et al., 2017) – and thus issues of validity that all researchers must be attuned to.

c) The Insufficiency of Behaviour Explanations

Bandura (2006) responds to the problem of scale validity with a series of guidelines, which, e.g., emphasise need to devise scales that are focussed on specific domains, graduated by levels of task demands, and piloted. Couched in this way, his approach is defensive because it counters criticisms that efficacy beliefs are appraised independently of the task (Bandura, 1986b) and that the underlying theory is too

simplistic in its explanations of human behaviour (Eastman and Marzillier, 1984). The recommended practice of creating scales that focus on particular areas of competency (Bandura, 2006), for instance, means concentrating on a certain aspect of behaviour in a specific context, rather than multiple aspects in general contexts. Plus, his own admission that self-efficacy is one of a number of mechanisms influencing human functioning (Bandura, 1986a) seems more demonstrable of a perspective embracing, rather than obscuring the complexity of human behaviour. As scholars have noted elsewhere, individuals are not always as aware or in control of their thoughts and behaviours as they assume (Shapiro et al., 1996) and more research is needed to understand the conditions that influence their beliefs (Pajares, 1996).

4.3.6 Envisioning a Fifth Self-Efficacy Domain

One way of enhancing our knowledge of the conditions impacting on a person's competency judgements could be to add another domain to the four delineated in Bandura's (1997) *Self-Efficacy Theory*. This particular domain could allow researchers to explore how people's self-efficacy beliefs are affected by feedback produced in a visual format and be called *Visual Feedback on Performance*. It would encompass the emotional responses of people involved in the situation, written and pictorial material (inclusive of assessments and photographs), and in my view, temper a possible limitation of the original domains. These domains encompass information that is experienced (via mastery and physiological and affective states), observed (via vicarious experiences) and heard (via verbal persuasion), but not solely information that is communicated visually or non-verbally. This is curious in several respects. First, in light of research demonstrating the utility and power of visual aids in various spheres, e.g., autism (Guldberg, 2010; Rogers, 2013), attitudes and behaviour (Joffe, 2008). Then second, in terms of the reported links between visual feedback and levels of self-efficacy (Wiltse, 2001; Weaver, 2006) – which Bandura (1993) himself also noted. Despite these observations and connections, the importance of visual feedback in the context of personal factors (Chong, 2018) and self-efficacy beliefs (Karl et al., 1993) remains relatively unexplored.

Features of Visual Feedback on Performance (VFP)

What is further striking in the literature associated with visual feedback, is the resonance of its features with Bandura's (1997) other domains. This has permitted my

conception of VFP as a fifth domain that is categorically distinctive, but not incongruent. Similar to verbal persuasion, for example, the content and delivery of ‘written’ feedback has an impact on how it is received by an individual (Weaver, 2006). This is because positive or negative-wording increases or decreases in self-efficacy beliefs (Escartí and Gusmán, 1999) and is typically aligned with self-attributions concerning effort or luck (Karl et al., 2013). Furthermore, it seems that perceptions of the provider issuing the feedback are as influential (Weaver, 2006) as they are in the domain of vicariousness, but conversely – when there is *less* similarity between the provider and the viewer, than more. In fact, the balance of the relationship is a delicate one – a line drawn between interactions that connote a power imbalance (Yang and Carless, 2013) and those where the provider is seen as an expert. This expert influence is explained by scholars such as Escartí and Gusmán (1999, p.92), who say:

people are inclined to believe evaluations about their capabilities which are made by individuals who represent an authority in the field (...) who have experience of judging the activity and, therefore, are more qualified to make judgements about performance.

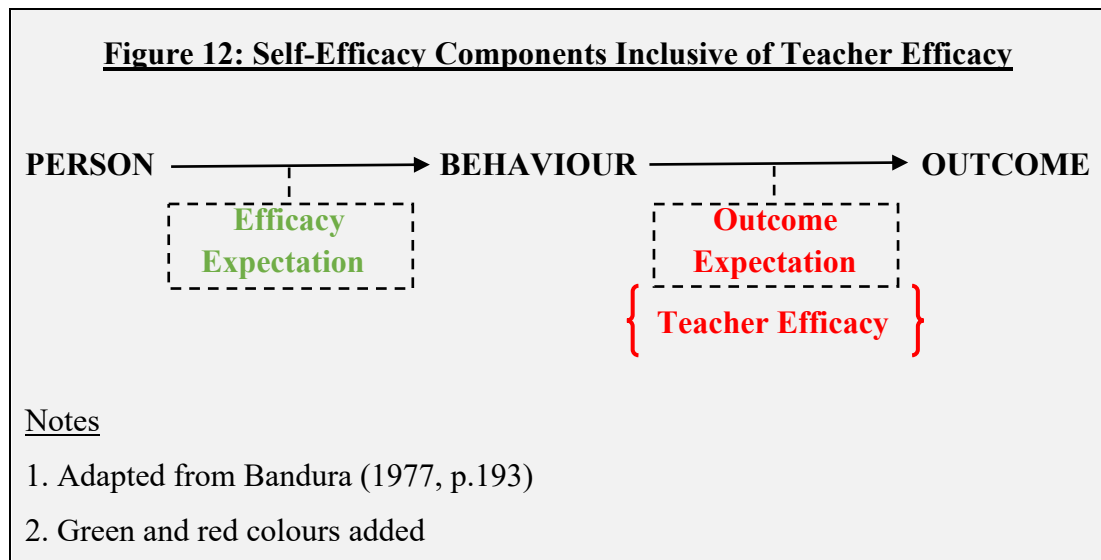
To maximise individuals’ responses and outcomes in this context, some researchers have thus suggested that the relationship between the provider and the receiver should entail a dialogue (Yang and Carless, 2013) – positioning recipients as active agents in processing the feedback (Chong, 2018). Timing, furthermore, is said to be critical. Feedback must be given within an interval that encourages action but does not preclude time for people to self-reflect on their performance (Yang and Carless, 2013).

4.4 Teacher Efficacy

Time to reflect on performance is a vital commodity, but one that may be supplanted by drives focussed on pupil achievement (Larrivee, 2008). Wider pressures can compel teachers to concentrate more on productivity and end results than on thoughts concerning the effectiveness of their practice. Indeed, this seems a very pragmatic way of managing the various and multiple responsibilities involved in teaching. Unfortunately, this lack of self-reflection – or self-appraisal – may be to the detriment of the very standards of attainment being sought. This is because teacher efficacy, which is a sub-entity of self-efficacy (Kotaman, 2010; Roof, 2015), has

repeatedly been linked to teacher effectiveness (Bray-Clarke and Bates, 2003; Dimopoulou, 2012) and correlated with pupil outcomes (Bruder et al., 2011; Roof, 2015). Pupils, for instance, tend to perform better when they are taught by teachers with high levels of efficacy (Kotaman, 2010), i.e., teachers who are thus more motivated (Ruble et al., 2011) and responsive to individuals' needs (Dimopoulou, 2014). Teachers' self-appraisals, moreover, can potentially foretell the quality of their work (Bray-Clarke and Bates, 2003; Roof, 2015) in aspects relating to, e.g., classroom environments (Dimopoulou, 2014, 2016) and behaviour management (Bruder et al., 2011; Ruble et al., 2011).

Instruction, student engagement and classroom management are known domains in teaching efficacy (Malinen et al., 2013) and represent specific contexts in which teachers may form judgements regarding their competency. In its simplest form, teacher efficacy is a measure of how much an individual believes s/he can do what is required to help children learn (Dimopoulou, 2012), or is interpreted as a teacher's estimation that learning will occur. This means teacher efficacy has equivalence with Bandura's definition of outcome expectation (Dimopoulou, 2016) – which I have illustrated in Figure 12, as an addendum to Figure 11.



Although many researchers tend to agree with its outcome expectancy equivalence, operationalisations of teacher efficacy are less equivocal (Roof, 2015). These are noticeable in accounts of the dimensions comprising teacher efficacy as a whole and can be confusing when trying to make sense of studies (Dimopoulou, 2016). In my interpretation, which echoes Allinder (1994), there are two components to teacher

efficacy, that are known as *General Teaching Efficacy* (GTE) and *Personal Teaching Efficacy* (PTE). This terminology was originally developed by an American corporation called RAND (Research and Development) and based on studies of Julian Rotter's *Theory of Locus of Control* (Dimopoulou, 2016). Rotter's (1966) theory says that reinforcement plays an important part in learning, where people regard the acquisition of rewards as either a consequence of actions controlled by themselves (internal control), or of actions controlled by the environment (external control). When applied to the construct of teacher efficacy, internal control relates to PTE (Brouwers and Tomic, 2000) – where teachers believe that they can personally influence pupil learning (Allinder, 1994; Roof, 2015), whilst external control relates to GTE and belief that conditions in the environment are more influential (Brouwers and Tomic, 2000).

4.5 A Rationale for EYP Self-Efficacy Research

In my review of the self-efficacy literature, I found only a few studies attending to the relationship between teacher beliefs and teacher practice in early years settings (e.g., Trivette et al., 2012; Guo et al., 2014). More commonly, the research focusses on teacher competencies in specific academic subjects (Jennett et al., 2003), in mainstream settings (Ruble et al., 2011) and thus children of school-age. This is puzzling, given the demand for high-quality EYEC (Nutbrown, 2012; Truss, 2013) and the criticism of standards observed in the sector (Sylva et al., 2004; Griggs and Bussard, 2017). If an understanding of EYP self-efficacy beliefs could influence the quality of staff practice (Guo et al., 2011) and levels of efficacy affect pupil progress and outcomes (Bandura, 1993; Bray-Clark and Bates, 2003), then surely there is vital need to explore early years practitioners' beliefs. More precisely, there is a need to understand the factors that shape their beliefs (Guo et al., 2011) and to “elucidate the manner in which those beliefs influence their practices” (Trivette et al., 2012, p.6).

4.5.1 Applying Efficacy Theory to Contexts of EYP Inclusion

Whilst self-perceptions of competence are repeatedly cited as a variable influencing the quality of teaching practices, these findings stem from research exploring mainstream teacher efficacy and we cannot know for sure whether they can be applied to teachers involved in special education (Ruble et al., 2011). There are only a handful of studies considering how practitioners work with autistic children (Dimopoulou, 2012; Dawson and Scott, 2013) and only a few studying children with

language delays (Guo et al., 2014). So, we have little knowledge of the competencies (Bruder et al., 2011) and beliefs held by practitioners teaching children with SEN and little to no information available for comparing study results. This knowledge could prove critical if, as the literature suggests, staff perceptions of children and their educability vary according to the severity of their needs (Scheuermann et al., 2003; Crosland and Dunlap, 2012) and pupils with SEN are deemed ‘more difficult’ to teach. Perceptions of teacher competence could be lower in contexts of special education and have a more noticeable impact on the quality of teaching. This reference to ‘teacher’ competence is intentional, for it draws attention to beliefs attached to a particular role that EYPs assume in practice, but not necessarily in name. Private settings have teaching responsibilities (DfE, 2017b) but do not specifically have to employ a teacher (Roberts-Holmes, 2013). This raises the question as to whether EYP efficacy should exist as a distinct construct or if it has equivalence with current conceptions of teacher efficacy. Without research to draw on, the question is difficult to answer but, in viewing EYPs as teachers by virtue of their teaching responsibilities, I would argue that the domains circumscribing *Self-Efficacy Theory* do at least have relevance.

Enactive Mastery Influences

As part of their teaching role, EYPs must cultivate environments that are conducive to learning – deploying programmes that are continuously responsive to every child’s needs (Guldberg, 2010) and guided by appropriately high expectations of success. Their efforts should be proactive in the face of challenge and strengthened by conviction that children make progress because they are effective practitioners. These elements of mastery are the hallmarks of an efficacious teacher (Dimopoulou, 2014) and valuable in contexts of early years education and SEN. The dimensions conceptualised in Bandura’s (1997) theory are also valuable, as they signal how the *strength* of people’s competency beliefs could vary according to the complexity (or *magnitude*) of children’s needs and to their type of disability – and might not assuredly *generalise* to different cohorts. Staff commitment to inclusion reduces as the perceived severity of children’s conditions increases (Barned et al., 2011) and EYPs have doubts specifically regarding their capacity to work with children with SLCN (Letts and Hall, 2003) or autism (Dimopoulou, 2016). Unfortunately, this may not be remediated by years of experience (Letts and Hall, 2003) or knowledge of the many interventions available, because the needs of each child are so diverse (Cross, 2011; Crosland and

Dunlap, 2012). That is to say, EYP doubts may be a reflection of the ambiguity surrounding recommended approaches (Mroz and Letts, 2008; Parsons et al., 2011) and the variation in children's needs, rather than insufficient years of experience and training. This is intriguing, not only in consideration of reports equating competency with training and qualifications (Nutbrown, 2012), but also in terms of contradictory evidence correlating or disassociating years of experience with mastery and higher levels of self-efficacy (e.g., see Ruble et al., 2011; Dawson and Scott, 2013).

Verbal Influences

When Bandura (1997) explains how verbal persuasion is used as a source of efficacy information, he makes the point that this information can be transmitted indirectly, as well as directly, e.g., through disingenuous comments, excessive praise and unsolicited help. He does not, however, discuss the potential impact of comments received beyond the immediate situation. This is salient in the matter of early years education and childcare because it concerns relationships with parents and the professional status afforded to EYPs. Effective parent-practitioner relationships are prerequisites in inclusive practice (Sira et al., 2018) and whilst this alliance has the potential to strengthen EYP faith in their competence, it also runs the risk of weakening it. There are, for instance, many accounts of parents who are dissatisfied with the support that their children receive (Blackburn, 2016; APPGA, 2017) and this dissatisfaction could be communicated in a way that negatively affects how EYPs view their competency. Any feelings of inadequacy, moreover, might be intensified by comments about the rate of children's progress, due to the predictions that *Self-Efficacy Theory* makes about verbal feedback. Verbal feedback is said to be more persuasive when it focusses on progress towards a goal, rather than efforts underlying it (Bandura, 1997). By extension, this means that appraisals of practitioner competency will be more convincing when they are associated with faster rates of pupil attainment. Proportionally fewer young children with SEN, however, reach expected levels of achievement than children without SEN (DfE, 2017a), which could deepen feelings of ineptitude on the part of staff, i.e., if the 'slow' rate of progress is attributed to practitioner incompetency. These feelings, together with the criticisms, may be further detrimental if they seem to devalue the work that EYPs do.

Vicarious Influences

In every early years setting, there will be a team of individuals demonstrating different types of expertise, creating opportunities for less experienced practitioners to learn (vicariously) from more experienced peers. Capable modellers can demonstrate more effective ways of managing problems when they arise (Ruble et al., 2011), so an EYP struggling with an activity could overcome the problem with reference to a competent other. This scenario is problematic, though, as it is reliant on the availability of practitioners who are suitably experienced and effective in the field of ASLCN – but who may not be part of the staff team. Indeed, sector-wide calls for more highly qualified practitioners (Osgood, 2009) and training that adequately prepares people for their roles (Nutbrown, 2012) means this reality is not inconceivable. Plus, even if there are staff wanting to develop their skills, they may be further limited by issues relating to training and its access (Elfer and Dearnley, 2007; Crellin, 2017). Access is critically difficult in terms of ASLCN, where courses are simply not available (APPGA, 2017; ICAN and RCSLT, 2018) or run by non-specialist staff (Letts and Hall, 2003; Scheuermann et al., 2003). In other words, issues related to training may further impede or prevent opportunities for EYPs to observe and learn from competent peers. Observational issues are additionally relevant in the practice of working with children, 1:1. Children with autism (Robertson et al., 2003; Dimopoulou, 2016) or SLCN (Mroz and Letts, 2008), for example, can have significant learning needs that require support on an individual basis. These needs require approaches that are tailored to each child and could involve work away from the main classroom area. An EYP, therefore, may not only observe practice that does not transfer well to his/her child, s/he could also be isolated from peers who could model practice in the first place.

Physiological and Affective Influences

It is argued that self-efficacy research may be particularly valuable for practitioners teaching autistic children (Ruble et al., 2013) because their work is physically and emotionally more demanding than that of general education teachers or teachers of developmentally delayed children (Coman et al., 2013). This need is perhaps justified by the weight of studies focussing on: burnout or attrition (Dimopoulou, 2012; 2014); emotional labour (Boyer et al., 2013; Crellin, 2017); the challenge of inclusive teaching (Sharma et al., 2012); the demands associated with teaching children with SLCN (ICAN and RCSLT, 2018) and the complexity of autistic

children's needs (Scheuermann et al., 2003; Vakil et al., 2009). What is most noticeable within these studies is the reference to autistic children in contexts of practitioner stress and competency beliefs. All teachers can experience stress (Jennett et al., 2003) but teachers who specialise in autism are particularly vulnerable (Dimopoulou, 2016). When efforts are not consistently successful, staff anticipate fewer positive outcomes (Shelton, 2013) and the inherent stress elicits doubts in practitioner competency (Ruble et al., 2011). These doubts can lead to burnout (Brouwers and Tomic, 2000), which is characterised by a range of symptoms including emotional exhaustion – and which suggests there is a link between stress and burnout (Schwarzer and Hallum, 2008) in contexts of autism. Yet, this link may be advantageous, for it equally suggests that acting on knowledge of how efficacy beliefs interact with practice could moderate stress in the field of autism and serve as a self-protective factor for burnout (Ruble et al., 2011). If staff could reflect on their self-efficacy beliefs and understand how these affect their performance when supporting autistic children, then they would be in a better position to resolve any doubts and potentially protect themselves from emotional exhaustion.

The Influence of Visual Feedback on Performance

In the early years classroom, two of the most important elements of visual feedback entail pupil engagement and progress. In the first instance, pupil engagement can be deduced visually from children's reactions to activities – attending to their facial expressions, body language and physical responses. Pupil progress, in contrast, can be seen on paper or in a digital format, by comparing records of children's attainment over time, e.g., via tracking sheets or successive video clips. Although pupil engagement is a crucial indicant for all teachers, it is perhaps even more crucial in early years settings, as it increases teacher efficacy (Guo et al., 2011) and encourages the warm and positive interactions (Guo et al., 2014) that some (controversially) believe are not always evident in children's nurseries (Elfer, 1996). Sight of pupils making progress also seems vital in the early years inclusive classroom, due to the bond between pupil success and practitioners' sense of accomplishment (Harwood et al., 2013) – or rather, the noted decline in teacher efficacy when pupils make poor rates of progress (Dimopoulou, 2016) and are autistic (Ruble et al., 2011). In this domain, therefore, a sound judgement of competency based on a child's progress must be predicated on an understanding of how traits within specific conditions affect his/her

ability to engage with demands and make progress. A child's delayed response, for example, might relate to the difficulties s/he has with understanding and using language (Cross, 2011) or interacting with others (DCSF, 2009) – rather than the strategy employed. Acknowledged as such, the 'feedback' would be less likely to destabilise levels of self-efficacy and thus allow staff to persist until the engagement they desire is secured. High levels of efficacy foster greater levels of effort and allow people to persist for longer when challenges arise (Bray-Clarke and Bates, 2003).

4.6 Closing Remarks

In this chapter, I have conducted a review of the literature on self-efficacy and teacher efficacy and demonstrated how this can be applied to the work carried out by EYPs. The discussion has emphasised need for research exploring efficacy in contexts of children with ASLCN and explained why contemporary conceptions of personal competency judgements require modification. This critique has led me to propose a fifth self-efficacy source domain and to explain how this complements Bandura's (1997) original four. Within the critique, specific examples of how EYP competency judgements could be influenced across all five domains were delineated. In all, the review of the literature now places me in a position to introduce the methodology of the study, which ultimately explores the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and EYEC inclusive practices.

Chapter 5: Introducing the Study Methodology

Chapter 5 is the first of two chapters explaining the methodology used in the study. In this chapter, the emphasis is on the theory underlining my practice and the steps taken. It begins with a critical review of the philosophy guiding my research approach and explores the assumptions I have made about its relevance to the study design, the participants and the data. My reasons for creating a mixed methods design are clarified and the design itself is delineated within two research phases, which were known as the Survey Phase and Photovoice Phase. At this stage in the thesis, the exposition of the phases is largely theoretical – indicating the plans I made before the outbreak of the coronavirus and how the fieldwork was meant to progress.

5.1 Initial Assumptions

Educational research is motivated by an initial problem or question, which is yet to be fully answered by the corresponding literature (Cohen et al., 2008). In my case, the problem stemmed from my work as an advisory teacher and the question as to why there were differences in the amount of help staff sought for children with ASLCN. The question was developed into a study profiling inclusive practices in private nurseries and solicited practitioners' views of their effectiveness. This intuitively means that my efforts were based on several assumptions. First, that participants would differ in their views of inclusion and personal competency, and second, that I would need to appraise a range of methodologies regarding the data. My assumptions are noted, for they run parallel to thought that researchers have different opinions as to how studies should be conducted and will consider a variety of perspectives when formulating them (Kelly et al., 2018). These perspectives are in themselves significant, as they influence how researchers derive meaning from their data (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017) and have implications for the defensibility of their findings. That is not to say one research stance is better than another (Shannon-Baker, 2016), but that there is need to legitimise and operationalise the one adopted. In doing so, the reader gains a greater sense of the study's premises and conclusions, and the underlying research philosophy gains its integrity (Saunders et al., 2019).

5.1.1 Conceptualising Philosophies

A research philosophy may be broadly defined as the researcher's system of thoughts (Žukauskas et al., 2018) – a system that reflects the values, beliefs and assumptions s/he holds about how knowledge is created and which influences the methodological decisions that are made (Saunders et al., 2019). Together, those values, beliefs and assumptions constitute a paradigm, i.e., a particular way of understanding the world and its reality (Kelly et al., 2018). Research paradigms help to distinguish one research philosophy from another (Žukauskas et al., 2018) but their expositions can be confusing (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017) and guidance for new researchers is limited (Shannon-Baker, 2016). A preliminary difficulty is exemplified by the overlapping of terms – with some researchers referring to particular approaches as examples of paradigms (Emam, 2009; Kelly et al., 2018), but others proposing them as examples of philosophies (Dimopoulou, 2016; Žukauskas et al., 2018). This blending of terminology has been attributed to the multiple ways in which the word 'paradigm' has been interpreted (Morgan, 2007; Kelly et al., 2018) since it was introduced as a research concept in 1962, by the philosopher Thomas Kuhn (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). In fact, the notion of a paradigm has not only been equated to a philosophical stance. It has also been equated to a world view, to shared beliefs in a research field and to a research exemplar (Morgan, 2007; Kelly et al., 2018). As I see it, each paradigm has its own set of characteristics (Bartlett and Burton, 2016) and a specific name – and the name defines a certain type of research philosophy. Thus, the characteristics making up an 'interpretivist' paradigm equate to the philosophy of interpretivism. Those that constitute a 'pragmatist' paradigm denote the philosophy of pragmatism, whilst the characteristics of a 'positivist' paradigm connote the philosophy of positivism. These three paradigms and philosophies are specifically mentioned for their dominance in the literature (see Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017; Žukauskas et al., 2018) – and for their influence in my study.

5.1.2 A Pluralistic Approach

Among the debates exploring the utility of different philosophies and paradigms, there is a lack of consensus concerning their number and categorisation (Kelly et al., 2018). There are also disagreements regarding the feasibility of combinations. According to Saunders et al. (2019), 'pluralist' researchers believe in the mixing of philosophies and paradigms, but 'unificationists' do not – asserting that

every part of the research process should fall under one type. Since my research has been guided by the philosophies of positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism, it is evident that I have identified as a pluralist. In this section, as I delineate the three philosophies, I will show how elements of each contributed to the development of the study and thus that a pluralistic stance was the most appropriate.

Positivism

Positivism was first introduced by the philosopher Auguste Comte in the mid 19th century (Farghaly, 2018) and takes an objective view of the world (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). It assumes that the world exists without influence from the researcher and that phenomena should be explored through observation and measurement (Ryan, 2018). This exploration involves searches for cause and effect relationships and ideally concludes with a universal explanation for the phenomenon concerned (Kelly et al., 2018). Positivism is relevant in the context of my research because of its connection with quantitative methodology and the emphasis on quantifying (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017) phenomena. Quantitative methodology featured in my study design and quantitative methods underlined the construction of the scale items in the Phase 1 online questionnaire. The questionnaire, moreover, was self-administered and completed remotely, without input from me. The positivist notion of cause and effect was equally pertinent, due to its consonance with my hypothesis that there might be a link between self-efficacy beliefs and inclusive practices; this hypothesis was reflected in one of the research questions. However, positivism did not wholly suit the development of my research because of its grounding in thought that there is only one version of reality (Ryan, 2018) or one explanation of a phenomenon. Embracing this particular viewpoint would have contradicted my assumption that practitioners have different self-efficacy beliefs and different perspectives on inclusion. To work on the assumption of multiple versions of reality (Kelly et al., 2018; Ryan, 2018) and the individuality of participant experiences (Dimopoulou, 2016), I needed to combine the philosophy of positivism with interpretivism.

Interpretivism

Interpretivism has roots in early 20th century Europe (Saunders et al., 2019) and takes a subjective view of the world (Ryan, 2018; Žukauskas et al., 2018). It supposes the influence of the researcher (Emam, 2009) and that phenomena should be

explored through the people who experience them (Saunders et al., 2019). Unlike positivism, cause and effect are analysed separately (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017) and findings help to understand, rather than explain (Emam, 2009) a specific scenario (Lin, 1998). To facilitate this, interpretivist researchers must enter the participants' world, see a situation from their perspective (Saunders et al., 2019) and search for meaning behind their actions (Chowdhury, 2014). This approach suited my research due to its alignment with the methodology underlining the Phase 1 interviews and the focus groups planned for Phase 2. During the interviews, I talked to participants in-person or over the telephone, sought their opinions on inclusion through open-ended questions and asked them to explain their competency judgements. In the process of doing so, I gathered multiple examples of qualitative data – and qualitative data align with the interpretivist model (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). Interpretivism appeared to be a good fit for the qualitative aspects of my research, in the way that positivism was suited to the quantitative aspects. This philosophical merger was ostensibly problematic, though, since interpretivism and positivism are usually considered as opposite ends of a continuum (Kelly et al., 2018), instead of neighbours. Their 'contradictory' stances had the potential to diminish the value of my findings and my efforts to answer the research questions in full. My reasons for espousing them were pragmatic but, in consequence, meant broadening my stance further.

Pragmatism

Pragmatism dates back to the late 19th century in America (Scott, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019) and ascribes to neither an exclusively objective nor subjective view of the world. Instead, it attempts to reconcile both (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017) and assumes there are, necessarily, many ways of conducting research (Kelly et al., 2018). This necessity is borne of a desire to provide a comprehensive picture (Saunders et al., 2019) of the world and to acknowledge that each person has their own version of this (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). As such, there is a blurring of its boundaries with interpretivism (Kelly et al., 2018), though pragmatism takes a more practical approach to exploring people's world views. Indeed, pragmatism is celebrated for its focus on methodological freedom (Dimopoulou, 2016) and "what works" (Denscombe, 2008, p.117) – permitting researchers to select the methods most suited to their research questions (Kelly et al., 2018). This potential for mixing methods made pragmatism an ideal philosophy for understanding the development of my study instruments. To gain

the richness and fullness of data I wanted, I felt it was important to create a set of instruments that practitioners could engage with. In Phase 1, for instance, I was conscious of need to ask questions that staff could identify with and that could capture their inclusive beliefs and experiences, in depth. For Phase 2, I knew from my previous employment that EYPs are used to photographing their practice and felt that this method would resonate. On these grounds and in line with the view of other researchers (e.g., Saunders et al., 2019), pragmatism thus served as a philosophical partner for my mixed methods approach and provided a connection between positivism and interpretivism.

5.1.3 Philosophical Research Assumptions

By defining and operationalising the philosophies that guided the development of my study, it is apparent that each has a different role and represents a particular set of values, beliefs and assumptions or paradigms. In the literature, researchers tend to explicate paradigmatic values, beliefs and assumptions within the more formal headings of ontology and epistemology (e.g., Ryan, 2018) – though some additionally refer to axiology (e.g., Saunders et al., 2019) and methodology (e.g., Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). Ontology concerns the nature or experience of reality (Ryan, 2018) – what this is and how it can be understood (Kelly et al., 2018). For some researchers, there is only one reality, that is described in objective terms and interpreted via measurements and facts. For others, reality is non-singular and subjective – shaped via the multiple perceptions of different people and their socio-cultural interactions (Saunders et al., 2019). Epistemology refers to the foundation of knowledge or what can be known (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017), so it considers how knowledge is constructed (Saunders et al., 2019), the forms it takes and how it can be communicated (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). Epistemology, like ontology, has objective and subjective stances, meaning that it is possible for knowledge to be communicated in numerical terms and as narratives (Saunders et al., 2019). Axiology, in contrast, is concerned with ethical issues and ethical behaviour – conceptualising and assessing what is appropriate and what is not, in pursuit of the research (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). It also indicates the extent to which researchers and their values influence the development of the study (Saunders et al., 2019) – and thus the value attributed to, e.g., the participants and the data collected (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017).

Exemplifying the Study Paradigms

In the study context, the three philosophies and their defining paradigms provide three examples of what ontology, epistemology and axiology may look like in (research) practice. For ease of comparison, these examples are summarised in Table 4, whose layout is adapted from Saunders and colleagues (2019). The examples are underpinned by the definitions provided by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017, pp.30-36) and again, by Saunders et al. (2019, pp.144-145).

Table 4: Contextualising the Study Paradigms

	Ontology <i>(View of Reality)</i>	Epistemology <i>(Foundations of Knowledge)</i>	Axiology <i>(Research/er Values)</i>
Positivist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ordered view of phenomena: that self-efficacy beliefs relating to different elements of staff practice can be collected as numerical data and then described, contrasted and generalised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of EYP's self-efficacy beliefs measured in the questionnaire as values on a rating scale Information about the participant sample recorded as answers to closed questions in the questionnaire (e.g., age group, gender, highest qualification, years of nursery experience and amount of training) Measures concerning the integrity of the self-efficacy scale maximise its scope to make inclusion-efficacy predictions in other settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher independent of the study in terms of the administration of the questionnaire

Table 4 continued

	Ontology <i>(View of Reality)</i>	Epistemology <i>(Foundations of Knowledge)</i>	Axiology <i>(Research/er Values)</i>
Interpretivist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple versions of phenomena, which are constructed socially through cultural traditions: that EYP interpretations of inclusion and perceptions of their competencies will be rich, varied and diverse – and influenced by the culture of the nursery where they work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of each EYP’s inclusive practices explored during 1:1 interviews Knowledge of each EYP’s inclusive practices ideally represented in annotated photos and discussed face-to-face New understanding of inclusive practices in a little researched domain (re: EYPs, young children with ASLCN and private day nurseries) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher part of the fieldwork, engaging with staff face-to-face – guiding interviews and the focus group discussion via semi-structured questions Reflecting on my role as an ‘insider’ and a researcher throughout the study – conscious of the potential impact of my ‘status’, experiences, perceptions and knowledge, e.g., when interacting with staff or disseminating findings
Pragmatist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple versions of phenomena, which are realised through ideas and experiences: that EYP interpretations of inclusion and perceptions of their competencies will be rich, varied and diverse – and influenced by their research participation Recognition that staff perspectives could change as they contribute to / experience the fieldwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practical knowledge gained in specific contexts: knowledge of inclusive practices and self-efficacy beliefs gained in four private nurseries Knowledge used to inform new practices: the self-efficacy scale has scope to become a tool widely used in private day nurseries – a potential means of EYPs gauging inclusive competency beliefs in the context of children with ASLCN, and of identifying areas for development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition that my PhD research has been driven by my lived experience of supporting nursery staff and children with ASLCN – and the question as to why some staff sought advice more than others Reflecting on the conclusions I have drawn at the end of the study – the extent to which these answer the research questions, relate to the literature and the implications they have for future research

5.2 The Methodology

So far, the discussion has shown how a particular paradigm can help to discern one research philosophy from another. Paradigms, however, can also help to define research methodologies (Corr et al., 2020) and methods (Farghaly, 2018), because the beliefs and assumptions they represent influence how researchers engage in and structure their research (Almaki, 2016). Paradigms guide their interests and the questions they ask, the study's purpose and its design, its procedures and its research ethics. My mixed methods design is characteristic of an approach synthesising multiple paradigms (Johnson et al., 2007) and can now be described.

5.2.1 Aims and Questions

The research explores levels of self-efficacy and the inclusion of children with ASLCN in the early years sector. More specifically, the emphasis is on practitioners working in private day nurseries, i.e., the strategies they use to include children with ASLCN, aged birth to 5, and individuals' perceptions of their competencies. The fieldwork is guided by three aims and questions.

Aims

1. To measure levels of self-efficacy in early years practitioners working with children with ASLCN
2. To identify and analyse practitioner examples of inclusive environments
3. To explore the relationship between EYPs' self-efficacy beliefs and inclusive practices in private nurseries

Questions

1. How do practitioners perceive their self-efficacy regarding the inclusion of children with ASLCN?
2. What strategies do practitioners use to facilitate the inclusion of children with ASLCN?
3. What impact do perceived levels of self-efficacy have on inclusive practice in private day nurseries?

5.2.2 The Study's Contribution to the EYEC Field

In my review of the literature in Chapters 2-3, I drew attention to the fact that studies of young children with SLCN (Stanton-Chapman et al., 2007) and autism (Maich et al., 2019), early years practitioners (PLA, 2018) and private nurseries (Crellin, 2017) remain rare – despite the government's latest policy on inclusion (DfE and DoH, 2015), the fact that private nurseries make up 63% of early years provision (see DfE, 2019b) and the need for practitioners to deliver high-quality EYEC (DfE, 2017a). In Chapter 4, I also highlighted the dearth of studies specifically examining the competencies (Bruder et al., 2011) and beliefs of those early years practitioners (Guo et al., 2014) – and used findings from the field of teacher efficacy to show why this paucity is significant. I discovered how high levels of efficacy belief can positively influence pupil performance (Kotaman, 2010) and moderate levels of stress (Ruble et al., 2011) in mainstream contexts, and hypothesised their impact on EYPs. As such, it seems that studies of self-efficacy normally focus on school teachers (e.g., Park et al., 2014) and teaching assistants (e.g., Lombardi, 2016) and research attending to EYPs is more likely to centre on their emotional labours (e.g., Elfer and Dearnley, 2007), status (e.g., Osgood, 2009) or attitudes (e.g., Simms, 2006). Self-efficacy studies may involve children with autism (e.g., Dimopoulou, 2016; Lombardi, 2016) but are yet to comprehensively include *young* autistic children or children with SLCN. Harwood (2009) is a rare example of inclusive practices in the preschool phase – but in the sense of policies and general SEN. All of these studies provide important insights but do not contribute to the field in the unique way that mine does.

5.2.3 The Mixed Methods Research Design

According to Cohen et al. (2008), research should be designed for a certain purpose and in the manner best suited to that purpose. This includes making a decision about the most appropriate methodology – of which there are three principal types: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods (Almaki, 2016). All three are common in the early years field (Harrison and Wang, 2018) but the one I have adopted – the mixed methods approach – appears to be rare in special education, constituting little more than 1% of material in the top three journals published between 2007-2019 (Corr et al., 2020). This is surprising, given that its flexibility allows researchers to choose, combine and tailor the techniques most appropriate for their study (Johnson and

Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Flexibility is surely essential for those “who work with diverse and complex populations and social issues” (Corr et al., 2020, p.26).

Quantitative and Qualitative Research

Mixed methods research can be simply stated as an approach combining aspects of quantitative and qualitative research (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017). Quantitative research essentially prescribes an empirical approach to understanding phenomena (Harrison and Wang, 2018), which assumes that data can be quantified (Queirós et al., 2017), analysed with mathematical methods (Yilmaz, 2013) and used to test hypotheses and theories (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Qualitative research confers a more inductive approach to understanding phenomena (Mohajan, 2018). Here, the focus is on people’s experiences in a specific context (Sandall et al., 2002) and the meanings they attach to them (Yilmaz, 2013). It involves efforts to gather and analyse *non*-numerical data that can be used to conceptualise and build new theories (Mohajan, 2018). Each research approach confers advantages over the other and both are known also for their limitations. Quantitative research is advocated for its objectivity (Queirós et al., 2017) but potentially problematic in the abstractedness of its data (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Qualitative data is less abstract but compromised by the time it takes to collect the data and the limited generalisability of its findings (Mohajan, 2018).

A Rationale for Mixing

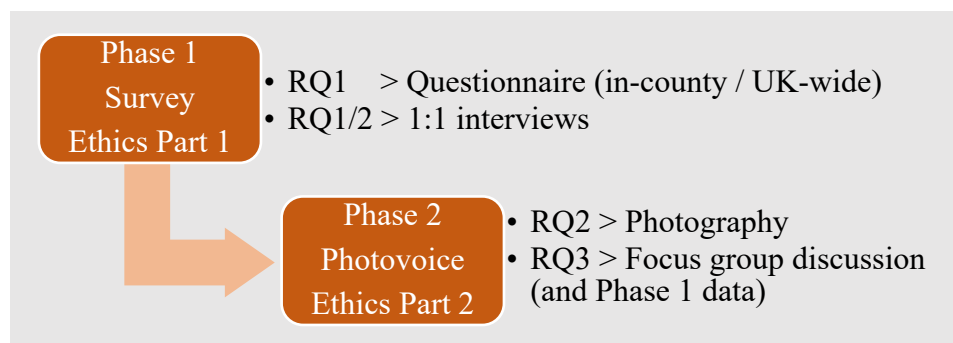
The mixed methods approach is thought to have emerged in response to the constraints (Doyle et al., 2009) and dissatisfactions associated with qualitative and quantitative research, i.e., as a means of providing a bridge between the two (Almaki, 2016), which balances out their weakness and harnesses the best of what each can provide (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Yet, the mixed methods approach has not escaped scrutiny either – with its reported legitimacy moderated by disputes concerning the compatibility of qualitative and quantitative approaches (Doyle et al., 2009) and by the variable ways in which the mixing can occur (Shannon-Baker, 2016). This lack of standardisation is implicit in the idea that approaches can merge at different levels (Corr et al., 2020) and stages (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017) – relative to the theoretical framework, the data collection and the interpretation of findings (Shannon-Baker, 2016). However, the inherent variability of mixed methods

research need not be viewed as a criticism. It could equally be seen as an advantage. In my case, the mixed methods approach tallied with my pluralistic research stance and offered the flexibility I needed for the research questions – from the design and implementation of the instruments, to the analysis and interpretation of the data.

5.2.4 Overview of the Fieldwork

The fieldwork was planned over two phases and each phase was divided into two parts (See Figure 13). Phase 1 was called the Survey Phase and involved the successive administration of an online questionnaire and 1:1 interviews. The questionnaire was launched twice – targeting practitioners in one county first and then nationally. Phase 2 was called the Photovoice Phase and similarly envisaged as two consecutive parts – with EYPs taking photographs of their work and discussing these in a focus group. Both phases of the fieldwork were underpinned by an ethical code of practice, which was approved by the University of Leeds (in a letter and email), and foregrounded attention to the issues of participant access, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and data management. These issues are conceptualised in Chapter 6 and were embedded in the processes of gaining ethical approval. This approval was awarded in two parts, pertaining to each of the research phases and the two sets of supporting documentation (They were separated in recognition of their ethical complexity). It should be said, though, that the documentation for Phase 1 underwent several revisions during the fieldwork, to accommodate changes that were made to the sampling criteria, recruitment methods and research instruments. The letter shown in Appendix 1, therefore, represents the point at which ethical approval was first secured, in Phase 1.

Figure 13: The Two Research Phases



In Phase 1, the questionnaire and interviews collected two sets of data to create a broader picture of EYPs' competency beliefs. This practice of using more than one tool to explore a phenomenon is typical in mixed methods research (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017) and was due to be repeated in Phase 2 – combining the photographic data with the focus group transcript. Method mixing is beneficial, as it produces insight that might have been missed from one method alone (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) and can inform future planning – by using the results of one method to develop the next (Corr et al., 2020). In fact, these benefits were realised during my study, because the responses from the questionnaire shaped the interview sample and schedule, and the interview data gave more meaning to the questionnaire findings. This mixing of tools and their rationale is précised in Table 5, which illustrates how the answers to each research question would be informed by data gathered from at least two research tools. It arguably discerns my research as a *mixed methods triangulation design*, i.e., one which collects and interprets distinct and complimentary sets of data in pursuit of a chosen subject (Almaki, 2016). The response to RQ1, for instance, was based on the questionnaire and interview data. Table 5 also indicates the intended successive administration of the tools and is important to note, because it explains why data from all of the tools would potentially contribute to RQ3.

Table 5: Purpose of the Research Tools

Phase 1 Tools		Phase 2 Tools	
Questionnaire →	Interview →	Photography →	Focus Group
Answer RQ1	Answer RQ1 and 2	Answer RQ2	Answer RQ3
Responses indicate interview volunteers	Responses add to those from the questionnaire	Responses add to those from the interviews	Responses add to the photography and Phase 1 data
Responses inform interview schedule	Participant subset forms photography sample	Participants become focus group sample	

5.2.5 The Research Schedule

The two research phases were mapped over a two-year period, which was preceded by my transfer year and efforts to pilot the questionnaire. By the end of the first year, I had also gained ethical approval for the first phase of fieldwork. The main events and practices are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6: Research Timeline

Year 2	Research	Ethics	Recruitment	Instruments	Fieldwork	Analyses	Write Up	Assessment
Spring 2020	Literature on self-efficacy, EYEC and inclusive education		Contacted 31 nurseries		First online questionnaire launched	13 questionnaire returns	Chapters 1-4	
Summer 2020	Literature covering research methodology	Phase 1 ethics amended to reflect fieldwork changes	Recruited 26 participants Created a website, contacted charities and used social media to promote the questionnaire		Fieldwork suspended due to COVID-19		Chapters 5-6 begun	Supervisor feedback
Autumn 2020		Secured approval for Phase 2	Recruited 2 participants and then 6 interviewees Efforts to recruit EYPs for Phase 2	Questionnaire responses used to develop the interview schedule	Second online questionnaire launched Interviews in-person and by telephone	2 questionnaire returns Interviews transcribed and analysed	Chapter 6 completed Chapter 8 completed	

Table 6 continued

Year 3	Research	Ethics	Recruitment	Instruments	Fieldwork	Analyses	Write Up	Assessment
Spring 2021	Considered the study's findings in the context of the latest EYEC and inclusive education research				Photovoice phase cancelled as a result of the pandemic and issues with recruitment	Questionnaire and interview data integrated and analysed	Thesis structure revised to account for the loss of Phase 2	Supervisor feedback
Summer 2021							Chapters 5, 7, 9 completed	
Conclusions determined and Chapter 10 written							Viva practice	
							Editing and proof reading	Thesis submission

5.3 The Survey Phase

The data in Phase 1 were collected from an online questionnaire and 1:1 interviews. These instruments are typical partners in a survey (Cohen et al., 2017) and were orchestrated in successive order during the fieldwork. The process began with the design of the questionnaire.

5.3.1 Questionnaire Design

Although questionnaires vary in their appearance and purpose, they usually entail a predetermined list of questions (Denscombe, 2008) aiming to collect data on a specific topic (Cohen et al., 2017). They are particularly useful when surveying large and widely dispersed populations (Denscombe, 2008) – not least because they can be administered without the researcher being present and surmount issues relating to time and distance (Cohen et al., 2017). The PLA's (2018) survey on mental health, for instance, reached more than 2000 EYPs online across England. The deployment of online surveys has become a popular alternative (Millar and Dillman, 2011) to traditional paper-based methods and likely been aided by the increase in the percentage of households with Internet access over the last two decades – rising from 9% in 1998 to 90% in 2018 (Statistica, 2019). Whilst they present challenges via their construction, privacy and confidentiality (Andrews et al., 2003), and require effort (Millar and Dillman, 2011) and skill (Shannon and Bradshaw, 2002) to complete them, many of these issues can equally apply to other formats (e.g., Cohen et al., 2017) and may be offset by their advantages. In this, online surveys are known for their sophisticated range of design options (Manfreda et al., 2008), their economy (Andrews et al., 2003) and their faster rates of return (Shannon and Bradshaw, 2002).

Presentation

Design is a critical feature of Web-based surveys and involves consideration of the type of text that will be used and how it is entered; the use of colour, images and animations (Andrews et al., 2003), the position of instructions, and the numbering and ordering of items (Cohen et al., 2017). These considerations are practical in the first instance because the inclusion of, e.g., images can increase the downloading time (Andrews et al., 2003). Condensed layouts are discouraging (Cohen et al., 2017) and excess colour can be distracting (Ritter and Sue, 2007). Indeed, there is a certain onus on researchers to get it right from the start (Denscombe, 2008), for questionnaire

response rates are typically lower than 50% (Cohen et al., 2017) and appropriate formatting can reduce participant abandonment (Ritter and Sue, 2007). To this end, the instrument should ideally contain a progress bar (Cohen et al., 2017) that helps individuals track their progress; there should be a ‘welcome page’ at the start and a ‘thank you’ page at the end (Ritter and Sue, 2007); and clear instructions should be provided for each type of question (Denscombe, 2008). This advice was acknowledged in the construction of my online questionnaire, for each of its 13 screens was embedded with a progress bar and a ‘Finish later’ option, and different questions were accompanied by a concise set of instructions. The welcome page thanked people for their interest and provided information regarding their consent, whilst the final screen thanked them for their time and invited them to contact me if they had any queries.

Content

The questionnaire itself consisted of 38 items, which were developed from a review of the literature and the study’s core themes (See Appendix 2). Twelve of the items were categorised as open questions and 26, as closed questions. Open questions are defined as those that allow the participant to answer more freely (Cohen et al., 2008) and have the potential to produce rich and unexpected data (Cohen et al., 2017). However, they also necessitate greater effort in their completion and tend to produce lengthier answers that lengthen the analyses (Denscombe, 2008). Closed questions, in contrast, are highly structured (Cohen et al., 2017) and require participants to choose their answer from a pre-determined list of options (Denscombe, 2008), which means they are easier to answer and quicker to process – but produce data more amenable to statistical interpretation (Cohen et al., 2017), than to qualitative analysis. Combining the two types of questions meant that the instrument was semi-structured, i.e., one that sets items out in a clear sequence and framework and permits more flexible responses (Cohen et al., 2008). The ordering and framing of the items was salient because, as Cohen et al. (2017) explain, this influences the tone of the questionnaire, the weight ascribed to the items and the nature of people’s responses. The risk, they add, is that responses are proffered merely for the sake of social acceptance or to satisfy the researcher’s agenda. That the question may be interpreted in a way that was not intended and that the researcher is reliant on the responses being honest and correct.

5.3.2 Piloting the Questionnaire

Concern over the rigor of questionnaire items is one of the reasons why pilots are usually advocated. They let researchers trial the instrument with a sample from the target population (Ritter and Sue, 2007) and potentially pre-empt problems before its official launch. Responses from a pilot help to check the clarity of the instructions, the suitability of the items and the time needed to complete the questionnaire – and allow the researcher to test his/her data analyses (Cohen et al., 2017). During the first year of my PhD, I hoped to capitalise on these benefits by running my own questionnaire pilot with a small group of private nurseries in my home county. I wanted to review the appropriateness of the documentation that participants would receive and to ensure that the wording of instructions was unambiguous and user-friendly. I also wanted to check that the questionnaire was accessible online, that it was straightforward to navigate and that all of the items would yield suitable data. Unfortunately, and despite my best efforts, the combined nursery responses did not enable me to build a pilot sample and thus to issue the questionnaire. That said, I was able to test my intended recruitment approaches and the experience prompted a number of adjustments.

Resolutions for Phase 1

- Address the potential impersonality of the recruitment process with an in-person presentation of the study
- Reduce the amount of information provided in the participant information sheet and enhance its visual appeal
- Ensure that fieldwork is scheduled outside of potential holiday periods
- Provide an advance summary of the questionnaire items, so that respondents know what to expect and can have confidence in their ability to respond
- Explain that the questionnaire can be accessed on a range of devices, e.g., tablet or mobile phone, as well as a computer
- Use responses from the in-county questionnaire to inform the design of the nationwide questionnaire

5.3.3 Interview Design

The questionnaires were followed by five 1:1 interviews. Interviews are highly regarded in research (Knox and Burkard, 2009), due to their capacity to explore

people's perspectives on a situation in depth (Boyce and Neale, 2006) in a naturalistic setting (Alshenqeeti, 2014) and to yield 'inside' information, otherwise unavailable to others (Denscombe, 2008). Though interviews occur in various formats (Alshenqeeti, 2014), the semi-structured interview is one of the commonest and typically used when the researcher has a clear idea of what the focus of the research should be from the outset (Gordon, no date). This clarity and the facility to explore individuals' experiences in their own environment rendered my decision to interview a natural one, as I had already concluded that the emphasis would be on inclusive practices and felt that meeting practitioners in their nurseries was the most suitable way to elicit their views on this. Semi-structured interviews involve a set of pre-determined questions but present opportunity to vary the order in which they are asked (Denscombe, 2008) and to probe the emerging themes (Alshenqeeti, 2014). When face-to-face, moreover, they provide the interviewer with non-verbal and verbal data (Knox and Burkard, 2009), which potentially improve the data overall by considering not just what the person says, but also by seeing how this is communicated (Gordon, no date). The improvement is not necessarily assured, for interviewees will only disclose what they are willing to share and some of this information might be extraneous (Alshenqeeti, 2014). This concern, however, may be tempered by the fact that interview data can be substantiated in conjunction with other methods (Boyce and Neale, 2006). My interviews were planned as a means of augmenting the questionnaire and Phase 2 data.

Schedule

Once a researcher has established the purpose of and rationale for their interviews, the next step should involve the preparation of a schedule (Cohen et al., 2008). The schedule is crucial because it helps to standardise the procedures involved in the delivery of each interview – specifying, for instance, what to say or do at each stage (Boyce and Neale, 2006). It is also crucial in its determination of the information needed to satisfy the research question/s (Gordon, no date), or rather, the questions that will be asked during the interview and their number (Boyce and Neale, 2006). Not unlike the items involved in a questionnaire, the researcher has open and closed questions at his/her disposal and must consider how these will be worded – mindful of the impact that their formulation could have on participants' responses and engagement (Cohen et al., 2008). My interview schedule is provided in Appendix 3, which acknowledges the advice in the literature and itemises the nine questions that

framed the first interview. This is noted because the number of questions satisfied the criteria issued by Boyce and Neale (2006), by being less than 15 and because the wording of the questions was slightly revised as the interviews progressed – to improve their comprehensibility. The issue of wording might have been pre-empted with a pilot, but I decided not to run a test for several reasons. Whilst pilot interviews are useful (Alshenqeti, 2014), my familiarity with the nursery environment and the subject matter gave me the confidence to interview practitioners without one. As recruitment was challenging and my sample size was small, I also wanted to maximise the number of interviewees that would contribute data. Changes to the schedule after interview one were anticipated but considered feasible – exploiting the flexibility of the semi-structured interview. In fact, question changes are not unusual in interviews that adopt relatively unstructured approaches and can be advantageous – stimulating the discovery of rich experiences (Knox and Burkard, 2009).

Delivery

Plans regarding the delivery of the interview are notable inclusions in the literature on interviewing techniques – demonstrating that thought must be given to the location and how the interviewer will interact with participants (Gordon, no date). The setting should be quiet and minimally distracting (Cohen et al., 2008), whilst the interviewer must be attentive to the speaker (Alshenqeti, 2014) and to his/her own reactions – to show an active interest in what the person says (Knox and Burkard, 2009) whilst keeping his/her personal opinions in check (Boyce and Neale, 2006). Rapport is vital (Cohen et al., 2008), as are efforts to make the speaker feel comfortable (Boyce and Neale, 2006) – though this can be difficult in view of the potential for power relations to emerge (Alshenqeti, 2014) and given the tacit agreement that the agenda is set by the researcher (Denscombe, 2008). One of the factors I needed to be aware of in the study interviews, was how my role might be perceived by nursery staff. That those viewing me as a ‘university researcher’ might be daunted by the prospect of being interviewed, whereas those remembering me as an advisory teacher, might be tempted to discuss an issue beyond the remit of the study. Both stances, moreover, could conceivably be compounded by the interview location: a nursery setting could accentuate the difference between an EYP and a researcher, or encourage disclosures through a sense of workplace security. The concerns were not limited to the information that interviewees might provide. They also comprised regard for the way

this would be retained. Tape recorders (Gordon, no date) and notes (Opdenakker, 2006) are often used to preserve the accuracy of the conversation but can be off-putting for participants (Alshenqeti, 2014).

5.4 The Photovoice Phase

The interviews were meant to mark the end of the first phase of fieldwork and produce data shaping the structure of the next. This second phase consisted of a photographic task and focus group discussion and was grounded in the philosophy of Photovoice – which is a photographic tool (PhotoVoice, 2019) or process (Strack et al., 2015) harvesting people’s ideas and perspectives on a particular issue. Its delivery was reliant on a subsample of interviewees volunteering for the tasks ahead – and planned for the start of 2021. The proposed start date was later than anticipated, due to the delays surrounding the launch of the second questionnaire and the restrictions imposed by the outbreak of COVID-19. These restrictions and the increasing burden they placed on the participants ultimately led to the cancellation of the photovoice fieldwork. Preparations for this phase, however, were still valuable and contributed to the study – impacting on my reflections and my practice (See Chapter 10). These were guided by what I had learned in the photovoice and focus group literature.

5.4.1 Photovoice

Photovoice is one of many research approaches grounded in photography (Woodley-Baker, 2009), but stands out in its emphasis on the empowerment (Catalani and Minkler, 2010) of people traditionally marginalised (Hannes and Parylo, 2014) or assigned with low status in society (Wang and Burris, 1997). In many cases, this has involved the recruitment of women (Catalani and Minkler, 2010), which made it particularly appealing to me, given the gender and status profiles of the early years workforce. Indeed, the power of Photovoice lies in the accessibility of photography (Stingu et al., 2015); that it reaches people from a diverse range of backgrounds and abilities (PhotoVoice, 2019), and is participatory in its philosophy – giving participants control of the fieldwork (Hannes and Parylo, 2014) and communicating their individual view of the world (Killion, 2001). These first-hand accounts are thought to strengthen the integrity of the research because they are created in natural environments and capture a real moment (Taylor, 2002) in a physical form (Grady, 2001). Plus, the fact that a single scene will be photographed in different ways by

different people (Schell et al., 2009) lends itself to the production of a wealth of complex data (Wang and Burris, 1997) with a wealth of possible interpretations (Killion, 2001). For some, the complexity engenders difficulty in the analysis (Wang and Burris, 1997), whilst for others, it is something to be explicated between the researcher and the participants (Woodley-Baker, 2009). In the present context, the accent on natural environments suited my wish for the EYPs to take photographs in their workplaces – and complemented studies concerning early years personnel (Stingu et al., 2015), teacher beliefs (Taylor, 2002) and the inclusion of children with autism (Carnahan, 2006). The multiplicity of photographic views, moreover, aligned with the study's interpretivist philosophy and my belief that each practitioner would construe the research question on inclusive practices in a unique manner.

5.4.2 Focus Group Discussions

One of the attractions of using Photovoice as a research tool was its scope to fit the exact needs of the research. Just as fellow researchers tend to ground their studies in the work of Wang and Burris (1997) but amend the methodology to suit their own research goals (Catalani and Minkler, 2010), so I tailored the fieldwork to my own research questions and participants. I wanted to bring the EYPs together to share, reflect on and discuss their inclusive nursery practices as part of a focus group. A focus group discussion (FGD) usually involves a small number of people talking to each other about a particular topic (Cohen et al., 2008) – but under the guidance of the researcher (Stewart and Williams, 2005), who maintains the focus of the discussion and ensures that everyone has the chance to contribute (Denscombe, 2008). Photographs are facilitatory in this respect, as they give participants a tangible frame of reference that detracts from the potential awkwardness of the situation (Schwartz, 1989) and may improve the flow and richness of the conversation. More plainly, the participants are more able to devote their attention to the content of the images than to the attributes of the interviewer. Thinking and talking about images vivifies and crystallises the arguments made (Grady, 2001) and one person's remarks can inspire comments from another (Perry, 2006). This clarity is essential in terms of the accuracy with which the resulting data are interpreted, as people do not necessarily interpret the same photo in the same way (Killion, 2001). For the EYPs, the FGD would have thus given them opportunity to convey their inclusive practices in a qualitatively truer manner and this would have enriched the data gathered in Phase 1.

Chapter 6: Phase 1 Fieldwork

This chapter reifies the stances and structures articulated in Chapter 5 and attends to the first phase of fieldwork. Divided into two parts, it begins with the construction, administration and analysis of the online questionnaire and then similarly proceeds with the interviews. Participant recruitment and methodological challenges are delineated and, together, explain why certain adjustments were required. Ethical conduct is addressed in the final part of the chapter. This focusses on participant access, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and data management.

6.1 Part One: The Early Years Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed over the course of almost one year, which was longer than the reported average of 2-3 months preparation time (Cohen et al., 2017). This duration reflects my efforts to pilot the instrument and coincided with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. Throughout this period, however, its aim and underlying research question remained constant: to gauge levels of self-efficacy beliefs in private nursery practitioners working with children with ASLCN (RQ1).

6.1.1 The Questionnaire Design

The instrument was designed on the Jisc Online Survey platform, which is run by an organisation promoting digital services in higher education (Jisc, 2020) and endorsed by the University of Leeds. Its 38 items were presented over 10 screens and positioned between screens introducing and concluding the questionnaire. Each screen was headed by a percentage progress bar and contained a 'Finish later' link, so that practitioners could pause the questionnaire and return to it later, if preferred. Participants were immediately routed to the final screen if they declined their consent on the opening screen.

Developing the Content

The content of the questionnaire is summarised in Table 7, indicating where questions were positioned and what they focussed on. Questions concerned with the profile of the sample were placed at the end, because this is where scholars recommend biographical (Braun et al., 2012) or sensitive information (Ritter and Sue, 2007) should be put. Questions exploring EYP views of their role and inclusion were located at the

beginning – as these were considered relatively straightforward, and it is advised that questionnaires should start with something simple (Denscombe, 2008). Though these were not self-efficacy specific, they were included to enhance the analysis. The self-efficacy questions (marked by the black box) occupied the middle part of the questionnaire and were divided into four unnumbered parts across four screens. This non-numeric feature was intentional, since the practice of numbering by section is supposed to be less off-putting to respondents than the numbering of every item (Cohen et al., 2017). The groupings were also purposeful, for they related to areas of the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfE, 2017b) and seemed logical, given the EYEC context of the research. More than this, they signalled the fact that self-efficacy beliefs are context-specific entities and must be measured in accordance with the demands of the situation (Bandura, 2006).

Table 7: Questionnaire Composition

Screen	Number of questions	Number of items	Focal point	
2	3	= 3	EYP views on their role, work and expertise	
3	4	= 4	Years of experience and children they support	
4	3	= 3	Understanding of children with ASLCN and inclusion	
5	1	4+1	Self-efficacy and children with ASLCN	Optional clarification of answers
6	1	4+1	Self-efficacy and relationships	Optional clarification of answers
7	1	4+1	Self-efficacy and teaching and learning	Optional clarification of answers
8	1	4+1	Self-efficacy and the nursery environment	Optional clarification of answers
9	1	= 1	EYP work priorities, in terms of effort	
10	1	= 1	Advantages and disadvantages of inclusion	
11	6	= 6	Qualification level	ASLCN training, gender, age, consent
Totals	= 22	= 34+4 = 38		

Notes

1. Closed-ended items are shaded in turquoise and open-ended items in purple
2. Blue text (+1) refers to the number of items that were optional

A Note on Scales

The domain-specific nature of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) has led many researchers to develop their own instruments for measuring individuals' beliefs – often as rating scales that combine measurements with opinions and allow for differentiated responses (Cohen et al., 2017). One of the most common is a Likert scale, the simplicity of which has enabled its expansion into various forms since it was introduced by Rensis Likert in the 1930s (Chyung et al., 2017). This versatility rendered it suitable to my purposes. Likert scales feature items that are united by a common topic and usually rated by levels of dis/agreement (Willits et al., 2016). Despite their popularity, they can be contentious – with debates centring on the use of a midpoint, whether the ratings should ascend or descend, and the scoring system (Chyung et al., 2017). These challenges are heightened in the realm of self-efficacy because of the criticisms surrounding the phrasing of items and the interpretations of scale points (See Chapter 4). Mindful of these difficulties, the questionnaire's self-efficacy items were expressed in the form 'I can' and the scale was divided into six equal parts: Very Strongly Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree and Very Strongly Agree. A midpoint was excluded to ensure that the EYPs would evaluate their level of competency belief in positive or negative terms – but tempered with the provision of an optional comment box.

The ChASE Scale

What should be evident from the descriptions of the study's scale and self-efficacy items is their originality. Although it might have been easier to modify an existing scale, my scrutiny of those available indicated that none were entirely suitable (See Appendix 4). The *Autism Self-Efficacy Scale for Teachers* (Ruble et al., 2013), for example, had potential with its emphasis on autism, but did not cover children with SLCN or the early years phase and was situated in America. Items were not always worded precisely and the scale points were not comprehensively labelled. This issue was noticeable in other scales too (e.g., Bandura, 2006; Dimopoulou, 2016). Where labelling was clearer, scales were rejected because the reference to SEN was insufficient (Höltge et al., 2019) or too broad (Dawson and Scott, 2013), or because the phrasing of items was potentially emotive (e.g., Forlin et al., 2010). That said, research by Höltge et al. (2019) did have relevance in its reference to preschool staff and the fact that the scale, like mine, was embedded in their questionnaires. Mine was

also similar to that used by Sharma et al. (2012), in terms of its scale points (= 6) and item numbers (16 v 18) – though their items were geared towards international pre-service teachers and general inclusive strategies. This lack of suitable self-efficacy scales led me to develop my own: the ChASE Scale – where ChASE stands for Childhood Autism Self-Efficacy, and where, for the sake of economy and in this context only, the word ‘Autism’ is shorthand for ASLCN.

6.1.2 Sampling

A research sample consists of a number of people or subject cases (Etikan et al., 2016) who are chosen for their capacity to provide the data needed for the study (Gentles et al., 2015). This selection process forms a fundamental part of any research, since it affects the quality of the work and the implications that can be drawn – and will impact on the research irrespective of the appropriateness of the research questions, the study design or data collection (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2017). The exact steps that researchers should take, however, are not clear. Descriptions in the literature tend to be ambiguous and inconsistent (Gentles et al., 2015) – and are compounded further by those assuming that sampling procedures vary according to the nature of the study (Etikan et al., 2016) and its methodology (Coyne, 1997). In the present situation, this implicit flexibility regarding procedures was viewed as an advantage, for it allowed me to change my sampling criteria in the recruitment stages.

The Questionnaire Sample

My initial plan, like that concerning the questionnaire pilot, was to concentrate on the practitioners working in private nurseries, whose primary role comprises the education and care of children under the age of 5 (including children with ASLCN). This effectively excluded certain portions of the staff teams, i.e., the managers and owners, but was justified as the means of focussing on the individuals most likely to produce the data I wanted. During the recruitment period in Phase 1, though, this exclusion criterion was amended to exclude just the nursery owners. The reasons for this were twofold: to capitalise on the interest shown by various managers when I sought their nursery consent and to increase the size of the sample. Sample size is an important factor to contemplate in any study (Cohen et al., 2017), because it has ramifications for the representativeness of the population being researched and the extent to which statistical precision can be attained (Gentles et al., 2015). In my study,

the sample size was additionally important as it needed to be big enough to represent a pool of individuals that I could repeatedly draw from throughout the fieldwork – and to accommodate the possibility of individuals withdrawing. Indeed, questionnaire response rates are proof of this, as the level of participant engagement can be lower than 50% (Cohen et al., 2017).

In the construction of the questionnaire sample, I aimed to produce a group of approximately 30 practitioners. The intention was modest but seemed feasible and aligned with the sampling strategy I had chosen. In the literature, the range of possible sampling strategies are grouped together under two broad categories (Teddlie and Yu, 2007), which represent distinct ways of selecting people from the wider population. ‘Non-probability sampling’ strategies target the cases most suited to the demands of the study (Coyne, 1997) and typically involve 30 or fewer participants (Teddlie and Yu, 2007), whereas ‘probability sampling’ strategies choose people at random (Cohen et al., 2008) and may entail larger groups. Non-probability sampling was the most appropriate strategy for my research in respect of its sample sizing – but equally beneficial for its subcategory capacities of sampling purposively and by convenience (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). ‘Convenience sampling’ is concerned with practicalities such as proximity and accessibility (Etikan et al., 2016) and satisfied my intention to sample practitioners in an area where I used to work. ‘Purposive sampling’ focusses on specific criteria (Cohen et al., 2017) or on the people most likely to provide what needs to be known (Etikan et al., 2016) – and thus supported my wish to sample those who: were aged 17+; had experience of working with children with ASLCN, aged birth to 5; and who were working in a private day nursery in the target county.

6.1.3 Recruitment

The recruitment of research participants has been described as one of the most difficult aspects of a study (Archibald and Munce, 2015) – with researchers typically underestimating the time and procedures required (Marks et al., 2017), or overestimating the availability and willingness of contributors (Archibald and Munce, 2015). These considerations are vital, because poorly planned or ineffective recruitment strategies can not only disrupt the pace of the research and the collection of data (Marks et al., 2017), they can also jeopardise the integrity of the study findings (Archibald and Munce, 2015). My efforts were intentionally systematic and designed to preclude the difficulties experienced with the questionnaire pilot. Nonetheless, the

recruitment still proved challenging in terms of the time it took to secure engagement – and despite the knowledge I had as a ‘partial insider’. A partial insider is a researcher who shares some aspect of his/her identity with the population under investigation, whilst also retaining a level of detachment from it (Ross, 2017). My insider status raised ethical questions in the context of the research (see sections 6.9 and 10.2.1) but was largely anticipated as an asset in facilitating access, and for the practical insight it could offer.

Approaching Practitioners

My affinity with the study group was a product of my previous employment in the research county and this experience meant that I knew of a SEN forum, where practitioners across the county regularly met as a group. I envisaged this forum as the starting point in the recruitment and as the place where I could introduce my research to a large number of practitioners. Attendance on the day was lower than the 25+ estimated but still constituted 10 practitioners, representing five settings. The session lasted roughly 1 hour and was framed by a PowerPoint outlining the research rationale, the two phases and the research activities. Following the meeting, settings were located using an online search engine (<https://www.daynurseries.co.uk>) and through a directory on the local authority website – ensuring that all of the known nurseries in the target county were included. According to my search parameters and knowledge of the region, for instance, the results from the website omitted settings attached to *Children’s Centres*. Thirty-one nurseries were consequently approached over the course of five weeks – the time it took to make contact with every setting during the Christmas season. Contact began with a phone call, seeking permission from the manager for me to forward details of the study by email. The email contained a consent form for the manager (Appendix 5), an information sheet for the participants (Appendix 6) and a request for a response within five days. It was hoped that the managers would return the consent form allowing their nursery to participate and forward a list of email addresses signalling the staff who were interested. Eight managers granted permission and, together, supplied 36 email addresses.

Recruiting Participants

Potential participants were sent an email thanking them for their interest and this was appended with two documents: a consent form (Appendix 7) and a copy of

the participant information sheet. This was a one-page document summarising the research rationale and its activities – and included details regarding the management of participant data and the right to withdraw. Although staff had eight days to return the consent form, the process of gaining consent took much longer in practice. Email addresses are not always reliable (Shannon and Bradshaw, 2002) and follow ups were necessary in multiple instances – asking managers to check for addressee errors or for staff to return the forms they had agreed to send. Not unlike reports in the literature (see Marks et al., 2017), my estimation of this ‘follow up and reminder’ timeframe was conservative: 26 consent forms were returned from five managers and 21 practitioners during the next two months. Once the consent forms were collated, instructions regarding access to the questionnaire were forwarded via two encrypted emails – first containing a hyperlink to the questionnaire and then its password.

6.2 Data Analysis

The first launch of the questionnaire attracted 13 EYP submissions, which was lower than expected but still constituted a large corpus of data – rendering more than 286 data items (13 x 22 questions) available for analysis (inclusive of any comments). These ‘data items’ – or unitary parts of a larger body of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006), comprised a mixture of qualitative and quantitative information and required careful thought as to the approaches that would be the most suitable for analysis. This is because qualitative and quantitative data analyses involve a series of steps (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) and are variably described in the field (Cohen et al., 2008; Denscombe, 2008). Denscombe (2008), for example, outlines five procedures common to both, and terms these: preparing, exploring, analysing, representing and validating the data. Yet, the categorical details vary across the two types and stand in contrast to those advocating *different* procedures (e.g., Castleberry and Nolen, 2018) and *more / fewer* steps (e.g., Braun and Clarke, 2006; Kent, 2015). Perhaps this is why some authors assume the middle ground and prefer to draw attention to procedures deemed fit for purpose (See Cohen et al., 2008). With a similar assumption, I decided to use the concept of ‘thematic analysis’ as a framework for interrogating the questionnaire data, since this approach is known dually for its accessibility to early career researchers and as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). As such, I largely followed the model explicated by Castleberry and Nolen (2018) – by broadly attaching their step-

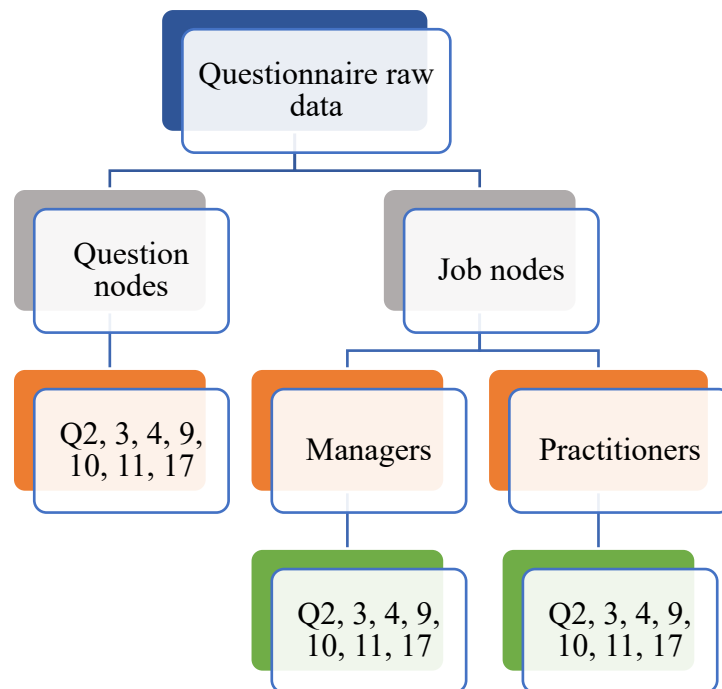
by-step labels to the stages of both the qualitative and quantitative data analyses, i.e., ‘Compiling’, ‘Disassembling’, ‘Reassembling’ and ‘Interpreting’.

6.3 The Open-Ended Items

Compiling the Data

Data from the online questionnaire were exported from Jisc Online Survey into two pieces of software, in two formats: into Nvivo 12 (‘Nvivo’) as 13 pdfs and into Microsoft Excel as a spreadsheet. Every pdf represented one participant or case and displayed her answers to each item in chronological order, one below the other. The pdfs were numbered 1 to 13 in the order that they were submitted – a numbering system that followed advice issued by Denscombe (2008) – and was advantageous in its scope to anonymise each case file and simplify the referencing. Transferring the files to Nvivo was also considered worthwhile, for this software, developed by QRS International (Wong, 2008), aids the management of qualitative data (Austin and Sutton, 2014) and acted as a data backup. That is, the files stored in Nvivo constituted a copy of the responses stored in the Excel spreadsheet and reduced the known danger of losing data (Denscombe, 2008). Excel is often connected with numerical data but nonetheless capable of processing quantitative *and* qualitative data, which it displays as a series of rows and columns (Meyer and Avery, 2009). I examined the qualitative responses to the open-ended items in Nvivo and the quantitative responses to the closed-ended items in Excel. This approach acknowledged that raw data has to be organised into a serviceable format (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018) and tempered the known difficulties of managing (Austin and Sutton, 2014) and extracting meaning from qualitative data (Denscombe, 2008). At this stage, it meant sorting responses to the open-ended items into seven separate parts and assigning them to specific ‘nodes’.

Wong (2008) likens nodes to sticky notes associating sections of text with a particular topic and, here, provided scope to compare everyone’s response (sections of text) to a specific question (a particular topic). Each node represented one of the open-ended items in the questionnaire and was labelled accordingly: Q2, Q3, Q4, Q9, Q10, Q11 and Q17 (See Figure 14). Sections of text from each pdf file were copied and pasted to the question node they related to, so that each node contained 13 pieces of data – the sum of sample responses.

Figure 14: The Division of Nodes

This organisation evolved as I immersed myself in the data, i.e., I subscribed to a process of familiarisation that involves the researcher reading and re-reading the data (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018) to the point at which patterns can be detected (Braun and Clarke, 2006). One of my first observations was that the number of practitioners and managers was similar, and this prompted thought that comparisons by job title might procure some interesting results. I therefore added two nodes to the original seven and called these ‘**M**anagers’ (who numbered seven) and ‘**P**ractitioners’ (accounting for six). The categorisations were not perfect, but this capitalisation helped to discern generalised references to practitioners / managers in the thesis from the data-specific references. (One of the participants was a teacher and had responsibilities relating to both. She was classed as a **M**anager on the presumption that her job entailed, e.g., the management of classroom staff and curriculum planning.)

Disassembling and Reassembling

Once the questionnaire data had been compiled, I looked for similarities and differences within each subgroup of data and began to consider how these could be coded or disassembled as a unit of meaning. Coding involves tagging a piece of data with a label that varies in terms of its type and the amount of data coded, and thus may

mean attaching letters, numbers and names to individual words or lines of text (Denscombe, 2008). In situ, the understanding that codes can be abstract, descriptive or directly extracted from the text confers a sense of flexibility in their construction – suggesting that schemes need not be based on those used by others and might evolve in the analyses (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018). My preference was for creating new codes and using words as labels, so that they were tailored to the study and made cross-referencing easier. The amount of data attached to the codes differed, however, being connected to either sentences of text or a complete item response. This strategy seemed logical, given that the amount of text (data) per questionnaire item varied by EYP and across the sample – from a few lines to one or more paragraphs.

In the next stage of the analysis (the reassembling), a similar strategy was employed in the determination of themes – conceiving new labels that categorised different numbers of codes. Themes, for example, can preside over a few or many pieces of coded data (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and are usually construed within a hierarchy, as a higher level of coding. Whilst this process sharpens views across the data terrain (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018), it also serves as a demonstration of the researcher’s imposition on the data. Data ceases to be raw or natural once the researcher begins to group it (Denscombe, 2008). More precisely: “During reassembly, the analytical thinking of the researchers is evidenced (...) Care must be taken to tell the story of the data” (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018, p.810) – so that the findings say more about the data than the researcher (Cohen et al., 2008). For reasons of economy, the ‘story’ of the questionnaire data is not detailed here, but in Chapter 7 – where all of the data codes and themes are delineated, visualised and interpreted.

6.4 The Closed-Ended Items

6.4.1: Excel

Compiling the Data

The derivation of quantitative data from closed-ended questions is a recognised practice in the methodological field and usually entails preliminary efforts to prepare it for coding (Denscombe, 2008) – not unlike those concerning qualitative data. Loading data into the Excel spreadsheet, therefore, denoted initial efforts to compile it – as did its subsequent transfer to SPSS Statistics 26 (‘SPSS’). This parallel compilation was deliberate, not only to enhance the level of analysis, but also to remedy a problem that arose when the ChASE Scale data was first opened in SPSS.

Rather than grouping the Likert responses together (for Q12-15), they were separated into their component parts – as 6 options per item x 4 items per domain x 4 domains (i.e., 96 columns). There should have been 16 (4 items x 4 domains). Errors occurring during data entry (Kent, 2015) are not unknown and so the transfer via Excel proved useful. In fact, Excel was also advantageous in its capacity to reveal numerical patterns within both the scale and demographic data. Those patterns were not immediately discernible in the data, as the responses in each domain (Children with ASLCN, The Environment etc) were presented in words, not numbers (Very Strongly Disagree, Strongly Disagree etc). This starting point is not uncommon in quantitative data analysis and typically addressed with the systematic coding of words as numbers (Denscombe, 2008). Plus, the ChASE Scale responses were situated amongst all of the other item responses, due to the design of the questionnaire, and needed to be presented more clearly. To this end, I created two worksheets in Excel – copying and pasting the ChASE Scale data onto one and the remaining item responses onto the other. Next, I extracted the data representing each ChASE domain and created four additional worksheets – to reduce the amount of data I would be viewing at any one time.

Disassembling the ChASE Scale Data

The participants' responses were recoded in Excel in the following manner: 1 = Very Strongly Disagree [VSD]; 2 = Strongly Disagree [SD]; 3 = Disagree [D]; 4 = Agree [A]; 5 = Strongly Agree [SA]; 6 = Very Strongly Agree [VSA].

Reassembling the Excel Data

In the next phase of the analysis, I used the coded data to calculate participant scores in each domain (the sum of values per four items) and recorded these on a new Excel worksheet – leaving space to compute the total scale score for each person and the total scale per domain. Using the relevant tools in Excel, these steps also simplified the process of determining score means and standard deviations – and for comparing scores between the Practitioners and the Managers. For completeness, an additional line of inquiry concerning the Likert responses themselves was pursued – to determine the frequencies with which the options VSD, SD, D, A, SA or VSA were used as a group, for each item.

6.4.2 SPSS

Compiling and Labelling the Data

To ensure the correctness of the ensuing statistical tests, I checked that the software had assigned the right type of measure to each of the data columns and made changes where these were necessary. From my interpretation of the literature and data, nominal and ordinal labels were the most suitable. Nominal data may be defined as mutually exclusive categories of data that have no numerical value – and exemplified by categories of gender or status (Cohen et al., 2008). As Q21 focussed on gender, participant responses were straightforwardly designated as nominal data. The remainder of the quantitative raw data were classed as ordinal, since this label characterises data whose categories can be ordered or ranked – like those on a Likert scale (Denscombe, 2008) – but not calibrated in metric terms (Cohen et al., 2008). As an illustration, the four age brackets in Q22 stood for different categories of age that increased one from the other, in unequal intervals (17-26; 26-36; 37-46; 47+). Mindful of advice from others (e.g., Kent, 2015), each of the columns in the matrix was additionally given a name – on the assumption that the parallel taxonomies (i.e., name and measure) would simplify the ensuing scrutiny of certain data variables.

Disassembling the ChASE Scale Data in SPSS

Within the columns, the physical entries were presented as a mixture of text (for the open-ended responses), zeros and ones (for the closed-ended items) – where the number ‘1’ indicated the option chosen by the participant. Multiple choice options from the questionnaire were displayed in the data view as separate columns, resulting in a mix of those with or without a ‘1’. Where a particular option was not applicable to any participant, this rendered the column ‘redundant’. None of the participants, for example, could identify with autism training amounting to none or less than an hour, so these two columns (options) contained only zeros. In contrast, entries for the open-ended items were reproductions of the original text – including two that I wanted to explore in quantitative manner. For the purposes of statistical analyses, this meant that several transformations were needed:-

- a) to code qualitative data for job roles and qualifications as specific numbers
- b) to conflate the Likert items into four columns representing EYP scores for each domain

c) [using (b)] to create a column representing the sum of each person's self-efficacy scale score

My efforts seemed reasonable, according to opinion that these kinds of transformations form a natural part of the coding process (See Denscombe, 2008; Kent, 2015). The data codes are specified in Table 8 and include those for SEND responsibilities. Whilst this information was not directly sought in the questionnaire, it could be deduced from what people had written in the accounts of their work.

Table 8: Data Coding

Independent Variable	Measure Name	Coding
Job Role (Q2)	Nominal	1 = Practitioner; 2 = Manager
Nursery Experience (Q5)	Ordinal	1 = 1-3 years; 2 = 4-6 years; 3 = 6+ years
Nursery Size (Q6)	Ordinal	1 = <40; 2 = 41-60; 3 = 100+
ASCLN Experience (Q8)	Ordinal	1 = 1-3 years; 2 = 4-6 years; 3 = 6+ years
SEND Responsibilities	Nominal	1 = No SEND; 2 = SEND
Qualifications (Q18)	Nominal	1 = Level 3; 2 = Level 5; 3 = Level 6
Autism Training (Q19)	Ordinal	1 = 1-3 hours; 2 = 3+ hours
SLCN Training (Q19)	Ordinal	1 = None; 2 = 1-3 hours; 3 = 3+ hours
Age Bracket (Q22)	Ordinal	1 = 17-26; 2 = 27-36; 3 = 37-46; 4 = 47+

In the course of the analysis, I wanted to gauge the extent to which the participants' self-efficacy scores were influenced by certain aspects of the sample's profile, i.e., to quantify interactions between different types of variables. A variable is a property that a researcher wishes to explore and can be categorised in two ways, either for its potential influence on the results (as an independent variable) or in terms of the results that are produced (as a dependent variable) (Cohen et al., 2008). The independent variables drawn from the questionnaire data are shown in Table 8 – but with the exclusion of gender and pupil age. These variables were not tested because all of the respondents were female and worked with multiple age groups. The dependent variable was the total ChASE Scale score and regarded as scale data (or

interval data – see Cohen et al., 2008), i.e., points of data separated by regular intervals that do not stem from a true zero.

Baseline Tests

In the final part of the disassembling stage and before interactions between the variables could be examined, it was necessary to perform two baseline tests – to assess the quality of the scale items and to check the distribution of the responses. The quality of a scale is a measure of its reliability and usually calculated as a Cronbach's alpha value (Taber, 2018), whilst the distributional nature of responses can be ascertained from a histogram (See Homer, 2018b). Both checks were carried out in SPSS and helped to determine the test most suited to my data. This proved to be the Kruskal-Wallis H. test (See Chapter 7).

Reassembling the ChASE Data

The Kruskal-Wallis H. test was applied to all nine independent variables to ascertain the significance of their impact on participants' self-efficacy scores. Significance is commonly inferred from a value less than 0.05 that answers to a 'null' hypothesis – where the null hypothesis rejects the existence of a particular interaction and assumes the odds of the results occurring by chance are less than 1 in 20 (Denscombe, 2008). Values exceeding 0.05 point to a high degree of chance and confer need to support the null hypothesis. When the Kruskal-Wallis H. test computed the interaction between staff qualifications and the scale scores, for instance, the resulting 'p' value was greater than 0.05 and meant that the null hypothesis asserting that qualifications do *not* affect the scale scores should be supported. This lack of significance was subsequently observed in all nine renderings of the test.

6.5 Interpreting the Results

The $p < 0.05$ benchmark is widely debated (Wasserstein et al., 2019) in the literature, leading some to conclude that interpretations of significance and its 'accept/reject' terminology should be made cautiously (Cohen et al., 2008). Indeed, significance might be better understood as a measure of confidence (Denscombe, 2008), since an element of uncertainty exists in any study findings – and an "[a]bsence of evidence is not evidence of absence" (Alderson, 2004, p.476). With this in mind, I also explored potential interactions between variables – using two types of chart.

Charts are important tools in the process of analysing data (Denscombe, 2008) and their depiction of responses made it easier to detect subtler differences. I created a series of bar charts for each independent variable, which illustrated the self-efficacy scores as percentages per domain and tabulated the means and absolute deviations. The absolute deviations (Laerd Statistics, 2018a) were preferred for their ability to gauge the absolute size of the spread of the scores, whilst the percentage conversions made the comparisons more equitable. Years of nursery experience (Q5), for example, yielded three sets of responses representing 1-10 people. Visualising the data in this mode helped me make sense of the closed-ended responses and complemented the reporting of the open-ended data. Combining qualitative and quantitative data can be challenging in respect of the overwhelming range of possible presentation styles (Denscombe, 2008) but, in reference to Cohen et al. (2008), perhaps simplified with an emphasis on purpose and reader accessibility. The presentation of the results thus included a series of quotes extracted from the EYPs' responses, as well as a range of figures and colours – to make their viewing more compelling and to illustrate the findings in the most succinct way possible.

6.6 The Second Questionnaire

Once the preliminary data had been processed, the questionnaire was revised and relaunched to capture data from EYPs beyond the research county. It also gave scope to address a potential problem with the layout and wording of items, which might have affected the first set of results. As an illustration, Cohen et al. (2017) talk about the excision of redundant items and how people's responses can be inadvertently biased by their 'reading' of the questionnaire. They also argue that respondents tend to favour the left-hand side of a rating scale, or to avoid its polar ends (i.e., an 'extreme' opinion rating). My results suggested that reader bias or irrelevance was present in the data for Q16, via the number of people choosing or not using particular items – and there was a noticeable righthanded orientation in the ratings attached to Q12-15. This implied that the ChASE Scale had not been sensitive enough to capture differing levels of self-efficacy belief. Items being rated should be clearly distinguishable as levels of challenge and the rating options plentiful enough to discern different levels of belief (Bandura, 2006). I wondered if the positive levels of conviction would recur when the items were re-worded and if the Likert scale had more points.

6.6.1 Questionnaire Amendments

The overall layout and content of the questionnaire broadly remained the same from the first version to the next, so that comparisons between the data sets would be feasible. Where there were changes, these centred on the structure of the self-efficacy questions or reflected the profile of the new sample:

- The participant information sheet was added to screen 1 and accompanied by a ‘QR code’. This linked to a more detailed version of the participant information sheet, that was stored in the university’s OneDrive repository
- Reference to pupils with SLCN was amended, so that ‘S’ stood for ‘Speech’ and was congruent with terminology in the literature (See Appendix 2)
- The Likert scale was increased by one point and the points were relabelled as: Do Not Agree (DA); Agree a Little (AL); Mostly Agree (MA); Agree (A); Strongly Agree (SA); Very Strongly Agree (VSA); 100% Certain (C)
- ChASE Scale items that originally contained the phrase ‘a/the child’ were rewritten as ‘children’, ‘any child’ or ‘every child’, to connote a higher level of challenge. These alterations affected items 2-4 in Q12, items 1 and 3 in Q13, all of the items in Q14, and items 2-4 in Q15
- The open comment boxes were relabelled in all four domains to potentially capture more of the EYPs’ qualitative responses
- The first option in Q16 (‘I know precisely what I am meant to do’) was placed further down the list and two previously unused options were replaced (Changing ‘I am doing routine and familiar jobs’ and ‘My admin jobs are up to date’ to ‘I am not feeling under pressure’ and ‘My tasks are challenging’)
- A question concerning participants’ geographical location was introduced in view of the wider dissemination of the questionnaire (which became Q21)

6.6.2 Extending the Recruitment and Sampling

In the early stages of the study, I had hoped that my efforts to recruit EYPs beyond the research county would be facilitated by a national charity operating in the early years sector. Essentially, I wanted to use their media presence to advertise the questionnaire and to recruit staff through a link published on their website. I contacted a charity early on in my studies and was initially fortunate in engaging their interest.

Progress, however, was stalled by the emergence of the coronavirus and this ostensibly led the charity to withdraw their support. This prompted four new and parallel approaches:

- contacting as many early years organisations as possible via an internet search
- emailing researchers known for their publications in the sector
- creating a website for my study
- promoting my work on Twitter and Facebook

The recruitment changes, however, did not constitute a change to the sampling criteria or to the type of sampling. These largely resembled those previously employed but aimed for a sample size of roughly 50 – and reached beyond the initial county to the whole of Great Britain.

6.6.3 Analysing the Data

Despite my efforts and the initial interest, the response to the second launch was low – generating only two more participant responses within the 3-month period it was open. For ethical reasons and for the purposes of comparison, the data were not discarded and still subjected to analysis – albeit in a slightly different way. This was considered essential, because the questionnaires were not identical, and the sample size was inconducive to inferential statistics. In the first stage, the organisation of the data involved the extraction of the two questionnaires from the Jisc Online Survey and importing the resulting pdfs into Nvivo. The ChASE Scale responses were then transferred from each file to an Excel spreadsheet and set within two tables – one for each person. As before, Nvivo was the means of qualitatively analysing the open-ended questions, whilst Excel was the means of quantitatively analysing the closed-ended questions.

Processing the Open-Ended Items

The processing stage of the analysis concerned the search for codable units of meaning and relating these to the first set of questionnaire data. The method of qualitative coding, though, was necessarily modified, owing to the number of respondents. As there were only two people, the re-creation of multiple nodes and sub-

nodes in Nvivo seemed unnecessary. The volume of text was modest, so the preliminary task of systematically and repeatedly reading through their responses was relatively straightforward. Following on from this, I evaluated the extent to which they resembled or differed from the units coded in sample 1.

Processing the ChASE Scale Items

The method of coding the ChASE data was adjusted to reflect the extra number of Likert-scale points and the new labels. More specifically, the values populating each cell were created using the following system: DA = 1; AL = 2; MA = 3; A = 4; SA = 5; VSA = 6; C = 7. The process was applied to all of the domains, and scores were summed for both participants. Further computations were then employed, so that I could reasonably compare their domainial scores with those in sample 1.

Reporting the Data

The findings were synthesised in three sections, which corresponded with the three areas outlined in the first round of results, i.e., staff roles and the purpose of a nursery; perceptions of inclusion and children with ASLCN; and the ChASE Scale.

6.7 Part Two: The Interviews

The interview questions were partly based on the findings from the two questionnaires and developed over the course of one month. Relative to the second research question, the overall aim was to identify examples of practices used to include children with ASLCN in a private nursery.

6.7.1 The Interview Schedule

Every interview was guided by a three-part schedule, which determined the information I would provide at its start and end points, and the questions I would ask. This structure, set out in Appendix 3, was adapted from the interview guide proposed by Boyce and Neale (2006, pp.11-12) – similar in the sense of the three-part division and box template, but different in terms of its content and questions. All nine interview questions were standardised but open-ended, meaning that everyone discussed the same topics but could respond uniquely. Like questions in the questionnaire, they each assumed a particular place in the proceedings (start, middle, end) and each had a particular purpose. Their construction was based on the questionnaire data and my

findings in the literature. In Table 9, each of the questions has been colour-coded to denote the different research strands: yellow for EYEC, blue for inclusive practices and green for self-efficacy beliefs.

Table 9: Clarifying the Interview Questions

Question	Topic	Rationale
1	Job role and nursery purpose	To ease people into the interview, by talking about something familiar, to enable comparisons with the questionnaire data and with the literature.
2	Knowledge of ASLCN	To determine whether the quantitative pattern of low self-efficacy beliefs measured in Domain 1 of the ChASE Scale would recur qualitatively, and to situate EYP understanding of ASLCN in the literature.
3	Planning	
4	Coping with challenge	Some of the questionnaire respondents felt they put more effort into their work when their key children were working well with them. This suggested that children's engagement might influence staff practice and invited the question as to how people would manage difficult moments.
5	Assessment	The emphasis on assessment inferred from the questionnaire data suggested that this might be a useful line of inquiry.
6	Social skills teaching	Chapter 3 drew attention to the benefits of using visual aids with autistic children (Rogers, 2013) or communication strategies with children with SLCN (Wellington and Stackhouse, 2011). These features were not wholly discernible in some of the questionnaire responses and warranted further inquiry.
7	Communication skills teaching	
8	Nursery environment	Environmental practices attracted the highest levels of self-efficacy belief in the ChASE Scale, and the importance of environmental structures (Erbes, 2010) was documented in the literature review.
9	Judging effectiveness	To gauge the extent to which the interviewee responses would correspond with Bandura's (1997) <i>Self-Efficacy Theory</i> and the five domains outlined in Chapter 4.

6.7.2 Sampling and Recruitment

Linking the interview questions with the questionnaires and research base was arguably a sound way of aligning the two research tools and of pursuing the initial findings. This connection was strengthened with the sampling strategies, as the philosophy underlying the convenient (Teddlie and Yu, 2007) and purposive (Cohen et al., 2017) methods employed during the questionnaire was similarly ascribed to the interviews. This meant targeting a sample of people who: were aged 17+; worked as a private nursery manager or practitioner in Great Britain; and who had registered an interest in the interviews in one of the questionnaires (via Q23/24 and the provision of an email address). Ten candidates volunteered from the first sample and one from the second. These individuals were invited to take part via an email, which thanked them for their contribution, briefly explained what the interview would entail and asked them to confirm their interest. As a result, six people were contacted by phone to make the arrangements and everyone was sent a follow up email, one week in advance of the allotted day. The email signalled my hope to record the interview and included a copy of the questions. This copy was presented at the start of the face-to-face interviews so that people could indicate their consent to be recorded. Telephone interviewees provided consent in an email on the day before the interview and then confirmed this verbally before we began.

6.7.3 Conducting the Interviews

The six people volunteering for interview came from the first research sample and were based in five different settings. Appointments were scheduled between October and November 2020 and the plan was to conduct the interviews on each of the respective sites, in all but one circumstance. This is because one of the interviewees had moved to a school in the months following the close of the questionnaire and her site was no longer appropriate in terms of the research stipulations. The decision to retain her, however, was justified in terms of her wish to continue with the study and the contribution that she could still make, as a former nursery manager. The result of this, was that our interview took place over the telephone, out of school hours. One other interview was similarly conducted by telephone, due to the timing of the appointment – but only because this coincided with a coronavirus lockdown period. In all, three interviews were held face-to-face in two nurseries and two were at a distance.

(For reasons unknown, the sixth person withdrew during this period.) Every interview lasted approximately 1 hour.

The meeting was guided by the schedule but led by me in the sense of maintaining its flow and track – a practice corresponding with opinion that interviewees do not expect to set the agenda and that the researcher’s degree of control varies with the nature of the interview (Denscombe, 2008). The recordings began once consent had been confirmed and were captured on a Dictaphone. Questions were asked in the order scheduled and entirely – unless the responses provided to one question covered information sought in another (which happened in one case). I decided not to take notes during the conversations, even though notes on verbal (Alshenqeti, 2014) or non-verbal communications (Gordon, no date) are advised. Here, the idea of using the Dictaphone as the sole recorder and the risk of the machine malfunctioning was outweighed by the risk of reducing rapport with the speaker and a personal difficulty in simultaneously processing verbal, non-verbal and written data. That said, I did document all of my impressions in a notebook afterwards, at home, on the same day.

6.8 Data Analysis

The interview data consisted of five audio files, which entailed the participants’ responses to nine pre-determined questions and probes, and therefore constituted more than 45 pieces of qualitative information. Interviews usually produce a lot of data and their analysis can be challenging from the outset, given the absence of one definitive approach (Alshenqeti, 2014). Thematic analysis, however, seemed a viable option. With a parallel emphasis on compiling, disassembling and reassembling, it not only mirrored strategies from the questionnaires, it also formed an analytical bridge between two commonly linked instruments (See Cohen et al., 2017). As a system, moreover, it complemented opinion concerning the reduction of interview data by coding (Alshenqeti, 2014) and the formulation of themes (Boyce and Neale, 2006).

6.8.1 Compiling the Interview Data

a) Transcribing the Audio Recordings

Due to the scheduling and number of interviews conducted, it was largely possible to transcribe each recording before the next interview. The only occasion where this was not feasible was in the instance of two interviews carried out back-to-back, in the same nursery. This progressive approach to compiling the data was

beneficial, as it yielded opportunity to fine-tune the questions being asked and made the task of transcribing more manageable. Contrary to Gordon's (no date) estimation that an hour of recording equates to 5-6 hours of transcription, my recordings each took roughly 8-9 hours to transcribe. Part of the problem was grounded in the quality of the recording. In other words, negotiating:-

- background noise (children in neighbouring rooms, heavy rain, people in corridors)
- hands-free technology (speaker-to-mobile proximity, timbre of the recording)
- idiosyncratic speech (accent, fast pace, low volume, pronunciation)
- fragmented speech (elisions, hesitations, incomplete words, interrupted sentences)

Though these environmental and actor-centred challenges are not unusual in interview contexts (see Denscombe, 2008), they were consequential – lengthening the transcription time and occasionally precluding the identification of specific words. In those moments, a decision had to be made about their documentation.

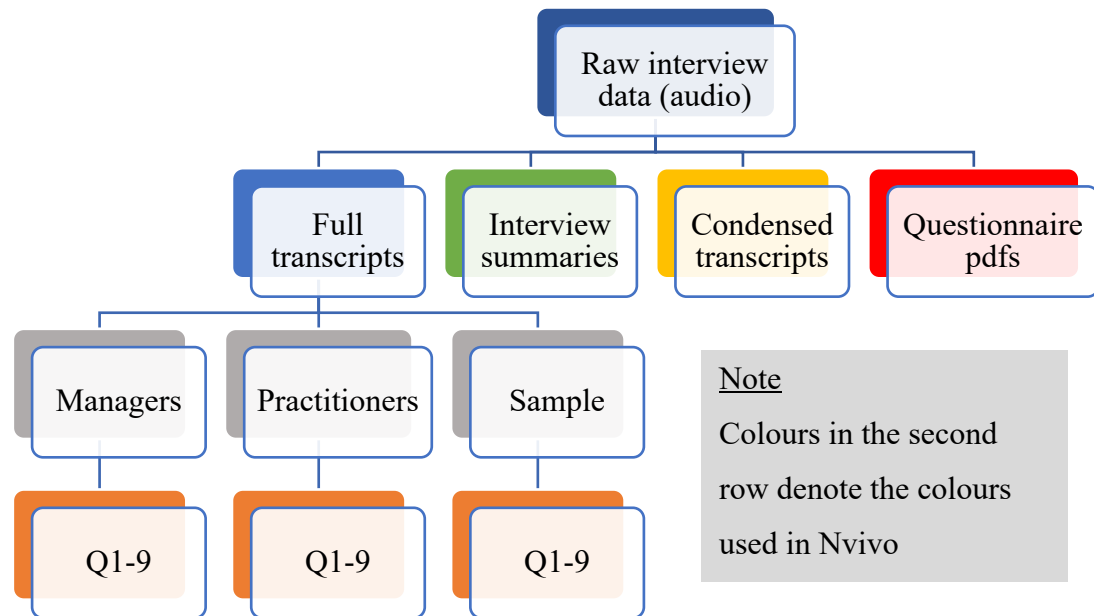
In qualitative fields, transcription is commonly viewed as “the act of (re)presenting original oral language in written form” (Bird, 2005, p.227) – but variably defined in terms of its purpose and style. These distinctions are important because their enunciation reflects the view of the researcher and influences the role that s/he plays in the transcription process (Henderson, 2018). Bird (2005), for example, explains how transcription can be construed as an act, an interpretation and a product, whilst Henderson (2018) refers to styles that are tidy or broad. In the current study, transcription was conceptualised as a physical and interpretive act – acknowledging that a transcriber is a conduit for the speaker's voice (not the voice itself) and cannot record every interview detail (Bird, 2005). Under this remit, the process of transcription is knowingly selective, relative to the content and presentation. I opted for the middle ground between Henderson's (2018) tidy and broad transcripts, by neither excluding the characteristics of a person's speech (e.g., filler words, pauses), nor strictly adhering to a formal transcription key (like using specific symbols to denote syllable stresses). The completed transcriptions thus entailed the following characteristics:-

- Bold and plain type to distinguish between interviewer and interviewee
- My name and a pseudonym for the interviewee, later abbreviated
- Anonymisation of names in brackets, e.g., (Nursery Name), (Area SENCo)
- The transcription of every discernible word and word fragment
- Preservation of grammar inaccuracies, e.g., theirself, a lot better day
- Reference to fillers or hesitations, e.g., erm, err, um
- Bracketed annotations of indecipherable words in red, e.g., (unclear)
- Apostrophes for elisions, e.g., sittin' or playin'
- Hyphens denoting unfinished words or interruptions, e.g., chil-
- Bracketed notes to highlight nuances of speech, e.g., (laughs), (gestures)
- Italics to denote emphatic utterances, e.g., we *always* reduce

Once transcribed, the audio files were securely deleted and the resulting Word documents saved to a secure folder on my university computer. Interviewee pseudonyms were recorded as file names and this facilitated their processing in Nvivo.

b) Compiling the Transcription Data

Before the interview data could be analysed, two intermediary steps were necessary: a) giving interviewees opportunity to validate my interpretations and b) creating a second version of the transcripts to concentrate the analysis. In the first case, this meant forwarding a two-page summary of every interview to each interviewee and inviting their feedback. The summary was divided into three sections covering the three interview strands – and each section contained an extract from the transcript, key interviewee points and a personal reflection. In the second instance, the transcripts were duplicated and then reduced by deleting any contributions from me. This ensured that the ensuing word frequency or text searches were only applied to the interviewee utterances. The audio files were re-configured into three groups: the full interview transcripts, the interview summaries and the condensed transcripts. These (Word) documents were imported into Nvivo and arbitrarily assigned a group colour to make the process of retrieving them visually simpler (See Figure 15). A file group housing the interviewees' responses to the questionnaire was also added to the Nvivo workspace.

Figure 15: Compiling the Interview Data in Nvivo

6.8.2 Coding the Data and Developing Themes

Disassembling and Reassembling

Once the files had been arranged in Nvivo, nodes were created as containers holding specific sections of text. Similar to those constructed during the questionnaire analyses, these represented the questions asked during the interview and were deployed at both the level of the sample and EYP role. As there was no teacher, the delineation was more straightforward than before. These nodes were developed using the full transcripts. The other documents were employed as triangulates. i.e., sources I could refer to when developing a line of inquiry. Word frequency checks within the condensed transcripts, for instance, illuminated differences in the type of resources EYPs used to support children’s communication skills, whereas the pdfs helped to pinpoint in/consistencies between the ChASE Scale ratings and comments in situ. The coding of data attached to each interview question, furthermore, involved an analysis of information *across* the transcripts, as well as answers produced directly in response to the question. This simultaneous separation and merging of data denoted another layer of inference on my part – but conferred two benefits. Conceptually, it navigated tensions surrounding the extent to which data can be reduced without losing a sense of its whole (see Cohen et al., 2008) and, more practically, recognised how people’s responses were sometimes relevant to multiple items. Coding and thematising the

responses thereafter replicated the approaches adopted in the questionnaire. Data attached to each node was scrutinised for dis/similarities and then tagged with a code representing a particular idea. These word-based codes were then conflated and subordinated by themes.

6.8.3 Reporting the Interview Data

To enhance the readability of the findings and to facilitate the discussion in Chapter 9, the analysis was presented in three sections. The first section focussed on the role of an EYP and a private day nursery, and summarised the data connected to Q1 and Q2. The second, forming the bulk of the chapter, looked at the strategies used to include children with ASLCN and drew together the data attached to Q3 and Q5-8. The final piece analysed the data linked to Q4 and Q9 and touched upon aspects of self-efficacy, by exploring how staff articulated their competencies. All three sections were preceded by a meta-review of the data to contextualise the interviewees' responses, e.g., profiling the sample by job title, age, experience, training and nursery cohort. This information was extracted from the questionnaire summaries (the pdfs) and updated after the interviews where possible, e.g., quantifying years of nursery experience as a number rather than a bracket of time. As the group was small in number and each person was known only by a pseudonym, it was possible to document these details at the level of the individual, without compromising anyone's identity.

The 'personalisation' of interviewee contributions was most evident in the quotes used to illuminate the findings. Although researchers need to be careful that quotes are deployed judiciously and not easily traced back to the speaker, they can nonetheless enhance the credibility of interview data and be gathered together, e.g., in boxes (Boyce and Neale, 2006). This convention was adopted within each of the three sections – using interviewee pseudonyms to 'humanise' an extract and boxing successive quotes in grey. For the purposes of legibility, hesitations and editorial notes were omitted from the original transcripts and in-person quotes were joined with ellipses. Plus, to promote fairness in representation, I noted the number of quotes drawn from each interviewee and tried to give each an equal voice. Within the presentation, four items were constructed retrospectively from the ChASE Scale data, to test for in/consistencies in what was later articulated. These four items were laid out as tables representing the four ChASE domains and displayed the ratings ascribed to their four items. As the scale items described an aspect of inclusive practice and related

to the interview questions (Q2, 6-8), this meant I could not only compare participant responses from both halves of Phase 1, but also within and between the subgroups.

6.9 Phase 1 Study Ethics

Educational researchers working within interpretive and positivist paradigms, and qualitative and quantitative methodologies have a great responsibility. They have to conscientize the way in which their values influence their research and research decisions, and simultaneously consider the impact of those values on the people in/directly participating (Basit, 2013). Every researcher also has a moral obligation to reflect on the effect that their work has on the wider social and research community (Universities UK, 2019) – to ensure that his/her practice complies with the details of law and adheres to the principles of excellence and inclusiveness (University of Leeds, 2019c). These reflections constitute an appraisal of ethical concerns and conduct, which should pervade every stage of the research and be examined in perpetuity (Economic and Social Research Council, 2021). This is particularly true in contexts involving children (Basit, 2013). Researchers must therefore act with integrity in the pursuit of knowledge that advances understanding in the field – maximising the gains to be made whilst minimising possible harm or risks (Cohen et al., 2017; British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2018). More personally, it means that a scholar conducting educational research in settings that include children – such as myself – has a fundamental duty to demonstrate care, rigour and transparency in her work.

Participant Access

The process of gaining access to a specific group of individuals in the name of research starts with the researcher contacting the representative person and seeking permission to make the approaches (Cohen et al., 2017). Acquiring permission from organisations can be difficult, though, due to the time that research demands and its seemingly intangible benefits to the respective workplace (Alcadipani and Hodgson, 2009). In the study context, this challenge was tempered by my former experience of working in the county where the group was located. That I was known to many of the nursery managers and they knew my target audience, granted some assistance in the process and tallied with opinion that liaison with someone already acquainted with the participants is advantageous (Basit, 2013). The steps I took have already been

described, but involved canvassing interest at a network meeting and consulting with gatekeepers. Managers were given time to reflect on the information provided and to decide whether they would allow their nursery to participate. Their consent was issued with the understanding that the arrangement was subject to renewal between the research stages / phases – and with recognition, on my part, that gatekeepers might withdraw their permission at any time (Cohen et al., 2017).

Informed Consent

For the practitioners, the communications for consent were conveyed through my university email account. This helped to distance me from my previous role and positioned me as a researcher with a set of obligations. Researchers must conduct their work within the written guidelines of the organisation they are attached to (BERA, 2018), so any information regarding participant consent had to abide by the protocols set out by the University of Leeds (2019a; 2019c). I had to explain the purpose and nature of the research, the manner in which data would be used and protected, and what the possible risks were. According to subjects' rights in ethical research (Dooly et al., 2017), information had to be sufficient enough to inform the consent; consent needed to be voluntary and people had the right to withdraw at any point. Electronic communication was deemed favourable because it intimated less pressure and was tacitly easier to withdraw from. Yet, this did not mean that the participants were entirely free of responsibility in the course of providing consent. There is similarly an expectation that they understand the nature and demands of a study and are in a position to make a free and informed choice (Cohen et al., 2017). Staff, for instance, may have felt an obligation to participate through our prior work connection, and needed to make a decision that was independent of this.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

All participants were able to contribute to the study knowing that their data would be anonymised and confidential. This assurance was particularly crucial during the interviews, in discussions of work experiences and practices. Relative to the findings, people needed to know that they would not be identifiable or traced back to their workplace – nor the people they worked with, their pupils or their setting. I was also conscious of the fact that interviewees may refer to individuals who have not consented to the research (Cohen et al., 2017) and this concern was borne out via those

who named a child, their colleague or nursery. The only exception to this ‘breach’ occurred in the interviews with Hannah and Isobel, owing to the fact that they worked together, mentioned each other and had both consented to take part. Some interviewees, moreover, made reference to me in my capacity as a former employee, which demonstrated a tension between the definitions of anonymity and confidentiality. Whilst both involve obscuring people’s identities to a reader, true anonymity is only possible when participants are unknown to the researcher (Roth and Von Unger, 2018). In the study, this meant that anonymity could not hold in the sense of interviewees being unidentifiable to me, but by following protocol at the University of Leeds (2019b), could be a feature of the reporting, e.g., replacing cited names with pseudonyms. BERA (2018, p.21) calls this strategy “fictionalising” and it seemed a pragmatic way of personalising the findings without compromising anyone’s identity.

Data Management

Anonymity is harder to guarantee in digital or online contexts (Denscombe, 2008; BERA, 2018) and had specific import in my efforts to triangulate the interview and questionnaire data. The sustainment of contact with participants meant I was retaining their personal data, and the retention of personal data is subject to the procedures in the University of Leeds (2019b) data protection policy. The policy states that data can only be kept for as long as it is needed and must be stored safe from accidental loss, destruction and unauthorised access. To this end, a number of approaches were used to safeguard the participants’ data, which included the use of pseudonyms and encrypted correspondence, password protecting files and devising a schedule for deleting personal information. These measures extended to the raw data too, though this required extra thought in terms of its reporting. Researchers, for instance, must not falsify or be unfairly selective in the data they present (Cohen et al., 2017) or their conclusions stem from exaggeration or misinterpretation (Dooly et al., 2017). As such, self-awareness is a critical part of ethical analyses (Cohen et al., 2017) and confers need to reflect on how one’s efforts might have ‘influenced’ the results. These reflections were essential in view of my background experience and the impact of the pandemic. They were realised in two ways – as actions to portray participants’ thoughts and experiences as accurately as possible, and in the dedication of a chapter solely focussed on a review of the research overall.

Chapter 7: Analysis of the Questionnaire Data

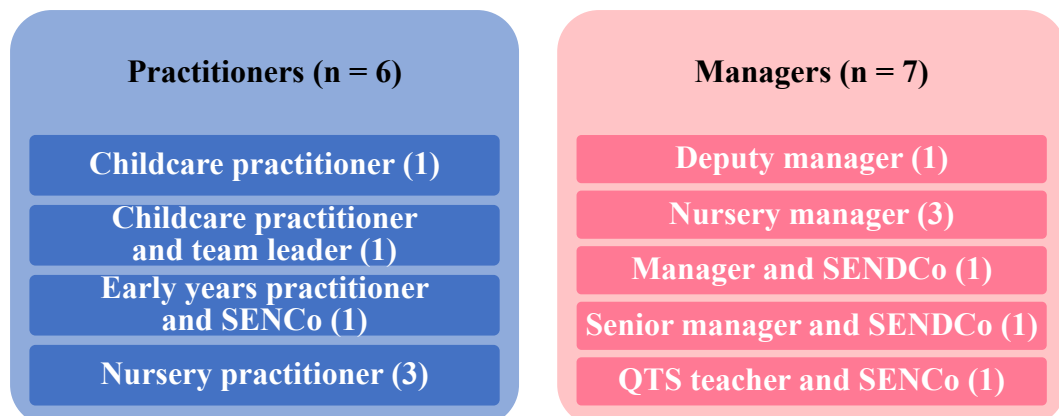
Chapter 7 provides an interpretation of the data resulting from the two online questionnaires. These are discussed in chronological order – and with a degree of detail reflecting the size of the first (n = 13) and second samples (n = 2). Discussions concerning the initial set of responses are therefore more extensive – but both analyses follow a similar structure. They begin with a profile of the sample, continue with the open-ended items and then conclude with the closed-ended items. Overall, the qualitative data illustrate how staff define children with ASLCN, view inclusive practice and discern its dis/advantages, whilst the quantitative data indicate levels of self-efficacy belief and report these as numerical scores and statistical values. Findings drawn from both data types form the basis of my response to RQ1.

7.1 The First Online Questionnaire

7.1.1 Participant Details

Amongst the 28 practitioners who initially consented to the research, 13 took part in the first questionnaire. These participants were all female and represented the full range of ages, from 17 to 47+, though the greater proportion (8) fell in the first half of this range (17-36). Six people referred to themselves as a type of practitioner, six as a type of manager and one as a teacher. These near-equal sized groupings are illustrated in Figure 16, which also shows that roughly one third of the respondents (5) had more than one role – acting additionally as a team leader or SEN/SEND coordinator (SEN(D)Co).

Figure 16: EYP Job Titles



Six staff cited a Level 5 or 6 qualification as their highest award and seven referred to one at Level 3 (See Table 10). This nominal division almost perfectly matched the division of individuals by role, because the cross-referencing of jobs with qualifications revealed that all of the Practitioners were qualified to Level 3 and that all but one of the Managers were qualified to Level 5 or 6. Interestingly, the two types of teacher qualification (EYTS and QTS) both featured within the sample but were not necessarily attributed to the individual's role. Participant 4, who held an EYTS qualification, stated her position as a senior nursery manager (and SEND coordinator).

Most of the staff had worked in a nursery for a good length of time, with 10 indicating that this was more than 6 years and one reporting less than 3. These durations were roughly mirrored by those relating to experiences of work with children with ASLCN, as nine respondents had more than 6 years in the field and two had less than 3. At first glance, there also seemed to be a degree of similarity between the amounts of training in autism and SLCN. These were the same in nine instances, with only four indicating that the volume of training they had received in autism was different to that concerning SLCN. On closer inspection, though, it seemed that autism training had earned slightly more attention – according to those who selected more than 3 hours of training in the questionnaire options. Not everyone was able to provide an exact figure for the duration – using terms like “lots” or “quite a lot” – but for those who did, the amounts were higher for autism in three cases and higher for SLCN in just one case. One respondent had received more than 12 hours of autism training over 18 years, but only 1-3 hours in SLCN, whereas another had undergone 20-30 hours of autism training and roughly 6 in SLCN.

As for the children that staff were working with, the data pointed to a fairly even distribution between those who had less than 40 children on roll (5), 41-60 (5) or more than 100 (3). However, accounting for the fact that some of the staff worked in the same nursery, the revised numbers implied that the most common number of children in a nursery was 41-60. (Deduced by matching the names of the nurseries on the consent forms with contact details on the questionnaires.) The average age of the children that staff supported proved more complicated to determine, because most participants were working with more than one age group and indicated this by selecting more than one category from the four available (birth to 2; 2-3; 3-4 and 4-5). These overlaps are recorded in Table 10 but obscure the exact coverage of pupil ages. Noting the minimum and maximum ages of the groups, for example, revealed *seven* pupil age

groups. Only four people worked with a single age group: the remaining nine worked with at least two age groups, making this practice more usual. Three a-piece worked with 2, 3 and 4 separate age groups.

Table 10: Demographic Data

	Item	Strands	Participants
Q22:	Age bracket	17-26	3
		27-36	5
		37-46	3
		47+	2
Q18:	Highest qualification	Level 3	7
		Level 5	2
		Level 6	4
Q5:	Nursery experience (years)	1-3	1
		4-6	2
		More than 6	10
Q8:	ASLCN experience (years)	1-3	2
		4-6	2
		More than 6	9
Q19:	Amount of autism training (hours)	1-3	4
		More than 3	9
Q20:	Amount of SLCN training (hours)	None	1
		1-3	5
		More than 3	7
Q6:	Children in the setting	Less than 40	5
		41-60	5
		More than 100	3
Q7:	Age of children supporting	Birth to 2	5
		2-3	10
		3-4	11
		4-5	5

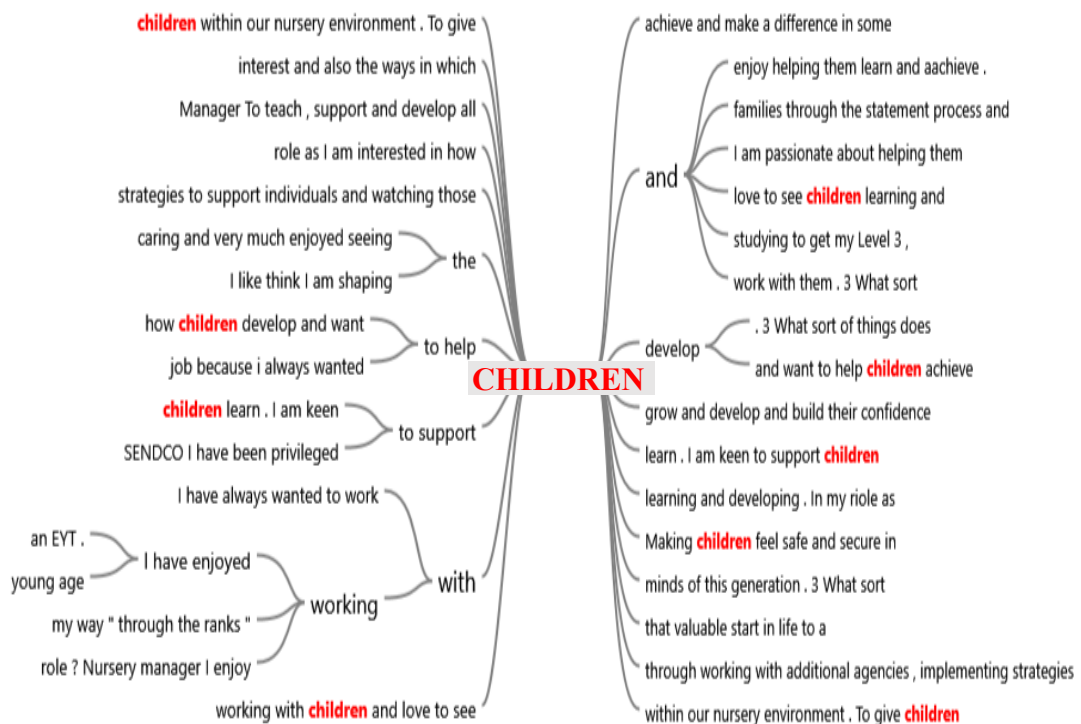
7.1.2 Analysing the Open-Ended Questions

The process of analysing the open-ended questions was described in Chapter 6 but essentially entailed steps to compile, disassemble and reassemble the data – using tools in Nvivo and the framework of thematic analysis. To enhance the readability of participant responses, I gave each person a pseudonym – following an alphabetical system that aligned with individual file numbers but did not compromise anyone’s anonymity. File 1 or person 1, for example, was named ‘Alice’; file 2, person 2, became ‘Bethany’; file 3, person 3, became ‘Chloe’ and so on, up to file 13, person 13 and the name ‘Megan’.

Motivations and Responsibilities

Questions 2 and 3 asked participants to explain why they had chosen to work in a nursery and to describe their core responsibilities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most commonly used word in both instances was the word “children” – referenced 17 times in relation to motivations and 27 times in relation to responsibilities (See Figure 17).

Figure 17: Nvivo Search for the Word “Children” in Q2



These references applied to Practitioners and Managers alike, excepting one outlier – Megan (a senior manager), who did not use the word at this stage. Incidentally, but arguably more surprising, the least commonly used word was “play” – which was employed just once, by one Practitioner. A popular theme that emerged from Q2 was a sense of the enjoyment and rewards that the job produced, as well as an overall desire to work with children and to have an impact on their development. For some, this desire was longstanding or wedded to their belief in the importance of EYEC:

I chose to become a teacher as since a young age I have enjoyed working with children

Eva, a nursery teacher and SEN coordinator

I like [to] think I am shaping the children's minds of this generation.

Hannah, manager and SEND coordinator

In fact, the idea of the job being part of a long-term career plan was implicit amongst nearly half of the respondents and accompanied by a wish to pursue an interest in child development. For the remaining respondents, the reasoning behind their job choice was connected to their skills and experiences:

I feel I am a natural leader, communicator and driver, and through these skills, I have found my way into the manager role.

Bethany, a nursery manager

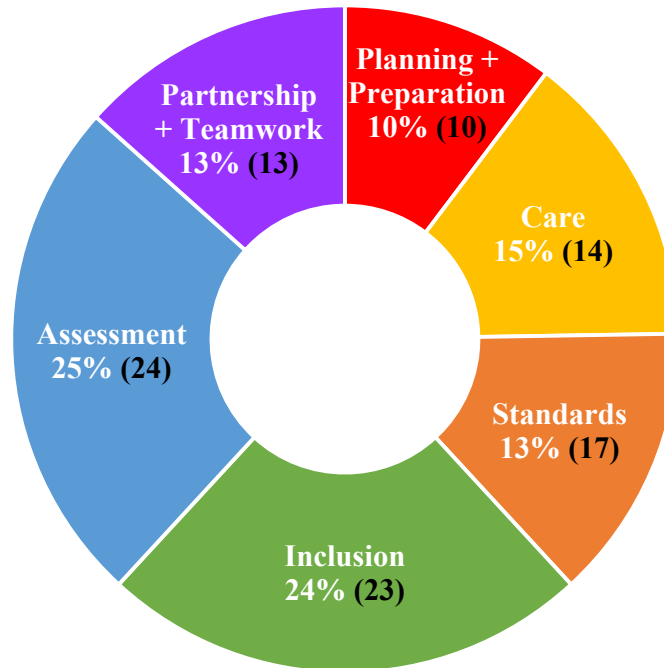
I started as a volunteer and realised I was good at what I do. I'm patient and caring.

Gina, practitioner and team leader

How staff described the duties that encapsulated their role, varied according to their level of responsibility. Managers listed tasks related to the overall running of the nursery and Practitioners referred to tasks associated with the children. Yet, deeper examination of the responses produced some interesting lines of inquiry. Variation, for example, was evident in the way in which people prioritised these duties (and inferred from the order in which tasks were reported). Four talked about managing the staff, three talked about providing a safe environment, two spoke of caring for children, whilst the remainder commented on teaching, nursery routines, safeguarding and watching children. Those 'priorities', however, were supplanted by an emphasis on assessment – at least when coding for the composition of everyone's duties. Assessment seemed to consume the greatest proportion of responsibilities, when compared with the five additional codes that emerged (See Figure 18). Responsibilities relating to 'Assessment' were more than double those concerning 'Planning and Preparation' – and were described in greater detail. Whilst Planning and Preparation served as a generic code, Assessment could be broken down into five sub-codes: 'Observation' (2 references), 'Tracking' (6), 'Record-Keeping' (4), 'SEND' (4), 'Analysis and Judgement' (8). These divisions are discernible in the description given by Alice, a Practitioner working with children aged birth to 2, who said that her work

involved “watching a number of children every day (...) planning activities that suit their learning (...) [and] tracking their successes”.

Figure 18: Coded Breakdown of Participant Responsibilities



Notes

1. Percentages calculated as a proportion of summed references
2. Reference numbers are shown in black type

‘Partnership and Teamwork’ also lent itself as a generic code and accounted for 13 statements mentioning children, families, colleagues and external professionals. Partnership duties were exemplified by those explaining that they worked with outside agencies, liaised with parents and supported families, whereas elements of teamwork were variably understated. Explicit in remarks like: “working within a team environment” or “team meetings”, but implicit in responses such as: “we follow a routine” or “supporting personal development with staff”. Personal development was also implied in the overarching domain of ‘Standards’ and assigned to one of three subcategories labelled ‘In-House’. The other two were ‘Child Development’ and ‘Statutory Duties’. The In-House subcategory comprised need to keep up to date with policies and procedures, to conduct appraisals and to upskill staff. Its referential comments (4) were comparable in number to those for Child Development (e.g.,

helping children to be independent or to meet their milestones) – but less than half of those regarding Statutory Duties. These numbered 10 and were embedded in remarks concerning Ofsted requirements, EHCPs, safeguarding and the EYFS.

Duties summarised under the code of ‘Care’ (15%) were proportionate to those concerning ‘Standards’ (13%) and similarly divisible into three – but as ‘Children’, ‘Colleagues’ and ‘Families’. The subcategory of Children predominated (with 11 references) and was articulated as efforts to ensure children’s safety and security, to provide suitable environments and activities, and to facilitate their independence. These particular duties of care had implications for beyond the immediate setting:

I help toilet train the children, getting them school ready that includes helping them be independent taking off their clothes/shoes etc.

Isobel, practitioner and SEN coordinator

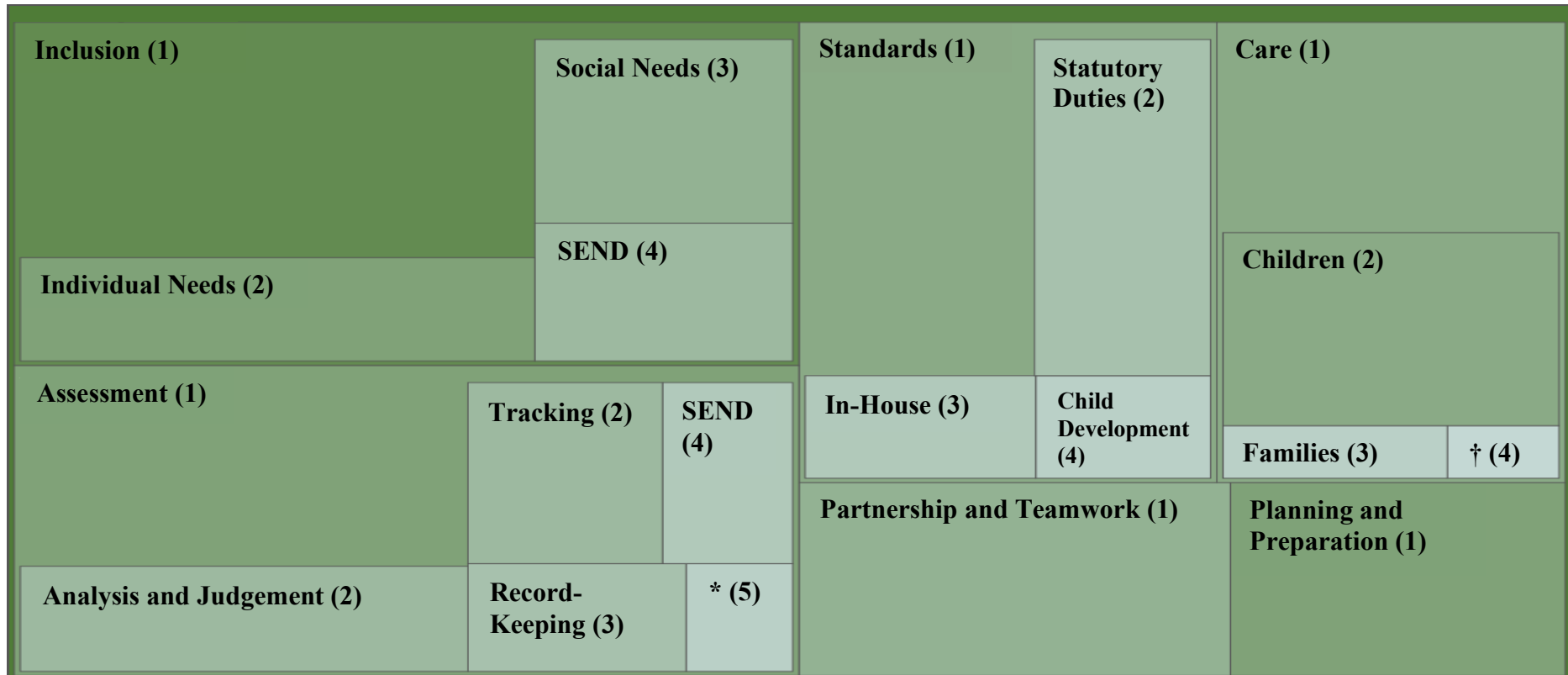
Ensuring all children and families are receiving the best support possible – food bank, clothes donations, regular attendance etc.

Bethany

They also connected to the two other subcategories of care. Care for Colleagues and Families both related to support for children – enabling all staff to meet children’s needs, to build relationships with children and families, and to protect their welfare.

Statements concerning children’s welfare were expressed as a duty to *all* children and thus had relevance for the final code, ‘Inclusion’. More specifically, they recurred under its subcategory of ‘Social Needs’ and augmented remarks concerning children’s social well-being – ensuring that every child can, e.g., access a place and settle in, have fun and be happy. Two other subcategories were coded in this domain: ‘SEND’ and ‘Individual Needs’, and these yielded a more comprehensive picture of EYPs’ inclusive practice. SEND references, here, entailed efforts to make referrals and plan for/support children not meeting expected outcomes, whilst those for Individual Needs were apparent in phrases such as “supporting every child [sic] individual needs”, allowing children to “develop at their individual rate”, and “implementing strategies that suit individuals”. All of these codes are shown in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Hierarchy Chart of Items Coded in Q3



Notes: Box sizes reflect the volume of references, whilst the gradation of colours and numbers illustrates their hierarchy, from dark to light, superordinate (1) to subcategory (5) | Symbols denote items coded as Observation (*) and as Colleagues (†)

“challenge”):

It can be characterised by difficulty in social interaction and communication and by restricted or repetitive patterns of thought and behaviour.

Debbie, a practitioner

These difficulties were understood as something that affected different autistic people in different ways, on different levels:

It is a spectrum disorder which can range from little to extreme effect on the individual.

Chloe, senior manager

A different system of programming information (...) [Children] can have high attainment but struggle in the social and communication side. Girls tend to mask

Fiona, nursery manager

Whether these interpretations corresponded to age, qualifications, role, experience or training was harder to discern – with only dissociative patterns recognisable in the data. For instance, whilst the number of statements concerning Difficulty (11) was similar to the number of individuals with more than 6 years of autism experience / training (8), this relationship was not absolute, because there were coded cases who did not have this amount of training and experience, as well as one non-coded case who did. And, though the emerging ‘Difference’ code applied to more Managers than Practitioners (4 versus 2), who had each attended more than 3 hours of autism training, one of those Practitioners had also received this amount – and one of the non-coded Managers had not.

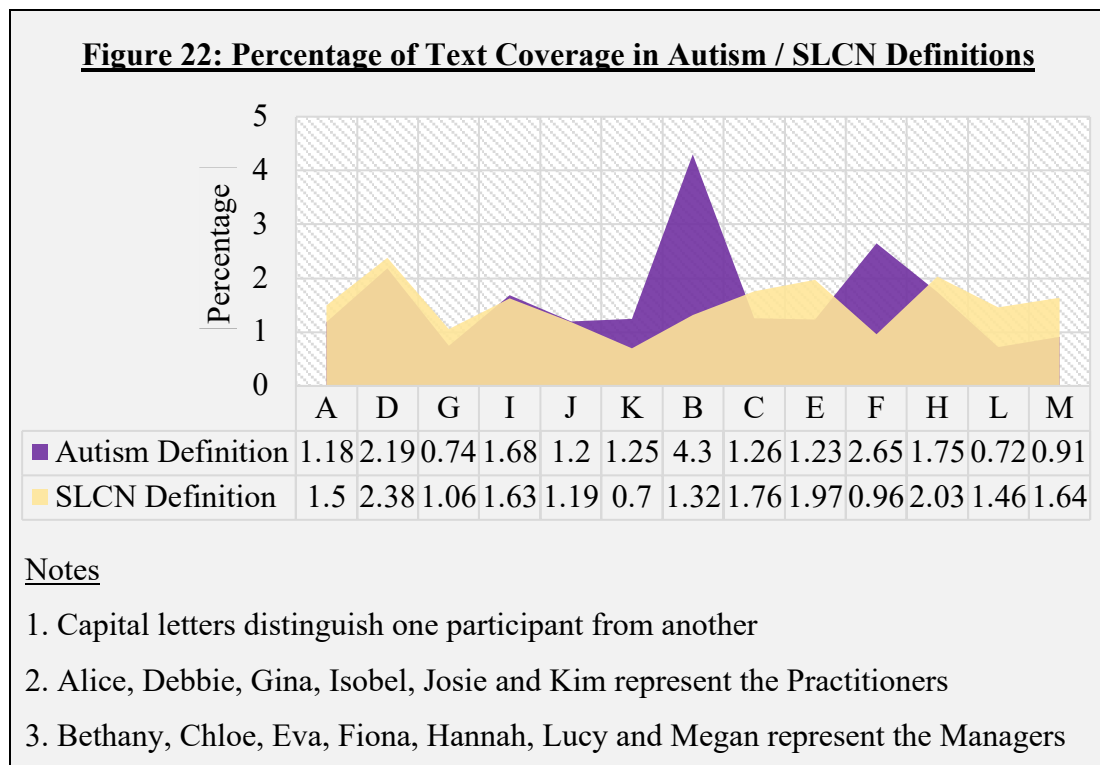
The words “difficulty” and “difference” were also used in the descriptions concerning children with SLCN, but not high in frequency. Rather, the words “children” (11), “social” and “communication” (both 8) were the most frequent (See Figure 21).

As with autism, participants also explained that SLCN affected children in various ways and that this could necessitate some type of assistance, e.g., to learn, communicate or interact with others. Yet, unlike autism, there were no references to degrees of severity or any suggestion of difference by gender. More commonly, respondents concentrated on children's ability to express themselves, such that their 9 references to speech, talking and verbal communication led to the creation of a sub-code named 'Expressive'. This code held more numerical weight than the three other codes: 'Social Elements' (6), 'Support Needs' (5) and 'Receptive' (3). Statements coded under Social Elements referred to difficulties with play, group situations and social interactions; statements coded under Support Needs included augmentative modes of communication like symbols, sensory diets and mood boards – whilst statements coded under Receptive related to difficulties with listening and the understanding of words, instructions and social cues.

When searching for patterns between EYP descriptions and variables pertaining to their profiles, this revealed little in the way of definitive conclusions, much like autism – though some distinctions could be made. More people (6), for instance, referred to the word “difficulty” in the age range of 27-47+ or were qualified to Level 3, than those who were aged 17-26 or qualified to Level 5/6 (both 3). A more striking pattern, though, was revealed when comparing the amount of information participants provided in Q10 (focussing on SLCN) to the amount produced in Q9 (focussing on autism). It seemed that people had written more about SLCN than autism. I decided to check this using an automatic feature in Nvivo, which instantly assigns each response with a value denoting the percentage of text that it covers. By transferring the relevant values to a table in Excel, I was able to generate a graph illustrating the volume of text produced in the descriptions of autism and SLCN – and to contrast the data across the sample and between the two conditions.

The graph, shown in Figure 22, suggests that EYP understanding of SLCN is reasonably balanced across the group (relative to the volume of text produced) but that their knowledge of autism is not. This spikier profile can be attributed to the data produced by Bethany and Fiona, owing to their greater autism percentages and the width of the gap between these and their SLCN descriptions. Their more sizeable descriptions of autism likely affected the mean ($\bar{x} = 1.62\%$) and standard deviation measures ($SD = 0.98\%$), which were greater than those for SLCN ($\bar{x} = 1.51\%$; $SD = 0.49\%$). This is useful to note, because the statistical suggestion that EYPs generally

held a greater store of autism knowledge obscures the qualitative conclusions that can be drawn from the individual responses. Here, the tabulated data allowed me to conclude that eight people wrote more about SLCN than autism and that expressions of SLCN were more detailed amongst the managers (since five of these individuals were managers).



For completeness, I carried out a Mann-Whitney test in SPSS to determine whether the differences in the volume of text for each condition were significant. This particular test was preferred to an independent samples *t* test because the data did not satisfy all of the conditions required for such a *t* test, i.e., the distributions were not all normal and the standard deviations were not all equal (See Van Den Berg, 2020a, and Table 11).

Table 11: Mean and Standard Deviations in ASLCN Text by Role

	Practitioner		Manager	
	Mean (%)	Standard Deviation (%)	Mean (%)	Standard Deviation (%)
Autism	1.37	0.5	1.83	1.26
SLCN	1.41	0.58	1.6	0.38

When it was applied to the volume of ASLCN text, the values shown in Table 12 were determined. Although the Managers' descriptions produced the largest difference in mean ranks in both the areas of autism and SLCN, these differences were not statistically significant.

Table 12: Mann-Whitney Test Results Applied to ASLCN Text

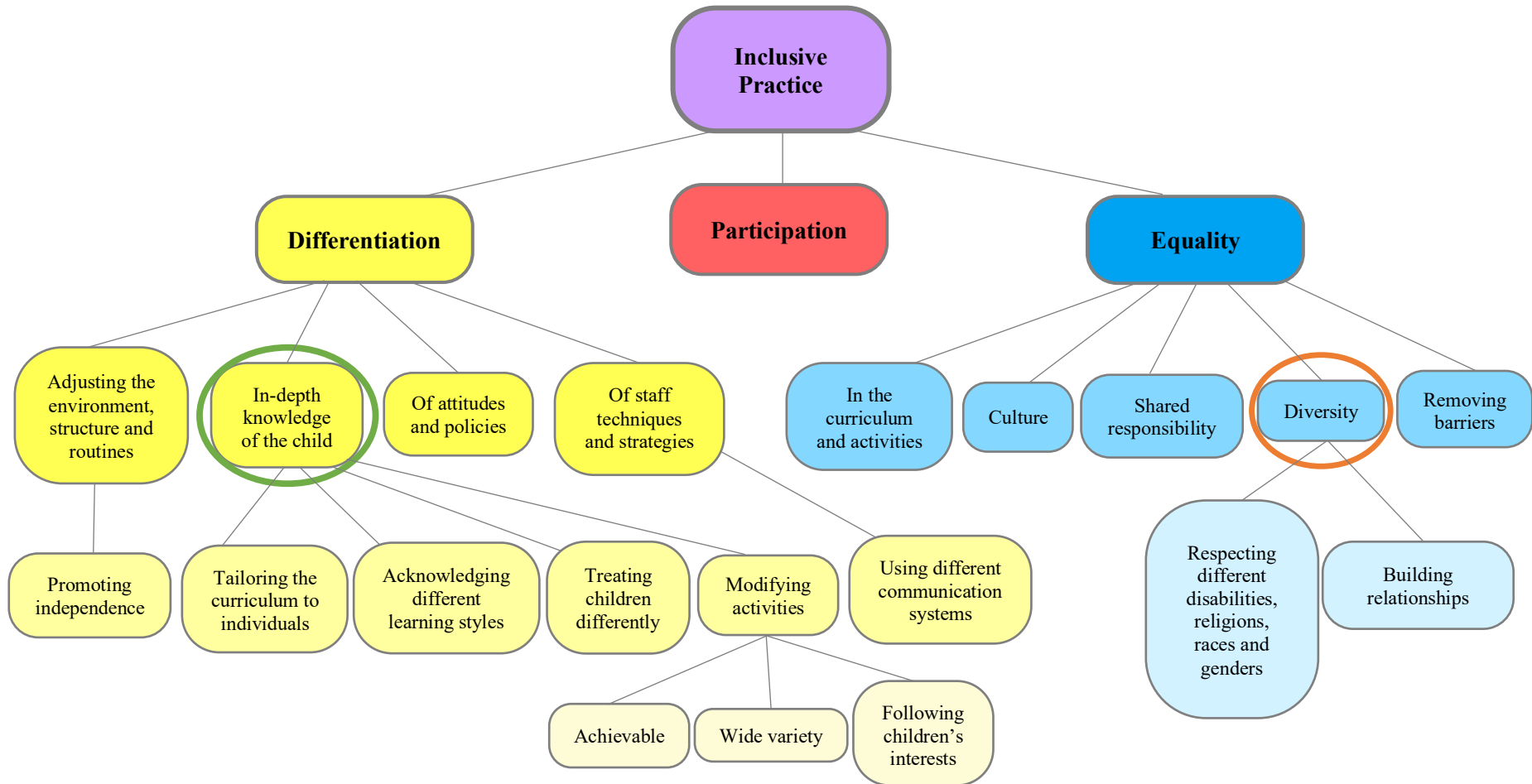
	Role	Number	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney	Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]
Autism	Practitioner	6	6.33	38	17	p > 0.05
	Manager	7	7.57	53		
SLCN	Practitioner	6	6	36	15	p > 0.05
	Manager	7	7.86	55		

Perceptions of Inclusive Practice

Staff perceptions of inclusive practice were solicited from Q11 and Q17, which sought views on its nature and dis/advantages. Under Q11, these views were interpreted in three areas. 'Participation' was determined as the superordinate theme but connected to two divergent themes – 'Differentiation' and 'Equality'. These were in themselves superordinate to 20 codes (See Figure 23). Henceforth, inclusion was inferred as a vehicle ensuring that every child is able to participate in nursery activities and interact with others – which is driven by an understanding that participation is secured in two veins: via differentiation (where children are treated differently) and via equality (where children are treated in the same way). As Chloe said: "Inclusive practice (...) ensures each individual person's needs are met (...) that we can adapt our practice to (...) include the person in every [aspect] of the setting. It does not mean treating all people the same, as the needs of one are different to the needs of another".

The weighting of codes suggested that differentiation features more strongly than equality in participant constructions of inclusive practice. As a theme, it also overarched the code with the most branches, i.e., 'In-Depth Knowledge of the Child' (ringed in green in Figure 23) – intimating that an understanding of every child's needs is key in the realisation of inclusion and manifest in personalised programmes accommodating different learning styles, interests and abilities. In contrast, the main code by weight, in the area of Equality, was named as 'Diversity' (ringed in orange) – though this linked to four other codes.

Figure 23: Coding Groups for Respondent Views of Inclusive Practice

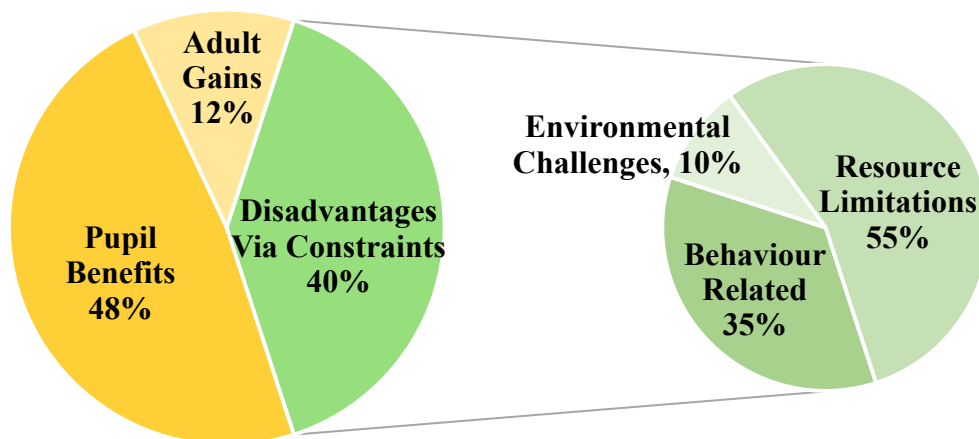


Inclusive practice was seen as a duty for all staff but went further than respecting different types of learning needs. It also demanded respect for disability, religion, race and gender; removed barriers; and fostered a culture of high expectation for pupils.

The Dis/Advantages of Inclusion

Notions of equality repeated in the comments denoting the dis/advantages of inclusion (Q17) but, alternatively, as a benefit – allowing children to be treated in the same way as their peers without SEN and to have the same type of experiences. Equality, though, did not dominate the analysis. What was more striking, was the participants' overall emphasis on the merits of inclusion. Of all the statements coded, 2/5 or 40% were focussed on the disadvantages of including children with SEN in the nursery, but 3/5 or 60% highlighted its benefits and gains. Disadvantages, moreover, appeared to be rooted in the problems or constraints that would prevent its success, rather than reasons as to why children should not be included. These percentages are graphed in Figure 24, which specifies all of the codes used in the coding.

Figure 24: Percentage References to the Dis/Advantages of Inclusion



The advantage codes are shaded yellow and were labelled ‘Adult Gains’ and ‘Pupil Benefits’, whereas the disadvantage codes are coloured green and themed as three types of constraint (environmental, behavioural and resource).

Advantages

All but two of the participants gave an example of how inclusion affected children with SEN and their peers, and almost half explained how it affected adults.

Adult gains were discernible in a fifth of the comments (constituting 6 references or 12%) and realised as opportunity for staff to broaden their skills base, access training and partner with professionals. One respondent also alluded to an attitudinal gain:

Having a child that sees things differently encourages us to look at things differently in order to understand them and support them. This is something that we would not ordinarily do as we have no reason to

Hannah

In line with four of her sample peers, Hannah also noted the benefits of inclusion for children without SEN. These entailed: helping children learn different ways of communicating with one another; raising awareness of everyone's uniqueness; and knowing how to care for and help each other. Children without SEN, though, equally served as important role models for those with SEN. Via peer interactions, participant' views on the advantages of inclusion could be distilled to the following:

- Enhanced play skills
- The development of speech
- Enhanced interaction skills
- Progression in their learning – “children make excellent progress”
- Flexibility – “more willing to try new things”
- Access to specialist support – including support for sensory needs
- Greater tolerance of busy, real-life environments
- The means of coping with the transition to school in mainstream

The Disadvantages of Inclusion

Amongst the three areas of disadvantage (via constraint), aspects relating to the nursery environment were described the least often. Explicated as thought that the layout and routines of the classroom might overwhelm some children and be unsuitable for others, these types of concerns were exceeded more than three times over in the area of behaviour, and more than five times in relation to resources. As such, 55% of the constraint-themed remarks were attributed to resources by seven staff and specifically concerned the availability of suitable staff and the capacity to support

children 1:1. This capacity or incapacity was conveyed as source of stress on the part of both the children and the staff. Where Debbie talked about the difficulties children have when their key person is absent on leave or unwell, seven people intimated the greater difficulties or burden of then managing a distressed child or multiple children. These references to behaviour were augmented by others that were behaviour related and – in the experiences of almost half the sample (six) – could result in damaged resources, peer distress and disrupted routines:

before we have found a rhythm and routine and all the right strategies, challenging behaviour can be very disruptive.

Hannah

Facing different routines, new targets and following instructions. This can impact on the environment and daily routines.

Lucy

Within such statements, however, there also seemed to be an understanding that children's behaviour was usually a result of a situation they could not cope with or that staff could not control.

Interim Summary of Findings

Considered overall, five principle observations could be made about the data attached to the open-ended items. Together, these shed light on the nature of work in a private day nursery, how staff perceived children with ASLCN and how they defined inclusion:

- Most people had chosen their profession as a result of their interest in children and child development – and were motivated by the sense of satisfaction this could bring
- Although staff duties varied according to their role as a Manager or Practitioner, there was a clear emphasis on the importance of assessment and inclusive practices
- Autism and SLCN were articulated as conditions that could affect children in different ways and which might warrant specialist assistance

- Inclusion was viewed as a means of addressing the needs of all individuals, with or without SEN, and realised through differentiated and equal practices
- Whilst participants felt that inclusion had benefits for themselves as well as the children they supported, the greatest challenges were highlighted in the context of available resources

7.1.3 Analysis of the Self-Efficacy Belief Scale Items

Perceived self-efficacy beliefs in the context of inclusion and children with ASLCN were connected to six questions in the questionnaire (Q4 and Q12-16). Q4 invited EYPs to consider the parts of their job they feel they do well, whilst Q16 explored the conditions inducing higher levels of effort. The four interposing questions covered different strands of inclusive practice (Knowledge of Children with ASLCN; Relationships; Teaching and Learning; and The Environment) and each strand contained four statements rated along a Likert scale. The 16 statements constituted what I have already described as the ChASE Scale – and form the basis of the ensuing analyses. These are augmented by the data produced in Q4 and Q16.

ChASE Scale Item Means and Reliability Measures

As Cronbach's alpha is commonly used by researchers to measure the extent to which a scale is fit for purpose (Taber, 2018), it was employed as a statistical means of judging the reliability of the ChASE Scale and its individual items. As a complete scale, the closeness of the resulting value ($\alpha = 0.942$) to 1 suggested a high degree of reliability overall and this level was maintained for almost all of the items, when these were considered individually. Indeed, further tests showed that the deletion of each item in the scale would have decreased the Cronbach's alpha value in 15 out of 16 instances. The only item proving marginally less reliable was Q13.4: I can teach children with or without autism / language difficulties how to play together. Without this item, the Cronbach's alpha value would have increased by 0.002 to $\alpha = 0.944$. As the difference was small, I decided not to reject the data associated with this item.

EYP Self-Efficacy Scores

To prepare the ChASE Scale data for statistical analysis, the Likert-scale ratings were coded as: VSD = 1; SD = 2; D = 3; A = 4; SA = 5; VSA = 6. These values were summed across the domains for each participant, providing a measure of

perceived self-efficacy in every area of practice. Alice, for example, responded to the items listed under The Environment with VSA, SA, VSA and SA, producing a score of 22 (6 + 5 + 6 + 5). The minimum (VSD = 1 x 4 items) and maximum (VSA = 6 x 4 items) possible scores in any domain were 4 and 24, whilst the minimum (4 x 4 items) and maximum (24 x 4 domains) scale scores were 16 and 96.

Comparing Practitioner and Manager Scores

The Practitioners’ scores are graphed in Figure 25 and tabulated in Table 13.

Figure 25: Comparison of Self-Efficacy Scores Between Practitioners

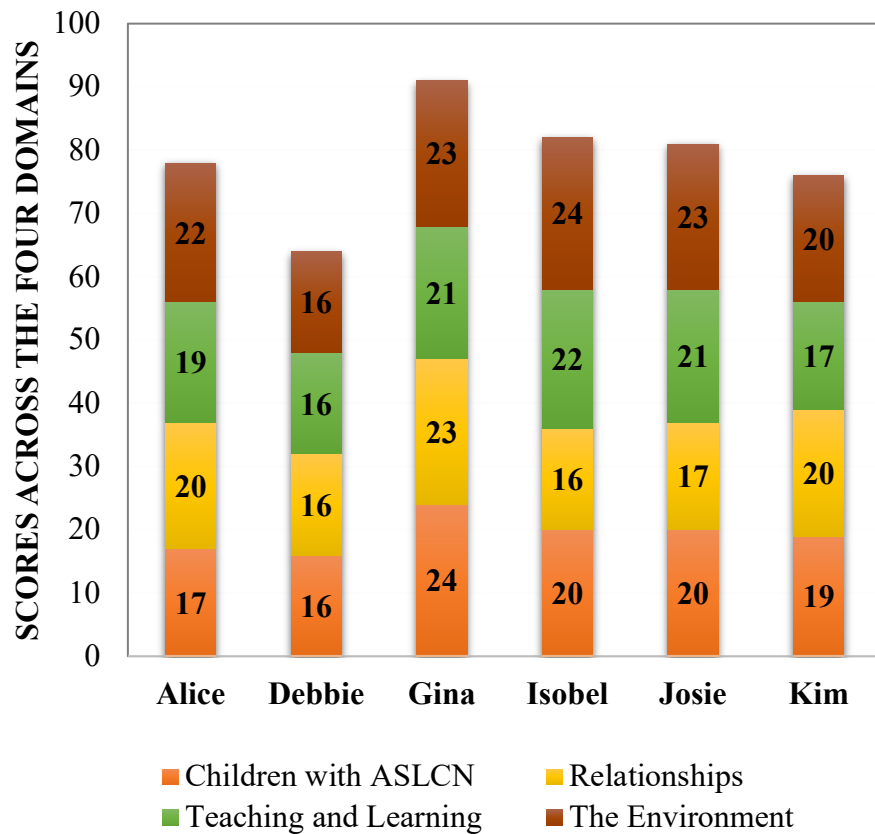


Table 13: Practitioner Scale Scores

ChASE Scale Score	Alice	Debbie	Gina	Isobel	Josie	Kim
Average Domain Score	19.5	16	22.75	20.5	20.25	19

In Table 13, we can see that Gina’s level of inclusive self-efficacy belief was not only high overall (being 91/96), but also when averaged across the four domains (scoring 22.75/24). Both scores were greater than any of the other subgroup Practitioner’s. Furthermore, Gina’s score of 24 in the area of Knowledge of Children with ASLCN was the highest of any participant – and could have stemmed from her personal experience of autism, since she qualified her domain responses with the comment: “I have had first-hand experience as my own son has autism”. Yet, this personal connection with autism did not translate into a high level of belief for Fiona, who mentioned elsewhere in the questionnaire, that she had an autistic daughter. In fact, Fiona’s self-efficacy scores on average and in total were almost the lowest amongst the Managers (see Figure 26), and the third lowest when looking at the whole sample.

Within the Manager subgroup, Lucy obtained the highest scores with a ChASE Scale total of 92/96 and a domain average of 23/24 (See Table 14). She indicated the strongest levels of self-efficacy beliefs possible in all but one of the domains – and more so than anyone else in her group or the full sample.

Figure 26: Comparison of Self-Efficacy Scores Between Managers

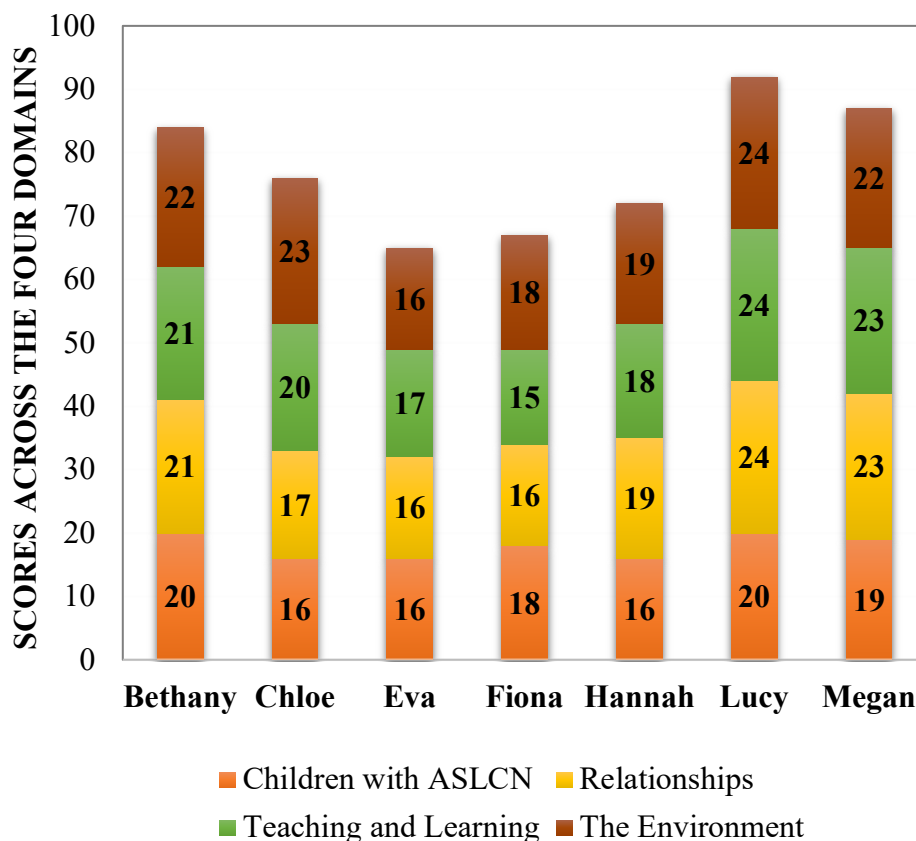


Table 14: Manager Scale Scores

ChASE Scale Score	Bethany	Chloe	Eva	Fiona	Hannah	Lucy	Megan
	84	76	65	67	72	92	87
Average Domain Score	21	19	16.25	16.75	18	23	21.25

At the opposite end of the self-efficacy scoring, Debbie and Eva presented with the lowest domain average and ChASE Scale totals. These individuals were similar in age (27-36) and years of nursery experience (more than 6) but dissimilar in respect of their ASLCN experience and training. Debbie had less experience (1-3 years versus more than 6) but more training (more than 3 hours versus 1-3). Eva's greater amount of experience may have given her practical insight into the breadth of children's needs but inadvertently induced a more cautious response to the items – perhaps able to agree in terms of the children she knew, but not necessarily in terms of the children she might meet in the future. This supposition stems from her comment that she agreed with the statements in Domain 1 – “provided time is spent with the child in question and a little understanding is gained about the individual”.

To explore potential differences in levels of self-efficacy belief according to role, average domain totals were calculated within the Practitioner and Manager subgroups – producing the data in Table 15. This suggests that the Practitioners, on average, had higher levels of self-efficacy belief than the Managers in the domains concerning their knowledge of children with ASLCN and the nursery environment. In contrast, the Managers held stronger levels of self-efficacy belief than the Practitioners when it came to practices concerning relationships, and teaching and learning.

Table 15: Comparing Average Domain Scores Between Roles

ChASE Domain	Practitioners	Managers
Children with ASLCN	19.33	17.86
Relationships	19.33	19.71
Teaching and Learning	18.67	19.43
The Environment	21.33	20.57

Self-Efficacy Item Scores

One of the most striking observations gleaned from the EYPs' self-efficacy scores was their strength. Scores may have been variable but even the smallest were still high. Debbie's domain average of 16/24 and scale total of 64/96, for instance, constituted the 'lowest' in the study but still equated to 67% of the maximum possible in the research context. Every person in the sample therefore had a high or very high degree of conviction in their ability to include children with ASLCN in their setting. At item-level, this meant an EYP was more likely to agree with a statement than to disagree with it. Indeed, when examining staff responses against each of the scale's 16 items, only two items elicited one negative answer. In Domain 2, one of the Managers strongly disagreed with the item, 'I can teach children with/out ASLCN how to play together' – and qualified this by saying that she could “not necessarily [make children] play together unless they chose to”. In Domain 3, another Manager disagreed with the item, 'I can recommend a new target for a child, which is at the right level of challenge' – and explained this by writing: “Due to my current role I would not set [a] target as [I] don't directly work with the children”. These Likert responses, shaded in blue and green, are recorded in Figures 28 and 29.

Self-Efficacy Domain Scores and Likert Responses

Participant responses to each of the items in the four domains are graphed in Figures 27-30. Figure 27, for example, shows that in Domain 1, seven EYPs agreed with the item 'I can calm a child's behaviour when s/he is upset', five strongly agreed and 1 very strongly agreed. These responses yielded an item self-efficacy score of 59, $([7 \times 4] + [5 \times 5] + [1 \times 6])$ – using the predefined coding system. Compared to its other domain items, this total suggested that participants did not feel quite as strongly about their capacity to calm an upset or angry child, as they did in preparing an activity matched to his/her way of learning. Item 3, concerning motivation, was responded to in a similar way. These two items, however – with scores of 59 – were not quite the lowest in measures of self-efficacy, because the lowest score was 58. This appeared in the relationships domain (Figure 28) and concerned EYPs' belief in their ability to teach children how to play together. Looking across the data graphed in this way, i.e., across the four figures, allowed the following observations to be made:-

- EYP self-efficacy beliefs were the most certain in practices relating to the

environment (relative to a combined item score of 272 or $69 + 68 + 68 + 67$)

- The area of practice inducing the least certainty concerned staff knowledge of children with ASLCN (via a total score of 241 or $61 + 62 + 59 + 59$)
- Item 15.1 attracted the strongest level of conviction, evidenced by the highest score of 69, meaning that people were most certain in their ability to make areas of the nursery accessible to all children
- The most frequent response along the Likert scale was Strongly Agree and, with its tally of 82, greatly contrasted with the frequency of Agree (72) and Very Strongly Agree (52) responses (and all three disagree options)
- The largest clustering of responses occurred in Domain 3: Teaching and Learning, where eight people strongly agreed with their belief in teaching children to be independent in their personal care
- The greatest variation in responses emerged in the domain of Relationships, according to the minimum and maximum item scores. Ranging from 58 to 64, this difference of six was greater than that resulting in the other domains (whose ranges were 2-3)

Figure 27: Self-Efficacy Scores and Likert Responses for Domain 1

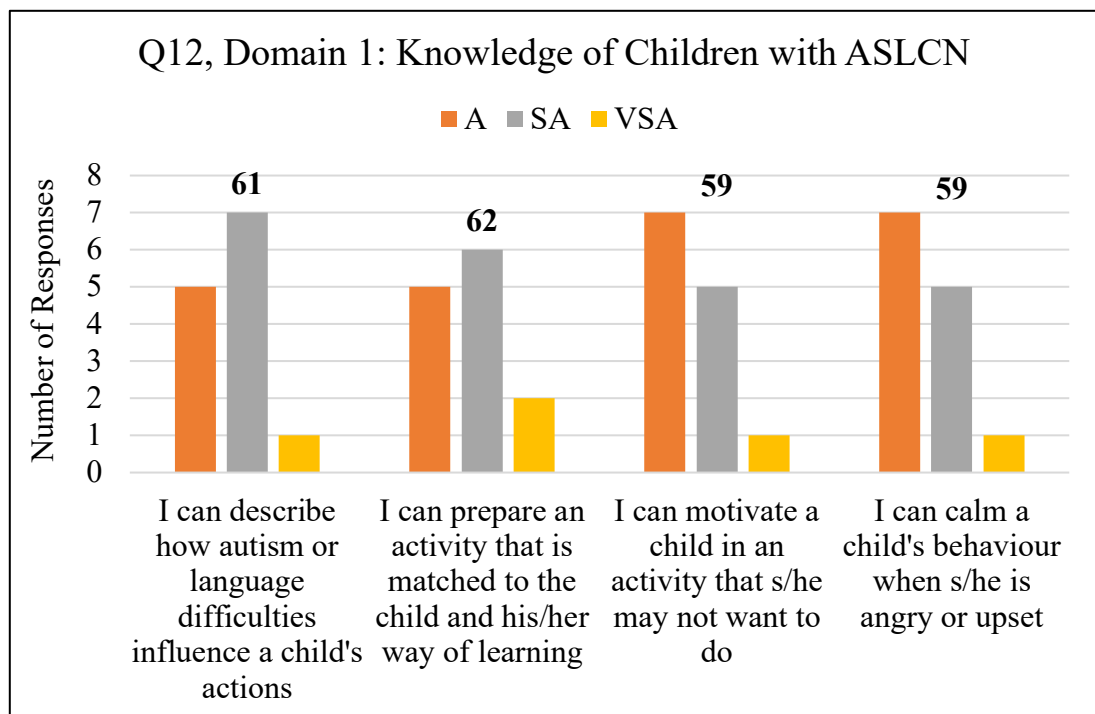


Figure 28: Self-Efficacy Scores and Likert Responses for Domain 2

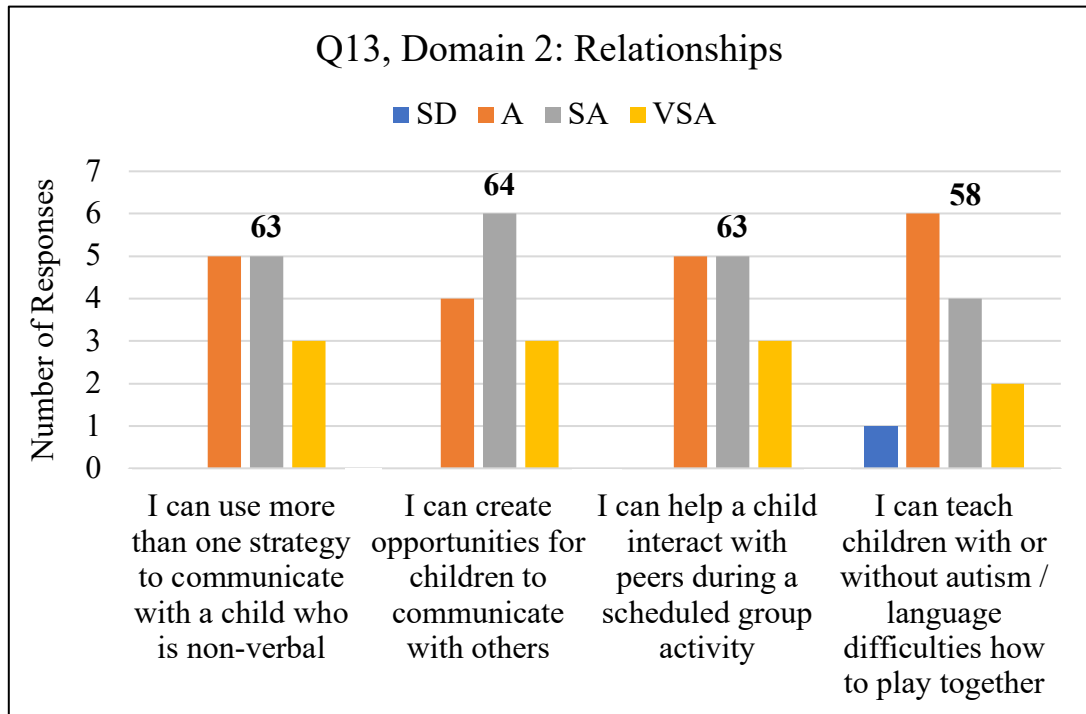


Figure 29: Self-Efficacy Scores and Likert Responses for Domain 3

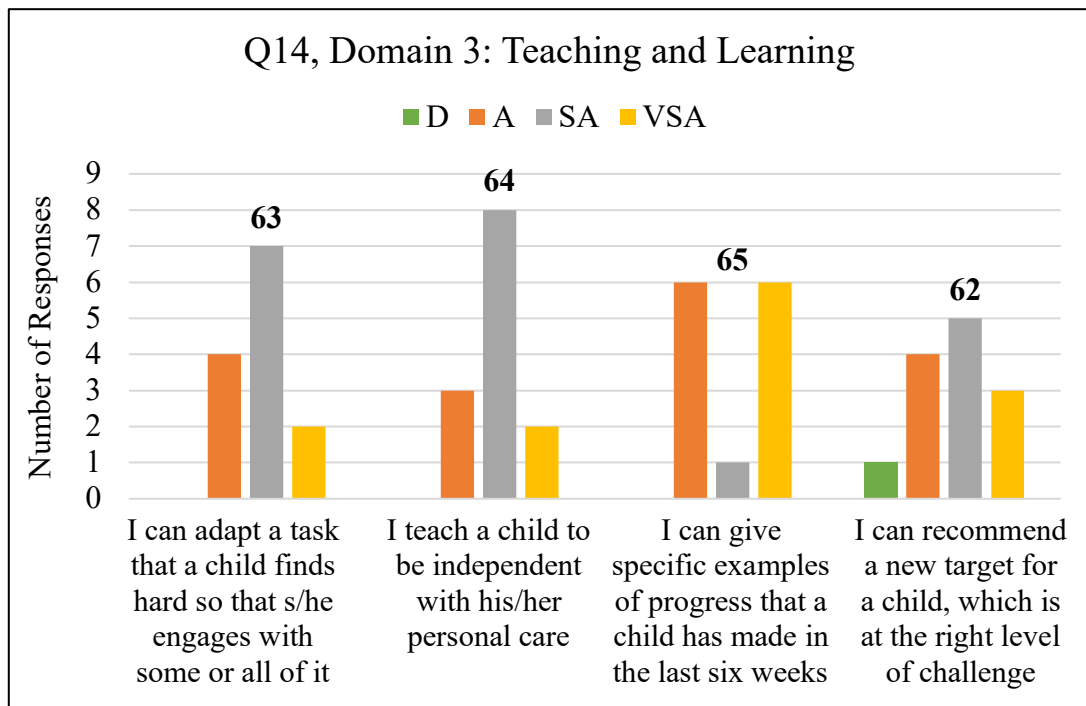
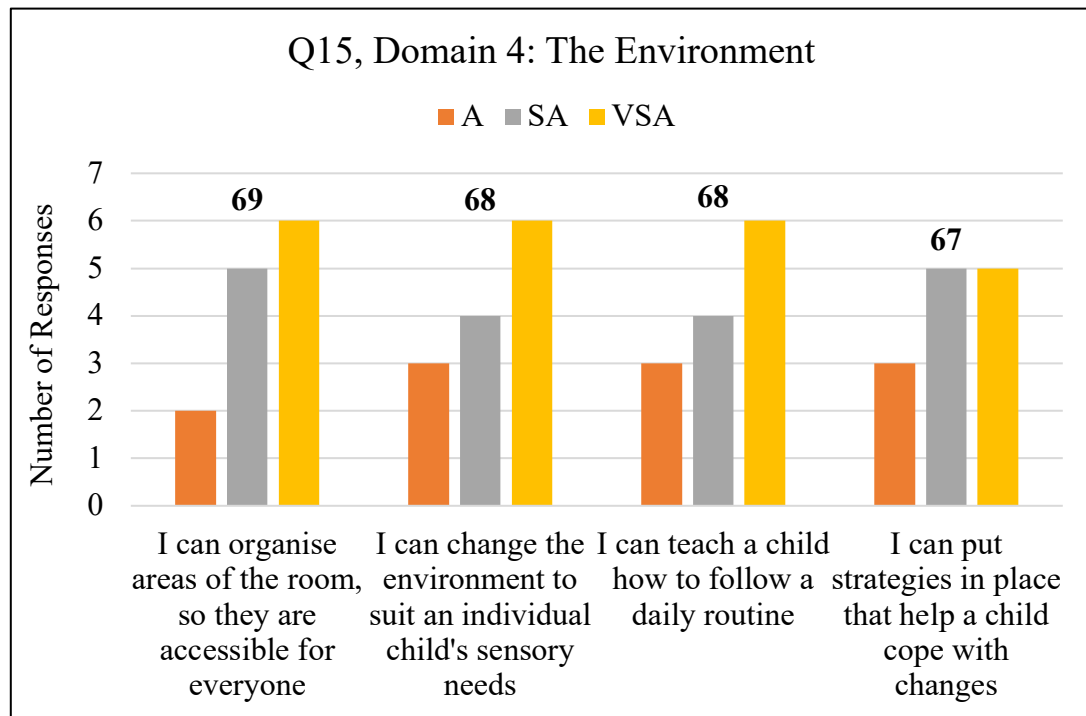


Figure 30: Self-Efficacy Scores and Likert Responses for Domain 4

What EYPs Believe They Do Well

Whilst the sample as a whole held the greatest conviction in practices encompassing the environment, those convictions were not necessarily evidenced in the qualitative comments people made about their perceived strengths. Only one person mentioned the environment when answering Q4: Which parts of your job do you believe you do well? The strength, moreover, was simply expressed as “giving them an environment where they can develop”. More typically, staff referenced their ability to interact with children, colleagues and families, and to provide support. One person was particularly forthright, saying that she was:

very passionate about supporting children and their families through difficult times and processes – particularly if it involves fighting for children’s rights to ensure they reach their potential.

Chloe

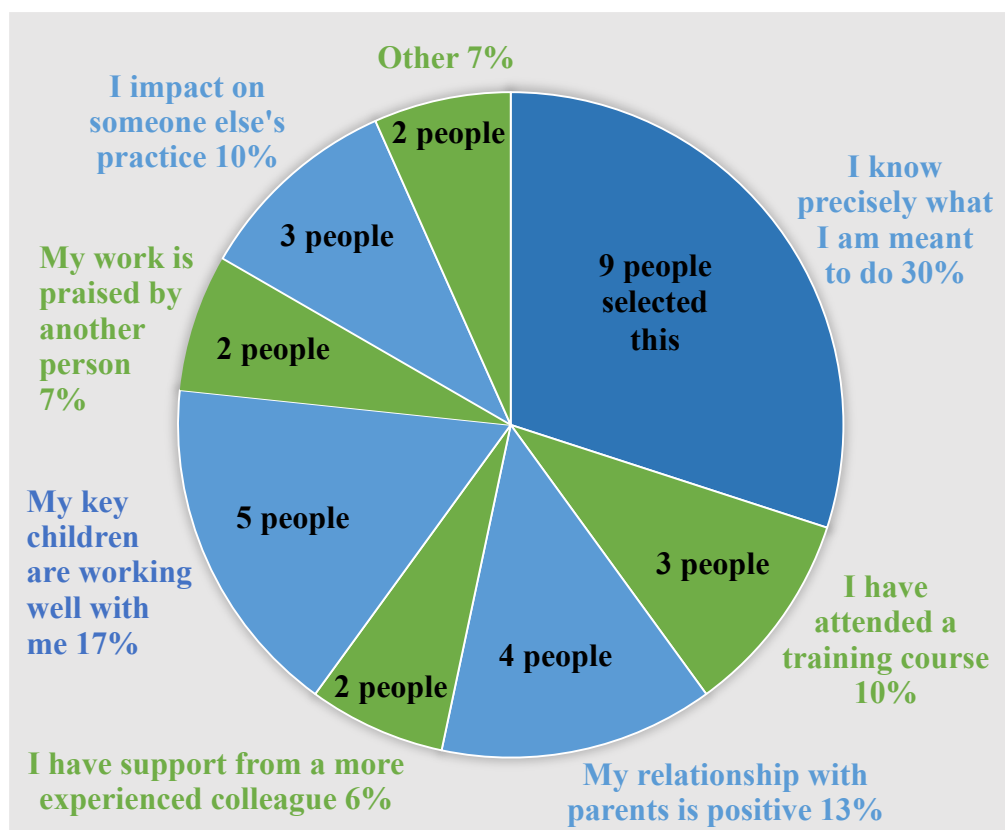
Interestingly, Chloe’s score in the Relationship domain was only 17 (see Figure 26) – one of the lowest across the sample and within her four sets of Likert ratings. Of the

four people commenting on a strength associated with items in this domain, none expressed a very strong level of belief and opted instead for the Agree or Strongly Agree response. Only one Practitioner listed a strength that corresponded with a Very Strongly Agree rating on the ChASE Scale (Gina) – saying that she understood children’s needs well (connecting with item 12.1). Not all of the strengths quoted by EYPs, however, were directly relatable to items on the ChASE Scale – making it difficult to gauge the generality of these qualitative-quantitative differences. As an illustration, individuals were not asked to rate their perceived ability to maintain staff morale, be open to new ideas, complete paperwork or be organised – but these strengths were volunteered in response to Q4.

Gauging Effort and Practice

Another area intuiting incongruence was discovered in Q16 – where staff were asked to choose examples of situations that would encourage them to put more effort into their work.

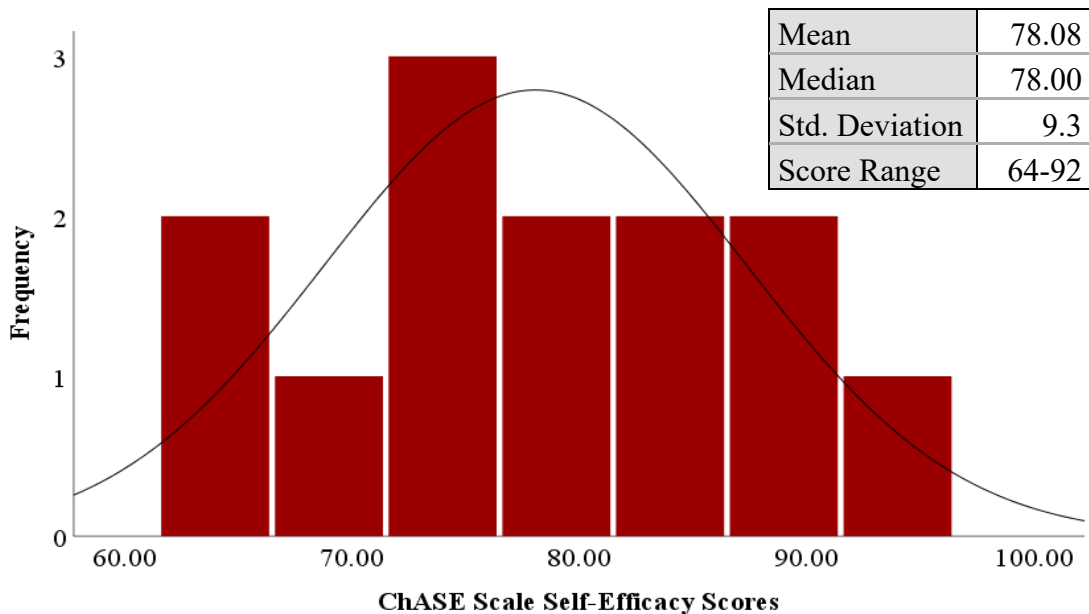
Figure 31: Factors Contributing to Work Effort



Here, it was obvious that what people felt they were good at (Q4), did not necessarily equate to higher degrees of effort (Q16). Isobel, for example, who felt that paperwork was one of her strengths, later associated more effort with knowing precisely what to do, experience of training and positive pupil engagement (i.e., rather than being up-to-date with admin, which was a potential option in Q16). No one felt that completed admin contributed to greater levels of effort, but many agreed with the importance of knowing exactly what to do. This option, listed amongst 10 others, was the most popular, followed by an emphasis on key children working well. Positive parent relationships emerged as the third most important contributor. This was valued by four respondents, who all happened to be Managers. Two other Managers, however, used the open text option to outline different motivational factors: using skills and experience to “work with children and families to obtain the best outcome for their child” and at times “when it matters to someone to get it right”. These ‘other’ comments constitute the 7% (or 2 people) portrayed in Figure 31.

Quantitative Analyses of EYP Self-Efficacy Scores

The formulation of closed questions in the questionnaire provided scope to explore possible interactions between EYP characteristics and self-efficacy scores, i.e., to see if the scale scores varied according to: people’s qualification, age, nursery size, years of nursery or ASLCN experience, autism training or training in SLCN. Plus, by working with the subgroup labels created early on in the analyses and noting the staff holding specific SEN or SEND responsibilities, there was additional scope to consider the potential impact by job level or position as a ‘SEND’ coordinator. From the outset, though, I was conscious of the limitations that might be posed by the size of the sample – that its smallness could not only compromise the significance of any statistical results, but also reduce the likelihood of there being great differences between variable groupings. With these limitations in mind, it was important to assess the distribution of the scale scores across the sample, via Figure 32. In reference to a normal curve, this figure shows the uneven distribution of the scores and a positive skew to the left – presumably affected by the highest levels of belief shown by some of the EYPs. According to Homer (2018a), positively skewed distributions point to a mean value that exceeds the median – such that the median should be a better indicator of average. In this case, the mean is greater than the median, but only marginally.

Figure 32: Distribution of Scale Scores Across the Sample

Consideration of the distribution was important because statistical tests of variance, like the ANOVA, assume it will be normal (Homer, 2018b). The uneven distribution of self-efficacy scores in the study context suggested that a one-way ANOVA would not be appropriate. This test rejection was further justified by my observations of the standard deviations occurring within each independent variable, since these were generally unequal between the groups (see column 1, Table 17) – and their equality is assumed in ANOVA testing (Van Den Berg, 2020b).

Table 16: Validating the Kruskal-Wallis H. Assumptions

Assumption	Comment
1. The dependent variable is ordinal	The ChASE Scale scores were compiled from a Likert scale
2. The independent variables contain two or more independent groups	Yes. The number of groups within each variable ranged from 2-4
3. Participants cannot belong to more than one group	Yes. There were no overlaps in terms of participant assignment to groups
4. Group distributions should be similar	The distributions for each independent variable were broadly similar, in the majority of cases (See Figures 33-41)

When considering the ‘age’ variable, for instance, the standard deviation in scale

scores varied from 2.08 – 12.09. Given the violation of ANOVA assumptions, the Kruskal-Wallis H. test was used instead, which is a known alternative to the one-way ANOVA (Laerd Statistics, 2018b) and does not need to meet the same assumptions (Van Den Berg, 2020b). The test was applied to each of the independent variables in SPSS – once I had determined that the assumptions associated in Kruskal-Wallis H. were satisfied (See Laerd Statistics, 2018b, and Table 16).

Using the results of the Kruskal-Wallis H. tests, I drew two initial conclusions – that the EYP self-efficacy scores did not vary according to any of the independent variables (as $p > 0.05$ in all instances) and that the group differences were generally very small (according to the x^2 values).

Table 17: The Kruskal-Wallis H. Test Applied to Nine Independent Variables

Independent Variable	Standard Deviation	Degrees of Freedom	Significance	Kruskal-Wallis H. (x^2)
Qualifications	Level 3 = 9.52 Level 5 = 12.02 Level 6 = 9.2	2	$p = 0.667$	0.932
Age	17-26 = 2.08 27-36 = 12.09 37-47 = 10.41 47+ = 10.6	3	$p = 0.84$	0.964
Job Role	Practitioner = 8.85 Manager = 10.34	1	$p = 0.976$	0.005
SEND Responsibilities	No SEND = 10.2 SEND = 6.34	1	$p = 0.347$	1.009
Nursery Size	< 40 = 7.46 41-60 = 10.04 >100 = 5.86	2	$p = 0.158$	3.755
Nursery Experience	1-3 years = 0 4-6 years = 0.01 6+ years = 10.59	2	$p = 0.885$	0.357
ASLCN Experience	1-3 years = 9.9 4-6 years = 0.71 6+ years = 10.06	2	$p = 0.513$	1.554
Autism Training	1-3 hours = 7.85 > 3 hours = 10.23	2	$p = 0.796$	0.096
SLCN Training	None = 0 1-3 hours = 6.88 > 3 hours = 8.93	2	$p = 0.088$	4.216

The differences in scores between the Practitioner and Manager groups were the

smallest overall ($x^2 = 0.005$) and meant that, in this sample and context, the role of an EYP had virtually no bearing on the level of belief they had in their inclusive capacity. In contrast, the largest group differences were discernible in the realms of nursery size ($x^2 = 3.755$) and SLCN training hours ($x^2 = 4.216$) – intimating some degree of impact on EYP competency beliefs (albeit without statistical significance). These three observations are highlighted in Table 17.

The independent variables were analysed within a series of charts and in terms of their means and absolute deviations (See Figures 33-41 and Tables 18-26). The rationale for this was described in Chapter 6, together with the method of expressing the domain scores as percentages.

Figure 33: Domain Scores as Percentages by Highest Qualification

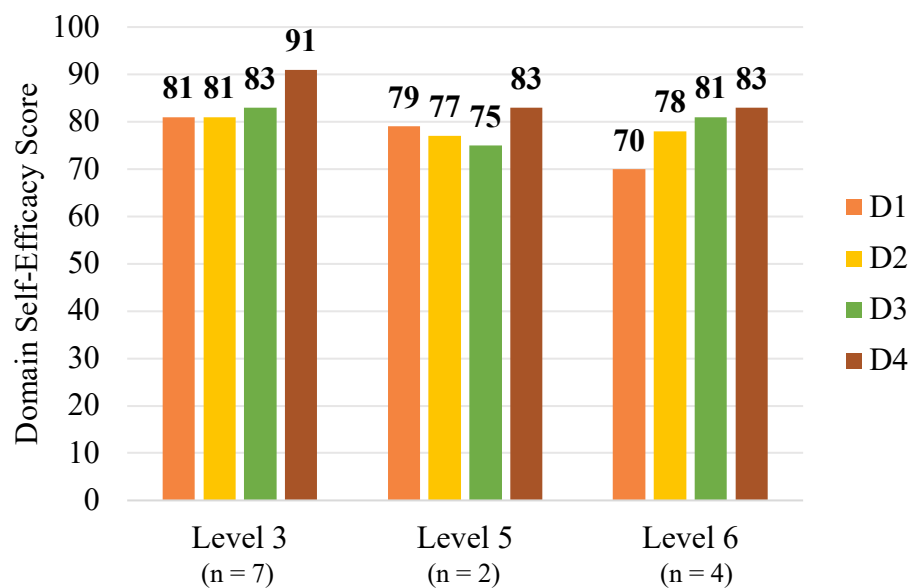


Table 18: Mean and Absolute Deviations for Levels of Qualification

	3	5	6
\bar{x}	80.57	75.5	75
Absolute Deviation	6.78	8.5	6.5

Key Points

- The highest level of belief was associated with the fourth domain and Level 3 EYPs, whereas the lowest level was associated with Domain 1 and Level 6

- Level 3 EYPS generally demonstrated greater levels of self-efficacy belief than those with higher level qualifications, across all domains
- The average scale score for participants who held the highest qualification was 75 out of a total of 96 (24 points x 4 domains), which was lower than the average of 80.57 attributed to EYPs with the lowest qualification
- The greatest spread of scores occurred in the Level 5 group

Figure 34: Domain Scores as Percentages by Age

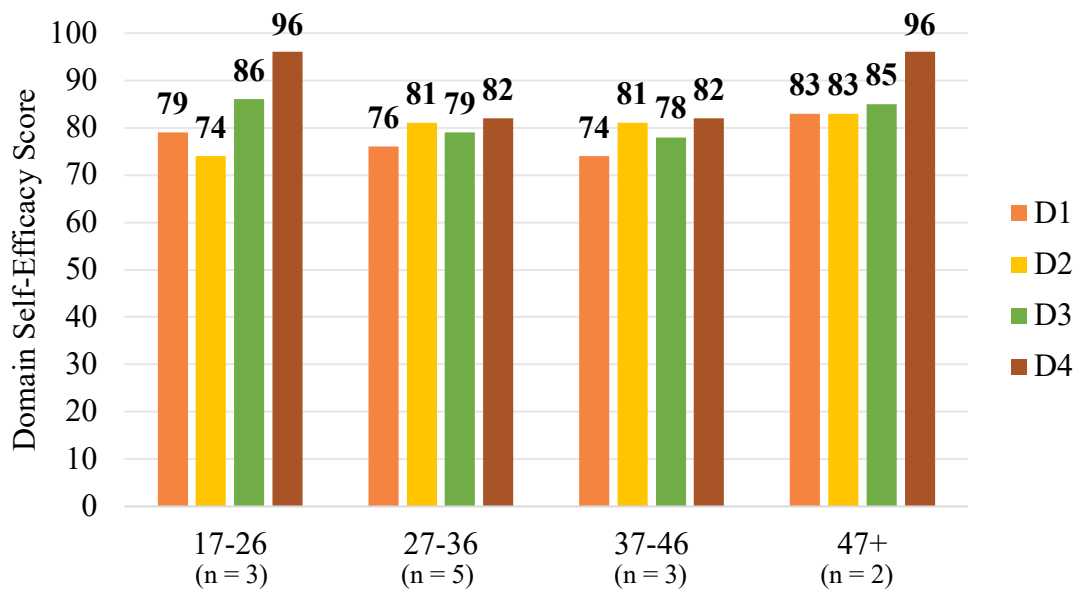


Table 19: Mean and Absolute Deviations for Participant Age

	17-26	27-36	37-46	47+
\bar{x}	80.33	76.2	75.33	83.5
Absolute Deviation	1.56	9.44	7.78	7.5

Key Points

- Self-efficacy scores across the four domains were the least variable amongst EYPs aged 27-36 (ranging from 76% in Domain 1 to 82% in Domain 4)
- Scores were the most variable across the domains rated by 17 to 26-year-olds
- In every age group, self-belief in practices relating to the environment were higher than in any other domain

- The highest levels of self-efficacy belief were identified amongst the oldest and the youngest EYPs
- Comparing average scale totals, staff aged 27-46 age seemed to have similar levels of self-efficacy belief
- Self-efficacy scores amongst the youngest EYPs were the most similar, in terms of their spread

Figure 35: Domain Scores as Percentages by Job Role

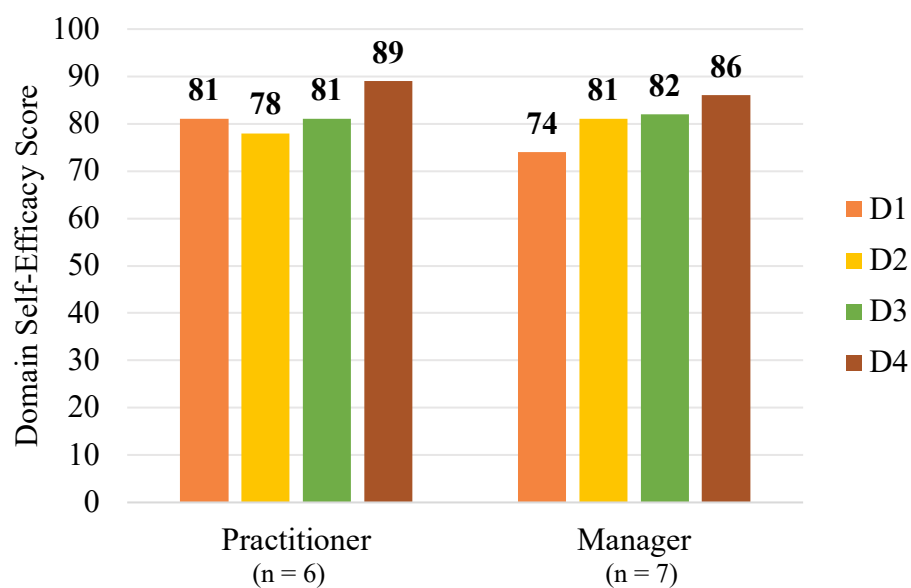


Table 20: Mean and Absolute Deviations for Job Role

	Practitioner	Manager
\bar{x}	78.67	77.57
Absolute Deviation	6	8.65

Key Points

- The lowest self-efficacy domain score emerged in the Manager's group, in the area concerning knowledge of children with ASLCN
- Managers provided marginally higher levels of conviction in Domain 2 (81%) and 3 (82%), when compared with the Practitioners (78% and 81%)
- The range of scores across the domains was similar in both groups, being 78-89% amongst Practitioners and 74-86% amongst the Managers

- The spread of scores within both groups was large and largest amongst the Managers

Figure 36: Domain Scores as Percentages by SEND Responsibility

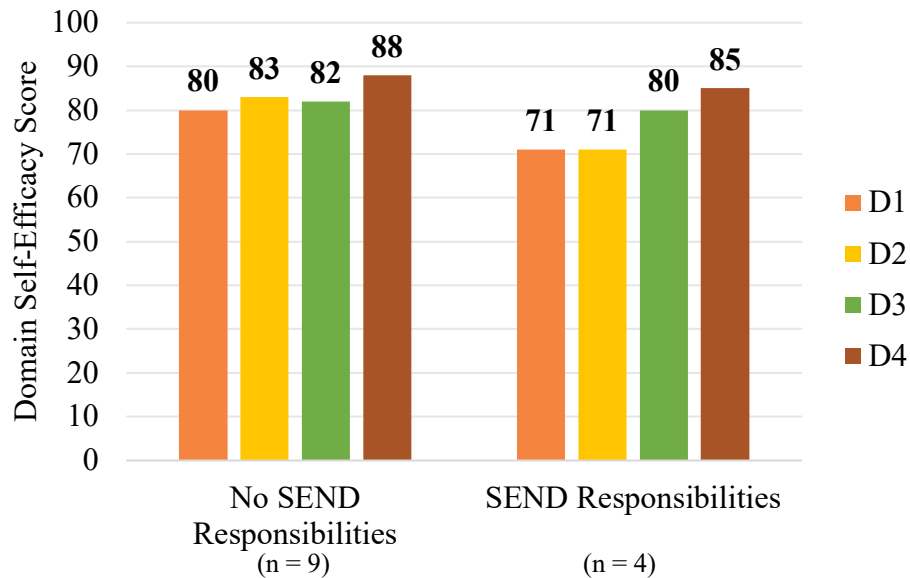
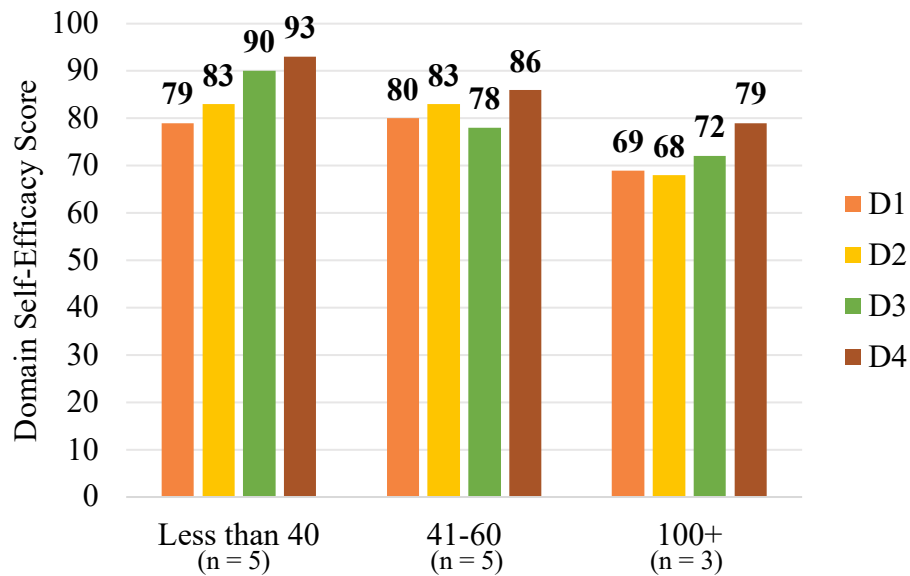


Table 21: Mean and Absolute Deviations for SEND Responsibility

	No SEND Responsibilities	SEND Responsibilities
\bar{x}	80	73.75
Absolute Deviation	7.78	5.25

Key Points

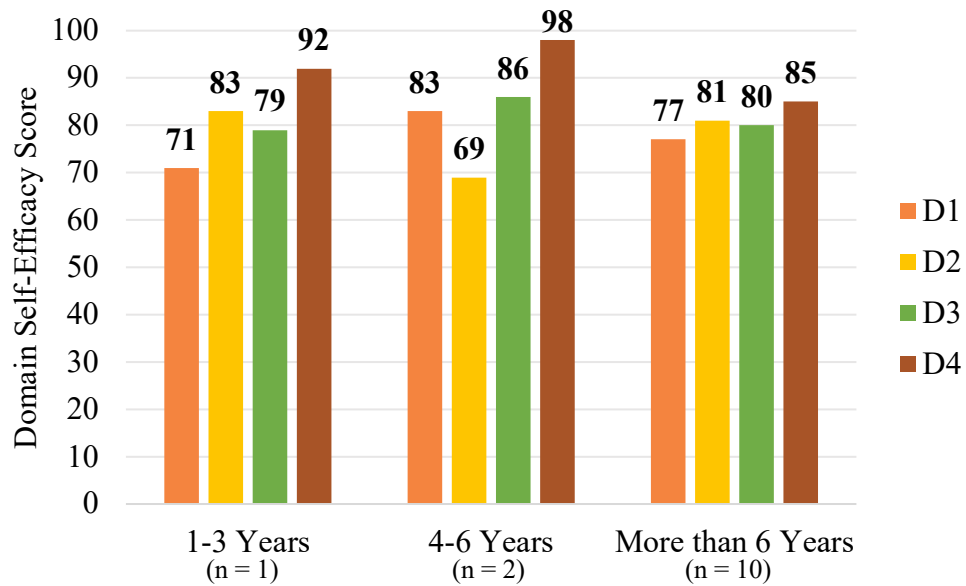
- Self-efficacy scores between the four domains were the least variable amongst EYPs without SEND responsibilities (8%), than those with (14%)
- Overall, staff with SEND responsibilities rated their inclusive competencies in the domains of Relationships, and Teaching and Learning as the same (71%)
- The average self-efficacy scale score was highest for those staff without SEND responsibilities – though this grouping also produced the greater spread of scores

Figure 37: Domain Scores as Percentages by Number of Nursery Pupils**Table 22: Mean and Absolute Deviations for Number of Pupils**

	< 40	41-60	100+
\bar{x}	82.8	78.6	69.33
Absolute Deviation	5.36	7.12	4.44

Key Points

- Ratings of self-belief pertaining to teaching and learning, and the environment were highest amongst staff working in the smaller nurseries
- Levels of conviction in the nurseries enrolling fewer than 40 children or up to 60 appeared to be the same or similar in the contexts of relationships (both 83%) and knowledge of children with ASLCN (79% versus 80%)
- Practices in the area of relationships induced the greatest doubts for EYPs working in the big nurseries (relative to the lowest percentage score of 68)
- According to the scale scores, the fewer the number of children in the setting, the higher the self-efficacy ratings provided by the staff
- The greatest dispersion of scores occurred amongst the EYPs working in nurseries with 41-60 children

Figure 38: Domain Scores as Percentages by Nursery Experience**Table 23: Mean and Absolute Deviations for Nursery Experience**

	1-3 Years	4-6 Years	> 6 Years
\bar{x}	78	81.5	77.4
Absolute Deviation	-	0.5	8.88

Key Points

- Participants with 4-6 years of nursery experience rated their levels of self-belief more highly than their colleagues in three of the four domains. It was only in the context of relationships that their ratings were lower / lowest
- Levels of belief were fairly constant across all of the domains for those staff with the most years of nursery experience
- The one member of staff with the least amount of nursery experience rated her self-efficacy beliefs in the domain of Relationships more highly than those with additional years of experience
- Overall, measures of self-belief did not seem to increase with increasing years of nursery experience – in any of the four domains
- The variation in scale scores is minimal or absent in terms of staff with up to 6 years of nursery experience, due to the size of the subgroup

- Levels of self-belief were very variable amongst the staff with the most years of nursery experience

Figure 39: Domain Scores as Percentages by ASLCN Experience

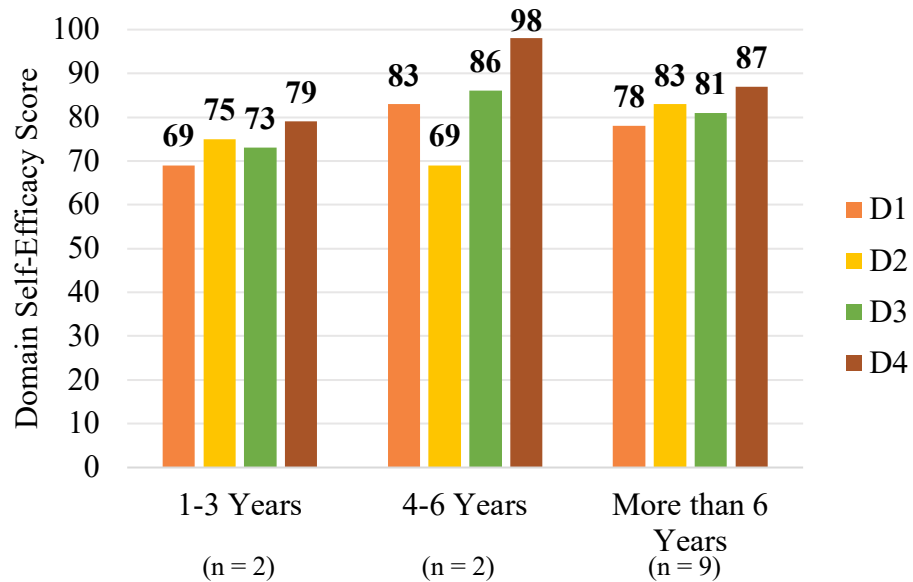


Table 24: Mean and Absolute Deviations for ASLCN Experience

	1-3 Years	4-6 Years	> 6 Years
\bar{x}	71	81.5	78.89
Absolute Deviation	7	0.5	8.54

Key Points

- Measures of self-belief did not seem to increase with increasing years of experience, in any of the four domains
- For the four Practitioners possessing 6 years or fewer ASLCN experience, levels of belief in three of the domains appeared to rise over time (via the scores in Domains 1, 3 and 4)
- Practitioners with 4-6 years of ASLCN experience produced the lowest and highest self-efficacy ratings within the full sample – via the domains of Relationships and The Environment
- The lowest measure of self-belief occurred in the 1-3 Years category, which comprised only Practitioners

- Differences between measures of belief were greater amongst the Practitioners with 1-3 years of ASLCN experience, than those with 4-6 years

Figure 40: Domain Scores as Percentages by Autism Training

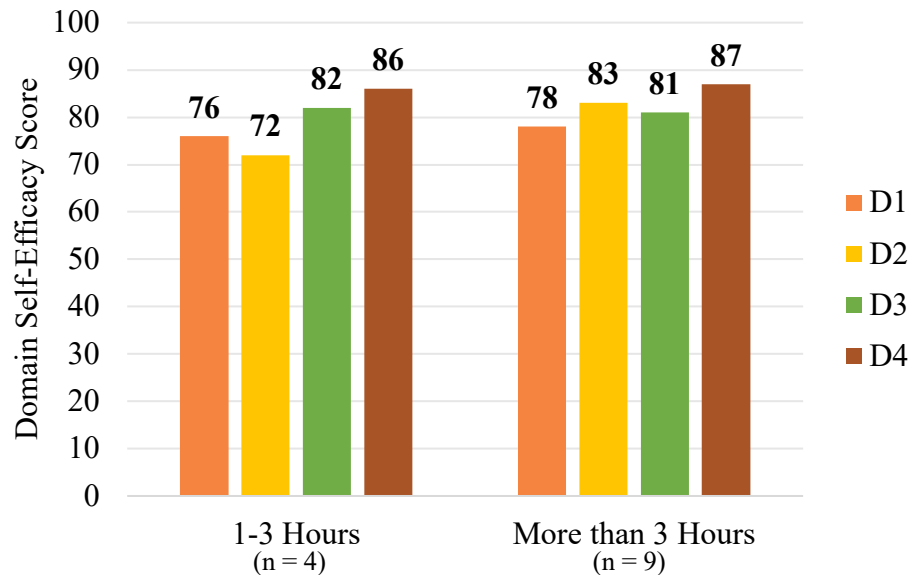


Table 25: Mean and Absolute Deviations for Autism Training

	1-3 Hours	> 3 Hours
\bar{x}	76.5	78.78
Absolute Deviation	5.75	8.64

Key Points

- Measures of self-efficacy belief appeared to increase with increasing hours of autism training in Domains 1 and 4, but the increases were small
- The lowest self-efficacy rating emerged in the domain of Relationships, in conjunction with the lowest amount of training. This domain produced the greatest difference in ratings between the two training intervals – rising from 72% to 83%. In all other domains, the increment was only ± 1 or $+2\%$
- EYPs with more than 3 hours of autism training provided the highest ratings of self-efficacy belief, though these ratings were only marginally greater than those with 3 hours or less

- Variations from the average self-efficacy score were fairly large in both subgroups, and slightly higher amongst the nine staff with the most experience of autism training

Figure 41: Domain Scores as Percentages by SLCN Training

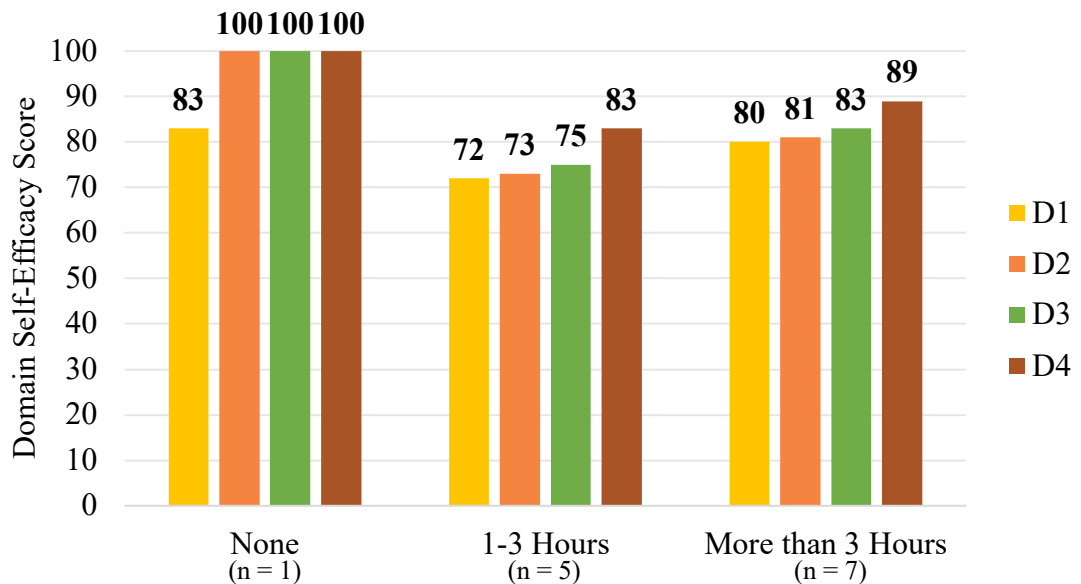


Table 26: Mean and Absolute Deviations for SLCN Training

	None	1-3 Hours	> 3 Hours
\bar{x}	92	72.6	80
Absolute Deviation	-	5.52	6.86

Key Points

- In the area of SLCN training, levels of belief increased in all domains as the amount of training increased (comparing the scores for the 1-3 Hours category with the More than 3 Hours category)
- In each domain, the deputy manager – without any SLCN training – rated her competency beliefs more highly than any other member of staff
- Whether staff had attended SLCN training or not, measures of self-efficacy belief were consistently the most similar or identical in Domains 2 and 3
- The difference between the highest and lowest average scale score – relative to SLCN training – was 19.4 (92 – 72.6) and represented the largest measure of difference amongst any of the variables

- The greatest spread of scores was discerned in the group with more than 3 hours of SLCN training

7.1.4 Summary of Findings from the First Questionnaire

The analysis was presented in three distinct sections covering participant demographics, the open-ended questions and the ChASE Scale data. The content of these sections can be summarised as follows:

1. Six Practitioners and seven Managers took part in the online questionnaire.
 - Most people represented the 17-36 age bracket, and everyone was educated to at least Level 3
 - EYPs had generally been motivated to join the profession by their interest in children and child development and most already had more than 6 years of nursery experience
 - Most people had at least 6 years of ASLCN experience and many had received more than 3 hours of ASLCN training
 - Most of the staff were working with more than one age group at the time of the study and in a setting with 60 or fewer children
 - The greatest proportion of EYP duties were linked to assessment and inclusion
2. Inclusion was recognised for its benefits to children with and without SEN and to the staff supporting them.
 - Inclusion was defined as a vehicle for treating everyone in the same way and for responding to more individual needs
 - Definitions of autism and SLCN were predominantly based on conceptions of difficulty and difference
 - Disadvantages of inclusion were expressed in terms of constraint – pertaining to the unsuitability of the nursery environment, the insufficiency of resources, and knowledge of how to manage children’s behaviour
3. Every EYP had high levels of self-efficacy belief in the realm of inclusive practice.
 - The strongest levels of conviction concerned the nursery environment and the lowest, knowledge of children with ASLCN

- None of the independent variables appeared to have a significant impact on levels of self-efficacy belief but small effect sizes were noticeable in the area of nursery size and ASLCN training

7.2 The Second Questionnaire

7.2.1 Participant Information

Every time a potential respondent opened the questionnaire, the viewing was recorded by Jisc Online Survey. This feature applied to the first questionnaire but proved more salient in the second. This is because the number of participants who submitted a response (two) greatly contrasted with those who visited the first page, which I inferred from the number of recorded views (103). The two questionnaires were completed by two women based in the northwest of England – a manager, whom I called Naomi, and a practitioner, whom I named Olivia (See Table 27).

Table 27: Demographic Data

Demographic	Naomi (Respondent 14)	Olivia (Respondent 15)
Job title	Manager	Practitioner
Age	37-46	17-26
Highest qualification	Level 5	Level 3
Nursery / ASLCN experience	More than 6 years	1-3 years
Amount of ASLCN training	1-3 hours	1-3 hours
Number of children in the setting	100+	41-60
Age of children supporting	All age groups, 0-5	All age groups, 0-5

In profile, both staff worked with children across the age ranges, from birth to 5 and had each attended 1-3 hours of ASLCN training. Both, moreover, had gained as much experience working with children who had ASLCN as children without – although the quantity of Naomi’s experience was greater. At Level 5, her highest qualification level was also higher than Olivia’s and these details matched the trend determined in the first round of the questionnaire – where the managers were generally more qualified than the practitioners and the practitioners were predominantly educated to Level 3.

For the purposes of situating the findings in the literature and informing the discussion in Chapter 9, the demographic details of this second sample were collated with those in the first and then compared with those relating to the national workforce.

The results of this collation and comparison are shown in Table 28. In essence, the data show that the study workforce was similar to the national one in its predominance of female workers, its ‘average’ minimum ages and teacher qualifications – but subtly different in terms of the job titles, nursery sizes and minimum qualifications.

Table 28: Comparison of Study and National Workforce Profiles

	Study Workforce (n = 15) (According to the data)	National Workforce (According to the literature)
Staff Title	Childcare-, Early Years-, Nursery Practitioner, ‘Manager’	Early Years Educator ¹
Teacher Qualifications	EYTS / QTS	EYTS / QTS ²
Qualification Level	Level 3 to Level 6	At least 50% staff with a Level 2 qualification / one with a Level 3 ³
Age	27-36 (mode)	24 ⁴
Gender	All female	1-2% male ⁵
Nursery Size	60 or less (mode)	Setting average of 44 ⁶

Notes

1. Sources = DfE (2019b)^{1,6}; DfE (2017b)^{2,3}; Simms (2006)⁴; Nutbrown (2012)⁵
2. ‘Manager’ refers to the label used in the data analyses and thus includes the deputy, senior and teacher practitioners

7.2.2 Open-Ended Question Responses

When comparing the data attached to the open-ended questions, Naomi and Olivia’s responses had much in common with those drawn from the research county, meaning that the codes and themes defined earlier were largely still relevant. Their reasons for choosing their profession, for example, were equally a result of their interest in working with children (Olivia) and of promotions earned over time (Naomi) – and the divisions between their responsibilities as a manager and a practitioner were similarly apparent. This divide was not only noticeable in the sense of running the nursery or working with children, but also in the number of references to children or personnel. Olivia made fewer references to staff and agencies but mentioned the word “children” three times more often than Naomi. Also of note, was the minimal use of

the word “play” in the material supplied. As before, this word was used just once and by a practitioner. One particular detail, though, was different and necessitated an extra code in the area of job responsibilities (‘Financial Affairs’). This is because Naomi listed debt control and marketing amongst her responsibilities, which could not be categorised by any of the original codes.

Perceptions of Inclusion and Children with ASLCN

Naomi and Olivia both explained autism as a condition that can manifest in a wide variety of ways and impact on an individual’s ability to communicate and interact with others. This interpretation was consonant with that offered by their peers, not least for the accompanying notions of difficulty *and* proficiency. In the first round, “difficulty” was inferred from statements containing the words “struggle” and “challenge”, but tempered by comments from staff like Fiona, who knew that autistic children may demonstrate high levels of achievement. These views prevailed in the second round, via belief that autistic children are “challenged with social skills, sensory disorders and repetitive behaviours” (Naomi) and that they can equally miss or exceed age-related expectations (Olivia). Interestingly, the intimations of difficulty were similarly construed from the later expositions of SLCN, since both participants talked in terms of expressive or receptive difficulties and each alluded to the need for additional support. How these views related to their training, age and qualification was again difficult to ascertain – but Olivia had assuredly conveyed her understanding of inclusion and children with ASLCN in greater depth. Where Naomi used 51 words to describe the children and 59 to define inclusion, Olivia used 104 and 308, respectively.

Inclusion in the second version of the questionnaire was quantified as an approach respecting the diversity of children and their needs, grounded in principles of differentiation and equality – and therefore consonant with the previous conception. Like Chloe, who had already written about individual needs and alluded to setting-wide opportunities, Olivia’s interpretation of inclusive practice was one where:

all children are given the chance of all opportunities and should be treated as an individual, regardless of any differences such as race, religion, disabilities, additional needs, finance and many more.

Similarities between the two sample definitions did not end there, for the disadvantages of inclusion were again outweighed by the reported advantages and equally couched as problems hindering success rather than as arguments against inclusion. In this respect, Olivia commented on the insufficiency of staff training, on the potential inappropriateness of the environment (by layout and design) and on the extent to which children could functionally interact with their peers. That is to say, she also identified aspects of inclusion that could be coded under Resource Limitations, Environmental Challenges and Behaviour Related.

7.2.3 ChASE Scale Data Findings

In the second questionnaire, the ChASE Scale was modified so that the items could be rated along a 7-point Likert scale (See Chapter 6). As the scale labels were also changed, some adjustments to the original coding system were required. The new codes were: Do Not Agree (DA) = 1; Agree a Little (AL) = 2; Mostly Agree (MA) = 3; Agree (A) = 4; Strongly Agree (SA) = 5; Very Strongly Agree (VSA) = 6; 100% Certain (C) = 7. This meant that the maximum score in any domain was now 28 (7 x 4 items) rather than 24, and that the maximum scale score was 112 (28 x 4 domains) instead of 96. Although the coding enabled comparisons between the two participants' responses to the ChASE Scale, the data could not be compared directly with that collected in the first questionnaire, because of the variations between the maximum possible domain / scale scores and the two sample sizes. Several additional computations were needed (See Table 29).

Sample 1 scores were determined for each subgroup (i.e., the Managers and Practitioners) by summing every self-efficacy score in every domain and then dividing by the number of its members. This value was divided by four to indicate the average per domain. Sample 2 scores were similarly calculated but without need for sizing adjustments. Naomi's scores, for instance, were 21 and 24 in the first and second domains and 28 in Domains 3 and 4 – giving her a scale score of 101 or a domain average of 25.25. Olivia's four domain scores were 21, 23, 24 and 25, amounting to a scale score of 93 or a domain average of 23.25. Notwithstanding the size of sample, the comparison of domain averages by role and with those from the first sample, indicated a reversive trend. The Practitioners' average domain score was marginally higher than the Managers' in sample 1 but moderately lower in sample 2.

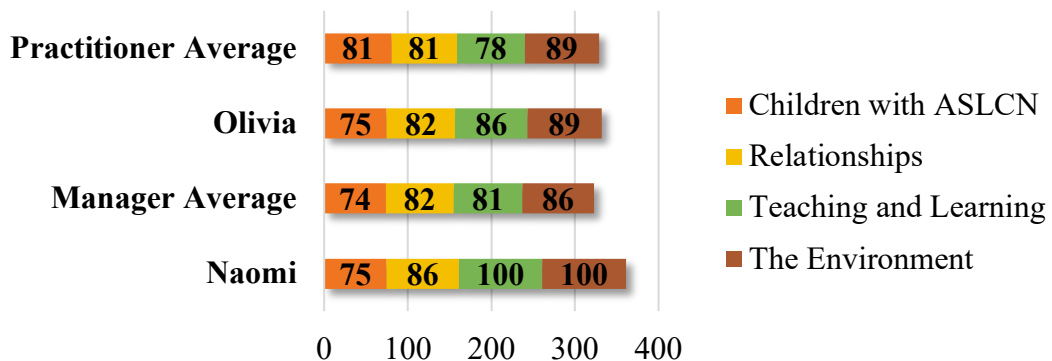
Table 29: Domain and Scale Scores for Sample 1 and 2

	ChASE Scale Scores		Average Domain Score	
Olivia	93		23.25	(93 ÷ 4 domains)
Sample 1 Practitioners	78.67	(472 ÷ 6 people)	19.67	(472 ÷ 4 domains ÷ 6 people)
Naomi	101		25.25	(101 ÷ 4 domains)
Sample 1 Managers	77.57	(543 ÷ 7 people)	19.39	(543 ÷ 4 domains ÷ 7 people)

Notes

1. Practitioner and Manager scores are based on data from the first questionnaire
2. Olivia and Naomi's scores are nominally higher than their peers by virtue of the Likert-scale summations

The next layer of calculations facilitated the comparisons of scores across the four domains, which are graphed in Figure 42.

Figure 42: Measures of Self-Efficacy (%) Between Samples / Domains

The domain scores were transformed into percentages of the maximum possible score to acknowledge the different sample sizes and Likert-scale ratings. Using the average domain scores calculated in sample 1 and dividing these by the maximum score of 24, for example, produces the percentage values of 81, 81, 78 and 89 for the Practitioners. Using Naomi's scores as an illustration in sample 2, and dividing by the maximum of 28, produces the percentage values of 75, 86, 100 and 100. Differences in the two questionnaires warrant caution in the comparison of data, but these procedures allowed for the following conclusions:

- Regardless of the sample or staff role, levels of conviction were highest in Domain 4: The Environment
- Statements regarding an understanding of children with ASLCN generally elicited the weakest levels of conviction amongst the four domains, but not in the case of the sample 1 Practitioners
- Naomi’s self-efficacy ratings were greater than Olivia’s in every domain except the first – where they were equal
- Naomi’s perceptions of her competencies were stronger than those of her Manager peers in every domain
- Olivia’s self-efficacy beliefs were ‘equivalent’ to her Practitioner peers in Domain 4 but more positive in the domains of Relationships, and Teaching and Learning

7.2.4 Factors Contributing to Work Effort

In both versions of the questionnaire, Q16 explored factors motivating effort at work and essentially involved participants making three selections from a list of 10. Eight of the options were the same in each rendering of the questionnaire, and those chosen by Naomi and Olivia are presented in Table 30.

Table 30: Factors Contributing to Work Effort

Naomi	Olivia
I am not feeling under pressure	I have attended a training course (3)
My relationship with parents is positive (4)	I know precisely what I am meant to do (9)
My work is praised by another person (2)	I have support from a more experienced colleague (2)

The two individuals held completely different opinions as to the variables influencing their work effort. Naomi’s motivation largely came from her interactions with other people, whereas Olivia’s was grounded in the security of knowing what to do and how. Yet, together, these opinions were largely congruent with those identified earlier – separated only by Naomi’s first choice, which was unavailable in the first questionnaire. The evidence of congruence is intuited from the bracketed numbers

featured in the table. Three people in sample 1, for instance, also put more effort into their work after a training course, as did four people in the context of positive parent relationships. Nine people similarly put more effort into their work when they knew precisely what they were meant to do – which suggested that this, above all others, was the most influential variable amongst the 15 people taking part in the study.

7.2.5 Situating Findings from the Second Questionnaire

Although the second sample was composed of just two people, it was striking that both their profile and responses to the questionnaire were highly consonant with those measured in the first sample. Naomi and Olivia also held a minimum qualification that was Level 3 or above and worked with more than one age group of children. Naomi equally had in excess of 6 years nursery / ASLCN experience and both staff had received at least some ASLCN training, rather than none. Career motivations and duties were also very similar between the samples, as were the interpretations of inclusion, autism and SLCN. Then, in reference to their self-efficacy beliefs, Naomi's and Olivia's were just as high as those recorded in sample 1 and highest in aspects relating to the environment.

Chapter 8: Analysis of the Interview Data

In this Chapter, the data gathered during the 1:1 interviews are analysed and connected to findings from the questionnaire. The analysis is divided into three parts, which each correspond with the three topics covered in the interviews: the role of an EYP and a nursery, the nature of inclusive practice, and staff conceptions of their competencies. It explores the views and experiences of five questionnaire respondents and articulates the strategies they use to include children with ASLCN in their nursery. The inquiry is qualitatively rooted in thematic analysis but interposed with quantitative references to the ChASE Scale data, where relevant. The sum of these discussions provides a response to RQ2.

8.1 The 1:1 Interviews

8.1.1 Participant Details

The EYPs who took part in the interviews are profiled in Table 31, using data extracted from the questionnaires and information gleaned from our conversations. Supplementary details are highlighted with blue text.

Table 31: Interviewee Characteristics

	Bethany	Hannah	Isobel	Kim	Megan
Job Title/s	Manager	Manager SENDCo	Practitioner SENCo Room Leader	Practitioner	Manager Room Leader SENCo
Age	27-36	37-46	17-26	27-36	37-46
Qualification	Level 5	Level 6	Level 3	Level 3	Level 6
Nursery Experience	6+ years	19 years	6 years	17 years	6+ years
Nursery Size	41-60	<40	<40	41-60	<40
ASLCN Experience	6+	6+	4-6	6+	6+
Autism Training	3+ hours	12+ hours	1-3 hours	3+ hours	3+ hours
SLCN Training	3+ hours	1-3 hours	3+ hours	3+ hours	3+ hours

The interview sample consisted of three managers and two practitioners, aged between 17 and 46. They all had at least 6 years of nursery experience and their settings comprised no more than 60 children. Similar to the spread of qualifications in the questionnaire sample, each person was certificated to Level 3, 5 or 6 and most had supported children with ASLCN for at least 6 years. In the context of training, everyone had attended some rather than none, but Hannah stood out as being the person who had experienced the least number of hours in SLCN and the most in autism.

8.1.2 Interview and Transcript Information

Two interviews were conducted over the telephone and three in a nursery. As Hannah and Isobel worked at the same nursery, this meant that the interviews spanned four locations. Every interview lasted more than an hour and produced 5842 to 10270 words. On average, these measures equated to 68 minutes-worth of audio and 8062 words (See Table 32). An extract from Isobel’s interview is shown in Appendix 8.

Table 32: Interviewee Meta Data

	Bethany	Hannah	Isobel	Kim	Megan
Duration ¹	1 hour 18	1 hour 9	1 hour 4	1 hour 8	1 hour 3
Interviewee Word Count ²	9615 (+9)	10270 (+77)	6638 (+110)	5842 (+6)	7945 (+39)
Transcription Length ³	13 pages (18)	14 pages (18)	10 pages (17)	9 pages (16)	12 pages (16)

Notes

1. Durations relate solely to participant responses to questions
2. The word count encompasses the number of words, fragments of words and audible hesitations (e.g., erm, err, um). Bracketed numbers represent the editorial words used to describe gestures or utterances
3. The transcription length stated in brackets indicates the ‘size’ of the entire interview, inclusive of my speech

Isobel and Kim both tended to produce shorter answers than the managers and received more prompts to convey their thoughts in greater detail. In consequence, the number

of pages featuring in their respective transcriptions increased by at least 70% when combining my speech with theirs, whilst for the managers, the maximum increase was little more than 38%. Viewed across the interview sample, Isobel and Kim also attracted the minimum and maximum number of conversational details. Relatively few details were added to the telephone interview with Kim (and with Bethany too), but the majority were recorded for Isobel – owing to her animated speech and gestures.

8.2 The Role of an EYP and a Private Day Nursery (Q1)

The first interview question invited people to talk about their job and their nursery – to explain their work and to offer their view as to the purpose of a nursery. In response, participant explanations seemed situated in notions of identity and career status, i.e., affiliated to the longevity of experience, the progression of responsibilities and the securement of promotion. This was most evident in the interview with Bethany, who had started as a practitioner but later worked as a manager – and had assumed the role of a room leader, SENCo and 2-year-olds coordinator, in the course of her career. Isobel was similarly noteworthy, but in terms of her qualifications – acquiring status as a SENCo and room leader and advancing from a Level 2 to Level 3 practitioner. Both members of staff also articulated the value and importance of their in-service progression, by referring to the insight it had afforded them. Isobel remarked: “It’s made me more aware of what I do, cos most things you do without realisin’”, whilst Bethany said:

it’s beneficial startin’ *from* bein’ a nursery nurse. I feel that’s where you pick up the most skills. It’s bein’ with the children every day. It’s dealin’ with parents every day. It’s dealin’ with challengin’ behaviour every day. It’s, it’s workin’ as part of a team every day.

These career-laden references were consistent with accounts across the research sample, since the idea of the job as being part of a long-term profession was similarly conveyed by the questionnaire respondents. The details of their duties also recurred in parts, when staff talked about completing paperwork, catering for children’s individual needs, liaising with professionals and supporting parents. Unlike data from the questionnaire, however, the distinction between managers charged with the operation of the nursery and practitioners focussed on the children appeared less obvious – not

least because interviewee managers talked about tasks relating to children more often than the practitioners. Though this finding could be explained by the fact that two of the managers counted themselves in their staff to pupil ratios, the referential difference was nonetheless conspicuous. Indeed, using Nvivo to calculate the word frequency for “child” or “children” in the condensed transcripts, an average count of 83 per practitioner and an average of 148 per manager was revealed. An equivalent pattern was observed in the context of supporting families – and work with families emerged as a prevailing theme. Practitioners and managers alike explained aspects of their work with parents, but it was the managers who discussed them more often. Here, the word frequency for “parent/s” constituted an average number of 34 references for the managers versus an average of 14 for the practitioners. Coding specifically within the responses to Q1, moreover, drew twice as many references to parents in the manager subgroup than in the practitioner subgroup – as the numbers in Tables 33 and 34 attest.

Table 33: Practitioner Coding for Q1

Q1 Codes	Isobel	Kim	References
Promote Social Skills		■	1
Teaching	■		1
Identifying Specific Needs	■	■	3
Paperwork	■		3
Relationships	■	■	3
Safety and Security	■	■	3
Set Routines		■	3
Differentiation		■	4
Play, Fun and Happiness	■	■	4
Supporting Parents		■	5

Code names and their references are listed in the first and final columns and represent the combined responses of members in the subgroup. Squares in the interposing columns show which codes applied to each interviewee. Ten codes were produced from the practitioners’ responses and 11 from the managers.

Table 34: Manager Coding for Q1

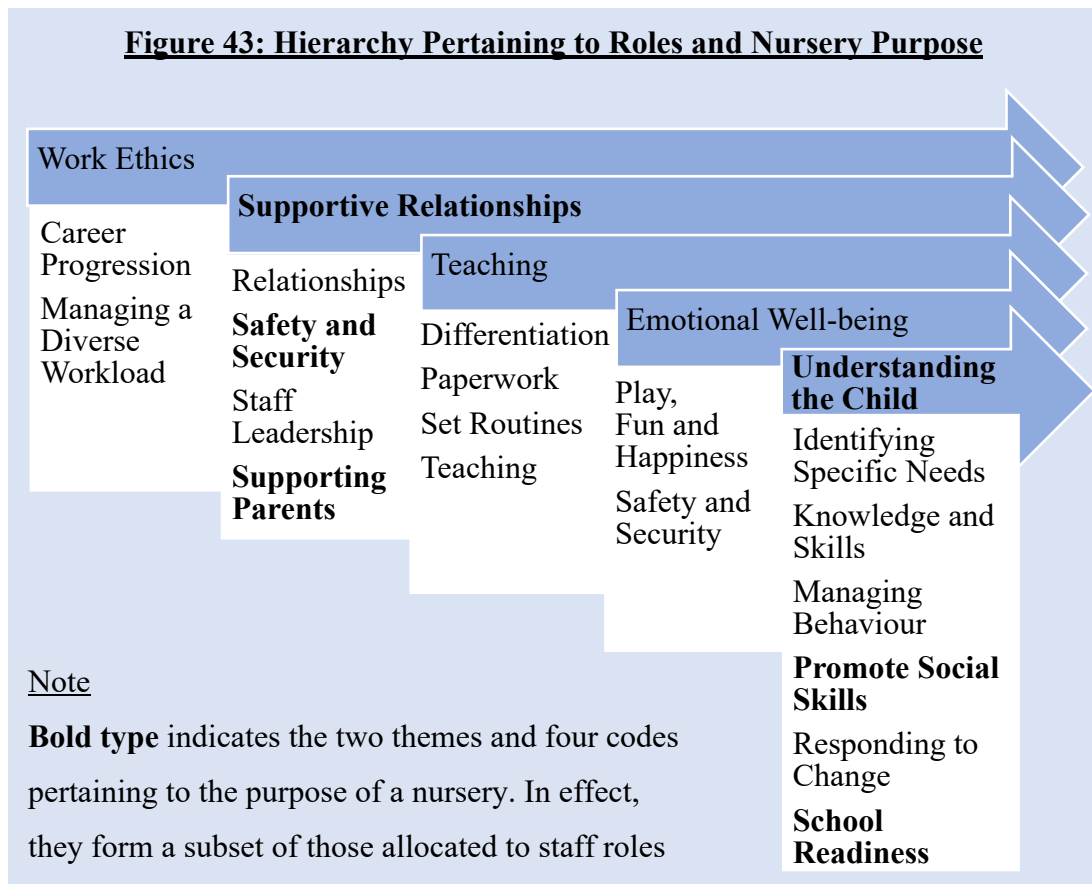
Q1 Codes	Bethany	Hannah	Megan	References
Managing a Diverse Workload	■			2
Career Progression	■	■		3
Set Routines	■			3
Identifying Specific Needs	■	■	■	5
Managing Behaviour	■	■		5
Relationships	■		■	5
School Readiness		■		5
Knowledge and Skills	■	■		7
Responding to Change		■		7
Staff Leadership	■		■	7
Supporting Parents	■	■	■	11

Presenting the codes in this way helped to deduce various patterns. Kim, for example, was the only practitioner with comments coded under ‘Differentiation’ and Hannah was the only manager that spoke on the topic of ‘School Readiness’. Seven references to ‘Staff Leadership’ were ascribed to two managers, whereas four concerning ‘Play, Fun and Happiness’ were attached to the practitioners. Amongst the managers, the two codes applicable to everyone were those nominated as ‘Identifying Specific Needs’ and ‘Supporting Parents’ – but only the former was appropriate to both practitioners. That said, they also shared the code called ‘Relationships’.

Despite the differences in staff positions, commonalities (shown in yellow) could still be found in respect of: the responsibilities associated with set routines; the identification of children’s specific needs; relationships with others; and support for parents. These individual codes served as signposts to five overarching themes. In the first instance, the work of an EYP could be summarised under the themes of ‘Work Ethics’, ‘Supportive Relationships’, ‘Teaching’, ‘Emotional Well-being’ and ‘Understanding the Child’ (See Figure 43). Two of these themes were also relevant in coding for the purpose of a nursery, as this was seen as a matter of ‘Supportive Relationships’ and a need to ‘Understand the Child’. This thematic interaction implied that efforts to understand and respond to the needs of a child must be based on an

understanding of and first response to the needs of his/her family. Bethany alluded to this in the questionnaire, perceiving her role as one ensuring children and families receive the best support possible – inclusive of food, clothing and funding – but perhaps Megan was the most enunciative interviewee:

a lot of the families that are coming through (...) have different challenges within their home lives. So, it might be unemployment (...) It could be mental health issues. There could be other services involved. So, when our children come, we – they come as the whole package. The families come (...) as a whole package.



8.3 The Nature of Inclusive Practice

Examples of how staff include children in their nursery were sought in six areas, pertaining to their knowledge of a child, planning, assessment, social and communication skills, and the environment. Data serving these areas were gleaned throughout the interview but most specifically from the responses to Q2-3 and Q5-8.

8.3.1 Knowledge of the Child (Q2)

In Q2, interviewees were asked to give examples of how they had gotten to know a particular child with ASLCN. This allowed me to gauge the extent to which staff strategies were ASLCN specific and how they compared with their competency beliefs in the ChASE Scale. Domain 1 focussed on EYP knowledge and understanding of children with ASLCN and its constituent items drew positive responses from each of the interviewees. These responses are presented in Table 35 in their original Likert form and as domain totals. Bethany, for example, held the highest level of efficacy belief (20), whereas Hannah had the lowest (16). This intuited that similar patterns of comparison would be found in interviewee references to children with ASLCN. Yet, this was not necessarily the case. People with the highest and lowest efficacy scores did not necessarily talk the most or least about children with ASLCN (See Figure 44).

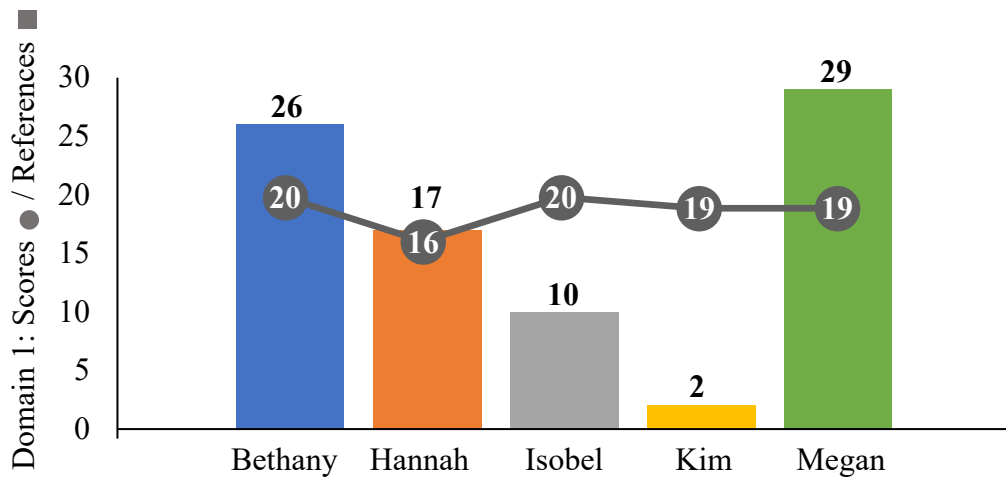
Table 35: Interviewee Competency Beliefs in Domain 1

Knowledge of Children with ASLCN Questionnaire Item 12	Bethany	Hannah	Isobel	Kim	Megan
I can describe how autism or language difficulties influences a child's actions	SA	A	SA	A	SA
I can prepare an activity that is matched to the child and his/her way of learning	SA	A	SA	SA	SA
I can motivate a child in an activity that s/he may not want to do	SA	A	SA	SA	A
I can calm a child's behaviour when s/he is angry or upset	SA	A	SA	SA	SA
Domain Total	20	16	20	19	19

The references to ASLCN were calculated in Nvivo, applying the text search function to the condensed transcripts and the words “Autism”, “Speech”, “Communication” and “Language”. Kim’s references were the least in total (equating to two utterances of the word “speech”) but did not correspond with the lowest self-efficacy ratings. Megan’s 29 utterances overall were the greatest as an interviewee but did not correspond with the highest efficacy score in this domain (20), as a questionnaire respondent. Just over half of those utterances (15) were related to the

word “Language” – which not only made up the largest proportion of her ASLCN words, but also predominated at the level of the sample. In fact, the sample’s number of references to “Language” (32) greatly contrasted with that for “Autism” (7). The word counts for “Communication” and “Speech” were 14 and 31.

Figure 44: Comparing Efficacy Scores with ASLCN References



Scrutiny of certain word frequencies proved worthwhile, as it showed that the results were consonant with a qualitative finding in the Q2 data. The sum of words associated with ASLCN (84) (see Figure 44), for instance, was seven times less than the total for “Child” and “Children” (604) and intimated a weighting towards children in general, than children with SEN or a specific condition – a weighting or emphasis similarly discernible in the way that staff talked about introducing children to the nursery. The initial process of getting to know a child was conveyed less as a distinction between those with or without a specific diagnosis and more about the individual (and family) as a whole. Quotes regarding transition are evidence of this, as Isobel said, “*Ideally* it’s the same, unless we feel like they *do* need that extra support”.

Transition was a topic that featured in every interview and thus used as a code for data produced by the managers and the practitioners. Inducting a child with ASLCN into the nursery was not interpreted as a condition-specific practice triggered by enrolment, but as an inceptual, holistic practice – relevant to every child and actioned with families *before* placement. Indeed, Kim said, “whether a child has SEN or not, the parent is still comin’ round (...) before puttin’ the child in (...) So, we’re still havin’ that conversation with, with mum or dad or the guardian (...) It’s not just when we have the meetins’”. These holistic approaches alluded to a broader notion of

inclusion by individual rather than by condition and resonated in the type of material staff gathered. Plus, across the nurseries, there was a clear pattern of parents being asked questions during their initial visits and of staff observing children's explorations in the room. Common too, was the tendency to document the information on standardised forms and to create an individualised baseline assessment. This recorded the child's likes and dislikes, his/her age and developmental history, support needs and family routines, as well as the involvement of any external professionals.

These observations gave rise to six codes in each interviewee subgroup and five of these were shared: 'Consultation and Collaboration', 'Documentation', 'Likes and Dislikes', 'Observation' and 'Transition'. The sixth code was nominated as either 'Approaches' or 'Getting to Know Parents'. For the practitioners, Approaches helped to summarise comments regarding their response to children's differing levels of need, e.g., providing extra support to settle in, using sensory aids or holding multi-agency meetings. In parallel, Getting to Know Parents was a means of capturing managers' opinions on their relationships with families. For Bethany, parent rapport was key in acquiring pupil information and necessitated a high degree of diplomacy:

when you do start askin' questions, some of them *aren't* very open to give information (...) So, you have to take baby steps with them (...) you have to be strategic on, on the type of parent you get. So, from that (...), I know what type of conversations I'm gonna be going two feet in with and I know what type of conversations need to come later

In Megan's view, however, parent rapport was not only couched in terms of trust and relatedness, it was also connected to reassurance and peace of mind. She believed that parents must:

feel comfortable with leaving their child with us. They're leaving their most precious gift with us and (...) they need to know that their child is happy and settled and that we're meetin' their needs.

In summary, it seemed that the strategies staff use to understand a child with ASLCN are heavily influenced by the relationships they build with parents and that efforts to form those relationships constitute a significant part of work as an early years

practitioner (as Q1 data revealed). Further, in the process of getting to know a child, staff developed an extensive view of what his or her needs were and had scope to exercise their professional judgement:

we know them on a paper-side to begin with and *then* we will start gettin' to know them personally. When they come in, we just (...) [start with] what we've been told. And then we just elaborate from it (...) [I]t's nice to say what they like at home but when they settle in here, it might be completely different.

Isobel

Isobel's use of the word "elaborate" was intriguing in its allusion to complexity, detail and alteration – and helped to draw out a theme labelled 'Flexibility in Approaches'.

Table 36: Theme and Codes Relating to Q2

Theme	Codes	Practitioner References	Manager References
Flexibility in Approaches	Approaches	2	
	Consultation and Collaboration	1	2
	Documentation	2	2
	Getting to Know Parents		2
	Likes and Dislikes	2	3
	Observation	1	2
	Transition	2	3

Flexibility was a common feature amongst EYP comments and resonated in, e.g., descriptions of children's induction (Transition), consultations with families (Getting to Know Parents), in the expositions of children's needs (via Observation, and Likes and Dislikes) and in terms of recording information (Documentation) (See Table 36).

8.3.2 Planning Activities (Q3)

The emphasis in Q3 was on staff pedagogy – discussing the activities that children are provided with and how these are determined. In the questionnaire, this aspect of practice was covered in Domain 3: Teaching and Learning, and generally viewed with greater conviction than that for Domain 2 (Relationships). Every

interviewee apart from Kim rated their teaching and learning competency beliefs more highly than those relating to their knowledge of ASLCN. None of the items in Domain 1 stimulated a VSA response but six instances were noted in Domain 3 (See Table 37).

Table 37: Interviewee Competency Beliefs in Domain 3

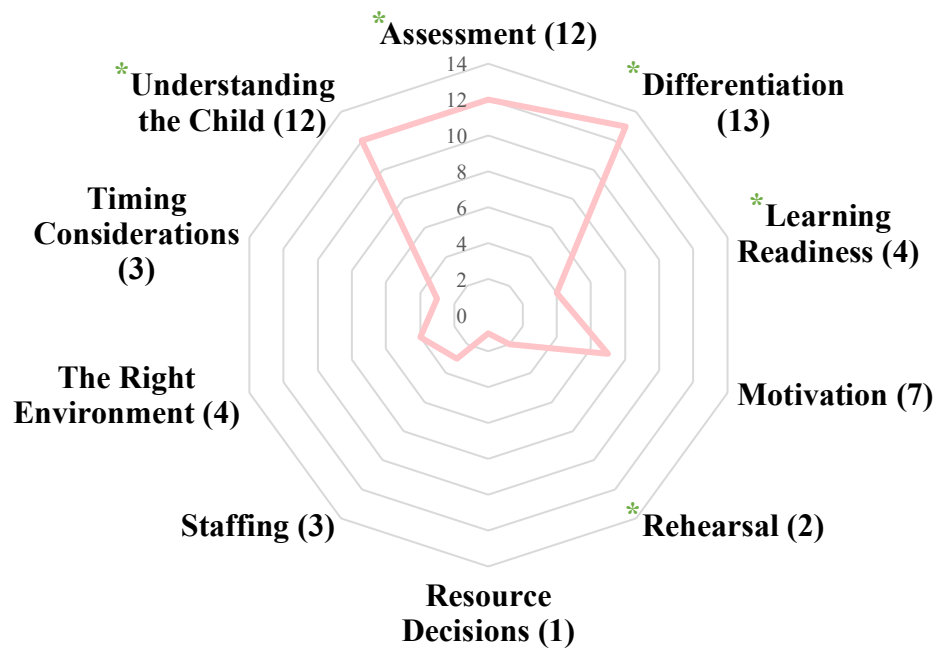
Teaching and Learning Questionnaire Item 14	Bethany	Hannah	Isobel	Kim	Megan
I can adapt a task that a child finds hard, so s/he engages with some or all of it	SA	SA	SA	A	VSA
I can teach a child to be more independent with his/her personal care	SA	SA	SA	SA	VSA
I can give specific examples of progress that a child has made in the last six weeks	VSA	A	VSA	A	VSA
I can recommend a new target for a child, which is at the right level of challenge	SA	A	VSA	A	SA
Domain Total	21	18	22	17	23

Just as there were differences between the first two ChASE Scale domains, so there were differences in the Q3 interview data. Here, the assignation of codes was greater for both subgroups; more codes were identified amongst the managers; and coding between the subgroups was more variable. These differences may partly be explained by the volume of data produced by Bethany, as her reply yielded lengthy sections of text and a wide range of thoughts. Across the 10 codes, she contributed 21 different ideas; Megan and Hannah articulated eight or nine.

All data associated with Q3 could be précised by 12 codes, five of which were common to both groups: ‘Assessment’, ‘Differentiation’, ‘Learning Readiness’, ‘Rehearsal’ and ‘Understanding the Child’ (marked with green asterixis in Figure 45-46). Yet, this commonality was not necessarily reflected in the details. Megan’s allusion to Rehearsal was child-focussed – stemming from the idea of children exploring objects for themselves before an adult-led activity, whereas Isobel’s was adult-focussed – adapting tasks that have been previously tried and tested. Commonality, moreover, did not consistently apply to subgroup member ideas – with only Understanding the Child as the coding exception to this. Just two of the seven practitioner codes were relevant to each person, whilst all 12 manager codes were

applicable to at least two individuals (and four related to them all) – suggesting that the managers’ philosophy of teaching was the more congruent as a subgroup. Plus, by contrasting the number of in-group codes, one could further infer that the managers assumed a broad stance in planning (its consideration involving 12 focus points) and the practitioners, a more focussed one (with 7 focus points).

Figure 45: Manager Codes (and References) for Planning

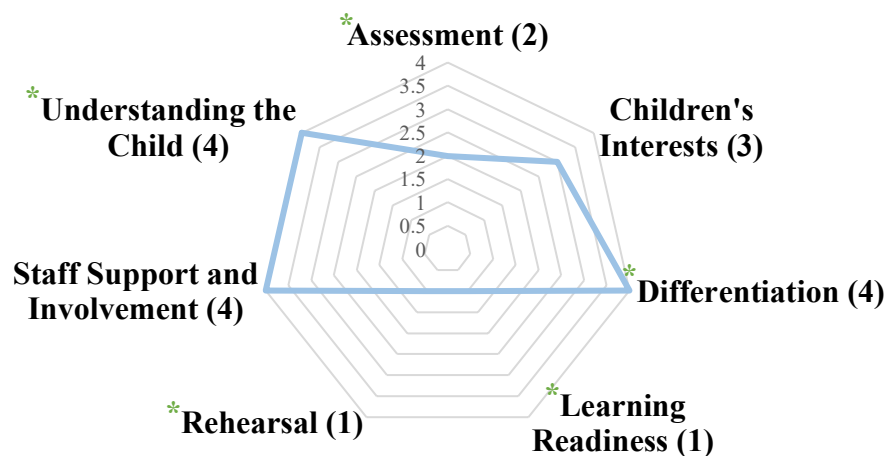


What Managers Consider in their Planning

One core idea pervading the manager interviews was the need to accommodate children’s interests. Megan talked about sparking their curiosity, Hannah used the word “stimulate” and Bethany spoke about “drawing them in”. Motivation was deemed a crucial element in pupil participation – stimulating a host of strategies and marking the difference between engagement and withdrawal. More than simply choosing interesting activities, managers indicated concomitant regard for the context (e.g., a toy accessible in free-play), the child’s previous experiences (e.g., using unfamiliar objects) and his/her participation in a group. This attention to suitable resources and anticipating children’s responses intimated an ideal and optimum set of circumstances that, in the analysis, led to the thought that motivation was a proxy for effective learning environments. All 12 codes were subsequently aggregated under the theme: ‘Conditions for Learning’. Matching activities to stages of development,

modifying tasks judged as unsuccessful and recognising resources that children were not yet engaging with, for instance, were practices / conditions connoting inclusive Assessment. Knowing which member of staff best effected a certain activity, understanding that children may need a while to develop an interest, or siting tasks at the right time of day were conditions related to ‘Staffing’ and ‘Timing Considerations’. In sum, the managers’ planning entailed decisions regarding the resources they would use, when and how. Decisions were guided by their understanding of a child’s individual needs and stemmed from judgements made in the present or past. Together, these variables represented efforts to create the right conditions for learning – increasing the likelihood of a child engaging in a task, enjoying it and being successful.

Figure 46: Practitioner Codes (and References) for Planning



What Practitioners Consider in their Planning

Children’s enjoyment of an activity repeated as a planning variable in the practitioner subgroup but was alternatively coded as ‘Children’s Interests’, instead of ‘Motivation’. This is mainly due to the fact that their statements referred precisely to the names of toys and items, such as flour, dinosaurs, numbers, trains and books. One of these statements foregrounded the importance of staff joining in with the children, such that their enjoyment of an activity was not just dependent on what was planned, but also how the adults modelled and facilitated it. This view was offered by Kim:

[F]or them to enjoy it, you know, we're gettin' involved as well, so we're showin' that *we're* havin' fun. And then the kids just imitate basically what, what we're doin' and they really enjoy it themselves (...) I think that's important because if you set up an activity and you're not gettin' involved, then the children are gonna be like, "Ooh. Well. Shall I put me hands in it or not?"

This hands-on, close-working approach was echoed by Isobel, albeit in another way:

[The] smaller intervention's *a lot* easier for them. They're more focussed (...) and you just feel like they're gettin' more out it, when it's you and two, rather than you and four or five. You're givin' them more of a personal approach then.

Their combined insight contributed to the development of the 'Staff Support and Involvement' code. Nominally overlapping with the managers Staffing code, it was distinguishable in its accent on pupil interactions. Pupil interactions comprised a core element of staff doing what Isobel referred to as "in the moment planning" – allowing the adult to modify the activity on the basis of a child's response to it, i.e., making it more or less challenging, or shifting the balance of adult support. What was interesting, here, was the tacit connection between the perspectives offered in the questionnaire and the interview. Isobel, for example, had a strong conviction in her ability to adapt a task for a child (item 1, Domain 3) and gave examples of this during the interview. In contrast, Kim's planning approaches frequently included colleagues – potentially signalling a fainter degree of conviction in her competencies, in line with the Domain 3 Agree response. This scrutiny of data and extraction of phrases was captured in the practitioners' subgroup theme: 'Interactions with Children and Communications with Staff'. For the practitioners, planning involved assessing children's stages of development and selecting the activities or resources most likely to engage their interest (i.e., linking the Assessment, Learning Readiness and Understanding the Child codes). Whilst these procedures were influenced by consultations with colleagues who had carried out similar activities before (via Rehearsal), both staff realised the importance of adjusting their planning during the activity – not only using pupil engagement as a gauge for whether the task needed to

be simplified or stretched, but also as a prompt to increase or decrease their assistance. Rather than an emphasis on creating the right conditions for learning, the practitioners' planning approaches were guided by their interactions with the children and amongst their colleagues.

8.3.3 Assessment and Recording (O5)

Two of the ChASE Scale's Teaching and Learning items touched on elements of assessment – prompting questionnaire respondents to think about their ability to articulate children's progress and to recommend next steps. As an interview sample, staff ratings were consistently positive but variable in strength, judging by the range of Agree to Very Strongly Agree selections. Bethany, Isobel and Megan demonstrated higher levels of self-belief than Hannah and Kim and particularly in the item concerned with progress, which consequently garnered a marginally higher group efficacy score than the one for next steps (26 versus 24). These patterns, though, were not necessarily observed in the interview data, because everyone talked about targets and could describe at least one occasion where they had facilitated a child's progress – like washing hands (Bethany), taking turns with another child (Kim) or engaging in an adult-led activity (Hannah). There were differences between individuals, but these were only apparent on closer inspection.

Five codes were applicable to every member of the sample and the majority of information pertained to the systems staff used in their recording. 'Recording Systems' was thus used to code 15 comments from the managers and 11 from the practitioners. They were similar in multiple ways, by being: age-related; narrow and broad; specific to the setting and national frameworks; influenced by colleagues, professionals and parents; and in terms of their verbal, digital and paper-based communication. Bethany, for example, referred to baseline and termly assessments, as well as assessments for children aged 2 and 3. Hannah referenced the *Development Matters* (DfE, 2020b) document connected to the EYFS framework, as well as the *Leuven Scale*, which gauges children's involvement and well-being across five levels (MacRae and Jones, 2020). Kim also talked about the EYFS and *Leuven Scale*, but additionally mentioned an app enabling instant, bi-directional communication between the home and nursery (i.e., one sharing photos and videos of children). This digitisation of pupil data was the preferred system of tracking children's long-term progress in all but one of the nurseries (Megan's) – and Isobel was noticeably keen:

It makes my life so much easier (...) You can do post-its, observations, take pictures, videos and upload it, like instantly or at the end of the day (...) It's just quick and easy (...) instead of writin' a quick post-it on a piece of paper (...) Yeah, I really do enjoy it.

Another important observation, here, was the specificity of systems for children with SEN – a specialism which stood out more than it had earlier. Hannah exemplified this in her belief that the *Leuven Scale* captures progress missed by the *Development Matters* framework, because “there’s a bit of a gap there, when it comes to children with additional needs, of kind of measurin’ how much progress is made in that little bit in the middle”. In fact, concern for children with SEN was an underlying feature of the statements tagged to all of the codes identified – not only under Recording Systems, but also under the other codes: ‘Rationale’, ‘Timescales’, ‘Use in Situ’ and ‘Working with Families’.

Rationale was associated with 10 comments in the manager group and three in the practitioner group, which made it the least ‘agreeable’ of all the codes, in respect of its subgroup differential. During the interviews, this meant that everyone held an opinion as to the purpose or reason for conducting assessments but that the managers alluded to it more extensively. The breadth of EYP comments necessitated an extra level of coding, with the resulting derivation of eight new sub-codes – including one representing SEN (See Figure 47). Bethany’s view of assessment was simultaneously considerate of children with SEN and cognisant of need to support staff. Remarking on the use of individual play plans, she said:

We found it a really useful tool because obviously you, you don’t get overwhelmed by the targets. There’s always one, between one and three targets (...) [which] helps to keep them really specific-based. So again, that stops practitioners bein’ overwhelmed and feelin’ like they’ve got lots of things to do.

Megan and Isobel also regarded assessment as something that should be focussed and manageable, but intimated that its place in daily practice was equally a matter of accountability to senior leaders or external agencies: “[Y]ou’ve just gotta fill in the

paperwork to prove what you're doin' already" (Isobel). "It's just making sure that it's just recorded. You've got the evidence to say that you're doing it" (Megan).

The idea of gathering evidence for a specific purpose was shared by all of the interviewees and the procedures themselves generally manifested in the classroom. This engendered the 'Use in Situ' code and was attached to both the practitioner (10) and manager statements (12). It meant observing and photographing children's engagement with activities, discussing their observations with staff and interpreting their findings at a convenient time. Less commonly articulated, but nevertheless important, was the accent on time – inferred from a total of 10 statements and coded as 'Timescales'. This was mainly an understanding that children with and without SEN do not learn skills at the same pace and that their acquisition may not be age-related. In Hannah's case, this knowledge was interpreted as a longitudinal need to assess children's skills in both depth and breadth and could be mean:

three months ago, they were maybe a 2 or a 3 on the involvement scale, whereas now, they're kind of a 3+ (...) [A]lthough on their sheet it doesn't show that they've made brilliant progress (...) we can say (...) they're trying more activities now (...) [I]t's not just a tick list for us.

Yet, accommodating different paces of learning did not mean carrying targets over indefinitely, in the thought that children would learn the skill eventually. Time was still a circumscribable entity: specified, monitored and adjusted when needed. This was especially true in the area of SEN and play plans, since they determined the targets that children would be working on and were formally reviewed with families on a 4-6-week schedule.

The importance of involving families in pupil assessments was posited throughout the interviewee sample and captured in 14 statements. These were coded as 'Working with Families' and characterised efforts to connect teaching and learning experiences at home with those in the nursery. Inconsistency between the two environments was inferred as a barrier to children's learning, but remediable in consultation. Bethany, for instance, referred to meetings where both parties could determine what was working / not working at home or in the nursery, and then use the information to update their strategies. In Megan's nursery, parent meetings were equally construed as an opportunity to share and address concerns, and typically

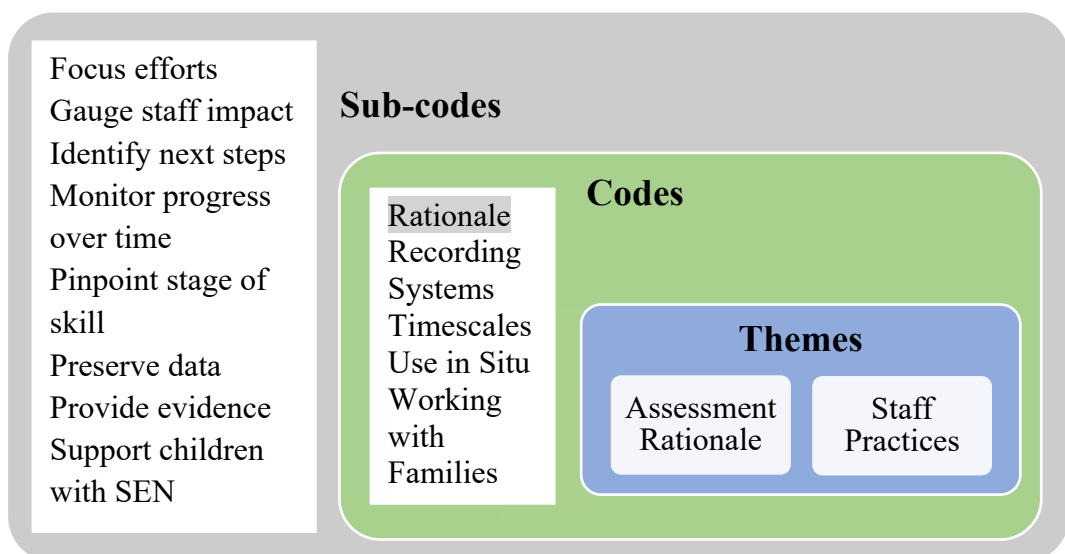
focussed on children’s communication or sensory needs. This sharing of information, however, was not always a forum for establishing what the adults should do next. Often, it served as platform for celebrating the children’s achievements or, in the context of children with ASLCN, to foster morale and encourage optimism:

[Y]ou’re rushin’ to the door, cos you can’t wait to tell them that, like, “Oh, they’ve, they done it and it’s gonna be a big thing for you at home”. Cos I always feel like it eases pressure on the parents (...) [T]hey rely on you *so* much, just to (...) give them the confidence (...) [I]t, it gives them a bit of satisfaction.

Bethany

In sum, assessment practices across the nurseries and between the subgroups were fairly similar in terms of their purposes, practices and relationships with parents. Specific arrangements were made for children with SEN, including those with ASLCN, but general approaches were adopted wherever possible. Thus, the type of assessments carried out depended on a variety of factors and had accountability implications for both staff and parents. Interpreting the data in this way suggested that the interviewees’ exposition of assessment rested upon two themes, namely: ‘Assessment Rationale’ and ‘Staff Practices’.

Figure 47: Overview of Coding in Q5



8.3.4 Developing Pupils' Social and Communication Skills (O6-7)

During the interview, people were asked to explain how they teach children with ASLCN to interact with their peers (Q6) and to give examples of how they support the development of speech, language and communication skills (Q7). These topics were covered in the ChASE Scale and pertained to four items in Domain 2: Relationships (See Table 38).

Table 38: Interviewee Competency Beliefs in Domain 2

Relationships Questionnaire Item 13	Bethany	Hannah	Isobel	Kim	Megan
I can use more than one strategy to communicate with a non-verbal child	VSA	SA	A	SA	VSA
I can create opportunities for children to communicate with others	SA	SA	A	SA	VSA
I can help a child interact with peers during a group activity	SA	SA	A	SA	VSA
I can teach children with or without autism / language difficulties to play together	SA	A	A	SA	SA
Domain Total	21	19	16	20	23

The sums of scores across each domain item were fairly similar, ranging from 23 to 26 and, relative to two managers, elicited the same type of responses as those in Domain 1 or 3. In contrast, the level of conviction shown for the other staff was either stronger (for Hannah and Kim) or weaker (for Isobel) – judging by their Domain 2 Likert responses. As a sample, the item focussing on strategies to communicate with non-verbal children drew the highest level of positivity (26), whilst the lowest, relatively speaking, was that concerning children's play (23).

Practices Associated with Children's Social Skills

Six codes were identified in the data attached to Q6 and two suited both subgroups: 'Interacting with Others' and 'Teaching Strategies' (See column 1, Table 39).

Table 39: Subgroup Coding and Reference Frequencies, Q6-7

	Q6: Social Skills	Q7: Speech, Language and Communication Skills
Managers	Addressing Individual Needs (8) Interacting with Others (9) Teaching Strategies (7) Understanding the Child (12)	Expressive Language Supports (4) Facilitating Routines (8) External Resources (4) Receptive Skill Strategies (9) Whole Class Approaches (7)
Practitioners	Following Routines (2) Interacting with Others (11) Managing Anxiety (5) Teaching Strategies (8)	Expressive Language Supports (5) Facilitating Routines (5) Receptive Skill Strategies (9) Supplementary Guidance (3) Trial and Error (2) Whole Class Approaches (1)

Kim's anecdote regarding a child learning how to take turns, for example, was resonant in an explanation proffered by Isobel, whilst managers Hannah and Megan had both used sensory aids to focus a child's attention in a group. Then, across the sample, there were common threads regarding staff modelling and the progression of skills:

[I]f the staff's there modellin' stuff like Makaton, they under-, they get more of an understanding and concept of what they're meant to be doin' in that area.

Bethany

I'd say *now* (...) he copes really well in group situations, because we went down into our little forest school area and there was about six, seven other children and they were all throwin' leaves up in the air and I caught a video (...) of him just laughin'

Kim

As before (in Q5), the weight of interviewee strategies were geared towards children who had SEN but included references to children who did not – as in the case of Megan, who said: “Not all of our children are ready to come and join in and do those

bigger group activities”. Interestingly, one of the ways she addressed this challenge was through an intervention known as *Attention Autism*. This is an autism-specific programme aiming to provide children with the social, communication and thinking skills they need to participate in a group activity (Davies, 2014). Megan’s exposition was notable because she had applied the programme to children with and without autism – and because she was the only interviewee to refer to an ‘autism-specific’ intervention.

Attention Autism stood out as a targeted and formal strategy for developing children’s social skills within an adult-led group activity. Although individuals provided many examples of how they facilitated children’s social skills, these seldom covered peer-play scenarios in situ (potentially affirming the relatively low ChASE Scale score described above) – and tended to mean circle-time activities and snack sessions. That said, Bethany’s opinion on the relevance of group sessions to children with SEN contrasted with the other interviewees and illustrated differences in how interviewees understood inclusion or regarded social interactions:

Even if they’re not participatin’, they can kind of absorb what’s goin’ on around them, with the children socialisin’ and (...) start to enjoy bein’ part of that

Hannah

They shouldn’t be made to sit there and their learnin’ bein’ impacted, cos they’re not gettin’ nothin’ from sittin’ in the circle.

Bethany

When paired interactions were described, these were specific rather than general and involved staff building relationships with children who were non-verbal, e.g., imitating their sounds, copying behaviours and gradually increasing demands in 1:1 situations. Since this approach to teaching social skills was illustrative of EYPs starting from their knowledge of a pupil – and congruent with variables previously coded under planning, knowledge of the child surfaced as a meaningful data tag. Amongst the managers, statements associated with knowledge of the child were attributed to the codes: ‘Addressing Individual Needs’ and ‘Understanding the Child’, and to ‘Managing Anxiety’ amongst the practitioners.

The eight statements connected to individual needs exemplified the various techniques that staff used to help children engage with them or in a group. Bethany talked about creating a “my space” area for a child who found the proximity of his peers difficult to cope with. Hannah referred to a pram that one of the boys found calming and liked to sit in, whilst Megan explained how one of the girls had been assigned a new key worker to capitalise on their emerging relationship. These statements followed a different thread to ones coded to an understanding of the child, because those illuminated ways in which staff interpreted children’s behaviour and used this knowledge to their advantage:

I’ve got one who doesn’t really like when everyone’s sittin’ down to do something, so he (...) can sit and read a book while everyone else is gettin’ ready (...) He’s then ready to sit and join in with us then, so it’s (...) very individual and it is about takin’ time to get to know the child – what they *can* do. What they’re willin’ to do at different times and kind of usin’ that and buildin’ on that.

Hannah

In the practitioner subgroup, the five references to ‘Managing Anxiety’ lent insight into moments that children had found difficult and how these were addressed. Within these remarks there was a divide between the adult taking charge and the child coping themselves. Kim talked about leading a child to a quiet area, away from a group situation they had found overwhelming, whereas Isobel had resorted to sensory items:

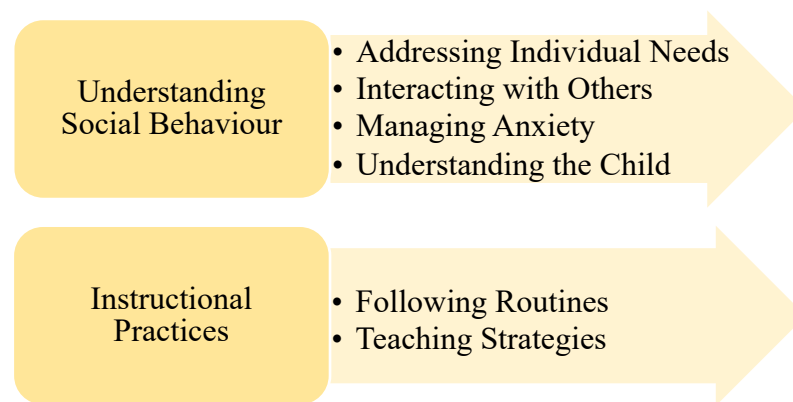
I got like the sensory wobble cushion (...) or we give them like [a] little fidgeter, summat to feel and squeeze, just to keep theirself occupied (...) [I]t really does calm them and soothe them a lot

Isobel then went on to talk about how the wobble cushion had helped some of the children anticipate their story-time – which they would automatically move to their seating position once it was presented. This generated another code, called ‘Routines’.

Analysing the data coded under children’s interaction skills, it was evident that the interviewees’ approaches were, first and foremost, reliant on their understanding of how a child behaved / would behave in social contexts, and what they needed to

cope or make progress. This split, between their knowledge of the child and the resulting strategies was inferred from the subsequent grouping and thematising of the codes – assembling four under the theme of ‘Understanding Social Behaviour’ and two under ‘Instructional Practices’. The groupings are delineated in Figure 48 and arguably serve as a demonstration of the complexities involved in teaching children social skills. Contrasting four versus two codes, it could be said that staff must devote more of their efforts to understanding the child than implementing the strategies.

Figure 48: Thematising Codes in Q6



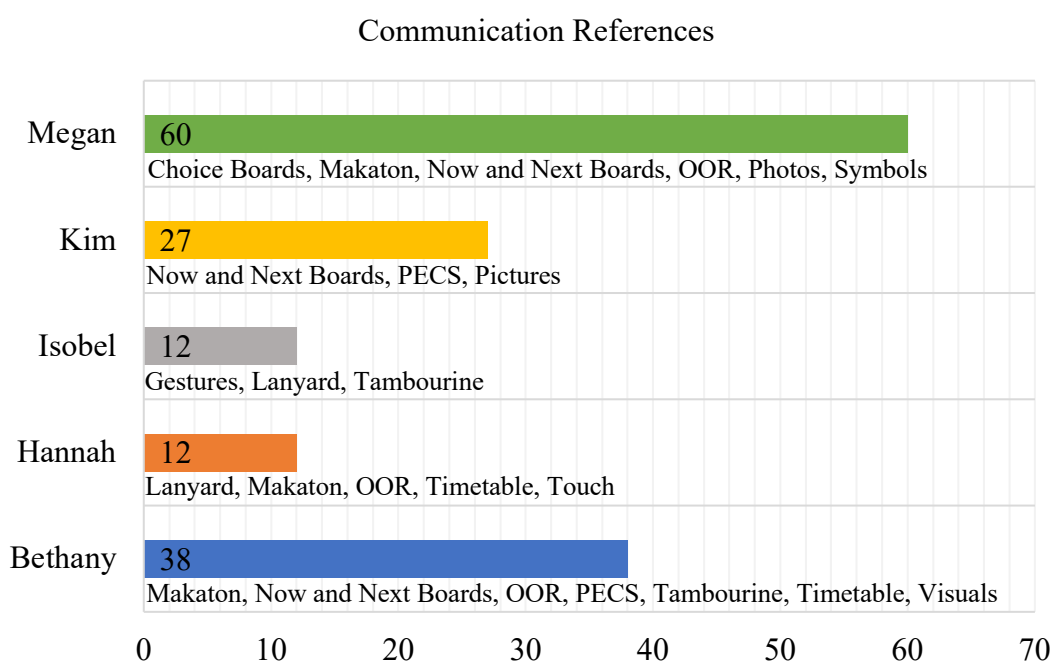
Practices Associated with Children’s Communication Skills

Of all the items in Domain 2 of the ChASE Scale, it was the first regarding communication with children that attracted the sample’s highest inclusive self-efficacy score. The level of conviction was strongest amongst the managers, who either strongly agreed or very strongly agreed with the proposition – and the summed score was highest on any item in any domain. Scoring for the second item – creating opportunities for the children to communicate was less, owing to the fact that Bethany reduced her strength of agreement from VSA to SA. Everyone else provided the same Likert response. Whilst the difference in scores was negligible (-1), the ‘higher’ degree of conviction in staff communication transpired in the interviews and to a greater extent, according to the coding. Seven codes were deduced in total – which can be seen in column 2 of Table 39. From this, we can see that there were twice as many sample-wide references coded to ‘Receptive Skill Strategies’ (18) than to ‘Expressive Language Support’ (9) – and infer that EYPs had more to say about their methods of

communicating with the children, than their strategies for helping children communicate themselves.

One of the ways in which communication approaches were extracted from the interview data involved listing the resources and methods that staff used. This list amounted to 14 different methods: choice boards, gestures, lanyards (keyrings with pictures and symbols), Makaton signing, now and next boards, objects of reference (OOR), symbols, picture exchange communication systems (PECS), photographs, pictures, a tambourine, timetables, touch and (generic) visuals. Some of these were used as a means of communicating information to children and of children expressing themselves to others – but not all were universally employed by the EYPs or to the same extent. Evidence of this is given in Figure 49, which depicts the number of times any of the methods were mentioned by an interviewee.

Figure 49: Frequency of References to Communication Methods



These values were determined using the word frequency tool in Nvivo and are striking, not least for their inter-group comparability and their corroboration with the Domain 2 scores. Megan's self-efficacy score of 12 for the two communication items, for instance, was the highest of all interviewees (selecting VSA twice) and this nominal ascendancy characterised her interview material. During the interview, she referred to a communication strategy more than twice as often as Kim, and five times more often

than Isobel and Hannah. Isobel and Hannah's scores were also interesting, by virtue of their equivalence (they worked in the same nursery) and in terms of their value. Not only were their communication references the lowest of the sample, so their Domain 2 communication scores were the lowest of their subgroup.

Although reasons for in-sample variation are difficult to ascertain, it is possible that the profile of the children in each nursery had some influence. Staff were not asked about the number of pupils attending with SEN, but from the information volunteered, Megan's nursery seemed to have a higher proportion of children with SEN than Hannah's. The children in these respective nurseries also differed in terms of their age. Megan's cohort were predominantly younger and of the same age (2), whereas Hannah's were mixed and included 3-4-year-olds. This spread of ages had created a practical challenge for Hannah, that surfaced in her reference to portable timetables:

[I]f you've got a few children that you're tryin' to use it with, you'd have them everywhere and then you've got to go and get it, or you've got them on a clipboard or people are movin' stuff, cos we've got a few children who just like to transport everything. I think if it was just 3 and 4-year-olds in the room it'd be different.

The economy of references to communication aids in Hannah and Isobel's setting could be a product of the fewer children who required them, their age and the need to manage the dynamics of the class. It suggested that augmented systems of communication were not only considered in the context of children who need them, but also in the sense of their impact on the class. In consequence, two other cross-sample codes were pronounced: 'Facilitating Routines' and 'Whole Class Approaches'.

Examples of how communication aids were appropriated to a nursery routine were voiced by every interviewee, but not everyone talked explicitly about their application to the whole class (i.e., Hannah and Kim). Coding under the whole class constituted statements illustrating widely adopted practices (supporting rather than managing children):

I feel like when a child first starts a visual routine, again, it's something that we'd use for all children, so all the children can discuss it

Bethany

Well, we do Makaton (...) That's just kinda part of what we do every day (...) [T]he children are just used to seein' us doing that (...) They're just used to seein' us kind of do those now and next boards or the photographs or holdin' up the object.

Megan

These whole class methods again pointed to an 'equitable' view of inclusion, similar to that construed from the questionnaire – that the pedagogy of inclusion in a private nursery involves treating everyone in the same way or giving everyone access to the same opportunities. More practically, they aided the smooth running of a nursery day. Coding for routines thus highlighted the methods by which communication tools were used to help children anticipate and negotiate different parts of the day – inclusive of:

- a visual breakdown of steps to be followed when using the toilet
- photos showing where items should be rehoused after play
- gestures for handwashing (before lunch)
- an object of reference signalling time in the garden
- a now and next board showing a child when he can follow his own interests

Knowing which situations the various aids could be applied to, though, did not necessarily translate into easy usage or success. This notion emerged from the data provided by the practitioners, who both made comments about putting something in place and then changing it if it proved unsuitable:

[A] lot of it is trial and error – what works best for you. Cos if it's not gonna work for you in applyin' it, it's not gonna be consistent for everyone bein' involved then.

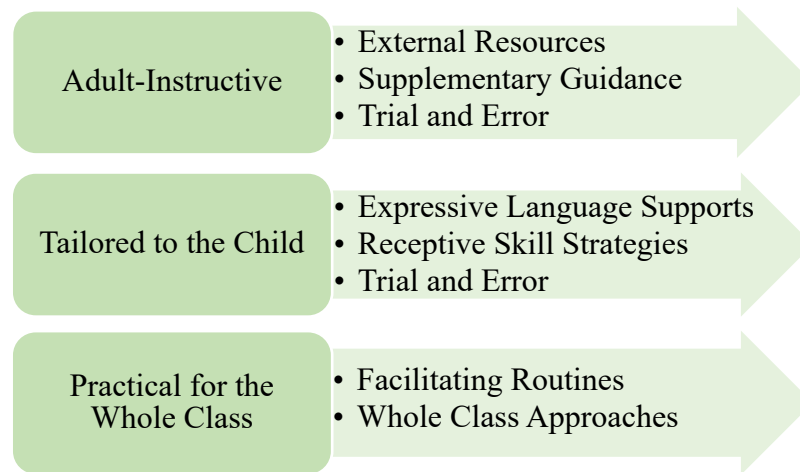
Isobel

[We] keep it ongoin' for a few weeks, until we make another decision of then what other cards we use, because they could actually pick it up in, in those few weeks. But if they don't seem to pick it up, then we (...) change the strategies

Kim

These comments were grouped under the code 'Trial and Error' and signposted routes to the final communication codes. In a wider discussion of communication practices, it was evident that everyone had at some point benefited from a form of help and support. Amongst the practitioners, the resulting code of 'Supplementary Guidance' entailed background reading, advice from professionals and information from parents. These topics were similar to those arising from the manager interviews – except theirs were coded 'External Resources' to align more closely with statements covering training and physical items (like a computer programme), as well as support from parents and professionals.

When processed altogether, the seven codes represented communication practices that were tailored to the needs of an individual but influenced by the dynamics of the class and the skill of the adult. Although a wide range of resources were identified, there were noticeable differences between the nurseries in terms of what was used and how. For some (like Megan), communication aids were embedded in classroom life, accessible to every child, and either augmented or differentiated where necessary. For Kim, support was introduced for specific children when the need arose, whilst for others, like Hannah, resources had to be tailored to the needs of an individual *and* suit the proclivities of his/her peer group. As such, a degree of challenge was intuited in communication practices, which was corroborated by statements pertaining to trial and error or quests for advice and new knowledge. Trial and Error was consequently deemed a feature of two of the three themes that were generated. Together, these indicated that practices associated with children's communication skills were most effective when they respected individual needs ('Tailored to the Child'), were feasible in daily routines ('Practical for the Whole Class') and were underlined by a level of mastery ('Adult-Instructive'). This is illustrated in Figure 50.

Figure 50: Thematising Codes in Q7**8.3.5 Accessible Learning Environments (Q8)**

The final interview question regarding inclusive practices focussed on aspects of the nursery environment and augmented the Domain 4 self-efficacy ratings (Shown in Table 40). This domain was associated with the highest levels of conviction in both the questionnaire sample and the interviewees as a whole group. Within the interviewee sample, though, the pattern of results was less straightforward.

Table 40: Interviewee Competency Beliefs in Domain 4

The Environment Questionnaire Item 15	Bethany	Hannah	Isobel	Kim	Megan
I can organise areas of the room, so they are accessible for everyone	VSA	SA	VSA	SA	SA
I can change the environment to suit an individual child's sensory needs	VSA	A	VSA	SA	SA
I can teach a child how to follow a daily routine	SA	SA	VSA	SA	VSA
I can put strategies in place that help a child cope with changes	SA	SA	VSA	SA	VSA
Domain Total	22	19	24	20	22

For two EYPs, this domain score was their highest overall (Bethany and Isobel) but for two others (Hannah and Kim), its maximum was equivalent with another domain. In the case of Megan, the domain score was neither her highest nor her lowest. Individual item scores did not necessarily complement the data collected during the interview. Where item 3 concerned EYP ability to teach children a daily routine, this was exemplified during the interviews with sample-wide references to visual supports like timetables and now and next boards. Megan and Isobel both very strongly agreed with the scale item but there was a marked difference in their referencing of visual aids on an individual level – according to the frequencies graphed in Figure 49.

Interviewee references to visual aids in the context of the environment were coded under ‘Timetable Structures’. This code applied to the managers and the practitioners but encompassed more than just the aids per se. It also incorporated discussions of when activities were carried out and why timetable resources might be needed. In Bethany’s opinion, structure in the environment was something that should be considered from the moment a child started the nursery and especially for children with additional needs. She thought visual aids were beneficial because they helped to prepare children for changes in the day and broke them down into manageable units. This breakdown was explicated in one nursery as blocks of activities, which repeated throughout the week. These were consistent in type but not necessarily in content, meaning that children would know “this is what happens every day. It might be different *activities* and it might be different *things*, but regardless, it’s free play, activity, free play, out – stuff like that” (Isobel). Timing in the context of the environment also had a role to play, ensuring that children had opportunity to access a place they enjoyed, and that the atmosphere was conducive to learning:

[H]earing the doorbell go constantly while you’re doin’ an activity, can not only be distracting from the activity, but it could make them think about their mum or their dad or whoever’s picking them up

Hannah

Efforts to create environments conducive to learning were connected to staff planning and overlapped with the data attributed to Q3. The emphasis here, though, was on the physical layout of the room and the allocation of resources. These resources were either generic in their availability to everyone (like familiarisation books for new

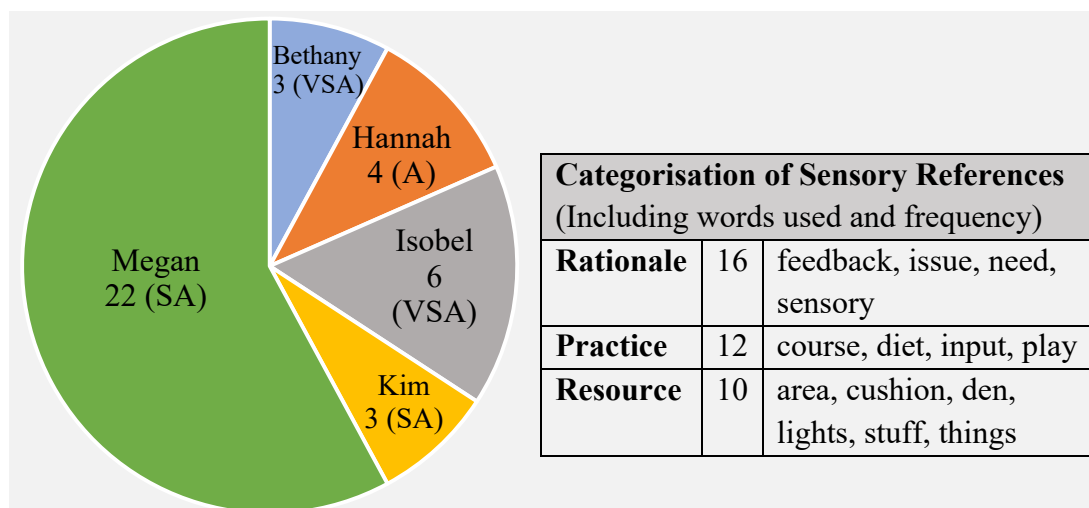
children and props in the home corner), or bespoke in their provision for children with particular needs (like wobble cushions and fidget toys). This distinction was drawn out in two separate codes: ‘Generic Resources’ and ‘Sensory Considerations’ and befitted interviewees across the sample (See Table 41). It was useful because it gave opportunity to narrate the responses and scores derived from the second item in Domain 4 – one that explored EYPs’ strength of conviction in their ability to create sensory-friendly environments.

Table 41: Coding in Q8

Codes	Practitioner References	Manager References
Defining and Managing Areas		9
Defined Areas	5	
Sensory Considerations	4	2
Generic Resources	6	2
Timetable Structures	4	4

The relatively small number of combined references to children’s sensory needs in conjunction with the environment (six) belied the total number counted throughout the interviews.

Figure 51: Interviewee References to Children’s Sensory Needs



As a sample, the word “sensory” was mentioned 38 times and paired with words such as “feedback” and “diet”. These words and their expositions fell into one of three categories, namely: ‘Rationale’, ‘Practice’ and ‘Resource’ – whose labels were used as sub-codes for ‘Sensory Considerations’ (See Figure 51). Interestingly, the fairly even categorical distribution of sensory words was not replicated at the level of the interviewee, nor did they align with the item 2 scale ratings. Megan was an outlier again – accounting for 22 of the 38 “sensory” utterances (58% of the total references), but only strongly agreeing with the scale item. In contrast, Bethany mentioned the word on just three occasions (constituting the joint lowest count) and very strongly agreed with the item.

Hannah was perhaps the only interviewee whose explicit references to children’s sensory needs were consonant with her Likert response – judging by the near minimum of four references and her comparatively weaker strength of conviction. Yet, this was also something of a misnomer in its suggestion that children’s sensory needs had little bearing on her nursery environment. Reviewing Hannah’s comments more closely showed that a variety of sensory-friendly strategies had been described – but not precisely with the word “sensory”:

Now we’ve got areas that have got a lot less resources on them (...) not havin’ so much choice, because that could be really overwhelmin’, as well. So, what we’d find is that children would just empty everything out, especially children that couldn’t communicate what it was that they wanted and would be gettin’ a bit frustrated (...) [So], to reduce the impact of that – the stress on the staff, the stress on the children, and the anxiety (...) we’ve took a lot of the toys away.

Bethany made a similar point in relation to new starters:

[W]e *always* reduce the amount of resources (...) in the areas (...) I always look at when a child’s startin’, how overwhelmin’ that area can be. Because (...) that’s where the tippin’ and things start happenin’.

These multiple references to the demarcation of areas and their organisation generated two final codes: ‘Defining and Managing Areas’ (for the managers) and ‘Defined

Areas' (for the practitioners). Each code drew attention to the importance of physical structures in the vein of accessibility and the subtly different ways of achieving this. Managers typically explained how the areas were set up, whereas practitioners tended to describe the resources within them:

[W]e've worked hard on having a *more* neutral environment (...) muted colours (...) [W]e haven't got things stuck all over the walls. It's all focussed on a display board (...) *natural* colours for the displays

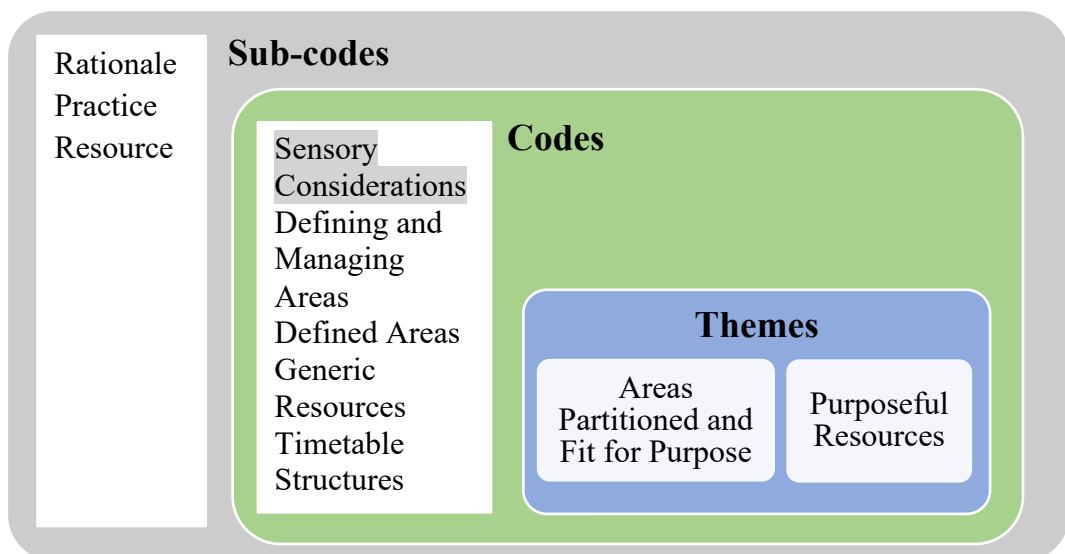
Megan

One area will get used more than another, which is currently the home corner (...) I've just put some nice new stuff in there (...) [W]e have a little chair with, that dolls are on. We've got like a little, little table and it's set out with like two cups and two little crates.

Kim

Using all five codes as a framework for understanding how EYPs make their classrooms accessible to all children, it seemed that their efforts were essentially driven by two tenets – designing a wide range of areas that suit a wide range of children and furnishing those areas with resources that promote their engagement and learning.

Figure 52: Overview of Coding in Q8



As themes, these were dually explicated as ‘Areas Partitioned and Fit for Purpose’ and as ‘Purposeful Resources’ (Shown in Figure 52). In the first instance, this conflated the two ‘area’ code references. In the second, it conflated the Timetable Structures and Sensory Considerations sub-codes with Generic Resources – to signify a range of physical items that are used in a specific way and for a specific reason.

8.4 Staff Perceptions of Their Competencies

During the interview, staff were given two distinct opportunities to talk about their strengths – to reflect on their management of challenging situations and to explain how they judge their effectiveness. These insights would augment the self-efficacy data produced by the questionnaire.

8.4.1 How Staff Judge Their Effectiveness (Q9)

From the anecdotes provided, it was clear that everyone, regardless of role or background, had experienced success and failure in their work. Failure, however, was not portrayed as something that negatively affected practice or dwelled on for long periods. Instead, it was accepted as an inevitable part of work with very young children and considered a vehicle for driving new practice:

[W]hen I very first started out, if it didn’t go well, I, I’d be a bit kind of frustrated, whereas now it’s kind of, it’s just par for the course (...) I think that if it doesn’t go right, it’s all about learnin’ from that and, and kind of buildin’ on that for next time.

Hannah

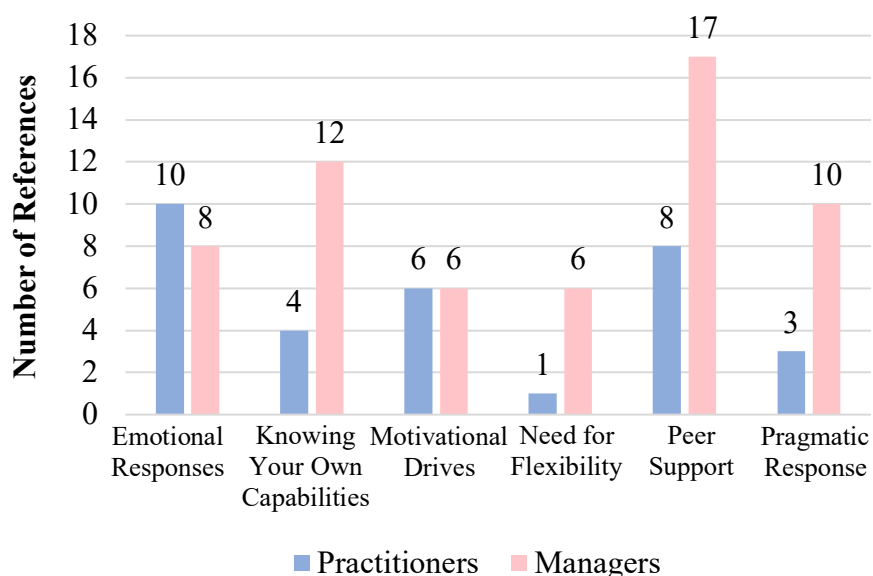
One of the ways in which interviewees currently judged their effectiveness therefore involved recognition of obstacles they had overcome. Indeed, when answering the question of how their practice had changed over time, notions of success could be construed from what staff felt they had learned and how they had improved. Kim “Definitely, definitely” agreed that her approaches had changed and offered the following, in respect of her experiences of SEN:

I would show signs of frustration because the child wouldn't basically engage in what I was (...) gettin' them to do (...) But now, I sort of stop meself from gettin' frustrated and I don't get frustrated anymore. You know, if it doesn't go well, I just take it as, as a knock on the chin and say to myself, "Right (...) Don't get frustrated cos it's goin' wrong that first time (...) you've got the whole day, it could go right".

What is interesting about the views offered by Kim and Hannah is what can be extracted from their management of frustrations. More than connoting a propensity for positive thinking in the moment, their reactions suggested levels of self-efficacy consonant with the ratings from the questionnaire – via an ability to assess the positives of their efforts overall or longitudinally. Although these two individuals contributed the lowest ChASE Scale scores, their scores (as percentages of the total possible) still amounted to 79% (Hannah) and 88% (Kim).

Frustration was a useful marker in the coding, situated in the wider context of emotional responses. Ten codes were derived from the Q9 data and six were pertinent to both subgroups (including 'Emotional Responses'). The unifying codes are presented in Figure 53, which indicates how many references were tagged to each label in each subgroup – and intimates the relative importance of a construct in the determination of staff judgements.

Figure 53: Comparing Communal Subgroup Codes and References



Importance (by numbers) can be inferred at the level of staff role or the full sample. Amongst the practitioners, the maximum assignation of 10 statements to one code suggested that an understanding of their emotional responses was especially significant when reflecting on their competencies. In contrast, allusions to peer support were coded the most often amongst the managers (17) – and this emphasis translated into a priority of importance for the full sample of interviewees (according to the highest combined score of 25). Peer support was interpreted as support garnered from a network of individuals working in or outside of the nursery. This comprised colleagues with the same job title, the setting SENCo, the nursery manager, advisory teachers, the area SENCo, health visitors and (unspecified) professionals or agencies. It was coded in connection with participants' competency judgements due to the influence that feedback had on staff practice. Praise from other people was a sign of effectiveness and motivated future labours. Kim's experiences, once again, were illustrative. During the interview she spoke of a recent conversation about a child with one of her peers:

[S]he went, "That's all come from you. You've learnt him how to do that". So, I suppose it's a case of me hearin' praise and gettin' praised for something I'm doin' right. Therefore, I continue to do that right.

A subtle difference, however, was detected between the two subgroups, in that the practitioners mostly talked about their interactions with colleagues, whereas the managers (also) referenced people beyond the workplace. In the case of Bethany, external support had been particularly prized – compensating for strains in her relationships with senior staff:

[T]he people that had a real positive impact on me practice and made me feel like I was achievin' something and made me keep goin' (...) [were] the likes of (Area SENCo) (...) health visitors, anyone that come in (...) [They] always passed comments on what a good job we're doin' (...) That reassurance, I feel like, you got a lot of praise and-, which built your confidence up lots from multi-agencies, rather than actually workin' at (Nursery Name).

That is not to say Bethany viewed the support from her senior peers as wholly inhibitive. A change of job had afforded opportunity to reflect anew on those relationships and led her to realise that they had at least encouraged her to question her practice and to strive for personal improvement:

At the time you are quite deflated (...) but then I look back and take it as a positive, because I wouldn't be as good or as confident or as able to talk about stuff in-depth, if I weren't gettin' questioned all the time. If I was always doin' a good job, what've I got to improve on?

This pragmatic approach to gauging competency was discernible in all of the interviews, as was the need to recognise the threshold of one's capabilities and to prioritise actions. Judging whether recent task success or failure was symptomatic of goals that had matched or exceeded their capacity, for example, might serve as a coping strategy. Failure attributed to unrealistic expectations would ostensibly foster resilience and maintain morale. 'Pragmatic Response' and 'Knowing Your Own Capabilities' were thus units of meaning preserved in the analysis:

I think, when we look back to our successes like that, we think, "Right. Ok. Take a deep breath (...) Pick one thing that's important at the moment. What is the priority here for us? (...) That's the goal for today (...) Pick something small and that's an achievement for your, for your child; it's an achievement for you durin' the day". And you start again tomorrow, the next day.

Hannah

Elsewhere in the data, four other codes were created to accommodate statements that only applied to one subgroup. Concepts coded as 'Looking for Solutions' and 'Relating to the Child' emerged from the practitioner interviews, whilst those labelled as 'Questioning Practice' and 'Children's Responses' were deduced from the managers. Looking for Solutions was similar to Questioning Practice, as each involved staff unpicking a given situation and modifying their practice to secure the best possible result. But close up, the approaches were not always the same.

Practitioners sometimes appraised their effectiveness after an activity. Some managers considered it in advance:

[A]t the end of the day, we have a little (...) discussion with the other members of staff. And we say like, “Well this didn’t work” or “That didn’t work well”, so we change it (...) all around for the next time.

Kim

[Some of us] will have an idea (...) and you think, “Right”, or, “I was thinking of doing this. What, what do you think? (...) D’you think they’ll like this? (...) [I]s that too hard or do we need to make that more challenging?”

Megan

Judgements of effectiveness were tacitly associated with the accuracy of staff planning and a degree of proactivity in pre-empting future problems. An individual would believe in her competence if a colleague validated her idea or if she had put steps in place to improve an existing activity.

The divide between ‘Relating to the Child’ and ‘Children’s Responses’ was similarly determined – acknowledging commonalities in interviewee statements, as well as sufficient areas of difference to warrant a split. Most obviously, references to children were the common feature – with their reactions serving as a barometer of practice. If children were happy and involved in their play, then the activity could be judged a success and the strategies efficacious. The emphasis on these two variables was revealed in a text frequency search, producing 64 instances of the words “happy” and “involved”, i.e., an average of more than 12 per person. What set the two codes apart, was the context in which these attributions were made. For managers, recognition of children’s happiness was a distal observation, whereas for practitioners, it was something noted in the course of an interaction. Every interviewee might consider themselves effective if children were happy and engaged in the activities she had provided, but how and how quickly that response was judged varied. In Isobel’s opinion, success meant:

that the children really enjoy it and then they want to do it again. Because if the child doesn't want to do it, doesn't want to be involved in it, that's where you start havin' a problem then (...) So, makin' it really enjoyable for *them* is a big key thing (...) It's gotta be worthwhile for that child. It's gotta have *their* interests in it. Cos if not, it's, it's basically pointless.

Which contrasted with Bethany, who said:

even if the dishes were in the sink, the room was a mess or an activity hasn't gone the way I wanted it to, as long as every child's well-being was bein' met and I could look round and see that they were happy and (...) engaged in an activity – no matter how long it's for, then I'd feel like I, yeah, I've got something right.

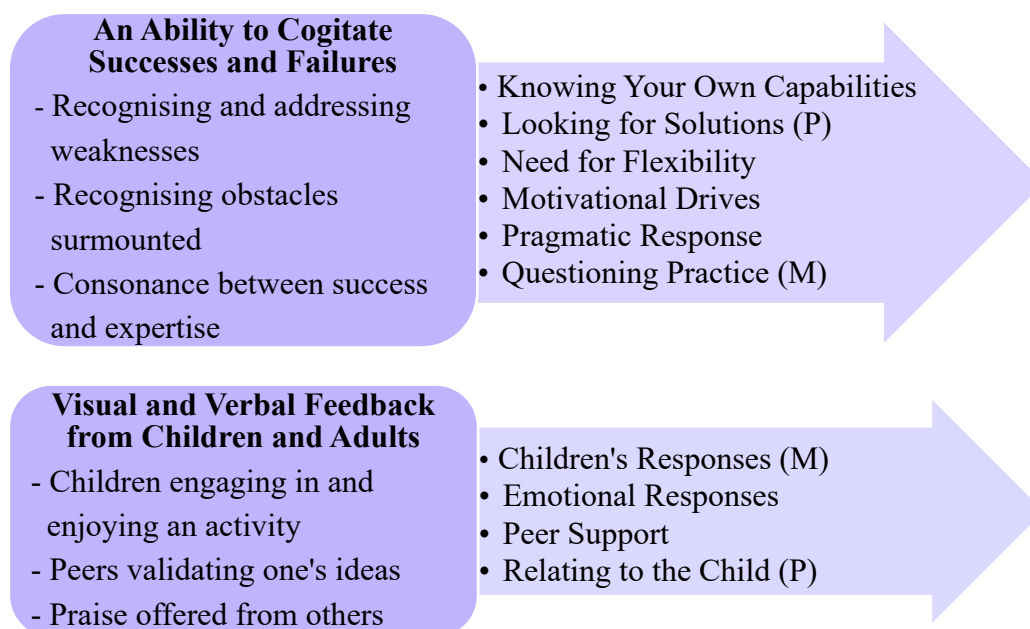
These competency reflections, drawn from all five interviewees, seemed to apply to their experience of working with all children, not specifically to children with or without ASLCN. Staff did refer to pupils with SEN in the course of their appraisals but predominantly talked in generalist terms. As such, EYPs' sources of efficacy belief appeared to stem, overall, from the following:

- An ability to recognise and address pedagogical or personal weaknesses
- Children engaging in a given activity and visibly enjoying it
- Peers validating an individual's ideas
- Praise volunteered from people working in and outside of the nursery
- Recognition of obstacles overcome through experience
- Succeeding in tasks corresponding with the person's level of expertise

These strands of thought – and the corresponding codes – could be represented by two main themes. The first was 'Visual and Verbal Feedback from Children and Adults' and the second, 'An Ability to Cogitate Success and Failure'. The final interpretation is visualised in Figure 54, with the themes marked in bold on the righthand side, above the efficacy sources. The 10 codes are written in the arrows and appended by a (P) or

(M) where relevant – to denote their pertinence to either the practitioners or the managers.

Figure 54: Thematising Codes in Q9



8.4.2 Responding to Challenges (Q4)

Reflections on successes and failures were not only embedded in discussions of efficacy judgement. They also featured in the strategies staff used to manage challenging situations. Q4 data showed that such reflections were not necessarily a priority for everyone and that various other factors were involved.

Table 42: Sample-Wide Coding for Q4

Practitioners	Managers
4 – Emotional Reaction	1 – Accessing Support from Colleagues
1 – Flexibility	9 – Drawing on Experience
2 – Knowing and Responding to the Child	3 – Having Appropriate Expectations
3 – Patience and Perseverance	3 – Knowing and Responding to the Child
2 – Positive Thinking	6 – Patience and Perseverance
1 – Solution-Focussed Questions	4 – Positive Thinking
	3 – Reflecting on Successes
	5 – Solution-Focussed Questions

Table 42 shows that 10 codes were formed and that each code represented 1-9 extracts of data. This implied that the strategies staff used to manage difficult situations were numerous and variably adopted. The most frequently coded strategy amongst the three managers related to their professional experience, whereas the two practitioners spoke about their emotional reactions – which meant acting on feelings of sadness, induced by children’s engagement in the moment. For Kim, this equated to her sometimes feeling “a little bit *sad* because (...) they haven’t wanted to participate or it hasn’t gone very well” – and proved a sentiment akin to Isobel’s feeling that “we don’t like them missin’ out on stuff”. The ‘Emotional Reaction’ code was the only identifiable point of (Q4) similarity between the practitioners. Kim’s other approaches were interpreted as ‘Knowing and Responding to the Child’ and ‘Positive Thinking’, whilst Isobel’s were deduced as ‘Solution-Focussed Questions’, ‘Patience and Perseverance’ and ‘Flexibility’.

Two of Isobel’s approaches were consonant with strategies used by the managers. She worked in the same nursery as Hannah, and Hannah also described strategies comprising patience, perseverance and solution-focussed questions. That they worked closely together was very evident during the interviews – with each referring to the other in name and formulating similar views. Where Isobel said, “Well, what goes through my mind is, “What can I do to make this child benefit from it? Why hasn’t it *worked*? And what can I do to fix it?”” Hannah remarked, “You sit back and you think, “Right, ok, what did go wrong? Why did it go wrong? Were they just not ready for that activity at that level? Do we need to adjust the activity?”” Kim’s approaches too, bore relation to those of the managers’ – in terms of them using their knowledge of the child and thinking positively. As an illustration, Megan said:

[I]t’s knowing the child and it’s knowing what those (...) things are that will help to calm them down (...) [W]e’ve had a lot of children with sensory diets, so, sensory input. So, I would say the staff are quite good at recognisin’ what children need and what helps to calm them down (...) so we’ll give them that time to calm down.

Overlaps were not restricted to subgroup strategies. They were also a feature of several codes. Positive Thinking resonated with Solution-Focussed Questions but could be divided in two ways – as extracts that were transcribed as statements or questions, and

as items pertaining to a future or immediate situation. Bethany, for instance, was confident that she could help children reach a given milestone – even if it took time and involved setbacks (which also chimed with the notion of Patience and Perseverance). Kim, in contrast, gave the example of substituting resources that children would enjoy for those they had not.

Interrogating the data in this way – looking at specific contexts in which strategies were implemented – was useful, since it implicitly marked out the situations that staff found challenging. When someone was asked how they dealt with a difficult moment, a moment was described and a strategy presented. Megan’s earlier conveyance of calming strategies had been employed in the context of children being anxious or unable to join in with an activity – positioning children’s anxiety as one example of challenge. Hannah’s optimism was harnessed in situations where the delivery of an activity fell short of what was expected – conferring challenge from approaches failing to go to plan. Following this process of deduction, eight different scenarios were discovered and collectively expressed as:

- approaches that did not work or activities failing to go to plan
- children being upset or not engaging in an activity
- delays in progress (e.g., children needing extra time reach a milestone)
- misunderstandings arising between children
- noisy environments and busy days (e.g., when rooms are at full capacity)

Four more contexts, however, were intimated by Bethany, when searching for the words “challenge”, “difficult” and “hard” across the data. Not described in the context of strategies, they still comprised:

- the complexities of effective communication with parents
- difficulties staff might have when deciding what resources to use or the targets to set with autistic children
- the challenge of tracking children’s progress through six weeks of evidence

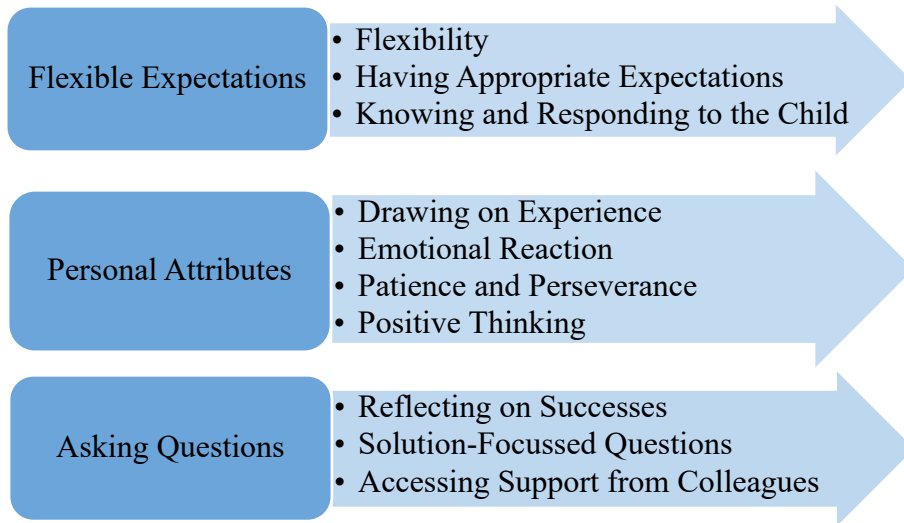
Interestingly, out of all the interviewees, Bethany used these words the most often (10) but only once more than Hannah. With their respective totals, this meant that the

managers had a slightly greater tendency than the practitioners to talk in terms of situations being challenging, difficult or hard (contrasting averages of 7 versus more than 4). Nevertheless, these difficulties seemed to be accepted as part of the job or even an essential requirement. Hannah admitted the following and then laughed:

I'm very confident as a practitioner with children that (...) meet their development requirements (...) but when it comes to (...) meeting the needs of children that don't quite fit in that little box, I do find myself a little bit lost sometimes. I don't mind admitting that. But I do accept the challenge

Bethany and Isobel, meanwhile, felt that challenges (and their underlying stress) wrought benefits via the feeling of satisfaction that came with the surmounting of problems or the edge that it gave to one's practice. When I put it to Bethany, that the mastery of simple tasks was less than fulfilling, she answered, "No. God. You'd get no satisfaction out of it (...) You do need that uneasiness". Herein, lay a striking tension between the coding in Q4 and Q9. On the one hand, tasks that matched EYP expertise helped to keep their self-efficacy judgements intact, but on the other, challenging situations (when mastered) had the potential to engender greater feelings of accomplishment.

Tensions aside, the interviewee's responses to challenging situations, i.e., Q4, could be reduced to three principal themes: 'Flexible Expectations', 'Personal Attributes' and 'Asking Questions'. Together, they were superordinate to the 10 previously stated codes and encompassed situations where activities did not go to plan, children were upset, or an approach did not work etc. It was inferred that EYPs dealt with problems by focussing on the changes that *they* could make to a given situation and that these changes were influenced by their internal states. Rather than expecting the child to change, staff critically appraised a situation and questioned their efforts, drew on aspects of their character and their knowledge of the child, and used this information to modify their own behaviour and the activity at hand. These final interview themes and codes are shown in Figure 55 and pave the way for the discussion that follows in Chapter 9.

Figure 55: Thematising EYP Strategies for Managing Challenge

Chapter 9: The Discussion

Chapter 9 is divided into three parts to set out my responses to the study's three research questions. It brings together the findings from the online questionnaires and 1:1 interviews and situates them in the fields of EYEC, inclusion and self-efficacy. Part one looks at the roles and responsibilities of the participants and probes their representativeness as practitioners in the early years sector. Part two discusses the approaches used to support children with ASLCN in a nursery (RQ2) – as a set of inclusive indicators – and explores these within the realms of national policies. Then, in part three, the extent of the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and inclusive practices is gauged (RQ1 and RQ3) and interrogated within the domains of *Self-Efficacy Theory*. The absence of photovoice data is acknowledged at the end of the chapter, and this precedes the final research appraisal that follows in Chapter 10.

9.1 The Research Questions

The study was inspired by my experiences of working as an advisory teacher in the private nursery sector, where it was evident that some staff sought advice more often than others. I wanted to understand the foundations of these differences and began to probe the literature on EYEC and inclusion. This signposted me to the research on *Self-Efficacy Theory*, revealing a lot of information in the context of mainstream school practices, but relatively little that was specific to private nurseries. Three research questions were then formulated:

1. How do practitioners perceive their self-efficacy regarding the inclusion of children with ASLCN?
2. What strategies do practitioners use to facilitate the inclusion of children with ASLCN?
3. What impact do perceived levels of self-efficacy have on inclusive practice in private nurseries?

9.2 The Early Years Practitioner

In her vision of the early years workforce, and amongst the recommendations set forth for the English government, Nutbrown (2012) wanted perceptions of work with young children to change – or rather, for the work to be understood as part of a

professional career that can advance in pay, qualification and levels of seniority. These perceptions were not only desirable in the realms of the general public, policymakers and children’s families. They were also vital in terms of drawing practitioners themselves into the workforce – challenging prevailing notions of the job being poorly rewarded, holding little status (Boyer et al., 2013) and impeded by complex training pathways (Elwick et al., 2018). In the study domain, these issues did not appear to be a threat to the participants’ sense of identity, inasmuch of the reasons they reported for becoming an EYP (See Figure 56). Whilst no one said they had been motivated by the salary, the phrasing of virtually every questionnaire response was indicative of a sample of professionals who viewed their work as being part of a career, believed in their influence on children’s lives and enjoyed the rewards that brought.

Figure 56: Reasons for Becoming an Early Years Practitioner

As a Career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I chose to work in early years and remain at this level • Child development has always been an interest • This was the next progression in my career
For Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To give children that valuable start in life • I am passionate about helping them achieve the best possible outcomes • I like to think I am shaping the children’s minds of this generation
Enjoyment and Rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I enjoy working with children • It is a very rewarding job • I have been privileged to support children and families through the statement process

Whether these views relate to a group of individuals whose study participation connotes higher levels of satisfaction than those who did not take part, or would be upheld beyond the sample, are evidently matters of conjecture. Regardless, they are striking in their comparison with studies asserting practitioners’ unhappiness at work (e.g., Crellin, 2017) and the difficulties previously associated with career development (e.g., Nutbrown, 2012). There was no indication that the EYPs’ choice of profession had come second to something else (like childbirth), no obvious signs that people were

unhappy and, with more than a third citing advancements in qualifications or responsibilities, no intimation that staff had been unable to progress in their role.

9.2.1 Roles and Responsibilities

Although practitioner duties differed in the details between the data sets, they broadly corresponded with those projected for the wider workforce (e.g., National Careers Service, 2021), such as planning, observing, writing reports and speaking to parents. These duties were also performed by the managers who counted themselves in the room ratios – and highlighted because studies of managers performing the same duties as practitioners are rarely reported in the field (Preston, 2013). This flattening of hierarchies also endured in work concerning families. From the descriptions provided, this seemed to take up a sizeable portion of manager and practitioner duties – and would probably be an advancement on the NDNA’s (2018e) estimation of the 7 hours spent on the universal entitlement paperwork. In this way, the data suggested that work with families was not always focussed on the needs of the child or that the relationships were always equal. In certain situations, relationships illustrated the primacy effect and bridging methods described by Boyer et al. (2013) and Elfer (2007) – where parents were regarded as the experts of their children and links were forged between the nursery and home environments. But in other circumstances, staff exercised their own judgements as to best practice and advice was proffered to parents, e.g., for aspects of mental health, employment or funding. In fact, the notion of providing care for families prevailed throughout the questionnaire and interview data and was, to some extent, a little unexpected. Amongst the EYEC debates on education and care, care is usually discussed in relation to children.

When staff talked about care for children, this was sometimes specified as physical acts, like changing nappies or helping children dress, but more commonly centred on safeguarding and well-being. However, these care-laden references were outweighed by statements relating to education and apparent in comments from staff like Olivia, who said her work involves “observing and documenting” children and supporting those who are “falling below and above their age-related expectations”. This educational accent was consonant with the literature ostensibly stationing staff as educators who must deliver a curriculum (Dockett, 2019) and gather performance data (Bradbury, 2019) – but not necessarily aligned with the participants’ job titles or own views of what should be prioritised. Unlike the DfE (2019b), the staff did not call

themselves *Early Years Educators* and alternatively alluded to the importance of children's development by stating their position as 'childcare-', 'early years-' or 'nursery-' practitioners. Then, just as Brock (2013) discovered that policies had changed the nature of practice for 12 practitioners, but attracted criticism if they did not agree with what staff felt was important, so Hannah asked:

Why is it always about school? No one cares about school. Everyone cares about what's happening in the moment with learnin'. Why is it that we've got to talk about school all the time? Can we just focus on the children enjoyin' what they're doin' and the learnin' that they're ge-, gettin' from it?

9.3 Including Young Children with ASLCN (RQ2)

Although a clear distinction could be made between participants' education and care-related duties, this division did not seem to extend to tasks concerning children with or without SEN. Pupil assessment or activity planning, for instance, were significant responsibilities concerning every child, irrespective of any diagnosis or need. More precisely, this 'every child' approach was a common feature in participant statements – and underlined by a broad interpretation of inclusion recognisable in the field, i.e., as a focus on everyone's needs, instead of a particular cohort's (Haug, 2017).

9.3.1 Interpretations of Inclusion

In the study, inclusion was seen as a collective responsibility, where everyone respected each pupils' interests and characteristics and strove for their participation in every type of activity. Inclusion seemed to be synonymous with participation and meant that its conception was in keeping with the definition tendered in Chapter 3, for this similarly referred to the culture of the nursery, the suitability of the 'curriculum' and participation. Of note too, was the sense of moral obligation attached to participation and inclusion, which was inferred from phrases like "participation barriers" and "culture of equality". This can also be found in the literature, amongst those describing the pursuit of effective practice as "a moral imperative" (Haug, 2017, p.212) or explaining how policy (Brock, 2013) and language (Ravet, 2011) can shape thinking or practice. Individuality was something to be recognised, but only to celebrate uniqueness or for the purposes of deciding the most appropriate pupil

strategies. What was less congruent with the literature, but equally striking, was how the participants' view of inclusion connoted a curious paradox – one where everyone was treated differently *and* the same.

9.3.2 Reifying Inclusion

An indication of what inclusion would look like in practice was gleaned during the interviews. This practice was divided according to six questions, which were individually discussed in Chapter 8 and expounded within a range of themes. In Table 43, these themes have been amalgamated and connected to the characteristics deduced from the questionnaires – suggesting that each type of practice can be classed as an indicator of either participation (marked in yellow) or differentiation and equality (marked in blue). This rendering helps to enhance the discussion but acknowledges that practices overlap. Getting to know the child, for example, is important in all areas, with implications for participation as well as differentiated and equal practices.

Table 43: Themes and Codes Defining Inclusive Nursery Practices

Inclusion Characteristic (Derived from the questionnaire)	Data Theme/s (Derived from the interviews)
Differentiation and Equality	Knowing the Child • Flexibility in Approaches
	Planning • Conditions for Learning • Interactions with Children and Communications with Staff
	Assessment • Assessment Rationale • Staff Practices
Participation	Social Interaction • Understanding Social Behaviour • Instructional Practices
	Speech, Language and Communication • Adult-Instructive • Tailored to the Child • Practical for the Whole Class
	The Learning Environment • Areas Partitioned and Fit for Purpose • Purposeful Resources

Differentiated and Equal Practices

In the interviews, the importance of working with families to support their children in the nursery was widely apparent and congruent with belief that parents play a key role in the success of early years inclusion (Sira et al., 2018). Their knowledge was sought by staff from the first point of contact and usually began as a routine conversation covering topics applicable to all children, e.g., dis/likes, diet, health and level of development. It was then modified according to the information shared. If a parent said his child was noise-averse or not communicating with words, questions exploring sensory-related behaviours or involvement with external agencies might then be asked. If a parent was reluctant to offer information or volunteered details that seemed incongruent with staff observations, questions regarding the family's personal circumstances might be broached and alert staff to the potential need for parent support. Once the information was collected, it was shared with relevant staff and plans were made to help the child settle in. The process was the same for all children, but the details were unique to each family. A high degree of sensitivity, flexibility and expertise was therefore required on the part of the inclusive practitioner – to recognise signs suggestive of a SEN; to establish the preliminary needs of each child and family; and to communicate this within the staff team.

Given the approaches EYPs employ during a child's transition to the nursery, it could be said that the expectation of inclusiveness begins even before the child enrolls and, further, that this is overshadowed by more typical expectations of staff having a range of curricular knowledge and skills (Dockett, 2019). In the nursery, these pedagogical expectations are primarily laid out within the EYFS (DfE, 2017b) and SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2015), i.e., in statutory documents influencing the activities that are provided, the child's participation in them and the progress that is judged. Planning clearly forms a critical part of the provision of activities and, in the study domain, was heavily influenced by managers' and practitioners' knowledge of the child. This is not surprising, as EYPs need to have a solid understanding of how children learn (Nutbrown, 2012) and must understand the characteristics of and within a wide range of conditions, to perform their role effectively. What is less obvious from an inclusive standpoint, however, is that this knowledge must be multiply interpreted in the context of information relating to individual children. Staff must develop and differentiate programmes of activities reflecting their knowledge of each child *and* the

information they have gleaned from parents, *as well as* their knowledge of the EYFS and SEN.

So, that's part of our role – to individualise everything and make sure the curriculum that we are providin' for each child is as individualised as it can be for them (...) But, then also on the opposite side, if a child needs extra support, maybe if it's with speech and language (...) then obviously we're there to support them with those needs as well

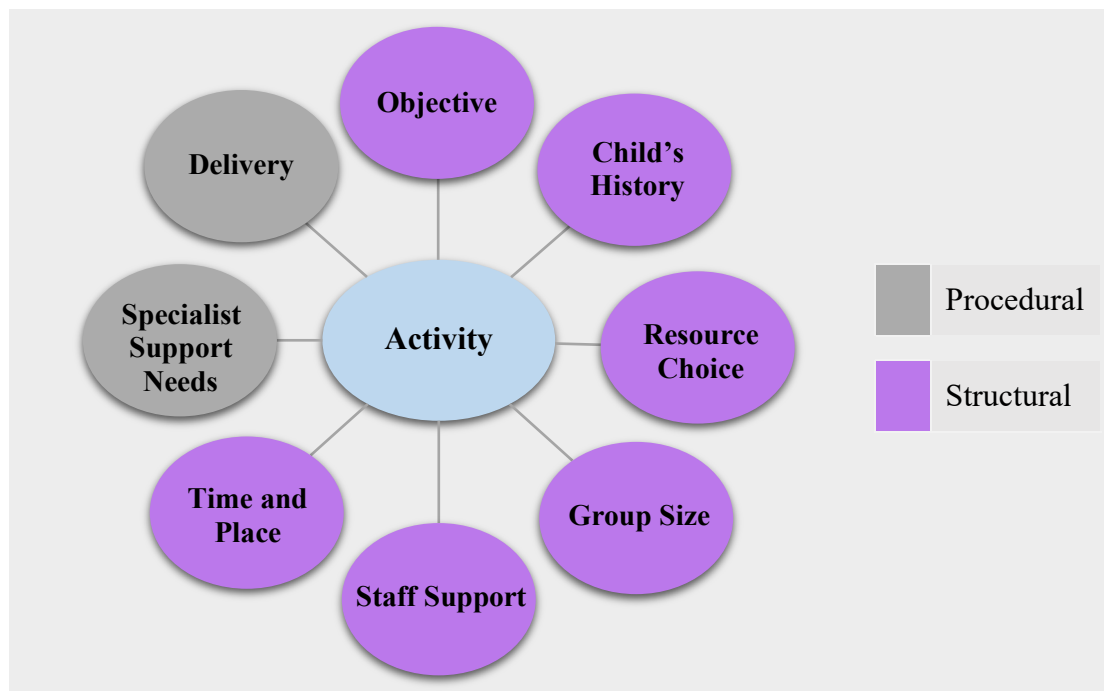
Megan

Knowledge of an individual child was not the only factor considered in the formulation of a programme or activity – nor its interpretation, the sole indicator of inclusion. Indeed, an understanding of the child was just one in a range of planning variables that emerged in the initial examination of the data. This multifaceted approach to planning was discerned in all of the practice areas that interviewees were asked to describe – and intuited as their perspective on effective inclusion. In the literature on inclusion (Buysse et al., 2001) and EYEC (Melhuish and Gardiner, 2019), studies exploring the quality of provision have typically concentrated on variables that can be classified as structures or qualities. This system of judgement seemed the most appropriate for reviewing the practices the interviewees reported. Not only was it logical in terms of using a framework already long-established in the literature (and referenced in Chapter 2), it arguably enhanced the integrity of my analyses. I felt that exploring an unknown area of research through a known lens would result in a more cogent piece of work than one viewed through a new or unfamiliar one.

To probe more deeply the information that staff provided, each area of inclusive practice was thus analysed as a suite of structures and processes that were regarded as indicators of effective and high-quality inclusive practice. In the realm of planning, this approach yielded six structural elements and two that were procedural (See Figure 57). Every element was considered whenever an activity was planned – and continually – with the implicit aim of creating the best conditions for participation and learning. Isobel, for example, was a keen advocate of “in the moment planning” and adjusted her plans if a child was not coping with the group or uninterested in the resources. She gave everyone opportunity to try the same activity but made changes if a child wasn't responding as expected. This consideration was relevant to all children

but perhaps had particular implications for children with autism. Efforts to incorporate their interests into a given activity are often advised (Guldberg, 2010) and can help to reduce their anxiety (Spiker et al., 2012).

Figure 57: Procedural and Structural Elements of Inclusive Planning



This application of children's interests (e.g., trains, numbers, sand) was mentioned by all of the interviewees, but came with an understanding that it could become an obstacle without careful management. Where Bethany used children's interests to draw them into little-visited areas of the nursery, Hannah suggested that an intense interest might make it difficult for the child to share a favourite object or use it in a new way. Decisions regarding the suitability of the resources were therefore not merely a means of including a child in an activity that they might enjoy. They also minimised the risk of their exclusion in the event of the activity becoming a barrier to participation. In effect, staff subtly demonstrated regard for how autism uniquely affects individuals (Masi et al., 2017) and the variable nature of inclusion strategies (Ravet, 2011). In some cases, a special interest could be a facilitator but in others, an impediment. Interestingly, one way of deciding which resource should be used or its suitability, was by rehearsing the related activity in advance – either with an independent set of children or with the targeted child, 1:1.

Structural decisions surrounding the number of children and staff allocated to a specified activity – as well as where it would be delivered and when – helped to maximise use of the environment and increased the likelihood of children engaging positively. Pupil behaviour was articulated as a possible inclusion challenge during the questionnaire stage and respondents generally interpreted autism and SLCN as two conditions involving some form of difficulty or struggle. This interpretation was not unusual – given research identifying the management of children’s behaviour as a common challenge in inclusive preschools (Varlier and Vuran, 2006), its emphasis on children’s difficulties (e.g., Scheuermann et al., 2003; Crosland and Dunlap, 2012) and the belief that certain expertise is necessary:

[T]eaching children with ASD alongside their non-ASD peers requires an additional set of skills, including the ability to manage groups of students with varying needs while simultaneously providing effective instruction

Ledford and Wehby (2015, p.1624)

In the interviews, the accent on children’s difficulties recurred but was alternatively construed as a starting point in staff planning – encouraging staff to think about why a child was struggling and how the problem could be remediated. Bethany’s approach was particularly illuminating:

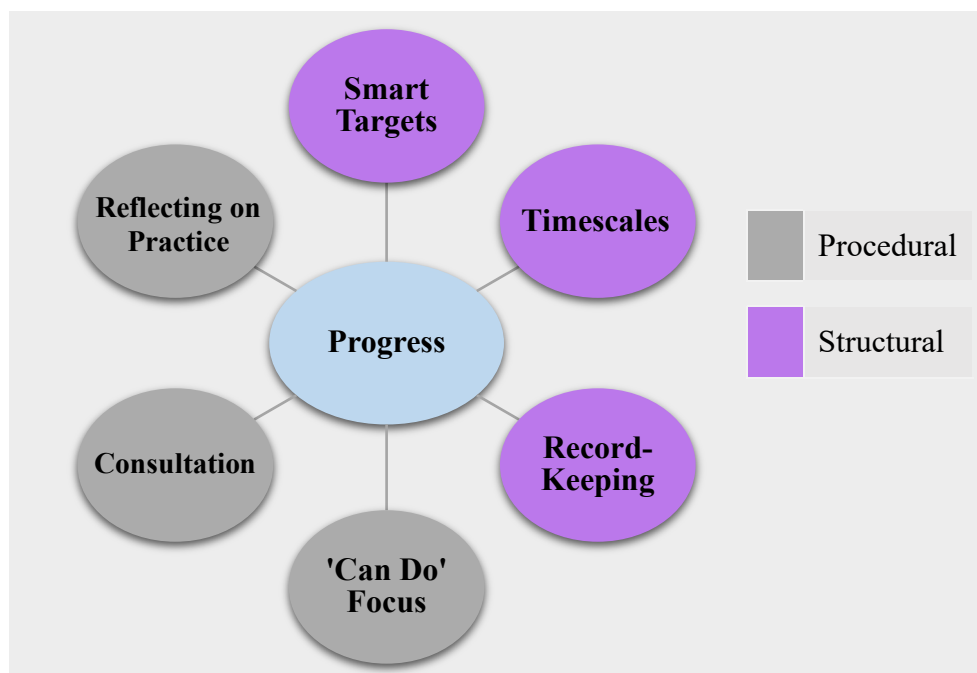
I need to start lookin’ at why they’re not playin’ in that area. If it’s sensory issues, then that would become more apparent, cos then I’d start lookin’ at mealtimes a little bit more (...) [T]his would all be informin’ me planning (...) [C]ould there be some underlyin’ needs that I need to, to pay more attention to?

This holistic understanding of the child contributed to decisions regarding the need for more specialist interventions that would help the individual access and engage in the environment more effectively, e.g., preceding table-top tasks with physical sensory activities. Judgements were routinely influenced by consultations with parents and colleagues, or advice from other professionals, and usually formalised on a play plan – which exemplified a specialist support need and was factored into staff planning.

The play plan stood out as an example of how planning for children with or without SEN might differ and involved evaluations of progress against specific targets, rather than the generic EYFS early learning goals. Judgements of progress against predetermined goals and outcomes can be difficult to make (Bradbury, 2019) and this opinion was shared by several interviewees. The difficulty, however, was less a matter of identifying what children had learned, than an issue of the appropriateness of the assessment scale. Hannah was especially concerned by this and felt that the national frameworks were not always sensitive enough to capture smaller steps of progress. Her view was thought-provoking, as it had implications for how the effectiveness and inclusiveness of her nursery might be judged: without the facility to precisely measure children's progress, an outsider might assume that her children are excluded from activities and not developing. This is inferred from thought that participation should enable achievement (Anderson et al., 2014) and that the data measuring achievements should prove a nursery's proficiency to an Ofsted inspector (Roberts-Holmes, 2015).

The task of assessment was managed by each nursery in slightly different ways, depending on their interpretation of the guidelines issued in-county and nationally. Despite the variation, six similarities regarding inclusive assessment were discernible (See Figure 58).

Figure 58: Elements of Inclusive Assessment



In the first instance, a child's progress would be measured against a set of pre-determined targets extracted from the EYFS, for this defines what children should be learning and achieving up to the age of 5 (DfE, 2017b). As a convention, it was adopted by all of the interviewees and used with every child irrespective of any diagnosis. It was not the only system, though, as many of the staff additionally talked about the importance of evaluating children's well-being and involvement, and gauged this with the *Leuven Scale*. Their adoption of the *Leuven Scale* was interesting, not just for its scope to record subtler signs of progress, but also in its connotation of inclusiveness. The *Leuven Scale* connects higher levels of pupil involvement with more purposeful learning experiences (MacRae and Jones, 2020) and high levels of involvement are suggestive of the participation embodying inclusive environments.

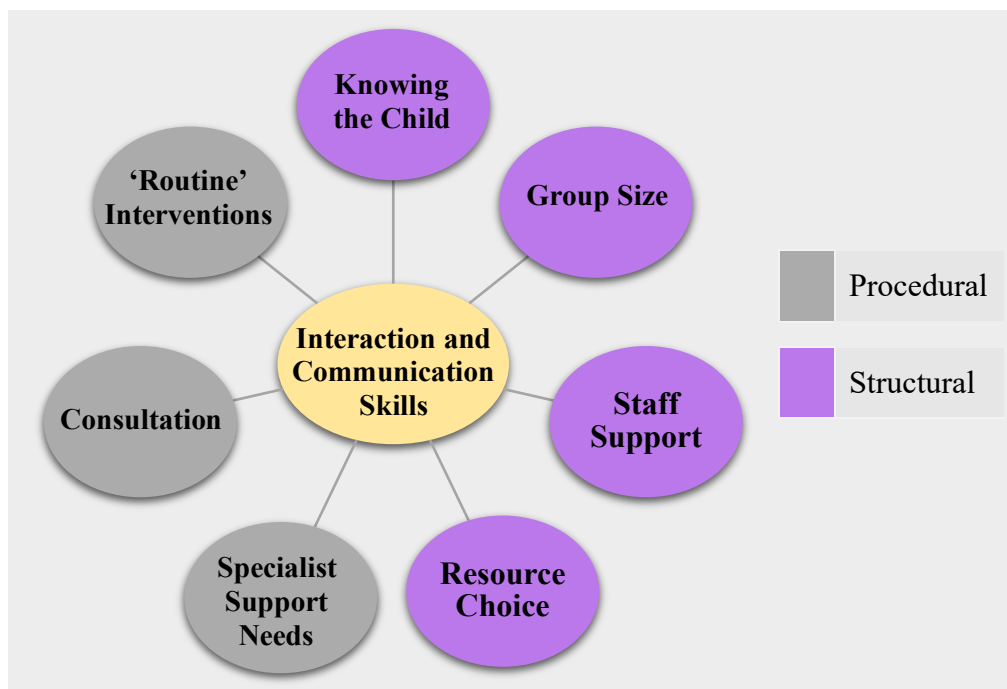
For the children who were not following 'standardised' patterns of development, progress was more flexibly judged, according to what was realistic for the individual. This example of individualisation is akin to Karila's (2012, p.589) description of the child "as the point of departure" for pedagogy, which as she subsequently elaborates, "changes what can be considered as normal in relation to the individual child's development and daily performance". Differentiating assessments from the child outwards rather than standardising them from a framework inwards has particular benefits for pupils with ASLCN, as it accommodates the fact that some may demonstrate skills in one area but not another (Guldborg, 2010) – and respects their varying ability to cope in certain situations (e.g., DCSF, 2008c; APPGA, 2017). In reviewing children's achievements against smaller targets, over longer time periods and in the home-school environment, staff were arguably more sensitive to an individual's successes and able to record these more accurately. Considering progress across environments, moreover, conferred a pedagogical gain, since it encouraged staff to reflect on their practice and to appraise the extent to which this was influencing a child's development. These observations are important to foreground, since they suggest that the 'can do' philosophy required for inclusion success (Harwood, 2009) may also be a signature of inclusive assessment. In these terms, it focusses attention on what children 'can do' *and* on what staff 'can do' to aid participation and learning.

Participation-Focussed Strategies

Participation was construed as a key inclusion driver amongst the questionnaire respondents and is also significant in the context of children with ASLCN, according

to how the associated impairments in interaction and communication skills affect their ability to participate in social situations (e.g., Thomas-Stonell et al., 2013; Ávila-Álvarez et al., 2020). During the interviews, and from an inclusion standpoint, it was therefore important to understand how staff taught these skills. In the subsequent analysis, a high degree of overlap transpired between the strategies focussed on children's interaction and those concerned with communication. These commonalities, highlighted in Figure 59, may be discerned as seven procedural and structural elements. Knowing the Child was pertinent here, as it conferred an ability on staff to reasonably predict how an individual would behave in a given situation and to provide the support needed to maximise his/her experience and learning. In fact, this support was often visual and required an understanding of the systems most suited to the child. Its selection, however, went beyond thought for the individual child, as staff had to also consider what would be reasonably feasible, e.g., thinking about the practicalities of managing multiple visuals in a room where children transported things.

Figure 59: Elements of Inclusive Teaching



The visuals described were consonant with those identified in Chapter 3, through their reference to photographs and pictures, timetables, gestures and signing. Within these references, there was a noticeable regard for strategies for

communicating information to the children that was unequal to the emphasis on teaching expressive language skills. Instances of children using visual aids to make choices, or of staff modelling language for use during play were recounted, but less often than those helping children understand what was expected in a certain situation. The reasons for this are hard to say, but the accent is nonetheless significant – especially when viewed against research identifying a predominance of expressive language difficulties in early years cohorts (Blackburn and Aubrey, 2016) and thought that these skills are challenging to teach (Dockrell et al., 2014). Indeed, Hannah alluded to their complexity when stating that her nursery is now:

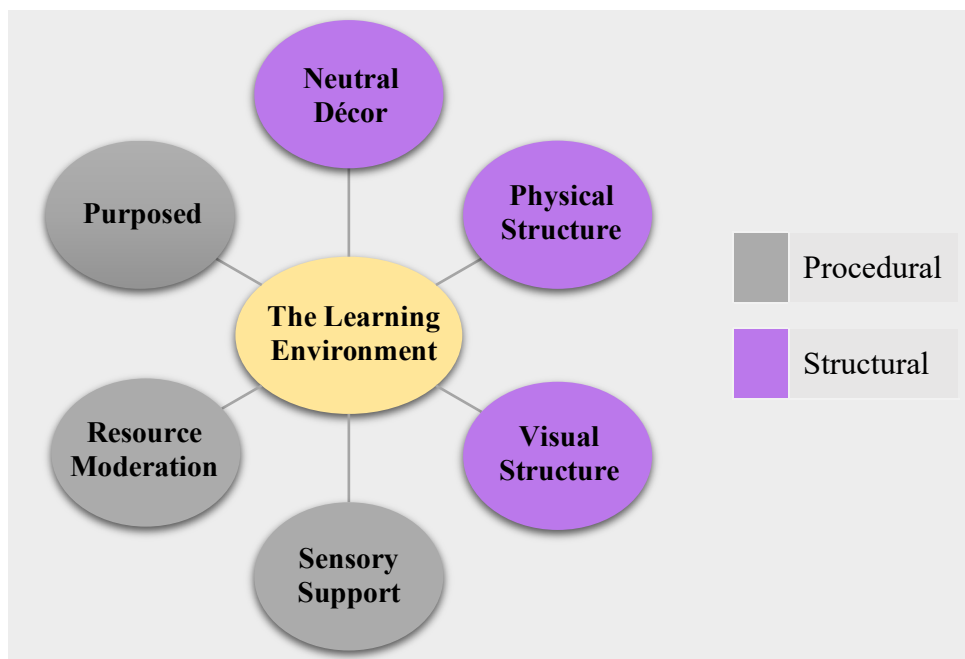
having to provide much more technical support for a child. We're having to know a lot more. We're having to understand a lot more about how speech and language works and how different issues can come about and how to resolve those issues

Another variable common to the teaching of interaction and communication skills was that concerning the size of the group. Teaching children 1:1 was tendered as an approach by several EYPs and seemingly subscribed to opinion that, e.g., autistic children benefit from 1:1 instruction (Ledford and Wehby, 2015) and specialist programmes (Dillenburger, 2011). Yet, that subscription was not necessarily unequivocal, owing to the inconsistent ways in which social interaction skills were developed or understood by the interviewees. On the one hand, Bethany felt that children “shouldn't be made to sit there” (in a group) and intimated a view of teaching that was conducive to work 1:1 – though perhaps more in the spirit of individualisation, than for reasons of specialism. Hannah's alternative interpretation suggested a shift away from 1:1 teaching, by asserting that group activities could be meaningful for children even if they were not active participants. The contrasts were problematic in terms of establishing a consensus but served as another illustration of how the heterogeneity of ASLCN profiles (e.g., Nicholson and Palaiologou, 2016; Masi et al., 2017) tests any ideas of uniformity or standardisation – and how an understanding of each child is essential in the determination of the approach.

Within the suite of practices described by the interviewees, the emphasis on visual structure and 1:1 teaching showed how various aspects of practice catered to the particular needs of children with ASLCN and how specific interventions, like

Makaton, were made accessible to (or benefited) all pupils. This customisation was exemplified by Megan in her reference to strategies that were “just kinda part of what we do every day” – and interesting in its resonance with research simply championing good teaching, i.e., noting that “the strategies that provide good results may be the same, independent of whether the student is ‘ordinary’ or ‘special’” (Haug, 2017, p.214). The ‘routineness’ of an intervention was thus a critical inclusive element to consider and could just as easily apply to the whole class, as it could to a specific individual and a certain time of the day. This latter distinction is meaningful, given the interviewees’ repeated references to children’s sensory needs and the strategies used to address them. In the field, sensory-based interventions are described as programmes of adult-led activities, which have a calming and organising effect on children’s sensory systems and enhance their ability to interact and play purposefully (Case-Smith et al., 2014). In Megan’s nursery, sensory diets were an essential support mechanism for other activities – a bespoke programme of sensory input offered to named children throughout the day, which would help them manage the demands imposed on them. In other nurseries, like Hannah and Isobel’s, sensory-friendly practices were more subtly stated but no less important, as they characterised efforts to organise the environment and make it accessible to everyone.

Figure 60: Elements of Inclusive Environments



Enabling environments are enshrined in the EYFS framework as one of four guiding principles facilitating children's learning and development (DfE, 2017b). This may be why they have traditionally been used as a medium for assessing classroom quality (Sylva et al., 2004) and evaluated in multiple domains – either on a rating scale, like the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale* (Sakai et al., 2003), or within a specific framework, like the *Early Years Autism Competency Framework* (Jones et al., 2014). Throughout the interviews, the environment was regarded as an essential part of inclusive practice and its exposition produced a lot of data. Its effectiveness was subsequently attributed to six elements (see Figure 60) – many of which constituted awareness of the fact that the sensory elements of an environment can inhibit or enhance children's participation. These influences were expounded by Hannah and Bethany, who both talked about moderating the number of resources in each area. In their experience, children could be overwhelmed by the multitude of available resources, find it difficult to communicate what they wanted and / or would then tip the resource over. However, it was not just a matter of limiting how many were available to children. It was also a case of deciding what the resources would be and why, where they would be stored and how they would be accessed. These decisions extended to the environment as a resource in its entirety, through the partitioning of areas within it – to decide what was needed, their accessibility and their appearance.

In the literature, the appearance of the preschool environment has become a key area of discussion, owing to the realisation that children are less distracted or can participate more purposefully when visual stimuli are reduced (Piller and Pfeiffer, 2016). Added to the reductive resource efforts reported by Hannah and Bethany, it was clear that the interviewees also considered ways to neutralise the décor. They tried to avoid harsh colours, confined work to designated display boards and endeavoured to create a quiet backdrop – all within a space otherwise known for its noise and chaos (Beltman et al., 2019). Noise is often difficult for children with ASLCN to cope with (DCSF, 2008a; 2009) and was conveyed here as a distraction when the doorbell sounded or a reason for a child to leave an activity. In consequence, quiet spaces were recognised as a valuable physical feature in the environment – either as a permanent fixture (partitioned from other areas) or as an itinerant accessory (like a sensory den), which gave children a place to withdraw to when needed. As an accessory, it was often dedicated to a specific child for a specific reason:

[T]he area was too open (...) so we purchased a dark den that we thought would really help them. And it was just an area (...) that they could go to (...) if they needed that time out or wanted to be on their own (...) [with] some cushions (...) some nice soft feely blankets. And both of the children would use that area quite a lot really.

Megan

This attention to physical and resource features is another observation worth highlighting for its inclusiveness. Quiet spaces and suitable furnishings are said to be indicators of enabling environments (See Sakai et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2014).

The partitioning of areas and siting of resources featured amongst a number of methods used to define places in the nursery. Visual structures were also universally adopted – but differed from the aids mentioned earlier in their utility as an environmental marker, rather than as communication and interaction tools. Labels for equipment, for example, which are beneficial for children with autism (DCSF, 2009) and SLCN (DCSF, 2008a), were prominent in all areas, ensuring that:

everything's photographed. Everything's got a place where it lives. So, the child understands where things belong or what that area is used for. So, if they go and play in that area, they can see straight away that it's a small world area, cos they can see the animals and things

Bethany

Timetables were commonplace too, but here the means of preparing children for changes in the environment, instead of steps in a task. In some nurseries, they had been dedicated to autistic children, in recognition of those who find change difficult (DCSF, 2009) – but were relevant to all of the children all of the time. As an illustration, Bethany gave children their own timetable when they started nursery, whilst Isobel described a timetable that applied to everyone and was always up on the wall. This class-wide timetable followed a pattern, which varied in the details but repeated in type, e.g., activity, free play, out – and was a rare example of a reference to the outdoor environment. It was rare because the interviewees said very little about how their outdoor spaces were used – despite the nationally stated importance of planning for (DCSF, 2008a) and engaging with outdoor spaces (DfE, 2017b).

9.3.3 A Conceptual Overview of Inclusive Practice

The strategies that the EYPs used to include children in their nursery have been brought together in Table 44, to show how the various structural and procedural elements drawn from the interview data compare across the different areas of practice.

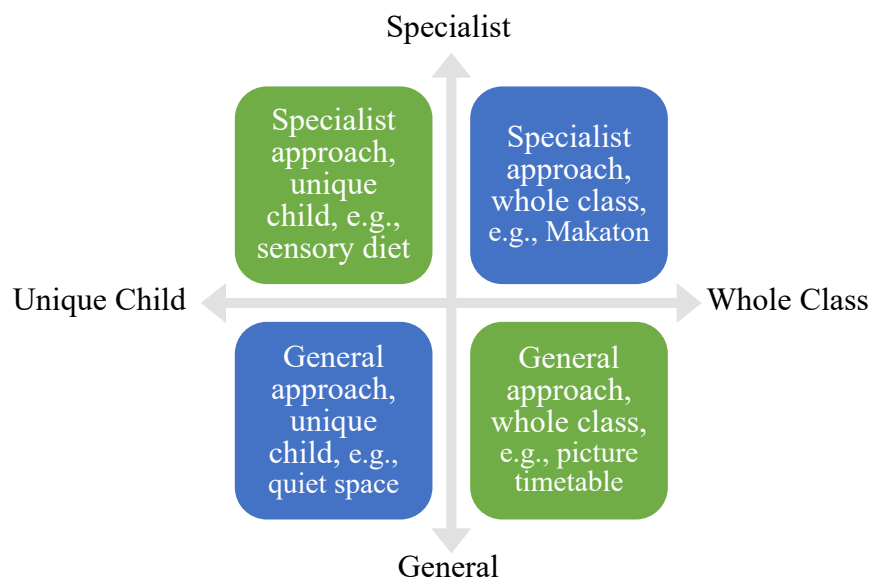
Table 44: Inclusive Structures and Processes

Inclusive Area	16 Structural Elements	11 Procedural Elements
Planning	Child's history Objective Group size Resource choice Staff support Time and place	Delivery Specialist support needs
Assessment	Record-keeping Smart targets Timescales	'Can do' focus Consultation Reflecting on practice
Teaching	Group size Knowing the child Resource choice Staff support	'Routine' interventions Consultation Specialist support needs
Environment	Neutral décor Physical structure Visual structure	Purposed Resource moderation Sensory support

The rationale for interpreting practices in this mode was commensurate with thinking that structural and procedural elements can be used as gauges used to assess the quality of early years provision (Melhuish and Gardiner, 2019) and levels of pupil participation (Coelho et al., 2019). It was not my intention to make a personal judgement of the quality of the practices reported, but to show how these compared with reports in the literature and could be framed as indicators of inclusion. In theory, though, the balance of these indicators does invite a judgement of sorts, i.e., that the quality of inclusive practice in a nursery may be determined more by the structures that set the scene for children's participation, than the processes determining how the 'scene' will be enacted (since there were more structures identified than processes). Following Melhuish and Gardiner's (2019) reasoning, this would mean that changes to the structural elements of a nursery could potentially improve the quality of the

provision more so than an emphasis on processes. However, their argument was couched, cautiously, in terms of enhancing staff qualifications or staff to pupil ratios, instead of inclusion. Thus, in my (equally cautious) interpretation of the interview data, a key starting point in the consideration of structural changes would alternatively concern the conditions for learning. Given the duality of approaches embracing differentiation and equality determined in the questionnaires, these conditions would ultimately suit the diversity of pupil needs and warrant a high level of expertise in their establishment (which is perhaps where qualifications may be a concern). To satisfy these expectations, or to be fully inclusive, the implications are such that staff must embrace a biaxial pedagogy – one which symbolises efforts to prepare and deliver programmes that are general or specialist, in approach and by cohort (See Figure 61).

Figure 61: Specialist and General Inclusive Nursery Practices



The narrative of two-dimensional practices in the sphere of inclusion is not a new one, according to research conducted by Buysse and colleagues (2001). Their conclusions, though, encompassed general and specialist practices involving the class and the individual (i.e., the green boxes) and were not explicitly applied in reverse (i.e., pertaining to the blue boxes). Intuitively speaking, this makes my exposition a valuable one, since it potentially enriches previous delineations of inclusive practice. More immediately, it creates a subtext for the data concerning the ChASE Scale and EYPs' self-efficacy beliefs – and enables a deeper understanding of them.

9.4 Perceptions of Self-Efficacy in Relation to Inclusive Practice (RQ1)

The ChASE Scale was used to measure staff perceptions of their ability to include children with ASLCN across four domains, which covered an understanding of the diagnoses, relationships, teaching and the environment. Whilst the perceptions were shown to vary from one EYP or domain to another, the variations were not unexpected, as different situations solicit different types of self-efficacy (Pajares, 1996) and people differ in their thoughts and skills (Dimopoulou, 2016). What was more surprising, was the margin of variations and the strength of people's beliefs. Simply put, the variations were small and beliefs were high – whether the participant was a manager or practitioner and whether she worked in or beyond the research county. To some extent, this should be cause for celebration, for it counters research suggesting that EYPs lack faith in their teaching abilities (McConkey and Bhlingri, 2003). On the other hand, it invites questions as to the accuracy of the self-report measures and their consonance with actual practice. Criticisms regarding the sensitivity of self-efficacy scales, for example, have a long history via researchers like Eastman and Marzillier (1984), and overestimations of self-reported competencies have already been documented by Trivette et al. (2012). Yet, in my case, I would argue that any criticisms and doubts relating to the ChASE data might be offset by their congruence with the interview data – and tempered by staff accounts of practice that seem congruent with measures of belief and Bandura's (1997) *Self-Efficacy Theory*.

9.4.1 Contrasting Judgements of Effective Practice

When the interviewees provided examples of their inclusive practices, I assumed that these were examples of what they considered to be effective. Assuming this made it especially important to understand how they judged their effectiveness and managed challenge. More than adding context to the strategies they highlighted and creating data that could be triangulated with the ChASE Scale ratings, it would also allow conclusions regarding their self-efficacy beliefs to be intuited. Hannah and Kim's scores, for instance, were the lowest within their manager and practitioner subgroups and both talked about feeling frustrated when things were not going well. As such, they were a potential demonstration of the stated link between low levels of belief, a tendency to dwell on failure (Bandura, 1993) and little expectation of mastery (Bandura, 1997). These connections proved problematic when examined more closely, because those frustrations were historical and later viewed in the context of successes

accrued throughout their career. Indeed, the longevity of their experience – more than 15 years apiece – rather complicated the picture, in light of studies contrarily associating years of experience with mastery (Ruble et al., 2011), and those unable to prove its impact on levels of self-efficacy belief (Guo et al., 2014). What could be said more concretely, was that Hannah and Kim’s views had changed and strengthened in the course of their work – and were at least proof of the dynamic and mutable nature of self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

Just as fluctuations in interviewees’ self-efficacy beliefs were evident in reflections over time, they were also apparent across the four ChASE Scale domains (see Table 45) – with each person believing themselves to be more or less competent in varying aspects of practice. This observation is noted, since it corresponds with research stating that *teachers* can be more skilled in one area than another (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). As none of the interviewees were teachers, the finding implies that conceptions of teacher efficacy have utility in the realm of private EYEC, where teachers are not necessarily employed (Blanden et al., 2017), but where ‘teaching’ duties are nevertheless discharged (See DfE, 2017b).

Table 45: Interviewees’ ChASE Scale Domain Scores

	Children with ASLCN	Relationships	Teaching and Learning	The Environment
Isobel	20	16	22	24
Kim	19	20	17	20
Bethany	20	21	21	22
Hannah	16	19	18	19
Megan	19	23	23	22
Domain Total	94	99	91	107

Note

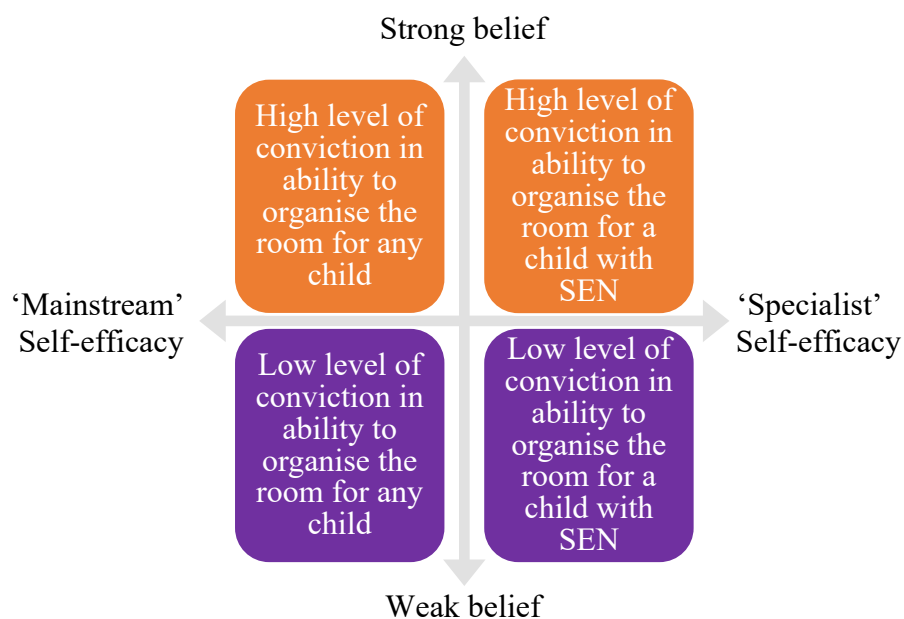
Domain totals represent the sum of coded Likert scores, extracted from Figure 25-26 in Chapter 7. The maximum possible score in any area was 24, or 120 for the group

This application might explain the different ways in which Bethany and Isobel gauged the effectiveness of their work. Although both associated children’s happiness with successful practice, Bethany looked at this more widely within the routines of the day and the room as a whole, whereas Isobel judged this according to a specific child and

activity. This matters because Bethany had the greater experience – and teacher efficacy predicts that less experienced teachers equate mastery with the success of a task (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

The area where staff rated their inclusive competencies most highly was in tasks relating to the environment. These levels of conviction were qualitatively supported by the interview data – in respect of the match between domain scores and the strategies described. Where questionnaire respondents were asked to reflect on their ability to make the setting and parts of the day accessible to all children, examples of how they did this were supplied. Those examples encompassed children with or without ASLCN and were offered without suggestion that a child’s condition positively or negatively affected feelings of efficaciousness. This finding was doubly interesting, owing to assumptions that efficacy beliefs are similar in mainstream and special education contexts (Allinder, 1994), and that work with specific groups of children can intensify feelings of inadequacy (Letts and Hall, 2003). In the area of the environment, it seemed that levels of EYP self-belief were strong and formed irrespective of the characteristics of the children. Further, it suggests that the strength of staff’s perceived self-efficacy beliefs would be upheld (strong or weak), regardless of the type of efficacy being measured (specialist or mainstream), or the needs of the children being supported. This is illustrated by the model in Figure 62.

Figure 62: Environmental Self-Efficacy Beliefs



By way of comparison, the combined strength of belief that interviewees held in the area of environmental practices (89% of the maximum possible) was not matched by their levels of conviction in teaching and learning – which was the lowest of all four domains (at 75%). Whilst this score in itself is high, the difference is perhaps concerning, given the status afforded to teaching (Bradbury, 2019) and that high levels of self-efficacy are said to enable performance (Malinen et al., 2013). One contentious way of interpreting the result is to say that the interviewees were *not* teachers and therefore unlikely to hold high levels of teaching efficacy. However, this explanation runs counter to my earlier argument siting teacher efficacy in early years settings and fails to accommodate Eva’s ChASE scores. Eva *was* a teacher and her teaching and learning self-efficacy beliefs were almost the lowest in the sample. An additional problem with this account is that it overlooks the multifaceted nature of nursery work and is rooted in opinion that weak self-efficacy beliefs are always detrimental to classroom quality. They may not be. The idea is touted because, in a field where many have come to this conclusion in school environments (e.g., Bray-Clarke and Bates, 2003; Malinen et al., 2013), at least one EYEC exception can be found. Guo et al. (2014) discovered that young children made more progress with their language and literacy skills with the staff who had *low* levels of self-efficacy – and consequently reasoned that it was the *lower* levels of conviction that fostered reflections on practice and persistence in seeking solutions.

9.4.2 Sources of EYP Self-Efficacy Judgements

Low levels of self-efficacy are not usually associated with persistence (See Allinder, 1994). Persistence is more typically a feature of high self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997) in educational contexts – characterising teachers who continually appraise their practice and explore problems in children’s learning (Dimopoulou, 2014). In the nursery classroom, this is likely to impact on levels of participation via evidence linking greater pupil engagement to higher levels of teacher efficacy (Guo et al., 2011). Essentially, it would predict that staff with high levels of self-efficacy belief would be more likely to persist in their efforts to engage children in an activity, and that when children were perceived to be engaged, staff levels of self-efficacy belief would either remain intact or increase. These associations have salience in the study context because they featured in interviewee views of competency, and characterised their interactions with children. In the questionnaire data, for instance, overall levels

of self-efficacy beliefs were high. During the interviews, everyone talked about their experiences of failure but gave examples of how they had persisted – and everyone used the responses they drew from children to gauge their effectiveness. Plus, these examples and experiences were numerous enough to prevail as two data themes – and the themes represented the principal sources of information that staff used to form their self-efficacy beliefs (See Table 46).

When Bandura (1997) delineated his theory of self-efficacy, he stated that the strength of self-efficacy judgements varied and that they were affected by information sourced from four domains. These domains, known as Enactive Mastery, Verbal Persuasion, Vicarious Experiences, Physiological and Affective States, were explicated in Chapter 4 and accompanied by my argument for a fifth, called Visual Feedback on Performance. In the exposition, I intuited their relevance in the field of EYEC and this relevance can now be justified with the interview data.

Table 46: Interviewee Sources of Self-Efficacy Belief

Self-Efficacy Domain		Interview Theme	Interview Data Source
Enactive Mastery	Physiological and Affective States	An Ability to Cogitate Successes and Failures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising and addressing pedagogical weaknesses • Recognition of obstacles overcome and solving problems • Succeeding in tasks corresponding to level of expertise
Visual Feedback on Performance			Visual and Verbal Feedback from Children and Adults
Verbal Persuasion		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Praise from people in/outside of the nursery 	
Vicarious Experiences		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peers validating individual's ideas 	

The first interview theme concerned success and failure and can be situated in the mastery domain, as experiences of success (Dimopoulou, 2012) and failure (Skipper and Douglas, 2012) have already been associated with this domain by other scholars. Failure appeared to play a fundamental role in the determination of competency beliefs, according to how it was internalised. Instead of seeing it as a sign of inability,

it was largely accepted as part of work with young children and used as a positive point of reference – either in hindsight, to recognise obstacles that had been overcome, or in situ, as an opportunity to shape and master new practices.

The second interview theme captured the ways in which staff were affected by the feedback they received from others and has been multiply aligned with the domains of Visual Feedback on Performance, Verbal Persuasion and Vicarious Experiences. This alignment comes, in part, from one of Bandura's (1977) views on how to distinguish mastery from the other domains. EYP judgements were sometimes based on information they had *not experienced directly*, but inferred from other people, e.g., seeing a child enjoying an activity, working alongside a colleague, or receiving a compliment from a colleague. Compliments are a feature of information sourced from the verbal persuasion domain and serve as a form of reassurance, increasing feelings of efficacy (Ruble et al., 2011) and levels of effort (Bandura 1986a; 1997). This enhancement was noticeable amongst several interviewees:

I suppose it's a case of me hearin' praise and gettin' praised for something I'm doin' right. Therefore, I continue to do that right.

Kim

[They] always passed comments on what a good job we're doin' (...) That reassurance, I feel like, you got a lot of praise and-, which built up your confidence

Bethany

Bethany's reflections were illuminating, as she also believed in the value of criticism. Negative feedback normally decreases feelings of self-efficacy (Ruble et al., 2011) and persistence (Bandura, 1986a), but in this instance, had eventually acted as an incentive for improvement. Her insights were useful for developing a deeper understanding of how people judged their effectiveness and how their judgements were influenced. Staff were not immune to disappointment or criticism but could benefit from their emotional reactions to it – evolving personally and professionally. Although emotional responses were somewhat understated amongst the interviewees, this interpretation suggested that people's affective states actually had a bearing across

all aspects of their work – and that Bandura’s (1997) physiological and affective domain should be nested within all of the other self-efficacy domains (as in Table 46).

Implicit in the experiences shared by Bethany, was the need for peer support networks. Where Bethany had often relied on external professionals for support, the other interviewees had evidently enjoyed support from colleagues within the setting. More than providing praise after the event, workplace colleagues were also an immediate resource from which to discuss ideas and seek advice. Social comparisons are not always favourable, especially if there is a feeling that a member of staff is less skilled and being ‘carried’ (see Beltman et al., 2019), but in this sample, my impression was such, that whether a peer agreed with her colleague or not, the interaction would be positive. If there was agreement, the knowledge and expertise of the person would be validated. If an alternative were proposed, it would empower the person to overcome the issue at hand. This has consequence in its reference to the domain of vicarious experiences, because this domain acknowledges how people are influenced by those perceived as similar to them (Bandura, 1986a; 1997), and can learn from their successes or mistakes (Dimopoulou, 2016). Translated into practice, this influence was exemplified by Hannah and Isobel, who worked together in the same nursery and used each other as a sounding board. Or by Kim, who commented on the importance of receiving moral support from her team. Or lastly, by Megan, who touched on the benefits of reciprocity, saying: “[I]t is very much a, a team effort (...) I can also support the staff – but then they can support me as well”.

The fifth and final source of information on which the interviewees appeared to base their judgements was consonant with the domain I called Visual Feedback on Performance. In Chapter 4, this domain was formulated on the understanding that when a person performs a behaviour involving someone else, the behaviour results in an experience that dis/confirms his or her initial competency judgement (Bandura, 1989a) – and that this judgement is drawn from the partner’s visual or emotional response to that behaviour. In the study, this was apparent in anecdotes regarding children’s happiness or enjoyment of an activity, and the link that was made between this and staff effectiveness. Everyone mentioned pupil happiness in conjunction with their expositions of capability – and irrespective of whether the children had SEN or not. “Happiness”, furthermore, was a high frequency word in the interview transcriptions and had a connection to children’s families. This suggests that feedback framed as pupil happiness had a double dividend – for, to quote Hannah, “[I]f you’ve

got a happy child, you've usually got a happy parent". If a child enjoyed an activity, the enjoyment would be perceived as a sign of efficacious and communicated to his/her parent later. Then, assuming the communication made the parent happy, this would add to the EYP's sense of efficaciousness:

to get that feedback from the parents was really nice. And I think if parents weren't happy, then they wouldn't bring the children to nursery. So, I think that's a good indicator in itself

Megan

9.5 Relating Inclusive Self-Efficacy Beliefs to Inclusive Practice (RO3)

The discussions in sections 9.3 to 9.4 explore the relationships between findings in the study with findings in the literature and draw conclusions that serve as answers to two research questions. Together, they document my observations of how a sample of early years staff practise inclusion in private nursery settings and how they view their effectiveness – both in terms of the strength of their conviction and in terms of the sources of information they use to make those judgements. In this final part of the chapter, that body of knowledge now serves as a platform for answering the third research question – to consider the extent to which inclusive self-efficacy beliefs influence or are associated with EYP practice. This particular discussion, however, cannot be regarded as a definitive response, owing to the absence of the photovoice data, which would have been produced during a second phase of fieldwork (See Chapter 10).

9.5.1 Formulating Links and Making Connections

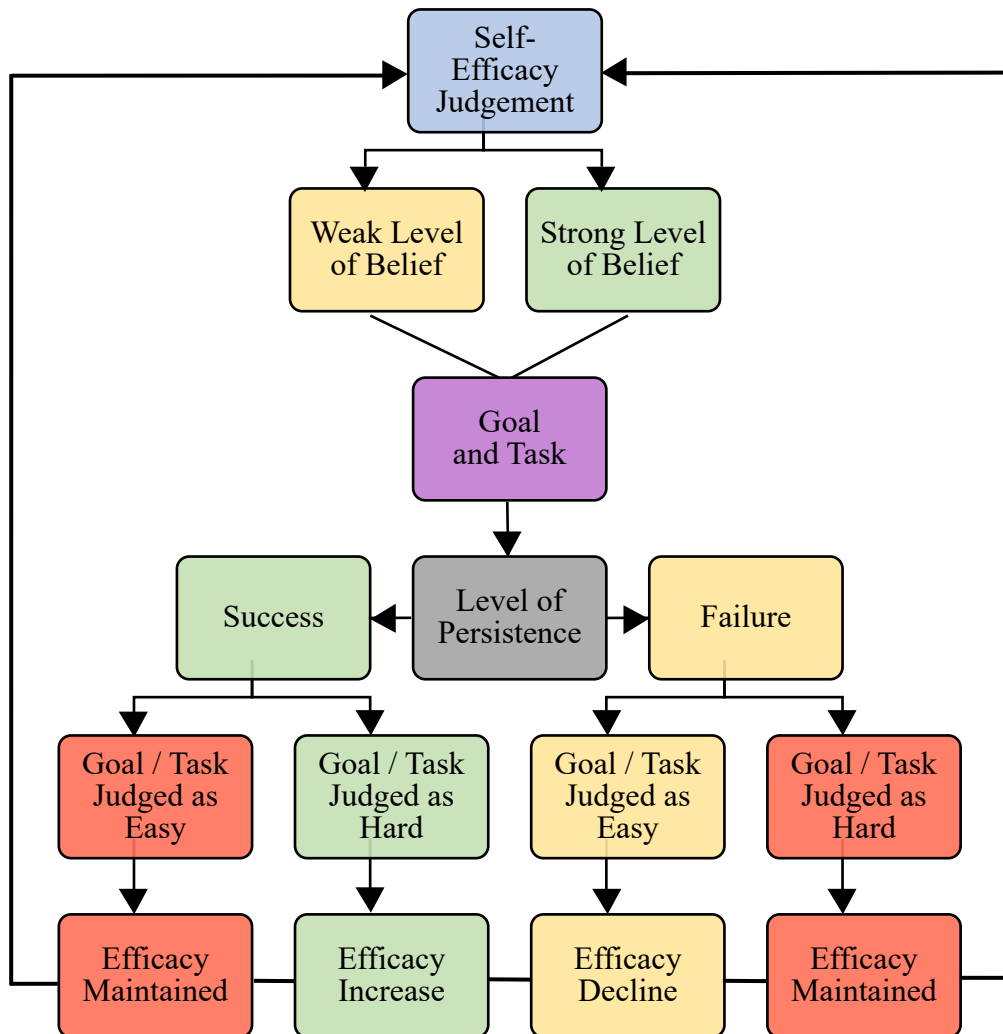
From my review of the literature on self-efficacy, it seemed reasonable to predict that inclusive self-efficacy beliefs would relate to inclusive teaching practices – given the more general assertion that efficacy beliefs can be related to (general) teaching practices (Bruder et al., 2011). Where teachers with a strong sense of efficacy positively influence pupil performance (Kotaman, 2010), for instance, this would be paralleled by high levels of inclusive self-efficacy belief and pupil engagement in a nursery environment. Similarly, where teachers with low levels of efficacy expect few results and exert low levels of effort in their work (Park et al., 2014), this would predispose EYPs with weak levels of conviction to admit defeat more swiftly and to

dwell on their lack of success. Indeed, such parallels seem consistent with the data produced in the study. Just as the ChASE Scale scores were indicative of high levels of EYPs' inclusive efficacy, so there were signs of nursery children reportedly making progress. Every questionnaire respondent said they could cite a specific instance of pupil progress in the last six weeks (item 3, Domain 3) and every interviewee talked about at least one occasion where they had influenced a child's learning. In addition, participant approaches to surmounting problems were indicative of high levels of belief, rather than low levels – driven by persistence in the face of setbacks.

The need for persistence was common to all interviewees, not just as a means of resolving a problem, but also as a means of cultivating satisfaction. Bethany, for example, when reflecting on her work with children with SEN said:

[W]hat makes you carry on and push through it, is that you get to know their, like, what they're capable of (...) [C]elebratin' their little things (...) that's what I enjoy most about the job. Perseverin' through it, havin' patience through it (...) [T]hree months down the line, that smallest achievement is massive

This illustration of satisfaction gained from the mastery of a task considered difficult is not unusual, since the level of challenge attributed to a task affects a person's expectation of success or failure (Dimopoulou, 2014), and experiences of difficulty in a task give meaning to the outcome (Bandura, 1997). Success in a task feels more rewarding when it is perceived as difficult and failure is possible, but less rewarding when it is regarded as straightforward and failure is unexpected. As such, one would not expect levels of self-efficacy to increase when the task is considered difficult or when the performance results in failure. Yet, viewed in the study context, these predictions do not necessarily follow through, as the coloured pathways in Figure 63 attest. This is significant because their outcomes may be a sign of the robustness of the EYPs' self-efficacy beliefs in the study – a validation of the scores recorded on the ChASE Scale and the interviewee reactions to failure.

Figure 63: Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Perceptions of Difficulty Pathways

From my reading of the interview data, failure did not have an adverse effect on the participants' levels of belief, and success was not a guarantee of enhancement. Challenging tasks could still be rewarding. What was important, was how the failure was interpreted – the questions that were asked (e.g., solution-focussed), the expectations that were re-adjusted (e.g., via the child's mood) and the personal attributes that were harnessed (e.g., perseverance).

Failure provided opportunity for staff to think about what had gone wrong and what could be done to increase the likelihood of future success. In this moment, attention was given to the match between their understanding and expectations of the child and of their personal practice and aim. If the goal were considered unrealistic or too ambitious in hindsight, the EYP could continue without loss of face and make the adjustments needed:

[W]hen we look back to our successes like that, we think (...) “What is the priority here for us? (...) That’s the goal for today (...) Pick something small and that’s an achievement for your, for your child; it’s an achievement for you durin’ the day”. And you start again tomorrow

Hannah

This example of resilience and retention of self-efficacy belief in the face of failure could potentially account for the sample-wide scores recorded in Domains 1 and 3 on the ChASE Scale – that whilst they were high, they were not the highest of all the domains. Staff felt they had a solid understanding of the needs of children with ASLCN, accessed this knowledge when an activity did not progress as expected and then recognised that their approaches might need to change. Staff did not try to change the child when things went wrong. They tried to change their own performance. This is favourable first, in its alignment with a philosophy of inclusion – where children’s difficulties are understood as a ‘problem’ with practice, not a ‘problem’ with the child (Sharma et al., 2012). Then second, because it bestows upon the interviewees a high level of personal teaching efficacy (PTE). PTE assumes people have personal control over a situation (Roof, 2015) and are not subject to control by factors in the environment. The interviewees questioned their practice not the child.

9.5.2 The Question of Influence

The approaches that the interviewees described in their inclusion of children with/out ASLCN and their capacity to manage challenge are congruent with the literature on *Self-Efficacy Theory* and inclusion. They relate in terms of the domains from which EYPs draw their judgements and in the domanical variations of expertise. They are aligned in their focus on the needs of the child and the conditions for learning – and are consistent with the categories of structures and procedures considered vital in effective practice. They are also consonant with the persistence needed to surmount obstacles and, finally, are characteristic of the high levels of self-efficacy belief recorded in the questionnaire. Contrary to the pessimistic views of accomplishment associated with low self-efficacy (Schwarzer and Hallam, 2008), staff celebrated their successes and did not dwell on failure. As such, the summary of findings from the data offer fairly compelling evidence of an association between self-efficacy beliefs and inclusive practice. What is less clear, is whether the association is mutually-interactive

or merely co-existent. That is to say, did staff's perceived self-beliefs influence practice and the results of practice influence self-belief? Or was it purely a coincidence that staff held high levels of belief and gave many examples of inclusive practice?

In the statistical analyses, there was no evidence of a relationship between the participants' demographic characteristics and their level of belief. Minimum and maximum years of experience or qualifications, for instance, did not equate to minimum and maximum ChASE Scale scores. Yet, the lack of demographic significance need not be a proxy for 'practical' insignificance, i.e., that participant practices had no relationship with their self-efficacy beliefs or scores. Similar to Bandura's (1977) definition of efficacy expectation and outcome expectation, interviewees believed they were capable of carrying out their work, even when the tasks were perceived as challenging and, further, knew they would eventually be successful. Their expectations, moreover, were tangibly affected by children's reactions and engagement, which typically motivated new courses of practice. Viewing the results in this way helps to make links with previous research, but unfortunately still leaves the research question unanswered. In one sense, self-belief drove inclusive practice, but in another, the result of those practices affected staff beliefs. At this stage, perhaps the most pragmatic way of answering the question of influence or association, is to say that EYPs who have high levels of belief in their competencies are more likely to be effective in their inclusive practices because of the characteristics inherent in that degree of conviction. These characteristics allow EYPs to reflect positively on their practice, to understand the needs and responses of their children, to proactively seek solutions and to persist in the knowledge that they (and thus the children) will ultimately succeed.

9.6 Chapter Summary

The principal aim of Chapter 9 was to answer three research questions. These answers can now be summarised in preparation for the final discussion in Chapter 10:

RQ1: EYP perceptions of self-efficacy belief

- Levels of self-efficacy belief were universally high
- The area of practice attracting the strongest levels of conviction was the environment and this trend was true to all participants

- Depending on the subsample, the weakest levels of belief were shown in the domain pertaining to staff knowledge of children with ASLCN or to teaching and learning
- Interviewees typically based their efficacy judgements on their experiences of mastery and on their interactions with pupils and colleagues
- Each of the domains explicated by Albert Bandura (1997) in his theory of self-efficacy proved relevant to the views shared by the interviewees
- The new domain pertaining to visual feedback was shown to be very relevant and exemplified by the impact of children's happiness on staff practice
- Aspects of teacher efficacy could be related to EYPs' self-efficacy beliefs

RQ2: Inclusive strategies

- Interviewees provided examples of how they planned activities, set up the environment, taught social and communication skills, and assessed progress
- Strategies were predicated on a goal of participation and engagement, and underscored by a philosophy of differentiation and equality
- Approaches and interventions were chosen for their suitability to the child as an individual and to the class as a whole – constituting a suite of practices traditionally associated with the diagnoses of autism and SLCN, and with children of nursery age
- The decisions framing inclusive practice were characteristic of the processes and structures documented in the EYEC literature and potentially proxy indicators of quality and effectiveness

RQ3: The relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and inclusive practice

- The high levels of self-efficacy belief measured in the questionnaire were congruent with the inclusive strategies described by the interviewees
- Experiences of failure and success, respectively speaking, did not automatically lead to declines and increases in levels of conviction
- Whilst the extent to which self-efficacy beliefs influence inclusive practice could not be robustly illustrated, there was evidence to suggest that the characteristics associated with strong levels of conviction had helped EYPs refine the ways in which they included children in their nursery

Chapter 10: Study Reflections and Conclusions

In this final chapter, I reflect on the findings drawn from my research and clarify their contribution to the literature on EYEC, inclusion, children with ASLCN and Albert Bandura's (1997) *Self-Efficacy Theory*. These reflections are grounded in the context of private day nurseries and include attention to the coronavirus pandemic, which broke during the research and impacted on the fieldwork. The intention overall, is to present a balanced critique of my work that honours the social researcher's obligation to reflect on the impact of his/her work (Universities UK, 2019), and conscientizes the ways in which I impacted on the research and participants. In doing so, I will assert the credibility and validity of the study, as well as critically examine its limitations and the role I played as a partial insider. I will clarify the extent to which the research met its objectives, but equally, acknowledge the missing Photovoice Phase and how this could have enhanced the data and findings. These reflections will conclude with my proposals for how the research should be developed in the future.

10.1 Appraising the Research

From the outset, the research was motivated by my work as an advisory teacher and my observation of how some early years practitioners sought advice more often than others. This observation engendered three research questions, which determined the course of the study and its focus on staff beliefs and practices. The study itself, however, had five academic aims that represented its intended contributions to the field. First stated in Chapter 1, these aims were to:

- 1) create new knowledge concerning EYEC, inclusion and self-efficacy
- 2) gather EYP views on the inclusion of children aged under 5 with ASLCN, nationally
- 3) describe examples of inclusive strategies in private day nurseries
- 4) explore the relationship between EYPs' self-efficacy beliefs and inclusive practices
- 5) conduct innovative research through the medium of Photovoice

Three of the aims were fully met (1, 3, 4), one partially met (2) and one unmet (5). This is because the study did contribute knowledge to the field and solicit practitioners' views on inclusion. It did provide examples of the strategies EYPs use to include young children with ASLCN and it did explore their self-efficacy beliefs. Affected by

the pandemic, it did not, however, gather EYP views on a national level, nor entail a phase of photovoice fieldwork. Considered overall, this means I accomplished the majority of what I set out to achieve. Yet, this assertion of success is tendered cautiously, as the satisfaction of aims does not necessarily make the study credible – especially when credibility is concerned with the truth of the data and the researcher’s interpretation (Cope, 2014). To ascertain the credibility of my work, I must state precisely what I believe the study has contributed to the field – and reflect on both the quality of the data and the analyses.

10.1.1 The Study’s Contribution

During my review of the literature, I argued that it is important to understand how private nursery staff perceive their competencies and include children with ASLCN in their setting. This argument was substantiated by an apparent dissonance between the dearth of research on private nurseries (Crellin, 2017), young children with autism (Maich et al., 2019) and SLCN (Stanton-Chapman et al., 2007) – and the level of challenge involved in an EYP’s work. Whilst I discovered that practitioners must deliver high-quality EYEC (DfE, 2017a) and cater for the needs of every child (DfE and DoH, 2015) – amidst concerns regarding their effectiveness (Taggart et al., 2015), pay and working conditions (Manning-Morton, 2006), I found relatively few studies showing how they regard and manage their responsibilities. These discoveries gave my research impetus and meant the findings would embody new knowledge.

Adding to the Literature

The principal findings are summarised in Table 47, under the three strands of inquiry – to illustrate how the data produced during the fieldwork augment the literature (and satisfies aim 1). Where Crellin (2017) and Preston (2013) posited that we know little of the experiences of staff working in private nurseries, for example, I have foregrounded the managers working in the classrooms, the practitioners’ work with parents and the instructional emphasis on education. Where Theodorou and Nind (2010) previously noted that our understanding of how children with autism are included in a nursery is limited, I have described the philosophy underscoring staff practices and their focus on strategies suited to the class and children with/out ASLCN.

Table 47: The Study's Contribution to the Research Domain

Strand	Topics Spanning the Fieldwork	Conclusions Drawn the Questionnaire and Interview Data
EYEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nature of an EYP's job • Career motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational aspects of the job were emphasised more than physical care and play • Assessment formed a key part of staff duties and applied to children of all ages • Support for parents formed a substantial part of staff duties • Managers were included in the ratios and worked with children in the rooms • Contrary to concerns in the literature, staff viewed their job as a career, had been promoted, gained qualifications, accessed training and seemed to enjoy their work
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advantages and disadvantages • The needs of children with ASLCN • Strategies and approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advantages outweighed the disadvantages that were unrelated to the children • Diagnoses were primarily articulated in terms of difficulty and sensory behaviours • A philosophy of equality and differentiation drove efforts to ensure pupil participation and engagement, and was consonant with the sample's conceptualisation of inclusion • Decisions informing staff approaches could be categorised as structures and processes • Approaches and interventions were chosen for their suitability to the child and the class as a whole, and practices comprised a mix of those typically associated with nursery-aged children or children with ASLCN
Self-Efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of strengths • Dealing with challenge • Sources of judgement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Items in the new ChASE Scale were statistically reliable gauges of self-efficacy belief • Self-efficacy beliefs were high regardless of role, experience, training or domain • Levels of conviction were highest in the management of the environment • Failure and difficulty were necessary experiences – enabling staff to develop a sense of achievement or mastery, and judged according to children's responses • Aspects of personal teaching efficacy and the domain of Visual Feedback on Performance were pertinent concepts for interpreting competency judgements

Then, as an extension to Bandura's (1997) *Self-Efficacy Theory* and the scales used to measure levels of competency belief, I have referred to a new domain of self-efficacy, which considers children's responses in the formulation of judgements – and to an innovative and statistically reliable scale, specifically created for EYPs.

The Utility of the Self-Efficacy Findings

Whilst the statements in Table 47 answer the question as to what the study has contributed to the literature, their intimation that EYP self-efficacy beliefs are an important consideration in pursuit of inclusive practice, warrants further clarification. The clarification is necessary because it has implications of accountability, when viewed in the wider context of EYEC. If high levels of self-efficacy belief positively influence teacher performance (Dimopoulou, 2016), and can be equated with the high levels of EYP self-efficacy belief and inclusive practices reported in the study, then Bandura's (1997) *Self-Efficacy Theory* could hypothetically be posited as a solution to the problems limiting provision and the effectiveness of the workforce. Indeed, in these terms, it would hold individuals solely responsible for the quality of practice in their nursery and attribute this to the quality of their self-efficacy beliefs. More pointedly, barriers to inclusive practice would be explained by weak levels of conviction, rather than (or regardless of) factors beyond an EYP's control. Given the complexities of conceptualising inclusion (Norwich, 2014; Bryant, 2018) and the extensiveness of the issues discussed in Chapter 2, this application of Bandura's (1997) theory is obviously problematic – but not entirely surprising.

'Systematising' Self-Efficacy Theory in EYEC

Prior to the presentation of his theory, Bandura himself inadvertently predicted its 'incompleteness' – by noting the diversity of studies examining human behaviour and recognising that self-efficacy is one of multiple influencers (Bandura, 1971; 1986a). Self-efficacy is context dependent (Pajares, 1996) too, meaning that contextual variables must also be factored into behavioural expositions (Reyhing and Perren, 2021). In short, explanations for inclusive 'behaviour' cannot be restricted to the scrutiny of a person's self-efficacy beliefs, nor can these be viewed as the only enablers or barriers to performance. Bandura's (1997) theory provides a framework for understanding differences in EYP practices, but it is not the only way and not a sector solution. EYEC is a multidimensional, multi-layered system of provision and so its

analysis arguably requires a multidimensional and multi-layered framework. Other researchers studying inclusion (Kamenopoulou, 2016) and EYEC (McKinlay et al., 2018), for example, have cited their findings in Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework, which examines a person's interactions with/in different (nested) layers of the environment – and can thus attend to the factors that in/directly affect the individual (Kamenopoulou, 2016). In the McKinlay et al. (2018) study of Australian practitioners, the conditions surrounding work were presented as a set of enablers and challenges, within five concentric circles – distinguishing, e.g., the person from the setting, the profession and the time period. The enablers and challenges described by the authors are very relevant to the English EYEC system, because they also concern professional development, pay, business pressures and sector disparity. Their conclusions are equally notable, for they surmise that the capacity of staff to perform their role *is* affected by factors pertaining to themselves – *and* by an array of interactive factors spanning all levels of the environment. Although it is beyond the remit of my thesis to probe the self-efficacy and inclusion findings within an ecological model (or others), Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework does offer future potential. First, in its possible attention to the interplay of variables influencing EYEC provision. Second, for its scope to absorb or nest Bandura's (1997) theory and view self-efficacy beliefs as interactive, person-level factors influencing practice. Then third, because its cross-referencing of data may align with a mixed methods design.

10.1.2 Gauging the Credibility and Validity of the Findings

One of the advantages of framing the research within a mixed methods design, was that I was able to collect data using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and could cross-reference the data sets – to look for dis/similarities at the level of the participant or an emerging theme. Staff views on inclusion and their competency beliefs, for instance, were deduced from their responses to the questionnaire and interview items (addressing aims 2 and 4), and the data harvested from one instrument was compared with the data from the other. This triangulation of multiple methods is considered good practice, as it deepens understanding of a particular phenomenon (Pandey and Patnaik, 2014) and acts as a measure of the study's credibility and validity – assuming that a finding has salience if it is repeated via different means (Ndanu and Jacinta, 2015). As credibility is normally used to gauge the quality of qualitative research and validity is used to rate quantitative research

(Cope, 2014), their combination (triangulation) theoretically constitutes a gauge for judging the quality of a mixed methods study. Indeed, given the lack of consensus between scholars as to the methodological perspective of triangulation that should be used (Abdallah et al., 2018), this approach seems a good fit. The points are made because they help to explain why the levels of self-efficacy belief delineated in the study should be regarded as credible and valid. When I triangulated the questionnaire and interview data, the high levels of self-efficacy belief were noticeable in both sets, i.e., the same result was produced by two different instruments – and so the finding is likely to be salient. This salience is also meaningful in the wider context of the results, since the conclusions I drew all ultimately relate to these high levels of conviction.

10.2 Judging My Competency as a Researcher

If the levels of self-efficacy belief were not credible and valid, then it would be hard to assert the credibility and validity of the answers I gave to the research questions – and thus the merits of the study overall. For the research to be respected for its quality, the data has to answer the questions (Saidin and Yaacob, 2016) and it must be salient (Ndanu and Jacinta, 2015). Yet, in the process of answering the questions, there should also be recognition of the fact that the researcher is an instrument that analyses the data (Nowell et al., 2017) and that biases cannot be eliminated from the interpretations (Teusner, 2016). As Thurairajah (2019) posits, research is not conducted in a vacuum but in a social world, which involves and is influenced by people. Just as my research was situated in a group of private nurseries and entailed interactions with practitioners, so these interactions created and shaped the data. The tensions are not unknown in the methodological field, however, and their impact can be mitigated when they are conscientized (Teusner, 2016). One way of doing this is through the act of reflexivity, as this compels a researcher to think about his/her interactions with the participants and how these influenced the data (Thurairajah, 2019). The approach is not without its criticisms, for it runs counter to the tenet of objectively constructed knowledge (Berger, 2013), potentially placing researchers (Thurairajah, 2019) and their personal observations more prominently in the study. Perhaps this is why its advocates additionally stress the importance of being systematic (Pandey and Patnaik, 2014) and call for a focus on the nature of the researcher-participant relationship, not just the researcher (Thurairajah, 2019).

10.2.1 The View from Inside the Research

Thurairajah (2019) discusses the relationship between researchers and participants in terms of a power differential or theoretical border, which distinguishes the two parties from one another and allows data to be shared, to varying extents. Within the discussion, she describes the ‘insider researcher’ and three levels of sharing – where some, none or all of his/her personal views are revealed in response to what participants say. It matters because I served as an insider researcher, i.e., possessed similar characteristics to the participants (Saidin and Yaacob, 2016), and could have used my nursery experience to influence the interviewees’ remarks. Plus, for the four interviewees who had known me as an advisory teacher, they equally had opportunity to solicit views from me. In many respects, the connections were beneficial as they encouraged people to be more candid, but in others, did pose challenge. Some of the interviewees, for example, used people’s names to illustrate their points and occasionally referred to my former role. This blurring of the researcher-participant boundary made me a little uncomfortable but was dealt with in two ways. In the first instance, in situ, the reference was acknowledged non-verbally, i.e., with a nod or smile, and then accompanied by a comment that confirmed the interviewee’s point without offering a personal opinion. In the second instance, I ensured that people’s names were replaced with a pseudonym or job title in the transcripts and in the results.

One other issue concerned the potential loss of data or misinterpretation. In keeping with Thurairajah (2019), I noticed that people occasionally spoke with the assumption that I knew what they meant – and thus with a degree of economy they might not have employed with someone unfamiliar with nursery practices. As an illustration, one interviewee used the phrases “you know” or “sensory diets” and “neutral environments”, which were comprehensible in the context of my previous work experience, but which needed elaboration to ensure the points represented her views, not mine. Unintentionally, it seemed as if I was in/directly influencing the course of the conversation, beyond what might be expected in a semi-structured interview – where flexibility is permitted in the responses (Cohen et al., 2008). Interviewees made ‘assumptions’ about me and this affected what they said. What they said prompted my responses and influenced the phrasing of the next question. Like Teusner (2016), I therefore kept a notebook reflecting on each interview and this made me more attentive to potential problems. Then, in the early stages of the data analyses, I sent each person a summary of their interview, so that everyone had opportunity to

dis/confirm what I had written. No one queried the summaries, so I assumed my interpretations were accurate.

10.2.2 Appraising Evolutions in the Research

This transparency, i.e., foregrounding and documenting processes serving the fieldwork is intentional, and arguably increases the integrity of my work. When there is a direct link between the researcher's inferences and the data presented, it is easier for the reader to see how the conclusions were made and to judge the trustworthiness of the research (Nowell et al., 2017). Trustworthiness is a measure of quality in qualitative studies and appraised with the criteria originally described by Lincoln and Guba (Cope, 2014). These criteria have quantitative counterparts (Denscombe, 2008) and both sets of terminology are précised in Table 48.

Table 48: Criteria Used to Judge Research Quality

Qualitative Research Sourced from Nowell et al. (2017)	Quantitative Research Sourced from Denscombe (2008)
Credibility Accuracy of researcher's depiction of participant data	Validity Data appropriateness, accuracy and precision
Dependability Consistency of data documentation, covering all research steps	Reliability Consistency of data produced by the research instrument/s
Confirmability Evidence of how conclusions were derived from the data	Objectivity Absence of bias in collecting, analysing and interpreting the data
Transferability Extent to which the findings apply beyond the sample	Generalizability Extent to which the findings apply beyond the phenomenon

The qualitative criteria include the credibility gauge mentioned earlier, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Nowell et al., 2017) – and are here emphasised more than the quantitative data, because the majority of my data were qualitative (and the quantitative data were statistically non-significant). Dependability concerns the

robustness of the instruments and the clarity of their exposition, which should enable other researchers to replicate the study (Denscombe, 2008) – and therefore requires the careful documentation of every step (Nowell et al., 2017). It is particularly pertinent in my study, to track the changes I made to the online questionnaire between the two launches – and for the fact that the Photovoice Phase did not go ahead (contrary to research aim 5). This is why the changes, which were necessary responses to the challenges that arose, were documented in the two methodology chapters (5-6).

Saidin and Yaacob (2016) suggest that an insider researcher is well-placed to overcome obstacles that arise during a study, because s/he has a personal commitment to the research. This commitment was certainly needed in the face of my problems with recruitment. Although discussions of recruitment difficulties (Archibald and Munce, 2015; Marks et al., 2017) had led me to anticipate them, my preparations preceded COVID-19, which I obviously did not foresee. One of the immediate consequences of this, was that nurseries across the country were forced to close to every child, except those who were vulnerable or had keyworker parents (Penn et al., 2020). From a research point of view, this raised a potential barrier to the continuation or richness of the fieldwork, as it reduced the reach of the questionnaire planned nationally and meant that I was unable to gather views from practitioners across the country (impeding aim 2). Not only were the nurseries operating at a reduced capacity, but the charity that I had planned to launch it with, was no longer able to support the research. This was a likely consequence of the pandemic and changing priorities on its part, and of the delays in communication on my part (as I considered how to proceed). My response was to delay the launch and to seek publicity support elsewhere, i.e., from other early years organisations and social media platforms.

10.2.3 Learning in Hindsight

The problems I faced with recruitment were fortunately surmountable and in hindsight, created experiences that have enriched my understanding of what it means to be a researcher carrying out real-world research. At the very least, they have made me think about what I have learned and what I would have done differently. In point of fact, one of the quotes extracted from my interview with Hannah now seems particularly insightful when viewed anew:

Not every activity goes well, even for children that know exactly what they're doin' (...) [but] every activity that we plan crosses so many areas of the curriculum (...) [I]t's very hard for an activity to be a complete failure. There's always gonna be some learning from there.

By replacing the words “children” and “curriculum” with ‘researcher’ and ‘field’, the comment could, informally speaking, just as easily apply to researchers and their methodology. In my case, there were definitely research activities that did not go to plan – the recruitment, the questionnaire launch, the Photovoice Phase – but the research was not a failure and there was ‘learning’. This learning is not only epistemological knowledge that has contributed to the field, but also methodological knowledge that has contributed to my development as an early career researcher. If I were to prepare the study again, I would do the following:

Recruitment

- Plan further in advance to ensure that I can present my research at the principal network meetings where there are larger audiences
- Approach a wide range of early years organisations from the start
- Offer to talk about the research onsite in the nurseries and provide consent forms that can be completed there and then, if preferred. Far (2018) adopted this approach in her PhD study of university students and found it beneficial
- Consider an alternative or additional sampling method, such as snowball sampling (Cohen et al., 2008), where potential participants are recommended to me by other potential participants
- Post examples of the questionnaire to settings that express an interest in the research, so that people can see what it would involve and how it links to their experience
- Communicate more by telephone to make the process less formal and more engaging

Methodology

- Begin the fieldwork with the Photovoice Phase rather than the Survey Phase, so that the research demands decrease with each activity, not increase

- Pilot the questionnaire so that changes can be made before the fieldwork begins
- Make the option of completing the questionnaire on paper more explicit
- Simplify the participant information sheet that was embedded in the second questionnaire

My overall aim would be to make the research more appealing (attracting a larger number of possible participants), more accessible (increasing the number of consenters) and more user-friendly (decreasing the number of withdrawals). Such efforts would, ideally, increase the size of the participant sample and the amount of data produced. In turn, this would help to address a principle limitation of the study – namely the number of people who took part. Generalising the results to people and contexts beyond the study, e.g., to teachers in primary schools, or even transferring them to another group of EYPs, for instance, would be problematic, given that the results are based on 15 participants. A sample size of 30 is usually the minimum expected when sampling purposively (Gentles et al., 2015). All of these efforts, however, would be subsumed within one core goal: to carry out the Photovoice Phase.

10.3 Reflecting on the Photovoice Methodology

In Chapter 5, Photovoice was described as a research tool (PhotoVoice, 2019) or process (Strack et al., 2015), which involves participants using a camera to communicate their views on a topic that has personal relevance to them. The rationale was expounded in the course of the chapter and the fieldwork was outlined as the sum of two parts, which would have entailed staff photographing aspects of their work and discussing the images in a group. In the process, this would have yielded visual examples of how children with ASLCN are included in their nurseries and given me an additional and tangible source of data with which to answer RQ2. This tangibility is significant, as it could have countered the subjectivity concerns associated with self-reported competencies (Trivette et al., 2012). When staff wrote or talked about their practice in the questionnaire and interviews, for example, they were basing their responses on a personal assessment of their approaches, rather than say the results of a formal piece of coursework or a classroom observation – and I trusted their truth and accuracy. Photographs would have offered a non-threatening way of checking these responses, since an image can record something that actually happened (Grady, 2001) and is an immediate source of evidence (Wang and Burris, 1997). Plus, given that

people have different ways of photographing their world (Grady, 2001), any commonalities discovered in the comparisons between the practitioners would have strengthened the salience of the findings.

If the photovoice fieldwork had gone ahead, the focus group discussions would have increased and enriched the scope of the photographic comparisons. FGDs are known for their capacity to produce data that can be triangulated with other sources (Cohen et al., 2008) and discussions of images tend to provoke greater participant involvement (Perry, 2006). This is because images can help people articulate their thoughts more easily (Taylor, 2002) and situate the discussion in something that is comprehensible to both the viewer and the photographer (Harper, 2002). People have their own understanding of what a photograph means (Killion, 2001) but / so any image will have multiple possible interpretations (Grady, 2001). From a research standpoint, this renders the participant's explanation crucial and allows the researcher to see his/her view more clearly (Taylor, 2002). That level of insight would have been highly beneficial in my study, as it would have enhanced my understanding of how the questions were perceived and helped the practitioners themselves to reflect more precisely on their practices. Not only this, the visual frame of reference may have acted as an aide memoire for those interviewees who were a little shy – or reduced some of the hesitations surrounding the questions on self-efficacy. Some people found it difficult to explain their judgements of competence and the photographs may have alleviated this challenge. I know from my work experience (and now the data), that staff regularly use photographs as an assessment tool.

10.4 New Research Directions

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of running the FGD would have been to observe the effect that the participants had on each other. In Perry's (2006) photovoice study of students learning online, people were naturally curious as to what their peers would say and were often inspired by their comments – for a remark from one person would trigger a response from another. This communal sharing of ideas is meaningful in my research context, in respect of the emphasis on staff's interactions with other people. When I analysed EYP responses to the questionnaire item concerning roles and responsibilities, Partnership and Teamwork emerged as a key code and covered statements relating to children and families, colleagues and external professionals. The accent recurred in the interviews and the recurrence suggests that it

could be worth pursuing as a new direction research. The current study was grounded in my interpretation of self-efficacy and created a platform for exploring inclusive practices – but only at the level of the individual and in relation to children. It did not pursue people’s beliefs as a collective, nor did it appreciate how much of an EYP’s role is dedicated to ‘including’ parents. Now equipped with the knowledge of how valuable partnership and teamwork is in a private nursery – and realising how much of that work involves families, these findings warrant further examination.

Exploring ‘The Power of Collective Efficacy’

When I wrote about Bandura’s (1997) *Self-Efficacy Theory* in Chapter 4, I showed how the theory has been applied to school teachers (Krammer et al., 2018) and considered its relevance to EYPs. For the purposes of my research, the discussion emphasised beliefs at the level of the individual, but it would have been possible to write about their beliefs as a staff group, due to the many studies exploring collective self-efficacy (Donohoo et al., 2018). In fact, Bandura (1993) acknowledged the significance of group beliefs in an earlier work – noting that teachers perform their duties within a social structure and positively or negatively shape the culture of a school through the beliefs they have about its capability. The term ‘collective efficacy’ was formulated later (Donohoo et al., 2018) and thenceforth concerned both a person’s judgment of the capability of the group and the shared belief that their efforts will be successful (Dimopoulou, 2016). Within this exposition – which Donohoo and her colleagues (2018, p.41) entitled: “The Power of Collective Efficacy” – individual members of a group commonly believe “that through their unified efforts they can overcome challenges and produce intended results”. Given the socio-political issues surrounding work in EYEC (Cameron and Moss, 2020), the complexities involved in meeting the needs of children with autism (Crosland and Dunlap, 2012) and SLCN (Cross, 2011) – and the study emphasis on teamwork, collective efficacy beliefs are likely to have ramifications for staff practice in an inclusive nursery.

Collective Efficacy in Relation to Teamwork

In theory, collective efficacy would relate to the beliefs EYPs have about the capacity of their colleagues to include a child with ASLCN in an activity and these would ultimately influence the behaviour and effectiveness of the team. Teamwork persisted as a key theme throughout the fieldwork and it was clear that the interviewees

held positive views of certain peers, valuing the support they had provided. This is interesting, as it means the interviewees were using and indirectly voicing judgements of their peers in the course of formulating their responses. When an interviewee commented on the relationship she had with a colleague, she was presumably reflecting on her interactions with that person and using the appraisal as a frame of reference for the remark that followed. What was also interesting, was that these judgements not only intimated gains for the practitioner (feeling supported), they also connected to future expectations of her colleague's practice and gains for the children. As an illustration from the interview data, Bethany and Isobel said:

if the staff's there modellin' stuff like Makaton, they under-, they get more of an understanding and concept of what they're meant to be doin' in that area

But all our children know about all our things on our lanyards mean. So, it's nice that everyone's followin' the same page. All on the same hymn sheet.

In the original analyses, these extracts were used to explain how the staff supported children's communication skills, relative to the interviewee. Now, however, it is possible to frame these examples of practice as a collective judgement. Bethany has connected the actions of a member of staff in general to a child accessing an area, whereas Isobel has linked the actions of everyone in her room with a child's ability to follow a timetable. These judgements are notable because if they are representative of collective efficacy beliefs, they could indicate different levels of strength between the interviewees. Bethany's use of the phrase "if the staff's there" has connotations of doubt that contrast with Isobel's assurance that "everyone's followin'".

Collective efficacy beliefs are said to have a similar effect on levels of effort and persistence to personal self-efficacy beliefs (Dimopoulou, 2016), meaning that when levels are low, staff tend not to persist in their efforts (Donohoo et al., 2018). Using the example above, this would predict lower levels of persistence and effort from Bethany and higher levels in Isobel. These predictions are obviously simplistic and purely hypothetical – but are at least an early indication of how collective efficacy beliefs might have influence in a nursery. Unfortunately, it is difficult to draw any firm

conclusions at this stage or to substantiate them with research in the EYEC field simply because that research is not available. At present, research on collective efficacy appears to be more plentiful in mainstream settings (Dimopoulou, 2016) and tends to focus on beliefs relating to the capability of the school, rather than groups of staff in individual classes (Krammer et al., 2018). For these reasons, my idea of investigating collective beliefs in relation to teamwork seems not only an appropriate extension of the present study, but also a necessary one. A study of the collective efficacy beliefs held by EYPs would add breadth to the literature base (by covering the early years phase) and, crucially, have salience for every nursery child. This is because collective efficacy beliefs are said to affect pupil achievement (Donohoo, 2018) and pupil achievement is a known concern for early years children (DfE, 2017a).

Collective Efficacy and Classroom Dynamics

When Bandura (1993) talked about measures of teachers' collective efficacy beliefs, he asserted that these vary across the school phases, in line with the educational demands that are placed on the children: as children get older, scholastic demands increase and the strength of staff beliefs decline. However, this association was subject to variation in the initial years of education, where the very youngest children were said to be less ready for instruction and then became more responsive. Teachers' collective beliefs start low, rise to a peak and then decline over time, as the extent of children's strengths and difficulties become more apparent. In other words, that teachers' collective sense of belief in their ability to influence children's achievements is affected by the profile of the children. Apart from the contentious intimation that demands on (and thus expectations of) early years children are low, this interpretation of staff beliefs is striking, since it contrasts with the high levels of self-efficacy discerned in my study. Their levels of belief, furthermore, seemed consistent across the nursery cohort – unaffected by the children's age, SEN or condition. This in itself is also striking, when compared with research by Krammer et al. (2018), who investigated levels of collective efficacy *and* self-efficacy amongst groups of class staff. They discovered that the characteristics of the class had an impact on collective efficacy belief but little impact on their self-efficacy. So, whilst the children's characteristics did not appear to affect the EYPs' self-efficacy beliefs in my study, they may have influenced their collective efficacy beliefs. New research would usefully explore these potential associations.

Influencing Collective Efficacy and Inclusive EYEC Practice

The Krammer et al. (2018) study is one of many exploring the variables that impact on levels of collective efficacy. In relation to inclusion (Lyons et al., 2016), this focus has involved an examination of how such beliefs can be cultivated and the benefits they have for an organisation as a whole (Donohoo and Katz, 2017). It is pertinent in the context of EYEC, as the findings suggest that high levels of collective efficacy foster a culture of positivity and proactivity – and could mitigate the impact of issues affecting the profession. Job satisfaction (Goddard and Salloum, 2012), socioeconomic status (Donohoo, 2018), a commitment to inclusion and effective teaching (Lyons et al., 2016), for instance, have all been linked to measures of collective efficacy. This potential is predicated on the assumption that when levels are high, people share in the willingness to act in the face of setbacks – and are less likely to succumb to external pressures (Goddard and Salloum, 2012) or political tensions (Hochwarter et al., 2003). Communality is notable, as people do not work without an awareness of their colleagues' beliefs and performance; when an individual has faith in the capacity of a co-worker, it has an energising effect on the person and strengthens belief in the group's ability to succeed (Goddard and Salloum, 2012). In respect of inclusive practice, this is consonant with the EYPs' view of inclusion and their high levels of conviction – but intuits that the success of inclusion is more than a personal belief in one's practice (as noted in 10.1.1), or an assumption that everyone will be inclusive. There must also be a *mutual* belief in each other's capabilities; congruence in what is judged as effective; a shared expectation of accomplishment; and a collective disposition to surmount obstacles.

Collective Efficacy in Relation to Parent Partnership

Based on the research outlined so far, it is evident that collective efficacy beliefs have implications for the staff and the children working within the nursery. Yet, it is additionally plausible that they would exert influence beyond the nursery, as well. Partnership with parents was key in the coding for the questionnaire data and qualified by comments from the interviewees. Before that, its value was equally apparent in my review of the literature (Elfer, 2007; Sira et al., 2018). What was not evident from my research, was the extent to which this partnership influenced the beliefs that staff held regarding their competencies. Parent partnership obviously formed a considerable part of EYP duties and responsibilities, and staff appreciated the feedback they received

from families, but the efficacy measures centred on their perceived capacity to educate and care for the children, not their perceived capacity to work with parents. The observation is important, as successful relationships with parents are vital elements in the determination of children's achievements (Shook, 2020) and inclusion success:

When parents and teachers establish and maintain a healthy relationship, which consists of shared beliefs and the commitment for positive relationship[s] (...) to support their children's development, the outcomes of inclusive practices increase not only for children but also for parents.

Sucuoğlu and Bakkaloğlu (2018, p.1190)

Whilst relationships with parents were largely portrayed in a favourable way during the interviews and their contributions were respected, there were occasional signs connoting fractures and differences of opinion:

you're rushin' to the door, cos you can't wait to tell them that, like, "Oh, they've, they done it and it's gonna be a big thing for you at home". Cos I always feel like it eases pressure on the parents (...) [T]hey rely on you *so* much

Bethany

I think parents don't appreciate or acknowledge what we actually do. So, they don't understand like all the stuff we have in place for their child who has got the needs (...) [T]hen when we come to them with like, "This is what we are doin'", they're like, "Oh Right. Ok". "So, can you do it at home now as well?"

Isobel

With an emphasis on staff-parent interactions, these extracts are examples of 'judgements' that position the practitioner as the expert and the parent as the subordinate – where either the parent is reliant on the EYP (e.g., via Bethany) or the child's education and care is reliant on the EYP (e.g., via Isobel). It would be unreasonable (and contrary to the rest of the data) to suggest that these positionalities

are fixed and generalised in Bethany's and Isobel's views of their parent-relationships, but they do help to explain how relationships will be underlined by certain beliefs and tensions, regardless of their nature or importance. These staff/parent tensions are not surprising, though, as they have already been documented in the field. Parents, for instance, are blamed for their child's behaviour (Todd et al., 2014) or not regarded as an equal (Shook, 2020). Or in contrast, it is the staff who are negatively received (Sucuoğlu and Bakkaloğlu, 2018) or criticised by parents dissatisfied with the time and resources allocated to their child (Shook, 2020). Framed within a potential study of parent-staff efficacy beliefs, these observations could be seen as an acknowledgement that when parent-staff relationships are under strain, they will be characterised by one (or each) person's doubts in the capacity or commitment of the other. Further, if levels of parent participation can be influenced by their efficacy beliefs and those of the 'teachers' (Bandura, 1993), then these will ultimately have a bearing on the child. In the future, it would thus be useful to explore EYP views of their interactions with parents and the impact of those beliefs on practice.

10.5 Final Remarks

The Research Context

When I embarked on my study of early years practitioners working in private day nurseries, I did so in the knowledge that the results of my inquiries would enhance the literature base. Many researchers have looked at self-efficacy in the context of teachers and mainstream education, but few have studied self-efficacy in the sphere of autism (Dimopolou, 2016) or EYEC (Guo et al., 2011). We may know much about how children learn in the early years, but we still know relatively little about the staff who are responsible for that learning (Crellin, 2017). Instead, most of what we know about life in EYEC seems to be encased in government rhetoric or debated as points of great concern. On the surface, EYEC is envisaged as an essential social investment (Adamson and Brennan, 2014), which enables parents to work, shapes children's future outcomes as an adult (Lewis and West, 2017) and is a crucial means of enhancing the national economy (Campbell-Barr, 2012). Below the surface, the notion of free and accessible childcare for parents is hamstrung by the complexities of the funding entitlements (Lewis and West, 2017) – and its insufficiencies are making it difficult for nurseries to remain open (NDNA, 2018e) and fulfil the demands made on them. Private sector practitioners are charged with great responsibilities on the one

hand but set apart from their public counterparts on the other, via their status, pay and working conditions (Hevey, 2018). Caring aspects of their role are meant to be valued but seem difficult to reconcile with an underlying agenda on school readiness (Van Laere et al., 2012).

These ‘muddles and contradictions’ were brought sharply into focus on the 23rd March 2020 – midway through my fieldwork – when nurseries and early years settings in England had to close in response to the pandemic (Early Years Alliance, 2020):

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that childcare is now much more visible to government and employers. It is being seen, as it wasn't before, as an essential and integral part of the education and employment infrastructure (...) The muddle and contradictions of the sector (...) are being highlighted as never before.

Penn et al. (2020, no pagination)

Those ‘highlights’ constituted financial costs for the nurseries and practical costs for their families – and the two were not mutually exclusive. The percentage of settings estimated as operating at a loss more than doubled from 11% before the pandemic to 25% during the outbreak (Blanden et al., 2020), and falls in demand from parents (Early Years Alliance, 2020) meant that the number of 0 to 4-year-olds attending a setting dropped from roughly 1.4 million to less than 250,000 (Blanden et al., 2020). Parents had to assume the role of a teacher and therapist (Parenteau et al., 2020) and to provide specialist programmes of support for their children, without access to their usual services – the emotional impact of which, continues to emerge (Neece et al., 2020). It is hard to predict what the situation will look like 12 months from now but, at the very least, I hope the pandemic has fundamentally changed the way that EYEC – and private nurseries in particular – are regarded and managed. Not only from the outside, where it is seen “as an essential and integral part” (Penn et al., 2020, no pagination) of the national infrastructure, but also from within. EYEC may be hindered by its ‘muddles and contradictions’, but at its heart are the nurseries and practitioners who need more attention, who should take a pride in their work and believe in their impact on young children’s lives. Indeed, in my study, the results provided an example of 15 EYPS who are already doing that.

The Study Results

In the course of my research, I planned to answer three questions, which would reveal how a sample of early years practitioners practise inclusion in their private nursery and how they perceive their competencies. Whilst the number of participants was modest, their profiles were broadly congruent with those described across the sector and provided an arguably sound base for comparing findings in the study with findings in the literature. I found that every member of staff held high levels of conviction in their ability to include children with ASLCN, across four early years domains – and that the result persisted between the questionnaires and interviews. This, together with the fact that the scale items used to measure staff beliefs were statistically reliable, point to the credibility / validity of the finding. Levels of self-efficacy belief were highest in aspects relating to the environment and, in general, predominantly based on their experiences of mastery and their interactions with children. In all, this meant that Bandura's (1997) *Self-Efficacy Theory* was relevant in the context of EYEC and children with ASLCN, and that the newly proposed Visual Feedback on Performance domain was salient.

During the interviews, participants described a range of strategies covering teaching and learning, assessment, social skills, communication skills and the nursery environment – and these bore the hallmarks of the structures and processes associated with inclusive effectiveness in the literature. Differentiation and equality emerged as central concepts in their philosophy of inclusion and this was predicated on a goal of participation and engagement. In practice, it meant providing programmes of support that dually suited the child and the class, and which seamlessly blended bespoke and general early years practices. Although I was unable to determine the extent to which efficacy beliefs influenced EYP strategies, there were indications of how the characteristics associated with high levels of conviction had helped to shape staff practices. One of the reasons that the relationship could not be fully illuminated was due to the loss of the Photovoice Phase. The implications of this were discussed and, as Crellin (2017) found in her study of early years staff, ultimately concluded the research with more questions than answers. These questions, however, allowed me to reflect on what I had learned as a researcher, and are constructive in their scope to show how the research can be extended in the future.

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Appendix 1: Ethical Approval Phase 1

The Secretariat
 University of Leeds
 Leeds, LS2 9JT
 Tel: 0113 343 4873
 Email: ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

[My address details]

**Business, Environment and Social Sciences joint Faculty Research Ethics Committee
 (AREA FREC)**

28 October 2019

Dear Sarah,

Title of study:	“If we’re happy and we know it...” A study of self-efficacy and its impact on the inclusion of children with autism and social communication and language needs in private day nurseries
Ethics reference:	AREA 19-035

I am pleased to inform you that the above research application has been reviewed by the Business, Environment and Social Sciences joint Faculty Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion as of the date of this letter. The following documentation was considered:

Document	Version	Date
AREA 19-035 SC Ethical Application for Phase 1.doc	1	08/10/2019
AREA 19-035 A10 Risk Assessment for Phase 1.docx	1	08/10/2019
AREA 19-035 A9 Research Presentation.pdf	1	08/10/2019
AREA 19-035 SC Ethics Appendices 1 to 6 and 8 for Phase 1.pdf	1	08/10/2019
AREA 19-035 Appendix 7.pdf	1	08/10/2019

Committee members made the following comments about your application:

- Any limits to withdrawal, e.g., once the results have been written up or published, should be made clear to participants in advance.

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the information in your ethics application as submitted at date of this approval as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available at <http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAmendment>.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation and other documents relating to the study, including any risk assessments. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two-week notice period if your project is to be audited. There is a checklist listing examples of documents to be kept which is available at <http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAudits>.

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely,
 [Staff name and details]

Appendix 2: Items Listed in the First Online Questionnaire

1. I have read the terms of consent and am willing to take part in the study.

Yes No

2. What is your job title AND why do you think you chose to do this role?

3. What sort of things does your work involve?

4. Which parts of your job do you believe you do well?

5. How many years have you spent working in a day nursery?

Less than one 1-3 4-6 More than 6

6. Roughly, how many children are there in your nursery?

Less than 40 41-60 61-80 81-100 More than 100

7. How old are the children you work with?

Birth to 2 2-3 3-4 4-5

8. How many years have you spent working with children who have autism or social language and communication needs?

Less than one 1-3 4-6 More than 6

9. How would you describe the condition known as autism?

10. What do you think it means when we talk about children with ‘social language and communication needs’?

11. What do you think inclusive practice involves or looks like?

12. These statements are about children with autism or social language and communication needs.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
I can describe how autism or language difficulties influence a child’s actions						
I can prepare an activity that is matched to the child and his/her way of learning						
I can motivate a child in an activity that s/he may not want to do						
I can calm a child’s behaviour when s/he is angry or upset						

12a. If you would like to add a comment, you can do so here.

13. These statements are about relationships.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
I can use more than one strategy to communicate with a child who is non-verbal						
I can create opportunities for children to communicate with others						
I can help a child interact with peers during a scheduled group activity						
I can teach children with or without autism / language difficulties to play together						

13a. If you would like to add a comment, you can do so here.

14. These statements are about teaching and learning.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
I can adapt a task that a child finds hard so that s/he engages with some or all of it						
I can teach a child to be independent with his/her personal care						
I can give specific examples of the progress that a child has made in the last six weeks						
I can recommend a new target for a child, which is at the right level of challenge						

14a. If you would like to add a comment, you can do so here.

15. These statements are about the nursery environment.	VSD	SD	D	A	SA	VSA
I can organise areas of the room so they are accessible for everyone						
I can change the environment to suit an individual child's sensory needs						
I can teach a child how to follow a daily routine						
I can put strategies in place that help a child cope with changes						

15a. If you would like to add a comment, you can do so here.

16. I put more effort into my practice when:-

- I know precisely what I am meant to do
- I have attended a training course
- My relationship with parents is positive
- I have support from a more experienced colleague
- My key children are working well with me
- I am doing routine and familiar jobs
- My work is praised by another person
- I impact on someone else's practice
- My admin jobs are up to date

- I have been given more work responsibilities
 Other

16a. If you selected 'Other', please specify:

17. What do you think are the advantages / disadvantages of children with special educational needs attending a day nursery?

18. What is your highest level of qualification?

19. How much training have you received, so far, regarding children with autism?

- None Less than one hour 1-3 hours More than 3 hours*

*Please state roughly how much training you have received _____

20. How much training have you received, so far, regarding children with social language and communication needs?

- None Less than one hour 1-3 hours More than 3 hours*

*Please state roughly how much training you have received _____

21. What is your gender?

- Female Male Gender Neutral Other

22. What is your age?

- 17-26 27-36 37-46 47+

23. Would you be willing to take part in an interview with the researcher at a convenient time and place?

- Yes* No

*23a. What email address could I use to contact you?

Note

The term 'social language and communication needs' was employed in the first questionnaire, as it was the one that I had encountered as an advisory teacher and would have been familiar to the participants. In later stages of the fieldwork, the label was changed to '*speech*, language and communication needs' to reflect my review of the literature – and then adopted throughout the thesis, for simplicity

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

Introduction: <i>Statements regarding thanks, interview purpose, duration, ethics, procedure, consent</i>	
<p>Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine open-ended questions • Factual items first • Flexible order of items thereafter • Anticipate opportunity to ask extra questions • Use probes as necessary • Prompts are for guidance and will not necessarily be asked • For simplicity, the meaning of the label ASLCN will be used interchangeably with the word 'child' during the interview. I.e., when I refer to children, I will mean children with ASLCN, unless otherwise stated • Finish with a positive question, endorsing the person's expertise 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the questionnaire, people gave me examples of what their job involves and showed me just how much goes on in a nursery! Can you start by telling me a bit about your job and then say what you believe the main aims of your nursery are? 2. I'd like you to think of a child that you have worked with, who has ASLCN. Without using his/her name, can you tell me some of the things that you did to get to know him/her? 3. When you are planning a new activity for a child with ASLCN, what sort of things do you consider, in terms of yourself and the child? 4. Sometimes, despite our best efforts, a child doesn't respond in the way that we expect or hope. How do you generally deal with and feel about those moments? 5. I've learned that different nurseries record children's learning in different ways. What kind of systems or approaches do you use to capture and share children's achievements? 6. As you know, it can be difficult for some children with ASLCN to interact with other people or to cope with social situations. How do you help children make progress in this area? 7. Children with ASLCN vary in the way they communicate and the extent to which they understand spoken language. What strategies tend to work best in your experience and why? 8. We know that some children need help to cope with / access different parts of the nursery environment. Can you give me some examples of things you have done to make your room suitable for your children? 9. In the questionnaire, you told me that you're really good at [insert example]. When you reflect on your practice, how do you judge what you are doing well?
Conclusion: <i>Statements regarding opportunity to add information / ask questions, outline next steps, give thanks</i>	

Appendix 4: Comparison of Selected Self-Efficacy Scales

Scale	Participant Context	Description	Reference	Comments
Autism Self-Efficacy Scale for Teachers (ASSET)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> America 44 special education teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30 items with no specified domains 11-point scale numbered in tens from 0 to 100, ranging from <i>Cannot do at all</i> to <i>Highly certain can do</i> 	Ruble et al., 2013, p.1158	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis on school-age children with autism Only three scale points are labelled Items open to interpretation, e.g., 28: Motivate this student
Self-Efficacy Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Germany 368 preschool teachers from 118 childcare centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 21 items in three domains 11-point scale numbered 0-10, ranging from <i>Not true at all</i> to <i>Absolutely true</i> 	Höltge et al., 2019, p.344	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scale described but not included Scale items embedded in a questionnaire Implicit reference to children with SEN (x3)
Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice (TEIP) Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mexico 286 pre-service teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18 items concerned with inclusive classroom environments 6-point Likert scale ranging from <i>Strongly disagree</i> to <i>Strongly agree</i> 	Forlin et al., 2010, pp.738-739	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General coverage of disability Phrasing is subjectively emotive, e.g., 'disruptive behaviour' or 'physically aggressive'
Teachers' Self-Efficacy Scale Disabilities (TSESD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UK 77 mainstream and special school teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 45 items with no specified domains 9-point scale numbered 1-9, ranging from <i>None at all</i> to <i>A great deal</i> 	Dimopoulou, 2016, pp.259-263	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis on school-age children with autism Not all points are labelled Items overlap at points, e.g., I can teach all autistic children... (42); I can help all students learn... (43)

Appendix 5: Manager Consent FormUNIVERSITY OF LEEDS
School of Education**Manager Consent Form**
Consent for the nursery to take part in the research study:
Practitioner Views of How They Include
Children in Private NurseriesAdd your
initials next
to the
statement if
you agree

1	I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet dated [date] explaining the above research project and have had opportunity to ask questions.	
2	I understand that there are time implications for the staff who take part in the study and that this may impact on their working day.	
3	I understand that the research involves interviews and that permission may be sought from the researcher (Sarah) to hold interviews with one or more of my staff on the nursery premises should they volunteer to participate.	
4	I understand that the nursery's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw consent at any time during the fieldwork without there being any negative consequences. I will inform Sarah Cobbe eds1c@leeds.ac.uk in the event of my wish to withdraw.	
5	I understand that the nursery will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research and that all information will be confidential and kept securely.	
6	I agree for the nursery to take part in the above research project.	

Nursery Name**Manager Name****Manager Signature****Date**

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
----------------------	----------------------	----------------------

Researcher Name**Researcher Signature****Date**

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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Appendix 6: Participant Information Sheet

Calling all Early Years Practitioners Working in Private Nurseries!



An invitation

Would you like to take part in a study exploring your experiences as an early years practitioner supporting children with autism or speech, language and communication needs (ASLCN)? There seems to be little research on nursery staff, so your views are very important.

Who is the researcher?

My name is Sarah Cobbe and I am a PhD student with more than 20 years' experience in the field of autism. I recently worked as an autism advisory teacher supporting children with ASLCN in nurseries and schools.



What will I be asked to do?

I am inviting as many practitioners as possible to:-

1. Complete a questionnaire online, which may take about 20-25 minutes of your time. It asks questions about your work with children with ASLCN

I will personally invite a smaller group of you to:-

2. Take part in an interview on your site / by phone, which may take about 1 hour of your time. We would talk about your SEN experiences as a practitioner

Do I have to take part?

No! It's up to you to decide. You would need to give your consent at the start of the questionnaire but could withdraw at any time until I've collected your responses.

Are there any risks or rewards if I take part?

There should be no risks but there will be a demand on your time. There are no obvious rewards, but you will be contributing to a study that should raise awareness of the important work you do to support all children!

How are you going to look after my data?



All data will be encrypted, stored securely and then destroyed at the end of the study period. No one will be able to identify you or your nursery in my writing, because your responses will be anonymous, confidential and only shared with people within the University of Leeds, where this is needed.

Notes



- If you would like to see a more detailed version of the study information, please email me, Sarah Cobbe: eds1c@leeds.ac.uk

- If you are unhappy with any aspect of my research, you can email [*supervisor details*]

Appendix 7: Practitioner Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS
School of Education

Participant Consent Form
Consent to take part in the research study:
Practitioner Views of How They Include
Children in Private Nurseries

Add your initials next to the statement if you agree

1	I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet explaining the above research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the data collection without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. I am free to decline my answers to any particular question/s.	
3	I understand that I will not be identified or identifiable in the report, or reports that result from the fieldwork, and that my name will not be linked with the research materials.	
4	I agree for the data collected from me to be stored in an anonymised form and used in the report or reports that result from the research.	
5	I understand that my responses to the questionnaire (and the interview if I take part in this) will need to be kept securely until February 2024 to comply with the data protection systems overseen by the University of Leeds.	
6	I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study may be looked at by auditors from the University of Leeds (where it is relevant to my taking part in this research). I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.	
7	I understand that safeguarding procedures will be followed in the event of any disclosure being made in the course of the study.	
8	I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher Sarah Cobbe edslc@leeds.ac.uk should my contact details change during the project and, if necessary, afterwards.	

Nursery Name

Practitioner Name

Practitioner Signature

Date

--	--	--

Researcher Name

Researcher Signature

Date

--	--	--

Appendix 8: Extract from Isobel's Interview Transcript

S: When you're, when you're realising it, it, it's not as successful as you might have hoped, as, as expected. What is it that you're asking yourself to try and then change [in] that situation?

I: Well, what goes through my mind is, "What can I do to make this child benefit from it? Why hasn't it *worked*? And what can I do to fix it?" (Laughs) They're the questions that go through my mind. I'm not gonna lie, we don't through all them, but eventually we will go back and revisit it and fix what – not what's broken – but what can be redeemed. Just, just make it a little better for them. Because we don't feel like, we don't like them missin' out on stuff, just because maybe they can't join in at that present moment. So, we'll go back to it and let them do it and kind of say to other children, "No, you've had your turn. Now it's such-and-such's turn". So, they will get a go eventually.

S: When you're thinking about those successes, you're thinking about something that has worked or go-, or has gone well. How do you know?

I: In my opinion, when it's successful and when it's gone well, is-. I feel like the child has, has enjoyed the activity and has got *something* out of it. Maybe not what *I* set out for it to be, but they've had *something* out of it at least. But, I think my main thing about doin' activities, is that the children really enjoy it and then they want to do it again (Rising intonation). Because if the child doesn't want to do it, doesn't want to be involved in it, that's where you start havin' a problem then – where they're not gonna want to do anything that you set out for them to do. So, makin' it really enjoyable for *them* is a big key thing. Cos it's, they've got, it's gotta be invitin'. It's gotta be worthwhile for that child. It's gotta have *their* interests in it. Cos if not, it's, it's basically pointless.

S: So, in a moment where you've got a child who's really engaged – that's one of your sort of clues, if you like, that-

I: That it's very successful, yeah.

S: That it's going well, yeah.

I: Cos then if it's successful and they're engaged and they're *involved* in it, you can then elaborate and be like 'in the moment planning'. And err maybe not go to plan with your own activity and go off onto something else. Maybe you set out for like erm a role-play activity, but then end up countin' or doin' other things – maybe readin' a story, cos that's what the child's then been involved in. But the child's *really really* engrossed into it, so you're like, "Right. Ok. Let's change that to go with what they're doin'" and continue it. I think that's why in the moment plannin' works very well (Laughs).

S: (...) Are there any, any other things, do you think, that have an impact on your sense of – I suppose your own well-being really? Um, in terms of your own confidence and dispelling those doubts that you might have? (...)

I: Yeah. The, everything's had an impact from like startin'. Erm, cos when I first started like, I didn't know nothin' from Adam. I was just there to play with the children until I actually started my Level 2. You know like doin' what you do now, not, not realisin' that's what I was doin', d'you know, when you're just playin' with the children. And then looking back now, I was like, "That's really good", because you've got people who come in doin' apprentices now and they don't speak to the children and it's a *really* big thing, that you've got to encourage your apprentices to talk to the children, when that's what they're kind of here to do. So, a lot of it has really impacted to who I am today and how involved I am with the children.