A Learning Spectrum: An Examination of Early Years Pedagogy

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Abstract

As early childhood education policy in England directs pedagogy away from play-based approaches towards formal methods, questions about the most appropriate and effective pedagogies to use with young children have arisen. Often the debate focuses on fully child-initiated play or adult-directed lessons. However, reflecting the varying needs of children, early years pedagogy is more diverse than following one of two approaches. This research examines the range of methods used to support learning in a Reception classroom.

Applying a sociocultural lens, this thesis applies Rogoff's (1990; 1993; 1995) 'planes of analysis' to explore how Reception-aged children learn in school. Woven throughout this thesis, these planes identify the learning roles children adopt in different contexts. From this, the types of learning observed in the data are categorised to highlight the dynamic nature of teaching and learning.

Over six months, a class of Reception children were filmed in different learning situations. The films were shown to the children and used as a stimulus to discuss the content. Data collection and analysis focused on how the children learned, interacted with one another, used adult support and applied previous learning when different pedagogical approaches were applied. Data presentation uses text discussion, excerpts of dialogue and photo stills.

Highlighting the complexity of teaching and learning, the data show that adults frequently adapt methods depending on the children's needs and interests. Much of the observed teaching and learning was neither wholly child-initiated nor adult-directed. What this study refers to as the 'in-between pedagogies' were the most frequently used and effective pedagogies in this Reception classroom. Furthermore, demonstrating the importance of sociocultural practices to motivate children and make learning meaningful to them, the data highlight the inseparability of the pedagogical and social aspects of teaching and learning.

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Abbreviations

AD: Adult-directed
ADFLO: Adult-directed, fixed learning outcome
ADOE: Adult-directed, open-ended
CI: Child-initiated
DfE: Department for Education
EYFS: Early Years Foundation Stage
EYFSP: Early Years Foundation Stage Profile
ELGs: Early Learning Goals
GLD: Good Level of Development
QCA: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
STA: Standards and Testing Agency

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis intends to research early years pedagogy and how Reception children (aged four-five) learn when different pedagogies are applied. While working as a teacher in an inner-city school, data on the children's learning were gathered to gain a better understanding of how they learn during child-initiated (CI) activities compared with adult-directed (AD) tasks.

Applying a sociocultural lens to the research, there is an emphasis on how children use social interaction to learn and learn how to interact socially. The focus of discussion in Chapter 3 and woven throughout the findings and discussion chapters, this research takes the view that learning is a social act and children are socially motivated to learn from their peers and adults. However, it is acknowledged that external factors, such as government policy, can equally impact teaching and learning.

The research discussed in this thesis is set within the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in England and is, therefore, influenced by the Early Years Foundation Stage (the EYFS) and accompanying policy *The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (The EYFS Framework)* (DfE, 2017b). This opening chapter begins with an introduction to *The EYFS Framework*, followed by a discussion on early years pedagogies and then some background information on my motivations for carrying out this research.

1.1 The Early Years Foundation Stage

Throughout this paper, there is frequent reference to *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b). Outlining the safety and welfare, as well as learning and development, requirements for all early years providers in receipt of government funding, *The EYFS Framework* plays a pivotal role in shaping the ECE landscape in England. Central to this thesis, *The EYFS Framework* is the focus of the policy analysis chapter, the subject of discussion in much of the research examined in the literature review and impacts the learning observed and analysed in the data findings chapter.

First introduced in 2008 (DCSF), there have been several revisions made to *The EYFS Framework* over the years (DfE, 2012; 2014; 2017b; 2021). Since writing this paper, a more recent framework (DfE, 2021) has been published but it was the 2017 version that was in place when data were collected for the empirical element of this research project. Thus, it was the pedagogical expectations and concepts of 'good practice' in this publication that impacted how teaching and learning were carried out.

In England, children begin compulsory schooling the year they turn five. Therefore, earlier than in many other countries, most children enter Reception when they are just four years old. As will be discussed throughout this thesis, children's introductory year in school is also their introduction to academic learning. *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) requires children to read, write and carry out mathematical functions, leading to a focus on Literacy and Mathematics and a move towards structured approaches to pedagogy more commonly associated with school (Ang, 2014; Wrigley, 2016; Bates, 2018).

Bradbury (2019a) describes the Reception year as a bridging year between ECE and primary school. As discussed in the next chapter, the experiences children gain while in Reception are often aimed at preparing them for the formal education they will receive in Year 1 (Kay, 2018; Hoskins & Smedley, 2018; Robert-Holmes, 2019). Reception children are normally taught by a qualified teacher, with support from early years practitioners or teaching assistants, in a primary school classroom. This differs from other early years settings that usually offer more open settings and have different staff requirements.

Throughout this thesis, I use the terms 'teacher' and 'adult' to refer to those working in Reception. The term 'teacher' specifically refers to teachers and 'adult' to teachers or other early years staff. It should also be noted that I reference literature that has looked at other early years settings (such as nurseries and preschools) and the term 'practitioner' frequently appears referring to early years practitioners.

The remainder of this section provides background information on *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) and examines the following key areas and how they affect teaching and learning in the Reception year:

- The Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning (CoETL)
- The seven areas of learning making up the curriculum

- Assessment requirements
- CI and AD pedagogies

CI and AD pedagogies are discussed in detail later in this chapter and are woven throughout subsequent chapters. Here, the CoETL, curriculum content and assessment requirements are discussed in relation to how they impact pedagogy.

1.1.1 The Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning

Taking into consideration how young children learn, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) describes three CoETL:

- Playing and exploring
- Active learning
- Creating and thinking creatively

Young children need opportunities to play and access to practical activities that encourage them to apply knowledge in original ways. *The EYFS Framework* (2017b) states: 'Play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, to think about problems, and relate to others' (p9). Congruent with this, there is a large body of academic research, to be discussed later, that likewise promotes discovery, active learning and, in particular, play (Yu, 2018; Smedley & Hoskins, 2020; Sproule e*t al.,* 2021). Palaiologou (2017) remarks that the focus of ECE 'should be on the creation of environments that encourage play and offer opportunities, experiences, expectations and motivation which empower children to make choices' (p1259). If the learning environment enables children to actively engage in playful tasks, there will be opportunities for children to develop their CoETL.

Considering the CoETL as a focal point, concepts of play, exploration, active learning and creative thinking give the impression that *The EYFS Framework* favours a CI approach. However, research has shown that other elements – specifically the drive to produce favourable data results (Basford & Bath, 2014; Wrigley & Wormwell, 2016; Robert-Holmes, 2017) and to ensure children are academically prepared for Year 1 of primary school (Ang, 2014; Brooks

& Murray, 2019) – are pushing ECE in the direction of more structured teaching – especially in Literacy and Mathematics.

1.1.2 The curriculum

While the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) for primary-aged children is subject-specific with a focus on Literacy, Mathematics and Science, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) takes a more holistic approach covering seven areas of learning:

1. Communication and Language (C&L)
2. Physical Development (PD)
3. Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED)
4. Literacy
5. Mathematics
6. Understanding the World (UW)
7. Expressive Arts and Design (EAD)

Known as the 'prime areas,' *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) states that C&L, PD and PSED 'are particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive' (p7). As children progress through early education and become more confident in the prime areas, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) advises that they should spend more time on other areas of learning. Contrary to the wide range of subjects covered in *The EYFS Framework*, research has shown that this often entails devoting a lot of time to Literacy and Mathematics (Robert-Holmes, 2015; Bradbury, 2019a). The reason for this being is to prepare children for future academic learning and the assessments carried out at the end of the Reception year (Hoskins & Smedley, 2018; Bradbury, 2019a; Robert-Holmes, 2019).

1.1.3 Statutory assessments

The assessment requirements for the EYFS affect how and what children learn in Reception (Robert-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016a) and thus warrant some explanation. In England, the government requires that assessments, known as *The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile*

(EYFSP) (DfE, 2022), are carried out at the end of the Reception year. There are statements of learning for each area – known as the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) – and children are assessed as working below the expected level (emerging), at the expected level (expected) or above (exceeding) against each ELG (it should be noted that the exceeding level has since been abolished in the most recent framework (DfE, 2021) but was still in place when this research was carried out). Children must meet the expectations of the ELGs for the 'prime areas,' as well as Literacy and Mathematics but not UW and EAD, to achieve a 'Good Level of Development' (GLD) during their Reception year. The data from the EYFSP is moderated by local authorities (LAs), reported nationally and used to make comparisons between different groups of children and geographical areas (see for example, DfE/National Statistics, 2019).

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, research has shown that assessment requirements have led to pressure on teachers to produce data comparable with other schools (Robert-Holmes, 2015; Nicholson, 2019), adaptations to teaching practices (Bradbury, 2012; Bates, 2018; Wood, 2020) and, due to the difficulty of achieving the ELGs in these areas, a Literacy and Mathematics-driven curriculum (Kay, 2018; Bradbury, 2019a). Robert-Holmes and Bradbury (2016a) state that these changes have 'the potential to undermine the foundations for children's personal development and learning' (p119). Moving away from CI approaches and a focus on the prime areas, driven by the need to meet the ELGs in Literacy and Mathematics, teaching methods are becoming increasingly structured (Ang, 2014; Bates, 2018).

The EYFS Framework (DfE, 2017b) recognises a need for both CI and AD activities. It states: 'Each area of learning and development must be implemented through planned, purposeful play and through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activity' (p9). Reception children should experience learning through a range of pedagogies and the purpose of this thesis is to examine the teaching and learning that takes place.

1.2 Early years pedagogy

Central to the aims of this research, it is useful to define what 'pedagogy' means. According to the Department for Education (2015):

> ‘Pedagogy relates to the “how”, or practice of educating… It concerns the “how” of adult and child interaction, whilst recognising that how children learn and develop at this stage is not just subject to what is intended to be taught, but it is also of particular importance how it is facilitated’ (p4).

Whereas the curriculum is concerned with *what* is taught, pedagogy relates to *how* this is carried out. With regard to this research, the differences and similarities between *how* CI and AD learning are facilitated, are of particular interest. Although recognising that pedagogy is not simply a case of either CI or AD learning, it is useful to outline what each of these approaches entails within the context of this thesis before examining the broader spectrum of pedagogies used in ECE.

1.2.1 A child-initiated approach

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2008) states that CI learning is ‘an activity wholly decided on by the child and is the result of an intrinsic motivation to explore a project or express an idea’ (p9). This definition suggests that children’s interests evoke ideas for independent play and themes to investigate without the need for adult support. Yet, as highlighted by Kinos *et al*. (2016), even in CI contexts, adults play a part in developing children’s learning. They define CI learning as the ‘acceptance of children’s interests and motivations as the driving force in planning, organizing, and managing children’s learning in early years’ (p347). Children are listened to and their interests are taken into account, but adults extend learning through enhanced provision and the introduction of new concepts in a way that is meaningful to the children.

There is a large body of research highlighting the benefits of a CI approach. For example, research has demonstrated that CI learning supports the development of cognitive skills (Gmitrova & Gmitrov, 2003; Robson & Rowe, 2012; Robson, 2016), inhibitory control (Goble & Pianta, 2017) and academic progress (Lerkkanen *et al.,* 2016). When children initiate learning, they are more creative and innovative (Ucus & Acar, 2018), motivated to learn (Robertson *et al.,* 2015; Goodhall & Atkinson, 2017), focused on their work (Alford *et al.,* 2016) and value the opportunities offered for choice and ownership of their learning (Robertson *et al.,* 2015; Theobald *et al*., 2015).

Nevertheless, some shortfalls with CI approaches have also been noted. For example, Cheung (2017) witnessed children repeating the same activities over again without adult intervention. Similarly, further research highlights missed opportunities to expose children to new experiences (Wood, 2014a) and challenge them (Walsh *et al.,* 2019) if teachers remain on the periphery of play. Finally, Stirrup *et al.* (2017) acknowledge issues with play-based pedagogies reinforcing children's standing in social class – with those from lower-class backgrounds displaying traits and skills often unrecognised or undervalued by staff. While CI can be effective, the examples given here demonstrate how adult involvement in play-based activities can further develop learning (as will be discussed later in this chapter).

Pramling *et al.* (2019) write that 'early childhood education in many countries has been built upon a strong tradition of a materially rich and active play-based pedagogy and environment' (preface). Early years pedagogy is traditionally associated with play-based, CI approaches rather than the formal methods more commonly associated with school. However, as emphasised in recent government publications, ECE policy in England is progressively becoming more weighted towards AD approaches to pedagogy (DfE, 2017b; Ofsted, 2017).

1.2.2 Adult-directed methods

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2008) describes AD learning as 'an activity defined, structured and delivered by an adult to a child or group of children…and focuses on a specific objective' (p10). In the case of the EYFS, this means structuring teaching and learning to meet the ELGs (see for example, Ang, 2014; Bates, 2018), to produce favourable data (Basford & Bath, 2014; Wrigley & Wormwell, 2016; Robert-Holmes, 2017) and, with a focus on Literacy and Mathematics (Kay, 2018; Bradbury, 2019a), ensure children are academically prepared for Year 1 of primary school (Ang, 2014; Brooks & Murray, 2019). Thus, teaching and learning in Reception classrooms is becoming more structured and directed to cover the content of the ELGs and progress children in Literacy and Mathematics. Adult direction is focused not on developing children's individual needs and interests, but on meeting policy and assessment requirements.

Research has demonstrated that over-directing children's time in school can negatively impact their learning experiences (Bates, 2018), stifle imaginative play (Gmitrov & Gmitrova, 2003) and stunt creativity (Cheung, 2017). Conversely, AD methods can have a positive impact on language progression (Fuligni *et al*, 2012; Goble & Pianta, 2017), the development of learning-related social skills, leading to improvements in future academic learning (Ansari & Gershoff, 2015) and the application of cognitive thinking (Kirschner *et al*., 2006; Robson & Rowe, 2012). AD teaching exposes children to activities they may otherwise not access (Robson & Rowe, 2012; Wood, 2014a), keeps them motivated and on task (Robson & Rowe, 2012) and gives them tools and ideas to progress their learning (Brown & Campion, 1994; Hakkarainen *et al.*, 2013; Cheung, 2017).

As the research discussed demonstrates, there are advantages and disadvantages to both CI and AD pedagogies. Therefore, Vaisarova and Reynolds (2022) recommend a blend of both to best support early learning. Similarly, Wise and O'Neill (2009) comment that it is not helpful to take an 'either or' approach to pedagogy. Early years pedagogy is complex – ranging from being completely CI with no adult involvement to the adult directing and controlling every aspect of the lesson (Tan, 2018). In between these two extremes, most learning situations require a variety of approaches. Thus, the range of pedagogies used in ECE is more aptly represented on a spectrum rather than being viewed as two separate entities.

1.2.3 A spectrum of pedagogies

Early years pedagogy is not a case of leaving children completely to their own devices. Nor does it have to entail adults directing children in school-like lessons. Successful teachers need to be flexible, responsive and able to use a range of approaches to meet the needs of the children they work with. As acknowledged in the literature, studies have begun to emerge on the 'in-between pedagogies' – that is pedagogies that fall between the two extremes of completely AD or entirely CI (e.g., Wood, 2014b; Tan, 2018; Pimlott-Wilson & Coats, 2019; Walsh e*t al.,* *2*019). The term 'in-between pedagogies' refers to the strategies adults use to support children when learning is neither wholly CI nor directed by adults to meet specific learning outcomes. The 'in-between pedagogies' combine responsive adult input with following children's emerging needs and interests. This can range from making suggestions to develop children's ideas during CI play or adapting structured learning based on the children's emerging needs and interests. This section will now go on to examine this research.

The idea of AD learning in the early years can induce negative connotations – specifically, an adult giving formal lessons to a class of young children sitting at desks. However, this is not necessarily the case. Tan (2018) distinguishes between 'maximum teacher-directed learning' and 'minimum teacher-directed learning.' She describes the former as 'characterized by pervasive and sustained knowledge transmission, passive learning, and rote-memorization' (p463) while the latter is 'where teacher directedness is employed sparingly in the process of student learning…' (p463), 'inspiring, mentoring, challenging and provoking the learner' (p464). 'Maximum teacher-directed learning' resembles Freire's (1979/2007) banking model whereby adults project information onto learners. Conversely, following an 'in-between pedagogy,' 'minimum teacher-directed learning' involves adults intervening to support learning if and when required, whilst following the children's lead. Adults join in and extend children without taking control.

Expanding on this idea of adults supporting learning, Wood (2014b) sets out three pedagogical approaches:

1. Child-initiated and self-chosen play
2. Adult-guided play in which adults are responsive to the child's needs and interests
3. Educational play to meet specific learning outcomes, using specific ways of learning

Of particular interest is the addition of adults guiding learning. Wood (2014b) describes 'guided play' as play that is geared towards achieving specific goals but done so in a way that follows the interests of the child. Varying slightly, Yu *et al.* (2018) state that 'guided learning' is 'learning that is active and engaged, where the child takes initiative in a playful learning environment and the adult supports, rather than directs' (p1). Although Wood's (2014b) definition allows for working towards specific targets, whereas Yu *et al.* (2018) promote a more CI approach, both versions are flexible in meeting the needs and interests of the children. As with Tan's (2018) 'minimum teacher-directed learning,' adults can ensure learning progresses while respecting the children's choices.

Gmitrov and Gmitrova (2003) write: 'By gently entering the playing process, skillful [sic] teachers may be able to shift children's cognitive and emotional development to a higher level using the powerful natural engine of the free play' (p245). The teacher's knowledge of the children allows for targeted teaching to move children on according to their individual needs.

Describing this approach as ‘appropriately participatory’, Walsh *et al.* (2019) state that teachers take time to get to know children and then build on their interests. They appear ‘to possess a balanced and shared approach to teaching and learning – at times responsive and on occasions intentional’ (p1168). Responding to the children’s needs, adults know when and how to direct but also when to step back and allow time for independent learning while observing and planning for progression.

Further categorising possible pedagogical approaches in the early years, Pyle and Danniels (2017) discuss a continuum of play-based learning (see Diagram 1). At one end, children are left to play independently (CI) whilst, at the other, adults organise and instruct children during group games (AD). These two extremes both involve elements of play, based on the children’s needs and some adult intervention.

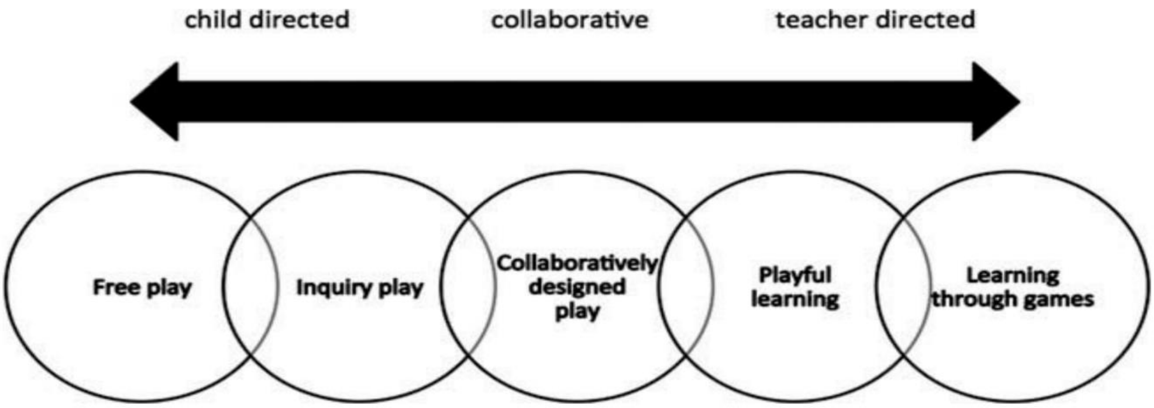


Diagram 1: Continuum of play-based learning

Even with free play adults direct learning (to some extent) through the materials they provide and the way the environment is set up. Describing adults as ‘facilitators,’ Magraw (2011) notes a key role is to observe children’s needs and plan activities and resources to ensure their needs are met. This similarly applies to adults coordinating group games. The games should be based on the children’s needs and, although the adult is likely to control the activity in so much as he or she will give instructions to follow rules and support with turn-taking etc., he or she should still be responsive to what is happening at that moment in time. Considering Pyle and Danniels’s (2017) most AD approach – ‘learning through games’, there is still a level of flexibility, allowing children to contribute and make decisions.

In between these two extremes, children may seek adult help during inquiry play, work together with adults to develop collaborative play or take part in playful learning and work with adults in small groups on focus activities. While much of the debate focuses on CI or AD pedagogies, much of early years learning centres around these more ‘collaborative’ activities featured in the middle of Pyle and Danniels’s (2017) diagram. As some of the research already discussed demonstrates, ‘collaborative’ or ‘guided’ learning can be particularly effective in the early years (Wood, 2014b; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Tan, 2018; Yu *et al*, 2018). These approaches help to capture the attention of young learners (Schneidman & Woodward, 2016) while, at the same time, adults can support and extend learning. Thus, satisfying the desire to follow the children’s interests while also progressing learning.

Robson (2016) writes: ‘the choice facing practitioners is not one of child-initiated versus adult-directed and -led activity, but about the balance between these modes’ (p764). Not only is it a case of balancing the amount of time spent on CI and AD learning, but also how adults interact with children. Demonstrating this balance, Mourão’s (2014) study of children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) found that both adult input and CI activities are required to support language acquisition. When carefully implemented AD learning was followed by opportunities for CI learning, learning was embedded and children showed a better mastery of the language they had learnt. However, he also discovered that teaching was most effective when adults used the ‘in-between pedagogies’ – joining in with play and introducing or revisiting new language in contexts meaningful to the children. Canning (2010) made similar observations during her study on children making dens when one group decided to instead make a home for a rabbit. The adult followed the children’s lead during the activity and extended their learning by giving them problems to solve, such as commenting that the rabbit would get fat if he ate all the vegetables. This then led the children to make an assault course to keep the rabbit fit.

Despite the advantages of following ‘in-between pedagogies,’ there can be barriers to success. For example, Hirst’s (2019) research found some childcare students were unclear about how to support children during open-ended activities such as constructing animal habitats. These types of activities may be viewed as children ‘just playing and exploring’ and, therefore adults can easily join in, but it does take a certain level of skill to be able to do so effectively. These trainee practitioners found the openness of the activity difficult, whereas more experienced staff may be better placed to use a wider range of pedagogies.

Even for more experienced staff, there can be obstacles preventing them from fully engaging with collaborative approaches. Hoskins and Smedley's (2018) research on practitioners' views on learning through play found that, while they were knowledgeable about and valued guided play and learning, with a demanding curriculum (the EYFS) and goals (ELGs) to meet, time constraints sometimes prevented them from doing so. Perhaps due to these pressures, Walsh *et al.'s* (2019) research found that some teachers struggle to follow children's interests and are instead focused on academic learning to meet the demands of the curriculum. Palaiologou (2017) states that, despite evidence of the benefits of integrated play, policy continues to insist on 'a formal approach to learning with reduction to play time… in favour of an emphasis on literacy and numeracy' (p1260). As explored in detail in the next chapter, policy pressures to ensure children meet the ELGs and achieve well in Literacy and Mathematics in particular are leading to teachers directing learning more in ECE.

Children need time to explore their interests but they also need support to master the foundations before they can independently apply new knowledge. Adults can guide children until they have developed a basic understanding through direct instruction as well as other techniques. If pedagogy is viewed as a spectrum, in between Freire's (1970/2017) distributor of knowledge and Magraw's (2011) facilitator sit a host of other roles that teachers carry out daily. It then becomes apparent that the role of the teacher is complex, varies according to the child and situation, and moves along a spectrum of CI and AD learning (this will be discussed in more detail and applied to the findings for this project in Chapter 5).

Robson and Rowe (2012) write that the boundaries between CI and AD learning 'are often difficult to sustain, and may also change in the course of an activity' (p354). The amount and type of adult support depends on the children and situation – varying from observing, planning and supplying resources to introducing new topics, joining in with play and extending activities through the introduction of new ideas. Moving away from the view that AD pedagogies involve children sitting at desks while teachers control learning, through the application of the 'in-between pedagogies,' AD teaching can be responsive, spontaneous and adapted to meet children's unique interests and needs.

1.3 The origins of the research

My interest in pedagogy, and how it impacts teaching and learning, emerges from my educational values and experiences of teaching in both the UK and China. I am aware that they influence my teaching practice and are inevitably embedded in my research and research practices. Diagram 2 gives an outline of what I view as major influences on what I perceive to be best practice. As my research unfolds, it will also become apparent how these factors have likewise affected my research choices.

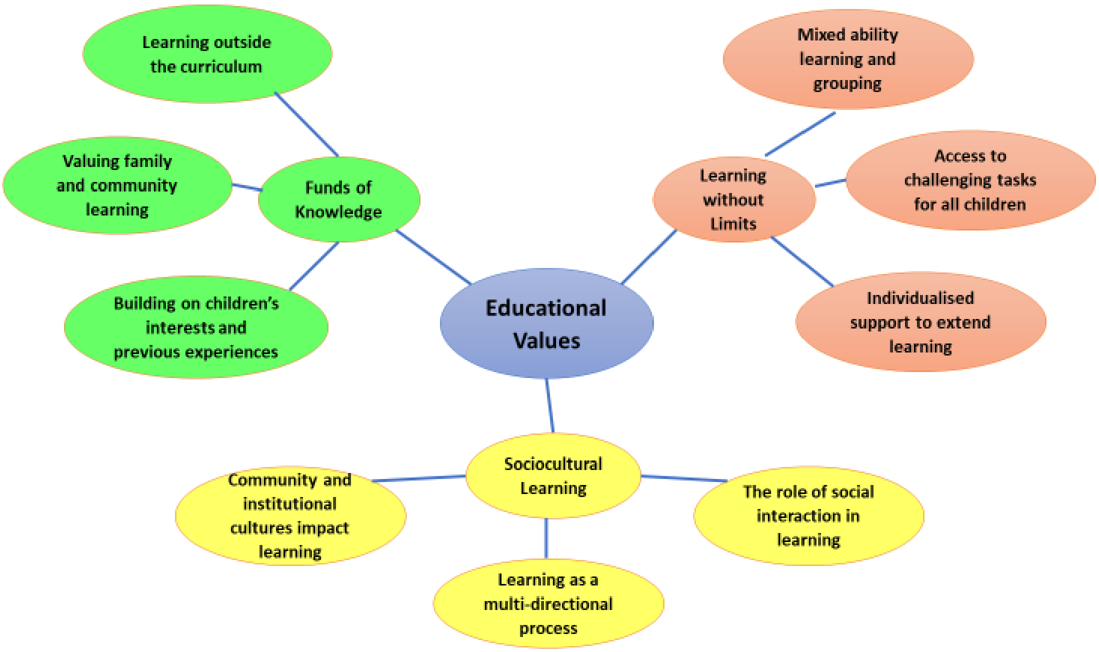

Learning outside the curriculum
Mixed ability learning and grouping
Valuing family and community learning
Funds of Knowledge
Learning without Limits
Access to challenging tasks for all children
Building on children's interests and previous experiences
Educational Values
Individualised support to extend learning
Sociocultural Learning
Community and institutional cultures impact learning
The role of social interaction in learning
Learning as a multi-directional process

Diagram 2: Educational values

Having begun my career in ECE as an unqualified teacher in Shanghai, my first experiences were quite formal in nature and sometimes clashed with my educational values. Yet, I could see that ECE in China was rapidly changing and becoming more progressive – see Tobin *et al.* (1989; 2009) for evidence of this – and I admired the bold moves being taken by the government. In the face of a long history of traditional, AD methods and opposition from parents and those working in ECE, the Chinese government was making great efforts to promote play-based learning in kindergartens. On returning to the UK, I found the situation to be quite the contrary.

I returned to the UK in September of 2013 when the EYFS had already been introduced and, after completing my teacher training, began teaching a mixed Reception/Nursery class in inner London. Despite never having taught in the UK before, I had visions of joining in with children's play and holistic learning but I discovered ECE was becoming increasingly structured, with a narrowing curriculum focused on academic learning in a classroom environment. My illusions of extending children's learning through play had been replaced with rigid planning and expectations of the whole class sitting at tables writing and completing mathematical problems. I began to question whether returning to the UK had been the right career move for me and wondered if there was hope for change.

Coinciding with the beginning of this project, there was a change of management at my school and new approaches were being considered. Inspired by the *Learning without Limits* project (Hart *et al.,* 2004), I was permitted to abolish ability-based differentiation in structured lessons – something that now plays an important role in my approach to AD sessions. We were also encouraged to let children experiment, with less focus on fixed outcomes. Therefore, despite my reservations about AD learning, I was starting to see that structured lessons could be more engaging and beneficial to the children, and more interesting for me as a teacher. For example, I was pleasantly surprised to one day overhear a child saying, "That was my best day ever," after a rather standard lesson about money.

The work of Ellis and Smith (2017) highlights the need for adults to be flexible and responsive, adapting practice as new information about learners becomes available. Different teaching methods can be effective, at different points of time and in various situations, dependent on the individual child. For instance, Wood (2014a) comments that children coming from a home-based culture that does not promote independent, flexible approaches may be more comfortable, and make more progress when directed by an adult. The children in my class predominantly come from Asian backgrounds and some of their parents have reported using more traditional techniques (such as memorisation and repetitive copying of writing) to support their child's learning at home. Despite these methods being against my own beliefs of what constitutes good practice for such young children, I do believe it is important to understand children's home backgrounds and lived experiences.

This brought me to ponder even more over the child versus adult-initiated argument and I started to wonder if AD learning could be more beneficial than I had previously thought. On the one hand, these doubts led me to view AD learning in at least a more neutral light and potentially led to an improvement in the teaching and learning experiences for both myself and the children. At the same time, they led me to question my fundamental views of good practice in ECE. Still holding the belief that CI learning plays an important role, I began to think about the function of adult input and how children can benefit from this. Thus, it is with these questions, doubts and hesitations that I embarked on this research project. Focusing on pedagogy and how the children use social interaction to progress, I hoped to gain some insight into what the children gain from CI and AD learning in the Reception classroom.

1.4 Research questions

With ECE in England moving towards more traditional schooling methods, as well as my inner turmoil over best pedagogical practices, I wanted to find out more about how children learn in adult and child-initiated learning situations. Hence, this thesis asks:

- How do Reception children learn during child-initiated activities in comparison with adult-directed lessons?

Through the exploration of the following supplementary questions:

1) How are pedagogical expectations communicated in *The EYFS Framework*?
2) What is the role of the adult in supporting children in different learning contexts?
3) How do children use peer-to-peer interaction to develop their skills and understanding?
4) To what extent do children build on existing knowledge to make sense of current learning?

1.5 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction

Laying the foundations of the thesis, Chapter 1 begins with a brief discussion on the EYFS, pedagogy and my positionality before introducing the research aims and questions.

Chapter 2: A policy analysis of the EYFS

Through the application of Hyatt's (2013) 'Critical Discourse Analysis Framework,' this chapter examines how pedagogical expectations are communicated in *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b).

Chapter 3: A sociocultural perspective on pedagogy

Chapter 3 examines how culture impacts children's learning in school and, through the application of Rogoff's (1990; 1993; 1995) 'planes of analysis' to the literature, highlights the complexity of Reception children's learning roles.

Chapter 4: Methods and Methodologies

In this chapter, I present an explanation of the research framework used, a description of the research sample and location and an overview of the data collection methods.

Chapter 5: A learning spectrum

Presenting the findings from the empirical element of this project, Chapter 5 gives examples of how children learn in a Reception classroom. Through the categorisation of pedagogies and the application of Rogoff's (1990; 1993; 1995) 'planes of analysis' examples of teaching and learning, taken from the data, are analysed.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Three key themes identified from the findings – the role of the adult in ECE, peer-to-peer learning and funds of knowledge – are discussed in relation to the wider body of literature.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

This final chapter reflects on the research process, highlights the contribution to knowledge and makes suggestions regarding future possibilities for research.

Chapter 2. A policy analysis of the EYFS

With a focus on pedagogical approaches, this thesis seeks to find out how Reception children learn. Acknowledging that policy – in the case of this research *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) – impacts how and what teachers teach and, therefore, how and what children learn, and addressing one of the supplementary research questions, this policy analysis asks:

- How are pedagogical expectations communicated in *The EYFS Framework*?

Policy acts as a medium through which policymakers communicate their intended outcomes to those working in ECE (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Robertson and Hill (2015) note that policymakers bring their 'own subjectivity – consisting of life experiences, values, interests, and identities – to every aspect of their work' (p168). Subsequently, teachers, who mediate and enact policy, bring their own subjectivity to their work. A single policy does not carry universal meaning to those involved in both its creation and enactment but can be interpreted differently by different parties. Ball (2015) writes:

> 'policies are 'contested', mediated and differentially represented by different actors in different contexts (policy as text), but on the other hand, at the same time produced and formed by taken-for-granted and implicit knowledges and assumptions about the world and ourselves (policy as discourse)' (p311).

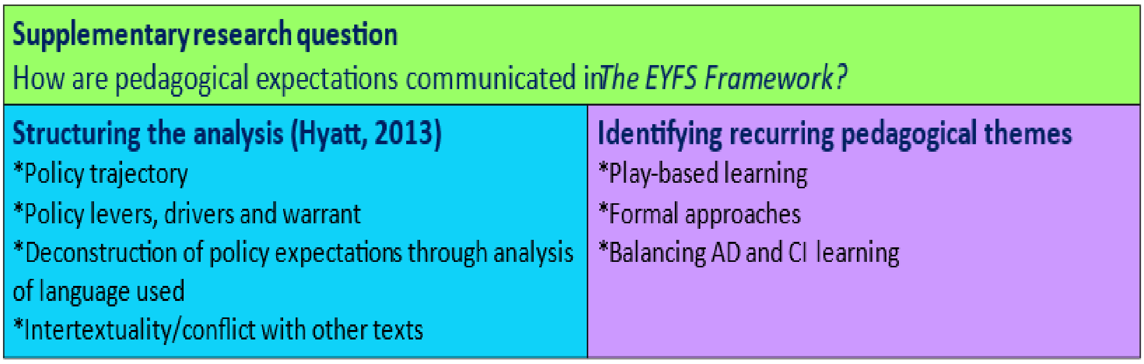
How policy is enacted can vary from teacher-to-teacher and may differ from how policymakers had intended. Before going on to examine examples of how policy is mediated and, in turn, how children learn in the literature review and findings chapters, this present chapter focuses on the pedagogical expectations as communicated in *The EYFS Framework.* The points discussed in this chapter place the learning described in later chapters in the context of the current early years framework in England. The expectations outlined in *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) are also compared with earlier policies (introduced later in this chapter) to show a trajectory of how pedagogy in policy has evolved over time.

First, a policy trajectory, in line with wider, external drivers, is presented to show pedagogical shifts in ECE over the last thirty years. Next, the levers, drivers and warrant driving *The EYFS*

Framework are discussed. Finally, the language used to communicate pedagogical expectations in *The EYFS Framework* is deconstructed and compared with earlier policies and government-funded reports.

2.1 A framework for analysis

This policy analysis amalgamates three components (Diagram 3) to form a comprehensive framework for analysis. The overarching aim is to answer the supplementary research question, Hyatt's (2013) 'Critical Discourse Analysis Framework' (CDAF) is applied to structure the analysis and Ryan and Bernard's (2003) 'Techniques to Identify Themes' are used to identify themes, related to pedagogy, in *The EYFS Framework.*



Supplementary research question
How are pedagogical expectations communicated in *The EYFS Framework?*

Structuring the analysis (Hyatt, 2013)
*Policy trajectory
*Policy levers, drivers and warrant
*Deconstruction of policy expectations through analysis of language used
*Intertextuality/conflict with other texts

Identifying recurring pedagogical themes
*Play-based learning
*Formal approaches
*Balancing AD and CI learning

Diagram 3: A framework for policy analysis

This section introduces Hyatt's (2013) CDAF and Ryan and Bernard's (2003) 'Techniques to Identify Themes' and explains how they were applied to this policy analysis.

2.1.1 Hyatt's Critical Discourse Analysis Framework

Contemplating the complex nature of policy intentions, Lester *et al.* (2016) note a shift towards researchers asking whose interests policy seeks to serve. As a tool to answer this question, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to analyse 'texts that inform and constitute the social realities and understandings of policy' (Lester *et al,* 2016, p5). Wild *et al.* (2015) write that CDA is employed to 'ask questions about relationships between language and society, specifically how these are managed in policy documents' (p232). CDA is used in this policy analysis to examine the language adopted in *The EYFS Framework* to communicate pedagogical expectations.

Hyatt's CDAF (2013) framework was chosen for this analysis because the analytical tools act as a checklist to ensure the relevant aspects of *The EYFS Framework* are rigorously interrogated. Tools one to four (see Table 1) work to contextualise *The EYFS Framework* – examining the drivers, levers and warrant behind the policy. Tools five and six are concerned with deconstructing *The EYFS Framework* – analysing the language used and its intended meaning. The application of these analytical tools formulates a detailed account of how pedagogical expectations are constructed in *The EYFS Framework*.

	Analytical tool	**Role in analysis**
Contextualisation	1. Trajectory	How policy evolves and correlates or conflicts with earlier versions (Liasidou, 2009)
	2. Policy lever	The tools used by the government to implement policy (Steer *et al*., 2007)
	3. Policy driver	The intended aims of the policy (Hyatt, 2013)
	4. Warrant	Justification for pursuing policy (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001)
Deconstruction	5. Deconstruction of language	Analysis of the text and discourse used (Hyatt, 2013)
	6. Intertextuality/ conflict with other texts	Similarities and repetition in different texts (Hyatt, 2013) or how content is contradicted in other documents

Table 1: Analytical tools

Specifically concerning the deconstruction element of this policy analysis, Ryan and Bernard's (2003) 'Techniques to Identify Themes' were used to highlight pedagogical discourse in *The EYFS Framework.*

2.1.2 Ryan and Bernard's Techniques to Identify Themes

Correlating with tools five and six shown in Table 1 above, a thematic approach was applied to the deconstruction element of this policy analysis. Through an examination of the language used in *The EYFS Framework,* current dominant discourses on pedagogy and how they have changed over time were highlighted using elements of Ryan and Bernard's (2003) 'Techniques to Identify Themes' (Table 2).

Approach to identifying theme	Definition
Repetition	Identify themes that reoccur throughout the document
Similarities and differences	Highlight similarities and differences between texts

Table 2: Techniques to identify themes

Firstly, **repeated** themes (Diagram 4) related to pedagogy were identified by examining and highlighting the language used in *The EYFS Framework.* These themes reoccur throughout the document as being important elements of effective pedagogy. Secondly, these themes, and the language used to discuss them, were identified in and compared to policies and government-funded reports to highlight **similarities and differences.** In the deconstruction section of this policy analysis, the below themes are examined in the context of *The EYFS Framework* and in relation to how discourse around pedagogical expectations has evolved over time.

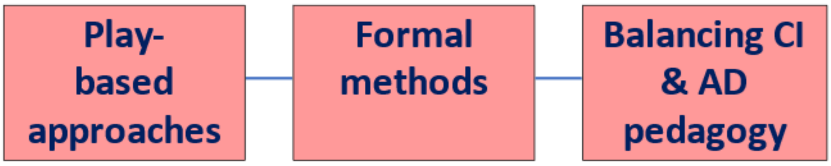


Diagram 4: Recurring themes of the EYFS

The next section contextualises *The EYFS Framework* through a trajectory of policies leading to the current approach to early years pedagogy. Following this, the policy levers, drivers and warrant behind *The EYFS Framework* are examined.

2.2 Contextualising the EYFS

Before engaging with the language used in *The EYFS Framework*, it is helpful to first contextualise the foundations around which the policy was built (Hyatt, 2013). Beginning with a policy trajectory, this section focuses on the policy levers, drivers and warrant behind *The EYFS Framework* and the shift to a privileging of AD approaches in the Reception year.

Table 3 below shows the policies featured throughout this analysis and Table 4 the reports carried out by independent, non-ministerial government departments and government-commissioned reports.

Policies
Aspects of Primary Education: The Education of Children under Five (*APE)* (HMI/DES, 1989)
Desirable Outcomes (SCAA/DfEE, 1996)
Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS) (QCA/DfEE, 2000)
Statutory Framework for the EYFS (The EYFS Framework) (DfE, 2017b)

Table 3: Key policies

Government-funded reports
The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Review – Report on the Evidence (Review of the EYFS) (TACTYC, 2011)
Teaching and Play in the Early Years – a Balancing Act? (Teaching and Play) (Ofsted, 2015)
Bold Beginnings: The Reception Curriculum in a Sample of Good and Outstanding Primary Schools (Bold Beginnings) (Ofsted, 2017)

Table 4: Key government-funded reports

A distinction is made between policy and reports produced by non-ministerial departments or external bodies as, although they are government-funded, are presented as being independent from government. These documents were chosen because their introductions represented distinct changes in pedagogical approaches.

2.2.1 The trajectory towards adult-directed instruction

Looking back to the late 1980s, Kwon (2002) states that, in England, there was little interference from the government in ECE. Generally, those working in ECE were trusted to make decisions regarding how to best educate children and the scarce government-produced documentation that was available predominantly promoted a play-based, CI approach. For instance, *Aspects of Primary Education (APE)* (HMI/DES, 1989) discusses an 'emphasis on purposeful play and exploratory activity' (p5) and criticises approaches that provide for ‘insufficient exploratory and practical work to support the children’s developing understanding of ideas and language before they start on the formal work more appropriate to later stages of learning’ (p5-6).

Nutbrown (1998, p51) praises earlier policies such as *APE* for giving prominence to play and self-chosen activities and recognising these pedagogical approaches as being just as valuable as acquired skills and knowledge. Three decades ago, there appeared to be harmony between policy and practice, and agreement between policymakers and policy enactors, or at least, those working in ECE were largely in control of the pedagogical approaches they implemented.

Moving forward to the mid-1990s, those working in ECE in England began witnessing significant changes regarding government involvement. Laid out in *Desirable Outcomes* (SCAA/DfEE, 1996), the 1990s saw the introduction of standardised learning outcomes, towards which all Reception children were required to work. *The Early Years Foundation Stage Review (Review of the EYFS)* (TACTYC, 2011) writes that the publication of *Desirable Outcomes* (SCAA/DfEE, 1996) ‘placed early learning and development on the national policy agenda for the first time’ (p7). However, alongside this recognition, decisions regarding what children learn were being taken away from teachers. Once associated with creativity and play, Anning (1998) noted an ‘alarming increase in government interference into pedagogy’ (p309). This interference steered ECE towards a more structured approach to ensure children met specific learning outcomes. David (1998) writes that childhood became ‘less joyful, less celebrated, less imaginative, less romantic, more pressurised, more rigid, more directed’ (p61).

Palmer (2016) asserts that *Desirable Outcomes* marked the end of play-based approaches in English ECE. With the introduction of *Desirable Outcomes* (SCAA/DfEE, 1996) came standardised learning outcomes and, with standardised outcomes, came a new focus on measuring progress and accountability (to be discussed throughout this chapter). Succeeding *Desirable Outcomes,* and continuing along this trajectory *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS)* was published in 2000 and was later followed by several editions of *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2012; 2014; 2017; 2021).

Demonstrating how expectations have evolved, Table 5 shows excerpts from policies about adults supporting learning. The vocabulary used to refer to the role of the adult has moved away from describing a responsive approach (highlighted in green) towards a more directive approach (highlighted in yellow).

Policy	**Reference to adult involvement**
APE (HMI/DES, 1989)	'Teaching which stimulates and builds upon curiosity' (p8) 'Teachers encourage children to write' (p18)
Desirable Outcomes (SCAA/DfEE, 1996)	'Respond to individual needs' (p3). 'Appropriate adult intervention' (p8) 'A framework for planning educational activities' (p3).
CGFS (QCA/DfEE, 2000)	'Observe and respond appropriately to children' (p16) 'Engage in activities planned by adults' (p11) 'Well-planned, purposeful activity and appropriate intervention' (p16)
The EYFS Framework (DfE, 2017b)	'More activities led by adults' (p9) 'Activities led or guided by adults' (p9). 'Planned *and* purposeful play, (p9).

Table 5: Adult's role according to policy

Over the past three decades the emphasis on AD methods in policy has increased. More recent publications, specifically *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b), do reference play and CI learning, but there is a clear drive for AD learning in Reception classrooms – both through structured lessons and play situations. The drivers behind these changes in approaches are now examined.

2.2.2 The driver for adult-directed teaching

The EYFS Framework (DfE, 2017b) states that the purpose of the Reception year is 'to help children prepare for more formal learning, ready for Year 1' (p9). As reiterated in *Bold Beginnings* (Ofsted, 2017), the document discusses a 'need to prepare children for the demands of the years ahead' (p12). These documents emphasise providing children with experiences in Reception that will enable a smooth transition to formal learning in Year 1, leading Brooks and Murray (2019) to comment that the rationale behind ECE in England is 'school readiness'.

A contested term (Kay, 2018; Brooks & Murray, 2019), it is useful to define what 'school readiness' entails within the context of English ECE. To highlight variations in ideology surrounding preparation for school, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2006) identifies two approaches; one influenced by a 'social pedagogy tradition' and the other 'pre-primary.' The former is concerned with a holistic approach to developing the child; encompassing care, learning and personal development, whereas the latter focuses primarily on academic readiness. Falling under the 'social pedagogy tradition,' *APE* (HMI/DES, 1989) discusses developing academic skills as 'a sound basis for education' (p8) but affords more attention to ensuring 'children feel secure in their new circumstances' and experience 'a smooth transition from home to school' (p7). On the other hand, *Desirable Outcomes* (SCAA/DfEE, 1996) introduces the idea of providing 'a foundation for later achievement in Key Stage 1' (abstract). Policy has since moved further towards promoting preparation for future learning in *The EYFS Framework* (DFE, 2017b) which explicitly 'promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness'' (p5).

As a bridge between non-compulsory early years education and primary school, Bradbury (2019a) writes that the Reception year is the target of 'policy agendas which emphasise school readiness, and the benefits of early intervention' (p310). The Reception year is seen as an opportunity to teach children the skills and learning behaviours they will need in primary school and beyond, and to give additional support to children who may struggle in Year 1 – the aim being that their learning will 'catch up' with that of their peers before leaving Reception. *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) states that this approach to 'school readiness' 'gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life' (p5).

Wood (2019) writes: 'The instrumental directives in the EYFS mean that notions of becoming are future-oriented towards academic achievement and school readiness' (p330). Feeding into wider political aims, she describes this neoliberal focus on preparing for future societal and economic contribution 'as a structural force that permeates all aspects of ECE' (p331). Harvey (2007) defines neoliberalism as the belief that 'well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade' (p2). Neoliberalism promotes individualism, competition, and a 'survival of the fittest' approach to politics, society, and education.

Robertson and Hill (2015) write: ‘A neoliberal believes that competitive individualism is ‘only natural’ and, indeed, beneficial to society’s productivity and profit, that it should be developed in schools and universities among children and students, and within the country at large’ (p169). This has resulted in dominant ideas of neoliberalism – accountability, value for money, and measuring academic progress becoming dominant features in Reception classrooms (Bradbury, 2012, p184), and young children, and those who work with them, becoming tools to achieve these ideals.

Clarke (2012, p298) attributes the inseparability of educational policy and politics to the social and economic value attached to education. The government views the funding of ECE as an investment and expects to gain returns on money spent in the form of children later joining the workforce, and contributing to society and the economy. Demonstrating this, The Department for Education (2020) recently commissioned a report, *Study of Early Education and Development (SEED),* ‘to estimate the financial returns to early education spending’ (p8). The report investigates the financial returns of investing in different types of childcare provision to find out which offers the best value for money.

Simpson *et al.* (2015) assert that ECE has itself become a policy lever used to help resolve issues in wider society. Education is part of the solution to alleviate poverty (Simpson *et al*., 2015), improve the life chances of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Kay, 2018) and ultimately prepare them for later becoming contributing members of society (Robertson & Hill, 2015). Diagram 5 shows how changes to ECE policy connect with solving problems in wider society and progressing the country as a whole. Highlighted in pink is the overarching driver for policy in general. In blue, are the levers to achieve global economic success and, in green, are the levers linked to ECE to help achieve the wider drivers and levers.

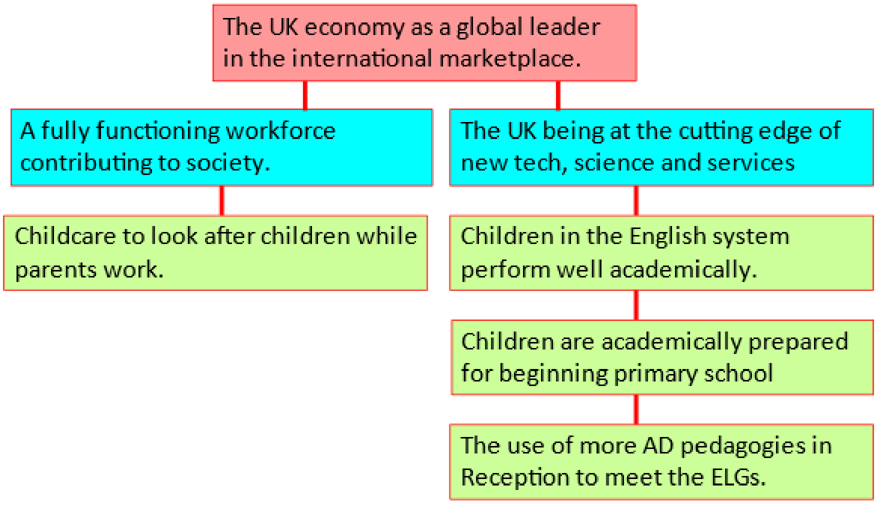

The UK economy as a global leader in the international marketplace.
A fully functioning workforce contributing to society.
The UK being at the cutting edge of new tech, science and services
Childcare to look after children while parents work.
Children in the English system perform well academically.
Children are academically prepared for beginning primary school
The use of more AD pedagogies in Reception to meet the ELGs.

Diagram 5: Policy levers and drivers

AD pedagogies and structured lessons with set learning outcomes are being used to prepare children for primary school. The policy rationale is that, if children are better prepared academically for Year 1, they will perform better throughout their schooling (DfE, 2017a; DfE, 2017b; Ofsted, 2017). As young adults, they will then later go on to succeed in the workplace, help to grow the economy and boost the country's position within the international community. Thus, 'school readiness' is a lever to prepare children for the workplace in order that they can contribute to the economy.

2.2.3 'School readiness' levers

The most notable levers, as communicated in educational policy (for instance, DfE, 2017b; STA, 2017) are requirements with regard to:

1. universal learning outcomes and standardised testing
2. data reporting and accountability

Introduced in the previous chapter, teachers carry out summative assessments – The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) – to check children's progress against the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) at the end of the Reception year. The Standards and Testing Agency (2017, p10) state the purpose of these assessments is to gather accurate information about each child to inform parents about their child's development against the ELGs, support the transition to Year 1, and help Year 1 teachers with planning. However, the document also goes on to state that the assessments are used 'to understand a child's performance in relation to national expectations and comparisons' (p10).

Although there is no mention of holding teachers to account for the outcomes of assessments in *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b), research has shown that teachers, knowing that the results will be compared to other schools, are under pressure to ensure the number of children achieving the Good Level of Development (GLD) meets what the Standards and Teaching Agency (2017) refers to as 'national expectations' (Bradbury, 2014b; Robert-Holmes, 2015; Robert-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016a; Bradbury, 2019a). That is, the percentage of children achieving the GLD should not fall below the national average.

Using the phrase 'the datafication of early years pedagogy' (Robert-Holmes, 2015), Bradbury (2019a, p7) comments that there has been a shift in practices, values and subjectivities towards a focus on the production and analysis of assessment data. For instance, studies have witnessed Reception children being segregated into groups according to ability (Robert-Holmes, 2015; Bradbury, 2019a; Robert-Holmes & Kitto, 2019), spending time in interventions (Bradbury 2019a), specific content being taught to cover the content of the ELGs (Robert-Holmes, 2015) and children on 'the cusp' receiving extra support to meet the ELGs (Robert-Holmes, 2015; 2019).

Furthermore, there is evidence of EYFSP scores being manipulated to avoid teachers and schools coming under scrutiny. Campbell (2022) writes that assessment requirements are 'forcing teachers to shape EYFSP scores into prescribed patterns within schools' (p371). For example, one teacher reported being asked by a local authority official if she wanted to adapt EYFSP scores because it was lower than expected (Bradbury, 2012) and other studies discuss teachers giving children low assessment scores on entrance to Reception to show excelled progress throughout the year (Bradbury; 2013; Robert-Holmes & Bradbury, 2017).

Ball (2013) writes that 'policies typically posit a restructuring, redistribution and disruption of power relations, so that different people can and cannot do different things' (p11). Policy, and specifically the EYFS and the EYFSP, is a means to direct or control teaching content and methods to ensure the desired outcome is achieved. Basford and Bath (2014) write that assessment requirements have ‘increasingly become a way for governments to exercise direct control over the practitioners working with young children’ (p119). Due to data pressures, teachers are focusing time and resources on meeting the ELGs and adapting their methods to do so. As an early years advisor reported to Robert-Holmes (2015), ‘the data is driving the pedagogy’ (p306). Thus, assessments, data and accountability act as levers for AD pedagogies and a means of achieving ‘school readiness.’

2.2.4 The warrant for changes to pedagogical approaches

Discussing policy around teacher training but applicable to other areas, Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001) use the term ‘warrant’ ‘to signify justification, authority, or “reasonable grounds,” particularly those that are established for some act, course of action, statement, or belief’ (p4). Applying this to the EYFS, this is the justification for the increased application of AD pedagogies in Reception classrooms in the pursuit of achieving ‘school readiness.’ Linking to some of the levers and drivers already discussed, Cochran-Smith and Fries’s (2001) categories of policy warrant have been applied to *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) in Table 6 below.

Warrant	**Definition of warrant**	**Application to *The EYFS Framework***
Evidentiary warrant	‘Justifications and grounds that are offered for conclusions and policy recommendations based… on empirical data, evidence, and facts’ (p5).	‘The learning and development requirements are informed by the best available evidence on how children learn’ (p7) *Research has shown that the ELGs and the pedagogical practices described in *The EYFS Framework* are the most effective.
Accountability warrant	Used to ‘demonstrate that recommended policies are justifiable and justified by the outcomes and results they produce’ (p7).	The EYFS ‘sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well’ (p5) *Through inspections and assessment requirements, providers must prove they are meeting policy expectations and progressing children’s learning.
Political warrant	Justification in terms of ‘service to the citizenry and of larger conceptions about the purposes of schools and schooling’ (p10).	The EYFS ‘gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life (p5). *Children will be better prepared to later join the workforce and contribute to society and the economy.

Table 6: Warrant for the EYFS

The ‘accountability warrant’ has already been addressed in the discussion on assessment and accountability in section 2.2.3 of this chapter and the ‘political warrant’ under the discussion on the wider, neoliberal aims of policy in section 2.2.2. These themes are woven throughout the final section of this chapter in relation to the discourse used in *The EYFS Framework* to discuss pedagogical expectations. Therefore, this section will focus on the ‘evidentiary warrant.’

The EYFS Framework (DfE, 2017b) states that ‘The learning and development requirements are informed by the best available evidence on how children learn and reflect the broad range of skills, knowledge and attitudes children need as foundations for good future progress’ (p7). That is, research has shown that, using a combination of AD and CI pedagogies, with an emphasis on structured teaching in Reception to meet the ELGs, is the best approach to ECE. However, there is neither an empirical evidence base underpinning *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b), nor reference to the research findings that prove this is the best approach.

Examining *Bold Beginnings* (Ofsted, 2017), which does have an empirical element, its recommendations are centred around improving the teaching of Literacy and Mathematics, with a focus on AD methods. For instance, the document advises allocating ‘sufficient time each day to the direct teaching of reading, writing and mathematics’ (p7) and ‘teaching reading in a systematic and structured way’ (p14). Taking a ‘pre-primary’ (OECD, 2006) view of ‘school readiness,’ the elements of teaching, learning and curriculum content observed to be effective are linked to preparing children academically for Year 1 of primary school. Thus, the findings continue the trajectory of preparing children academically for school.

In contrast, the earlier published *APE* (HMI/DES, 1989) focuses on ensuring ‘children feel secure in their new circumstances’ and a ‘smooth transition from home to school’ (p7). Following a ‘social pedagogy tradition’ (OECD, 2006), *APE* views care and personal well-being as being at the forefront of ECE. Research has shown that those working in ECE often value this caring approach to supporting young children (Basford & Bath, 2014; Hoskins & Smedley, 2019; Rudoe, 2020). For example, Rudoe (2020) found that teachers’ perceptions of quality education contrast with the outcomes-orientated vision of present policy and instead favour holistic pedagogies adjusted to meet the needs of individual children. Regardless of these opposing views on what children need, as discussed earlier, teachers and other early years staff must meet the statutory requirements of the EYFS. Resulting from this conflict in values, practitioners have ‘described an early years environment that required them to push children towards achieving academic milestones, a process that often felt hollow and target driven’ (Hoskins & Smedley, 2019, p82).

While there is evidence of teachers giving in to these pressures and following the EYFS (Robert-Holmes, 2015; Bradbury, 2019a), Archer (2022) found that some teachers seek to fracture ‘the official subjectivities of ‘ideal’ early educators constructed through policy … *through* multiple ‘micro-resistances’ to policy imperatives’ (p436, *italics author's own*). Archer gives examples of a teacher ignoring instructions from management to teach Nursery children in ability groups and a Reception teacher grappling with government requirements to systematically teach phonics which were in conflict with his belief in following children's interests and learning through play.

Returning to Ball's (2015) earlier statement regarding policies being ‘‘contested’, mediated and differentially represented by different actors’ (p311), the examples given above demonstrate how some teachers are choosing to deliberately disregard or manipulate requirements – either policy or school requirements derived from policy – to continue teaching in a way that is meaningful to them. By doing so, they avoid the hollow feelings, linked to an outcome-driven environment, described by Hoskins and Smedley (2019) and can instead pursue a more caring approach aligned with earlier policy (for example, *APE (*HMI/DES, 1989)). With the views of both professionals and earlier policymakers on ECE appearing to conflict with current approaches, questions regarding whether it is how children learn that has evolved or policy targets and policymakers' priorities.

The underlying drivers, levers and warrant discussed in this section, linked to neoliberal concepts of economic growth and global competitiveness, are embedded in policy and communicated in *The EYFS Framework* as pedagogical expectations. This, in turn, affects teaching and learning and the experiences of children in Reception classrooms. The next section examines the pedagogical expectations laid out in *The EYFS Framework* and compares these with earlier policy and government-funded reports.

2.3 Deconstructing pedagogy in the EYFS

The language used in *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) represents the aims policymakers are pursuing. To examine these aims, this deconstruction uses Hyatt's (2013) ideas of deconstructing language and intertextuality to answer the supplementary research question:

- How are pedagogical expectations communicated in *The EYFS Framework?*

Returning to the themes identified in *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) – play-based approaches, formal methods and balancing CI and AD – the remainder of this chapter examines how these themes are represented in *The EYFS Framework* and how this compares with previous policies and other government-funded reports.

2.3.1 Play-based approaches

As *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) articulates, 'play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, to think about problems, and relate to others' (p9). Play is not just a desirable factor in children's early learning experiences but 'essential' in progressing early skills and can impact later learning. Examining the role of play in supporting children's learning, as communicated in *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b), four concepts stand out as being pivotal:

- Children can direct play
- Adults can direct play
- Play should be planned
- Play should be purposeful

Firstly, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) asserts that 'children learn by leading their own play, and by taking part in play which is guided by adults' (p16). Congruent with the literature on using a wide range of pedagogies discussed in the previous chapter (Wood, 2014b; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Tan, 2018; Yu *et al., 2*018; Walsh e*t al.,* 2019), according to *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b), it is beneficial for adults to join in with children's play and for children to participate in AD play. Play is an effective medium for motivating and actively engaging children and adults can use play activities to introduce and model new material, question children's thinking and offer support.

Sharing this view, several earlier policies and government-funded reports have similarly promoted play involving adults. For example, *APE* (HMI/DES, 1989) recognises that 'children need… practical activity and planned play' (p33) but suggests that leaving children 'too much to themselves… may quickly degenerate into undemanding time-filling activities' (p33). Similarly, *CGFS* (QCA/DfEE, 2000) highlights the importance of adults 'supporting and extending children's play, learning and development' (p1). As reiterated in government-funded reports, *Teaching and Play* (Ofsted, 2015) states that early years teaching should entail adult 'interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities' (p11) and *Review of the EYFS* (TACTYC, 2011) writes: 'the evidence is clear that young children learn best through play and interaction' (p20). Synonymous across these documents, there is a recognition that children learn best through play involving adults to challenge and guide.

Demonstrating a more structured approach to applying play-based pedagogies, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) states: 'each area of learning and development must be implemented through planned, purposeful play' (p9). *The EYFS Framework* requires teachers to plan for activities, giving a learning-focused purpose to play and avoiding the 'undemanding time-filling activities' described in *APE* (HMI/DES, 1989, p33). However, questions have arisen around who dictates the purpose of children's play and for what teachers should be planning (Robertson & Hill, 2015).

Alluding to a personalised approach to planning, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) seeks to provide 'opportunities which are planned around the needs and interests of each individual child' (p5). As reflected in earlier policy, teachers should observe children's learning needs and, through their unique interests, plan play activities to develop learning. For instance, *APE* (HMI/DES, 1989, p10) writes that high quality planning, acknowledging children's own interests, underpins the success of supporting learning and *CGFS* (QCA/DfEE, 2000) states that 'practitioners will need to plan for each child's individual learning requirements' (p18). Finally, *Review of the EYFS* (TACTYC, 2011) concurs with the need 'to identify learning priorities and plan relevant and motivating learning experiences for each child' (p30).

Therefore, the purpose of play is to ensure children's distinct needs are met through an individualised approach to planning.

Conversely, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) also states that the ELGs cover the 'knowledge, skills and understanding that all young children should have gained by the end of the Reception year' (p7) and 'must shape activities and experiences' (p5). If children are to gain the knowledge and skills outlined in the ELGs, they need experience of the content and, therefore, teachers must take this into consideration when planning. Being published before the introduction of universal learning outcomes, *APE* (HMI/DES, 1989) only discusses planning in relation to children's learning needs. However, the later introduced *CGFS* (QCA/DfEE, 2000) states that its 'principal aim is to help practitioners to plan how their work will contribute to the achievement of the early learning goals' (p2). This highlights the importance attached to covering the content of the ELGs and ensuring children achieve the GLD – an expectation that did not exist prior to the introduction of standardised learning goals and accompanying assessments.

Examining the planning expectations of *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b), teachers must plan purposeful play according to individual requirements whilst simultaneously covering the content of the ELGs. Following these conflicting expectations, Murray (2017) writes that teachers in England must 'satisfy a paradox' – meeting the unique needs of individual children while working towards the expectation that 'every child achieves an homogenous set of goals to be 'ready for school''(p340). Returning to the earlier discussed drivers, levers and warrant, under pressure to produce favourable data, research has shown that the latter often takes priority when teachers are planning for play activities (Robert-Holmes, 2015; Bradbury, 2019a).

Steering planning for learning and the direction of play away from individual needs and interests towards a focus on the ELGs, Wood (2019) describes a 'transformation of play into educational play, the playing child as the good learner and the 'school ready' child, and the early childhood practitioner as the effective practitioner' (p793). As recapitulated by Robertson and Hill (2014), they argue that play, once considered as belonging to children, under the current landscape of policy, assessment and accountability has been 'appropriated and repossessed, or even stolen as it is surrendered to the achievement agenda' (p168). Play is now less frequently viewed as an opportunity to follow children's interests and introduce new concepts but is instead more often considered as a mechanism through which the content of the ELGs can be taught and, in turn, the GLD can be achieved.

It should be noted that there has been no reference to *Desirable Outcomes* (SCAA/DfEE, 1996) in this section because there is little reference to play, apart from discussing different types, in the document. Additionally, *Bold Beginnings* (Ofsted, 2017) has not been referred to because, while the discussed policies and government-funded reports, to varying extents, agree that play-based pedagogies are beneficial for children's learning, *Bold Beginnings* (Ofsted, 2017, p29) criticises the downplaying of Literacy and Mathematics, in favour of play-based and CI pedagogies, and preventing effective progression into Year 1. Emphasising the importance attached to directed teaching, *Bold Beginnings* (Ofsted, 2017) moves further along the trajectory towards formal methods of instruction in Reception classes.

2.3.2 Formal methods

The literature shows that, in connection with academically preparing children for primary school, the use of more formal teaching methods in Reception classrooms has been becoming more prominent in recent years (Ang, 2014; Chesworth, 2018b; Basford, 2019; Smedley & Hoskins, 2020). As communicated in *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b), it states: 'as children grow older, and as their development allows, it is expected that the balance will gradually shift towards more activities led by adults, to help children prepare for more formal learning, ready for Year 1' (p9). Progressing through the Reception year (the final year of the EYFS), more time and attention should be afforded to AD teaching and giving children experience of formal pedagogies. The reasoning being that they will be better prepared for learning in Year 1.

In earlier policies, there is no explicit reference to formal pedagogies but *Desirable Outcomes* (SCAA/DfEE, 1996) states that the ELGs 'provide a foundation for later achievement' (p1) and *CGFS* (QCA/DfEE, 2000) discusses developing skills 'that will prepare young children for key stage 1 of the national curriculum' (p3). These documents emphasise the importance of the ELGs and preparation for future learning but *Bold Beginnings* (Ofsted, 2017) is more direct about adopting formal, AD pedagogies. It not only encourages teachers to 'ignore the perceived tensions between the principles of the EYFS and teaching a whole class directly' (p16), but promotes 'direct, interactive whole-class instruction' (p16). That is, teachers should use formal teaching practices more commonly associated with primary school, such as children sitting at desks to complete tasks, to teach whole-class lessons.

Other policies and government-funded reports take a less rigid view on the need for children to gain experience of formal teaching practices. For example, *Teaching and Play* (Ofsted, 2015) refers to staff 'fine-tuning how formal or informal… each learning experience should be to meet the needs of each child most effectively' (p5). Similarly, *Review of the EYFS* (TACTYC, 2011) acknowledges that 'some children are especially vulnerable to the impact of stricter routines, less open environments, and more 'formal' pedagogy' (p28) of classroom settings and *APE* (HMI/DES, 1989) specifically warns against using formal methods with young children. Promoting play-based pedagogies, it states children should not 'be taught by methods which are widely agreed as unsuitable' and their education should not 'be a hot-house forcing-ground' (p33). Thus, *The EYFS Framework,* along with the papers discussed in the previous paragraph, to varying degrees, promote the introduction of formal methods in preparation for Year 1. The documents discussed in this paragraph are more concerned with using the most appropriate pedagogies to meet children's learning needs.

Returning to the topic of 'school readiness,' Basford (2019) attributes this pedagogical shift to a focus on academic instead of emotional preparation for primary school. Comparing the earlier published *APE* with *The EYFS Framework*, the former discusses the need for a 'smooth transition from home to school' (HMI/DES, 1989, p7), while the latter focuses on 'ensuring children are ready to benefit from the opportunities available to them when they begin Year 1' (DfE, 2017b, p9). Basford (2019) writes that 'pedagogically, this has meant a shift in 'free' play and self-expression to scripted learning to achieve more pre-determined curriculum based [sic] learning outcomes' (p779). Impacted by pressures to cover the content of the ELGs and achieve the GLD, more formal lessons are replacing play-based, holistic teaching and learning practices.

Robert-Holmes (2015) highlights 'concomitant pedagogical shifts towards the replication of primary school performance culture' (p307) and expresses concerns that CI pedagogies are becoming marginalised in favour of more formal approaches. Contemplating why such pedagogical changes have been taking place, Bradbury (2019a) links this push for 'school readiness' with human capital theory. Described as 'the knowledge, skills, competences and attributes that allow people to contribute to their personal and social well-being, as well as that of their countries' (Keely, 2007, p3), Campbell-Barr and Nygard (2014) argue that this is the driving force behind investment into ECE in recent years. Contending the intentions of the government, Robertson and Hill (2015) believe the true aim of present policy is 'to serve the economy rather than promoting either the liberal-progressive full-flowering of each child's individuality and potential, or the social-democratic creation of a more socially just society' (p171). They assert that changes in policy and pedagogy are being carried out in the best interests of the economy, not the children or their learning, stating this is 'a direct result of a neoliberal, global drive to increase economic competition and competitiveness' (p171).

An increasingly global market has led to intensified competition and, beginning with the EYFS, the English education system appears to be taking steps to prepare the children of today for the workplace of tomorrow. Ang (2014) writes:

> 'increasing competition at a global level has… been a major factor in influencing the way early years education is shaped... *leading to a* competitive 'global race' where governments become increasingly concerned with national ratings and maintaining a competitive edge in educational outcomes' (p188, *italics author's own*).

The neoliberal push for recognition as a global power has spread from the workplace down into education systems. As a cog in the wheel of a neoliberal society, the 'school readiness' agenda plays a role in developing children's academic skills and knowledge so that they later become contributing citizens to the economy.

Particularly applying to children from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds, the government report, *State of the Nation 2019: Social Mobility in Great Britain* (SMC, 2019), states: 'There are increasing efforts across government, and across society more widely, to redress the socio-economic divide as early as possible' (p22). This type of discourse on social inequality and mobility, and 'closing the gap' has been prominent in government and government-funded documentation for some time (DfE, 2017a; Ofsted, 2017; HCEC, 2019; SMC, 2019). Policies and government-funded reports referring to ECE as 'an investment in the future' (TACTYC, 2011; DfE, 2017a) exemplify the idea that ECE is viewed as a 'viable strategy to close the learning gap and improve equality in achieving lifelong learning and full developmental potential among young children' (Unicef, 2012, p4). By doing so, children are less likely to be a ‘financial burden’ to society as adults. Kay (2018) concludes that ‘the current ‘school readiness’ agenda is seen to be a solution to the cycle of poverty and a way of ensuring children grow up to be financially contributing members of society’ (p22).

Chesworth (2018b) writes: ‘What is problematic here is not the aspiration to raise attainment, but rather the outcomes through which attainment is measured, and how these outcomes are assessed’ (p2). The EYFS, and education in general, may aim to facilitate social mobility but, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, these practices can perpetuate inequalities by valuing a limited range of knowledge and skills (the ELGs) while discounting others (Theobald e*t al.,* 2015). Children who show behaviours and skills aligned with those detailed in *The EYFS Framework* are considered to be successful learners and those who do not – often children who come from different cultures or backgrounds and hold different sets of values, skills and knowledge – can go unacknowledged (White, 2007; Campbell, Barr, 2011; Bradbury, 2013). To combat this, Ang (2014) recommends a more holistic view of what constitutes as valuable learning, knowledge and skills, and a more balanced approach to teaching and learning.

2.3.3 Balancing CI and AD learning

The concept of balancing CI and AD pedagogies has commonly featured in early years policy over the years. For instance, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) writes that there should be a ‘balance between activities led by children, and activities led or guided by adults’ (p9). Likewise, *Review of the EYFS* (TACTYC, 2011) states: ‘children need a balance between activities which they initiate and which can then be guided by adults, and activities which are directed by adults’ (p21), and *APE* (HMI/DES, 1989, p5) highlights the importance of children receiving a broad and balanced education. As with some of the earlier discussed literature (Wood, 2014b; Tan, 2018; Yu *et al.,* 2018; Walsh *et al.,* 2019), these documents expect children to experience both CI and AD pedagogies, covering a range of subjects, and see value in adults participating in CI play to guide learning.

The EYFS Framework (DfE, 2017b) does not give details as to how time should be divided amongst different pedagogies. Instead, there should be an ‘ongoing judgement to be made by practitioners about the balance between activities led by children, and activities led or guided by adults’ (p9). Those working with children are best placed to understand their needs and select the most appropriate pedagogy to support learning. Giving more detail as to what this entails and concurring with some of the earlier discussed literature on the complexity of early years pedagogy (Robson, 2016; Pyle & Danniels, 2017), *Teaching and Play* (Ofsted, 2015) writes that effective teachers view their

> ‘approaches to teaching and play as sitting on a continuum… weighing up the extent of their involvement and fine-tuning how formal or informal, structured or unstructured, dependent or independent each learning experience should be to meet the needs of each child most effectively. (p5).

Pedagogy should not be static, nor dictated by the personal preferences of teachers, but continuously adapted to capture the interest of children and meet their emerging needs. *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) aims for children to become ‘resilient, capable, confident and self-assured’ (p6) learners and recognises that children need opportunities to ‘learn by leading their own play’ (p9) to do so. As described in *CGFS* (QCA/DfEE, 2000), teachers should ‘value, support and encourage independent learning’ (p33) and, according *Teaching and Play* (Ofsted, 2015) provide ‘unstructured, informal and independent experiences for children to learn’ (p14). Thus, whilst children benefit from adult guidance and input, they also need exposure to more explorative approaches that encourage them to take risks and make decisions.

Reflecting the neoliberal discourse of ‘rational choice,’ ‘self-promotion’ and ‘individual responsibility,’ Bradbury (2013) notes that ‘free play organisation of the classroom in Reception provides the opportunity for children to be motivated, rational choosers who engage purposefully in ‘learning’ in all its forms’ (p9). Concurrent with Walsh *et al.’s* (2006, p201) research, they found that, when children are given opportunities to act independently, they engage in more challenging activities, are more learning disposed, and show higher levels of emotional, social and physical well-being. Synonymous with learning characteristics linked to children becoming independent and confident learners, allowing children to navigate their learning through CI activities provides a more practical platform than if an adult were directing the activity.

However, as Wood (2014a) highlights, ‘free play is undertaken for its own sake, and the goals that are formulated by the players emerge, or are planned, within the context of play’ (p12). Allowing children time and freedom to develop characteristics associated with becoming independent learners can conflict with the control over learning required to direct children towards achieving the GLD. Elaborating on Murray's (2017) earlier comment about teachers having to 'satisfy a paradox' of fulfilling the sometimes-conflicting expectation that children's individual learning needs must be met whilst simultaneously ensuring they achieve the GLD, teachers in England may be experiencing a paradox of pedagogies. *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) suggests that teachers should use their professional judgement to select the most appropriate pedagogical approach but, under the current accountability regime, research has shown that achieving the GLD, through more formal AD approaches, often takes precedence (Robert-Holmes, 2015; Robert-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016a; Bradbury, 2019a).

Linking back to the discussion on the 'school readiness' agenda, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) places more emphasis on using formal AD methods for the purpose of academic teaching than earlier policies. For example, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) asserts that 'as children grow older, and as their development allows, it is expected that the balance will gradually shift towards more activities led by adults, to help children prepare for more formal learning, ready for Year 1 (p9). Comparatively, *CGFS* (QCA/DfEE, 2000) refers to the 'direct teaching of skills and knowledge' (p23) in the context of supporting children to use scissors and pencils correctly. Whilst in the past, direct teaching was acknowledged as being beneficial to children's learning, it was seen as a way to develop basic, as opposed to academic, skills.

At the other end of the spectrum of pedagogies, *Bold Beginnings* moves further along the trajectory towards formal lessons in Reception classrooms. *Bold Beginnings* (Ofsted, 2017) recognises the Reception year 'as the beginning of a child's formal education' (p8) and, as such, explicitly promotes the formal teaching of academic subjects. It encourages 'direct, interactive whole-class instruction, particularly for reading, writing and Mathematics' (p16), and criticises play-based and child-initiated pedagogies for hindering progress in literacy and mathematics and preventing effective 'progression to Year 1' (p29). With a clear emphasis on formal, AD pedagogies, *Bold Beginnings* (Ofsted, 2017) aims for children to be academically prepared for later learning and the whole-class lessons they will experience there. Recent studies suggest that children's experiences of Reception are increasingly moving in this direction (Bradbury, 2019a; Hoskins & Smedley, 2019; Robert-Holmes & Kitto, 2019). Terming this process as the 'schoolification' of Reception children, Bradbury (2019a) notes that data procedures have led to 'more formal teaching, a focus on literacy and mathematics, and use of 'ability' grouping' (p7).

Although the EYFS curriculum is not the focus of discussion and there is no scope to fully explore the topic here, it is helpful to briefly examine how expectations in Literacy and Mathematics have increased and, in turn, impacted pedagogy. *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) asserts that 'the level of progress children should be expected to have attained by the end of the EYFS is defined by the early learning goals' (p10) and *how* children learn (the pedagogy) is impacted by *what* they must learn (the content of the ELGs). Studies have shown that, in the case of the EYFS, this often entails allocating time and resources to the direct teaching of literacy and mathematics (Bradbury, 2019a; Robert-Holmes & Kitto, 2019).

Except for requiring children to meet the criteria of the ELG in Literacy and Mathematics, as well as the prime areas, to achieve the GLD, there is no mention of prioritising Literacy and Mathematics in *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b). However, examining the requirements for the ELGs in these two subjects is illuminating (It should be noted that the expectations have changed in the most recent version of *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2021)). In Literacy, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) expects children to be able to 'read and understand simple sentences' and 'write simple sentences which can be read by themselves and others' (p11). Comparing these requirements with earlier policies, the learning outcome for Language and Literacy in *Desirable Outcomes* (SCAA/DfEE), 1996) states that children should 'recognise their own names and some familiar words' and 'use pictures, symbols, familiar words and letters, to communicate meaning' (p3). Having no statutory learning outcomes, *APE* (HMI/DES, 1989) mentions teaching 'children about the relationship between letters and the initial sounds of words in stories' (p17) and 'providing writing materials for them to record… such things as shopping lists and telephone messages' (p18).

In Mathematics, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) expects children to 'count reliably with numbers from 1 to 20, place them in order and say which number is one more or one less than a given number… add and subtract two single-digit numbers and count on or back to find the answer' (p12). Comparatively, *Desirable Outcomes* (SCAA/DfEE, 1996) requires children to 'recognise and use numbers to 10 and… begin to show awareness of number operations, such as addition and subtraction' (p3). Finally, *APE* (HMI/DES, 1989) states that 'children learn to sort, match and order during domestic play' and should be given direct experience in activities that develop 'understanding of ideas about order, difference and quantity' (p24).

These examples demonstrate how policy requirements for achievement in Literacy and Mathematics outcomes have increased over time. Ang (2014) writes: ‘the expectations of children to achieve in the national tests inevitably contribute to the drive for a more formal curriculum, focused mainly on core aspects of learning such as literacy and numeracy’ (p192). Children have gone from pointing out initial sounds in books and using mark-making to write shopping lists to reading and writing sentences. Likewise, mathematical activities, once based around practical experiences in role-play and construction activities, have now been replaced with learning a range of mathematical functions and applying them to various problems. The learning examples given in *APE* (HMI/DES, 1989) suggest a holistic and play-based approach to pedagogy. However, research has shown that formal lessons to meet increasingly challenging learning outcomes in Literacy and Mathematics have become increasingly common in Reception classrooms (Ang, 2014; Bradbury, 2019a; Robert-Holmes & Kitto, 2019).

Despite *The EYFS Framework* promoting a balance of CI and AD pedagogies, the expectations in Literacy and Mathematics, along with the drive to academically prepare children for Year 1 of primary school, have resulted in children experiencing more AD pedagogies during their Reception year. Furthermore, AD pedagogies are moving further away from adults guiding children through play-based activities towards formal lessons. Thus, the balance of pedagogies in Reception classrooms is becoming weighed down by policy and data expectations.

2.4 Pedagogical expectations

This policy analysis asks: How are pedagogical expectations communicated in *The EYFS Framework?* To answer this question, Hyatt’s (2013) CDAF, along with Ryan and Bernard’s (2003) suggestions to identify recurring themes, were applied. Through an examination of the levers, drivers and warrant behind *The EYFS Framework,* a deconstruction of the language used to discuss pedagogy and comparison with earlier policy and government-funded reports, this analysis has demonstrated how pedagogical expectations are becoming increasingly focused on AD pedagogies to meet policy requirements on assessment and data.

Concurrent with earlier research, the trajectory shows how ECE in England is becoming progressively standardised through the implementation of universal learning outcomes

(Campbell-Barr, 2012; Ang, 2014; Hoskins & Smedley, 2019). To achieve these outcomes, there has been increasing interference in early years teaching and learning through the introduction of more detailed policy on the part of the government (Kwon, 2002) and, under pressure to do so, a move towards more AD pedagogies in Reception classrooms (Campbell-Barr *et al.*, 2012; Basford & Bath, 2014; Robert-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016a). Considering the rationale behind these changes, the political warrant, levers and drivers highlight a neoliberal undertone aiming to ultimately prepare children for a competitive, global workplace. Despite criticisms from the academic community, English early years policy appears focused on subsequent stages in life – namely getting children 'school ready' in preparation to later be 'work ready' (Bradbury, 2013; Kay, 2018; Wood, 2019).

Regarding pedagogical expectations, *The EYFS Framework* (2017b) communicates that play-based approaches, formal instruction and balancing CI and AD pedagogies are pivotal to the education of Reception children. As with earlier policies, such as *CGFS* (QCA/DfEE, 2000) and *APE* (HMI/DES, 1989) it promotes 'planned' and 'purposeful' play, but the focus is to ensure the content of the ELGs is covered and children achieve the GLD. *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) expects Reception children to experience formal, AD pedagogies to both cover the ELGs and academically prepare them for Year 1. Despite this, there is still an expectation that a balance of both CI and AD should be applied in Reception classrooms – albeit that the balance tends to weigh more heavily on the side of AD methods – particularly in Literacy and Mathematics.

Comparing *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) to the past policies and government-funded reports referred to throughout this chapter, policy expectations regarding pedagogy are becoming progressively tailored towards achieving standardised learning outcomes and 'school readiness.' At the same time, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) continues to hold on to approaches traditionally associated with ECE such as play-based pedagogies. Returning once again to Murray's (2017) concept of teachers having to satisfy a paradox, the conflicting expectations that Reception children should experience play-based and explorative pedagogies but also formal instruction, that teachers should ensure children's individual needs are met while simultaneously ensuring children meet the ELGs and that children should become confident and independent learners while adhering to adult direction and following a demanding curriculum, mean teaching and learning in Reception classrooms has become a paradox of pedagogies.

Through a review of the current literature on the EYFS, the following chapter will move on to examine the practical teaching and learning that takes place in English Reception classrooms.

Chapter 3: A sociocultural perspective on pedagogy

The overarching aim of this research is to examine the use of adult-directed (AD) and child-initiated (CI) pedagogies in Reception classrooms, and in particular, how children use aspects of sociocultural learning. A sociocultural lens is applied to comment on the learning described in the existing literature and the data collected for this present project. Focusing predominantly on research concerning The Early Years Foundation Stage (the EYFS), but also exploring relevant early years research from other countries, the purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of sociocultural theory in education, introduce Rogoff's (1990; 1993; 1995) 'planes of analysis' and apply the framework to the existing literature.

From a theoretical perspective, defining specific learning behaviours and capabilities as 'expected,' places the EYFS within the realm of developmentalism (Basford & Bath, 2014). Although there is no scope here to fully explore the intricacies of developmental theory, Basford and Bath (2014) comment that it ties in with the positivist drive to measure progress, declaring some characteristics as 'normal' while rejecting others as 'abnormal.' Expanding on this, Wood and Hedges (2016) note that this method was created to combat a 'laissez faire' approach to ECE whereby adults provide opportunities but there is little adult intervention. To prevent this, and as is the case with the EYFS, teachers are given concrete targets (the Early Learning Goals (ELGs)) to work towards and this is how progress is assessed and measured.

As Theobald *et al.* (2015) have highlighted, focusing on specific behaviours and capabilities can lead to other skills and knowledge going unnoticed or being discounted. Values attached to developmentalism and the EYFS – specifically achievement in Literacy and Mathematics, and 'school readiness' – can overshadow what is important to children. As Rodriguez (2013) states, in my teaching and research, I 'seek not just to instruct but to inspire, connect with, and engage students in meaningful learning experiences' (p87). Working with diverse groups of children, as is the case with the school where I teach, this can present both opportunities as well as challenges (Rodriguez, 2013).

Addressing this issue, Ang (2014) advocates 'recognising the diverse contexts that shape children's learning, which are at times at odds with the prescriptive nature of government policies and curricular expectations' (p185). A wide range of talents and learning, reflecting children's broad range of experiences, should be celebrated and built upon in education. To facilitate this, Marginson and Dang (2017) suggest sociocultural theory as a more flexible and inclusive alternative to the rigid and individualistic features of developmentalism. Derived from the work of Vygotsky (1962), sociocultural theory is based on the belief that the learning of individuals is predominantly shaped by their social environment. Learning is a social act, influenced by the surrounding community and environment. It is culturally significant and culture subsequently impacts what is learnt and how learning happens. Interactions that occur between learners and members of their communities, their families, teachers and peers are reciprocal, and people are motivated (or demotivated) to learn by those they encounter.

3.1 Culture in education

Children first experience learning through their home culture and the practices of those in their immediate environment – normally their family members. Influenced by factors such as geographical location, religious practices, socio-economic status and family heritage, these early childhood experiences vary from child-to-child. Transitioning from home to school can be challenging for children – particularly when English is not their first language and they are used to different cultural practices (Woods e*t al.,* 1999; Drury, 2007; 2013). Consequently, several studies have demonstrated how children can benefit from building on their home experiences in school and learning through activities of cultural significance to them (e.g., Moll *et al.,* 1992; Chesworth, 2016).

The empirical element of this research was carried out in a school where the children come from a diverse range of backgrounds. Most have experience of their families' home country cultures as well as practices more culturally associated with England and, through these diverse experiences, the children have developed unique interests in topics culturally significant to them. However, as previous research has found (Hoskins & Smedley, 2019; Nicholson, 2019), there is rarely time to follow these interests due to time constraints and pressures to focus on the content of the EYFS.

Recognising culture as an important factor in education, the next section begins by looking at how culture can influence education systems and practices. It then goes on to discuss funds of knowledge and how they can be accessed as a starting point to progress learning and, finally, the extent to which children's home cultures are celebrated and used to further learning in Reception classrooms is examined.

3.1.1 Culture and learning

From an international perspective, research suggests that globalisation has had little impact on the cultural identities of individual countries when it comes to education (Tobin *et al.,* 2009; Zhang & Pelletier, 2012; Maad & Cherni, 2015; Nah & Waller, 2015). Despite recent attempts by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2018) to standardise ECE across the continents and the international uptake of approaches such as Montessori and Reggio Emilia, ECE systems across the world have retained key elements of their traditional cultural identities. Zhang and Pelletier (2012) note that western ideals such as 'learning through play' and 'child-centred learning,' have been widely adopted but blended with traditional practices. Elements of foreign approaches are borrowed and amalgamated with local methods to form new cultural identities unique to individual countries. Describing how this process has evolved, Tobin *et al.* (2009) write:

> 'Some cultural practices have been replaced by practices borrowed from abroad, but other cultural practices have emerged unscathed… still others have evolved into hybrid forms, and along the way some new cultural practices have been invented' (p23).

On a country-wide scale, education culture has evolved to reflect expectations and aims during specific periods. However, Tobin *et al*. (2009) comment that these changes are more likely to have occurred due to policy changes and, as has been highlighted in the earlier policy analysis, reflect the aims of policymakers rather than represent the increasingly diverse school populations they affect.

Education practices should evolve to meet the ever-changing needs of those they seek to serve. With globalisation comes an increase in the number of children entering schooling in a country different from where they or their parents were born and they bring with them a range of previous experiences and diverse cultural learning needs. Following the early days of bilingual children entering the English school system, Drury (2007; 2013) found that some easily picked up the cultural practices of school while others found it difficult to adapt. She describes a child becoming distressed in her new surroundings and staff struggling to understand her needs. She notes that, from a sociocultural perspective, the practices of school are not an extension of those experienced at home but an entirely new set of rules. Children 'require a whole new information set to become internalised, not merely as what is expected by their nursery, but also what is passed on to them through the setting of wider social, cultural and historical forces… of early schooling' (Drury, 2013, p50). For any child beginning school, this can be a daunting process but, the more school culture differs from a child's home culture, the more difficult it can become.

Recognising the complexity of the situation, Woods *et al.* (1999) write – 'there is a mix of cultures, individuals differ, and lives are lived out at different levels' (p133). Yet, despite the many barriers, they observed children making sense of their experiences and developing friendships. They became adept at communicating with each other (through various mediums and languages) and began to build sub-cultures. They do so because they are socially motivated to become part of their new community. Hedges and Cooper (2016) argue that – 'Participation in cultural activities, and in the actions and social interactions through which they occur, determines the experiences that both motivate children's interests and those they can draw on to express interests in an educational setting' (p318). For young children starting school, they form new identities through the friends they make, the interactions they have with them and the experiences they create together. These experiences hold the potential to create curiosity and inspire children to learn.

So far, the discussion has focused on children from overseas but research has shown how communities close in proximity can also hold very different cultural beliefs and practices. For example, Heath's (1983) influential study observed how young children, from the same area of the USA but with different backgrounds, learn to talk. Despite all participating children and their families speaking English as a first language and being born and raised in the area, the study found distinct variations in how the culture of each community impacts language and communication development. This demonstrates the extent to which local cultures and interactions within the community can impact children's learning. The degree to which children's learning varied across the three communities similarly highlights the uniqueness and fragility of community cultures. Every child's culture is an amalgamation of the experiences they have gathered throughout their short lives. It is influenced by family, friends and encounters, and is unique to each individual. These factors can be used as tools to develop and enhance learning but, all too often, these variations are seen as barriers as opposed to opportunities.

As earlier discussed, Basford and Bath (2014) criticise the EYFS for following an approach based on what is deemed 'normal' development for children. They point out that this narrow view of what is 'normal' can lead to skills, besides those described in the EYFS, going unrecognised, putting children from different cultures at a disadvantage. To reflect the diverse backgrounds of children in multicultural classrooms, and value the range of experiences they bring, Kim *et al.* (2021) recommend a 'culturally responsive curriculum.' Their study found that, by implementing a 'multiliteracies pedagogy,' the class teacher began to recognise a wider range of the children's acquired skills and, in turn, adapted her pedagogy to build on them. Moving beyond a reliance on text in a traditional paper format and instead using technology as a medium for learning, the children were able to 'successfully move between modes such as visual, spatial, audio, gestural, written, and oral language' (p6). Pedagogy and learning evolved to meet the needs of the children who were then able to better express their ideas in various ways. Prior to implementing this new approach, the teacher had been unaware of some of these skills and was, therefore, unable to develop them.

Educators can gain a better understanding of the diverse skills children already have by cooperating with their families. Discussing emergent bilingual children (but applicable to all), Mullaney (2021) suggests that adults should observe how children interact with their families and adopt some of these practices in school. Through better awareness of home practices and learning, teachers can better provide for children's unique needs, interests and cultures. This can be done by accessing children's 'funds of knowledge' which can be an effective way to find out more about children's home learning to then build on in school.

3.1.2 Funds of knowledge

For young children, previous everyday experiences that occur in the home with family members are often culturally significant. They can spike curiosity, become independent hobbies and be developed in formal education to make learning meaningful to children. Derived from earlier research (Vélez-lbáñez, 1988; Greenberg, 1989 (cited in Moll *et al.,* 1992); Tapia, 1991 (cited in Moll *et al.,* 1992)), Moll *et al.* (1992) use the term 'funds of knowledge' 'to refer to these historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being' (p133). Taken from tasks relevant to the community featured in their research, they give examples of hunting, mining, horse riding and cooking as possible funds of knowledge. In an English context, Chesworth (2016) discusses children bringing experiences, such as repairing cars and baking, from home to school. Funds of knowledge are interests and learning, grounded in the family or community and experienced alongside other members, that can be used as a contextualised starting point for learning in school.

However, there are several barriers preventing funds of knowledge from being fully utilised in formal education. For instance, Chesworth, (2016) found that teachers may hold misconceptions about where interests have derived from, and in turn, not be able to fully develop them. Getting to know children and their interests takes time but research suggests that curriculum and assessment commitments are dominating many Reception classrooms, leaving little time for doing so (Campbell-Barr *et al*., 2012; Basford & Bath, 2014; Robert-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016a). Campbell-Barr *et al.* (2012) assert that the current approach "*imposes* restrictions to practice, limits to understandings of children and *fails* to engage with the wider social context of the child' (p859 *italics author's own*). In attempts to meet policy requirements, some types of play and activities are not acknowledged as legitimate or purposeful learning (Murray, 2017; Chesworth, 2018b). The focus on the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) means learning outside of these is sometimes not valued and there is not enough time for teachers to get to know children, their interests and where they stem from. Building relationships with children and their families can be a valuable tool in understanding funds of knowledge but, with increasing measures of accountability and performance ranking, it is not always possible.

The relationships and interactions children have with others can be equally beneficial as the activity itself because children are often more motivated to learn when working collaboratively with others. Acknowledging the complexity of relationships within communities, Moll *et al*. (1992) write:

> 'these networks are flexible, adaptive, and active, and may involve multiple persons from outside the homes; in our terms, they are "thick" and "multi-

> stranded," meaning that one may have multiple relationships with the same person or with various persons' (p133).

This view is shared by Rogoff (1995) who states that it is naïve to think that 'influence can be ascribed in one direction or another or that relative contributions can be counted' (p141). Within this complex network of relationships, individuals hold many roles – there is no fixed 'teacher' and 'student.' Learning is a multi-way process with each member holding a unique skill set that can be shared to benefit the wider community and its members.

In comparison, Moll *et al*. (1992) state that relationships between children and their teachers can be '"thin" and "single-stranded," as the teacher "knows" the students only from their performance within rather limited classroom contexts' (p134). Linked to these one-dimensional relationships, Marsh's (2003) research on 3–4-year-olds' literacy practices at home and in Nursery illustrates how seldom home literacy practices are mirrored in school. She discovered that, while Nursery literacy practices were often replicated at home, literacy practices popular at home, such as activities around media and cultural texts, were rarely adopted in Nursery. *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) discusses practitioners supporting parents and carers to build on school learning at home but there is no reference to transferring home learning to school. Despite research highlighting the benefits of learning more about children's home lives and using this information to develop learning in school (Moll *et al.,* 1992; Marsh, 2003; Mullaney, 2021), it appears school and home, teacher and family continue to be viewed as separate entities.

For educators to learn more about children's home lives, they first need to develop relationships with families. However, in their study of teachers entering the homes of their four-year-old students to find out about family learning, Whyte and Karabon (2016) found issues of power and perception can act as barriers. Despite the teachers' eagerness, they observed strongly defined boundaries between home and school with the teachers determining, and families allowing them to determine, the direction of learning and conversation. Although the teachers were in 'family territory' to learn about home practices, because of perceptions of the teacher as educator and children/families as learners, teachers tended to control the experiences. This example demonstrates the imbalance of power between families and teachers. If families and the skills and knowledge they help children to learn were viewed as being as valuable as those taught to children in school, there may be a more even distribution of power, better enabling families and teachers to see each other as equals and work cooperatively.

Moving away from a focus on academic subjects predominantly associated with school, a wider range of knowledge and skills – activities culturally significant to children and their families – must be recognised, valued and developed in the classroom. Suggesting an alternative to the rigid restrictions of formal education, Rogoff (2003) states the case for adopting a cultural approach – accepting cultural differences in learning and valuing the contributions families and their cultural practices can bring. At the heart of this approach, is an open mind to education and a desire on the teacher's behalf to work as part of the child's learning community.

3.1.3 Rising to the multicultural challenge

With little attention afforded to building on home learning in school in policy documents such as *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b)*,* the mixing pot of cultures, identities and languages that now makes up many early years settings can be viewed as problematic by some educators (Drury, 2007; 2014; Bradbury, 2013; Clarke & Watson, 2014). According to Ang (2010), the EYFS 'may have done well in acknowledging the importance of cultural diversity *but* it falls short of attaching sufficient weight to cultural differences that often exist among ethnic groups (p48, *italics author's own*). In practice, there is still misunderstanding about how to cater for multicultural identities.

For example, to promote equality, some settings do not plan for racial differences. But, in not doing so, Clarke and Watson (2014) note that the needs of minority children are being overlooked. In other cases, educators have shown outright frustration towards children who do not 'fit the mould.' For instance, Wright (1993) reports children from different backgrounds being 'perceived as a problem to teachers because of their limited cognitive skills, poor English language and poor social skills and inability to socialise with other groups in the class' (p58) and teachers 'showing open disapproval of their customs and traditions' (p28). More recently, Bradbury (2013) describes a teacher becoming annoyed with a child who interrupts a shared reading story by reading the content aloud before the teacher does. Despite the child demonstrating advanced reading skills, her 'disruptive approach' did not fit with the culture of the setting.

In the above-described situations, the children did not fit the description of what the EYFS and, in turn, the teachers deemed to be 'the ideal learner'. Bradbury (2013, p1) describes the 'ideal learner,' as communicated in the EYFS, as a child who is able to make rational choices, self-promote and learn independently. This infers that children who might struggle with acquiring or displaying these characteristics – namely children who come from cultures that do not value or promote such traits or children with special educational needs – are unlikely to be viewed as 'ideal learners' or have their different approaches to learning valued.

Returning to the influence of neoliberal politics discussed in the previous chapter, Bradbury (2013) writes that the identity of the 'ideal learner' is 'constituted through a framework of neoliberal values, which overlay older and alternative notions of a 'good student' while closing down other possibilities for successful subjectivities in school' (p1). Sonu and Benson (2016) state that, through policy, school routines and practices, and shame, children are sculpted into neoliberal learners who will fit the mould of neoliberal citizens of the future. Referring to the USA but applicable to the English system, they use the term 'quasi-human' to describe the view that children are in some way not fully formed humans and need guidance to become so. Specifically applying to children who possess learning traits not acknowledged by the EYFS, they can be misunderstood or under-valued because they do not fit the description of the 'ideal learner' (Stirrup *et al.*, 2017; Robert-Holmes & Kitto, 2019).

Celebrating the achievements of those who conform and excel within the confinements of what is expected, the EYFS 'has the power to shape who is understood as successful' (Bradbury, 2013, p6). The competitive nature of a neoliberal education system that celebrates 'winners' (those who fit the EYFS mould) means 'losers' (those who do not) are made to feel ashamed of their failure. Campbell-Barr *et al.* (2012) criticise the EYFS for predetermining what skills should be important to a child, with little regard for individual needs and preferences. White (2007) notes that these white, middle-class values may be well-suited to children and educators from the same background but imposing such attributes upon children from other cultures makes it difficult for them to engage with the setting and the learning that happens there. As Campbell-Barr e*t al.* (2011) argue - 'If the culture of the community that children come from is not recognised and valued, it can alienate them from the setting/school and turn them off education' (p866). Moll *et al.* (1992) write that this can lead to classrooms seeming 'encapsulated, if not isolated, from the social worlds and resources of the community' (p134). When children enter the Reception year at just four years old, they already possess a bank of experiences and skills. However, if these experiences and skills are not aligned with the expectations of the EYFS, then already at this young age, a gulf between children and formal education can begin to develop.

This narrow view of what constitutes effective learning impacts how children are viewed as learners. For instance, Woods (1999, p158) states that teachers may identify children as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ pupils and ‘able’ or ‘less able’ learners, leading the other children to classify their classmates in the same way. Hart *et al.’s* (2004) extensive research on ability grouping has shown that this form of labelling can be detrimental to children’s learning, both present and future. Once a child believes they are a certain type of learner, they tend to behave in that way. Yet, the different treatment of children is sometimes unintentional. For example, Lillemyr *et al.* (2011) found that teachers used more direct approaches with certain groups and different cultural groups showed preferences for teacher and child-initiated learning. Here, the teacher consciously or unconsciously makes assumptions about the children’s learning preferences based on the racial or social group they belong to. In response, children from those groups become pre-inclined to a specific learning style.

The work of Conteh *et al.* (2007), *Multilingual Learning: Stories from Schools and Communities across Britain,* similarly highlights issues with the monolingual (and monocultural) education system currently in place in England. Kenner’s (2010) review praises the book for bringing to light how community languages and approaches to education can be undervalued in policy and by politicians. Rather contradictory, Bailey and Harries (2009) comment that the book draws attention to ‘the discrepancy between the celebration of diversity within government policy and a homogenising ideology which permeates within contemporary society’ (p91). While Kenner (2010) believes policy does not merit multilingualism, Bailey and Harris (2009) think it is celebrated in policy but see the dissonance between policy and practice.

Regardless of this disagreement, Conteh *et al.’s* (2007) work and associated reviews (Bailey & Harris, 2009; Kenner, 2010) show that, in practice, for the many multilingual and multicultural children attending English schools, the pre-existing knowledge and skills they bring are largely being ignored. Stirrup *et al.* (2017) write how presumptions are made ‘about the predispositions children bring to each setting and their ability… to recognise, display and perform appropriately those forms of play which are valued most in EYE policy texts’ (p356). For some children from different cultures, they have had little previous experience with the type of play outlined in *The EYFS Framework* (Wood, 2014a) and the play they do participate in can be unrecognised by adults.

Perhaps due to this lack of recognition of other cultures, children can reject their home language and practices whilst in school, and instead solely adhere to the dominant culture. For instance, Clarke and Watson (2014) describe children of different ethnicities favouring white dolls over dolls of the same ethnicity as themselves and, not only refusing to speak their home language but belittling it. Showing a deficit in bridging learning between home and school, this once again highlights the issue of policy dictating and restricting what is seen as valuable learning, while neglecting to recognise anything outside of this as of value.

However, this does not have to be the case. There is an established body of research (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Chesworth, 2016; Hedges & Cooper, 2016) that advocates, and in some cases demonstrates the effectiveness of, broadening the educational scope to embrace cultural uniqueness and provide better learning opportunities in schools. Presenting the case for an alternative approach, Hedges and Cullen (2012) describe a view of ECE that encompasses 'children's early cognitive and affective development through everyday experiences and learning processes, represented in concepts such as funds of knowledge, working theories and dispositions, are viewed as outcomes' (p922). That is, children's everyday experiences and interests, particularly those embedded in the cultures of the children's families and communities, can be used as a springboard from which learning can be propelled forward.

3.2 A sociocultural perspective on pedagogy

The idea that cultural and social experiences should form the core of educational activities sits at the foundations of sociocultural theory. From Rogoff's (2003) perspective, '*people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in light of their cultural practices and circumstances of their communities – which also change'* (p4, *italics in original*). Optimal learning takes place when children embark on learning journeys that are set in a context in which they are culturally acclimatised and socially motivated. Hedges and Cullen (2012) write:

> ‘Children’s learning and knowledge-building about their world is focused and given meaning by the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs. Children’s active participation in families, communities and cultures is motivated by their desire to be participating members of such groups’ (p936).

When children begin school, there is a desire to make friends and become part of their school community. It is this desire to be socially accepted that drives children to adapt to their new circumstances and learn new knowledge and skills.

Stemming from the work of Vygotsky (1978), learning is understood to be a social process that takes place through interactions with others. He writes: ‘Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, *between* people… and then *inside* the child’ (p57, *italics in original*). The child is exposed to new knowledge and skills through others and the interactions they have with them. They then internalise new learning to gain a deeper and more personal understanding. Mirrored in the work of Dewey he writes that ‘every individual has grown up… in a social medium. His responses grow intelligent, or gain meaning, simply because he lives and acts in a medium of accepted meanings and values’ (1916/2018, p313). A person’s knowledge and understanding can only be understood in the context in which it has been experienced and these experiences are impacted by the surrounding environment, culture and interactions with others.

Returning to Moll *et al.’s* (1992) idea of holding multiple relationships with different members of the community, Rogoff (1995) notes that both Vygotsky’s and Dewey’s theories ‘focus on children participating with other people in a social order with a seamless involvement of individuals in sociocultural activity’ (p141). Advocating a similar approach, Rogoff (1995, p142) looks to examine children’s development through the ‘cultural activity’ and ‘interpersonal actions’ they experience in their everyday lives through observing social activity in three ‘planes of analysis’: **community**, **interpersonal** and **personal**. Linked to these planes, are three ‘developmental processes’ that this thesis will refer to as ‘learning roles’:

- **Apprenticeship** – **community** processes referring to the active involvement of individuals participating in a culturally organised activity with others to develop less experienced members

- **Guided participation** – **interpersonal** processes referring to the face-to-face and side-by-side processes of communication as members participate in culturally valued activities
- **Appropriation** – the **personal** process of how individuals learn and change through their participation in an activity and how this impacts how they later handle situations

Concerned with the learning and development of children, the remainder of this chapter focuses on the application of these learning roles to the existing body of literature on CI and AD learning. The framework is then later applied to the empirical data collected for this research project in Chapter 5. This framework of analysis was chosen because it offers a structured approach to viewing data from a sociocultural perspective. It takes into consideration varying learning contexts, the impact of the environment, the influence of others, the social interaction that occurs with different actors and the pressures and constraints these can have on children and their learning. Overall, the framework offers a broad view of different types of sociocultural learning that take place in the early years classroom.

3.2.1 Apprenticeship

Rogoff's (1995) use of the term 'apprenticeship' refers to inexperienced members of the community being guided by those who are more experienced through culturally organised activities. It involves new members learning about the structure of the community and related practices, including 'cultural constraints, resources, values relating to what means are appropriate for reaching goals… and cultural tools' (p143-144). 'Apprenticeship' entails an introduction to the foundations of the community or communities in which the child is immersed, the traditions, cultural norms, history and rules. It describes the infrastructure of the community, how to behave and what is expected of members. Returning to the work of Drury (2007; 2013), children entering the Reception year will have become accustomed to the practices and tools of their families and home communities, but beginning school involves learning an entirely new set of cultural practices. It is through 'apprenticeship' that children start to understand their role in school.

Bradbury's (2013) example of a child reading aloud during a shared reading session demonstrates that, while the child has learnt quite advanced reading skills, she has yet to adapt to the procedures for story time. She does not yet understand that story time is not an appropriate time for her to demonstrate her knowledge. In other research, Bradbury (2014) describes a child labelled as ‘disruptive’ by the teacher during tidy-up time. The children are required to stop and show fingers in the air as the teacher dings a triangle, but the child has his hands full of toys. She states that the child ‘is confused about what to do because he has no hands free to do the fingers action’ (p351) and gets told off for not following instructions. These children are still learning the rules of their new school community and are, therefore, not sure how to behave.

Amongst the children themselves, some rules need to be adhered to if a child wants to be accepted. For instance, Wood (2014a) discusses a young boy trying to join an established friendship group. He was not allowed to participate when he approached and broke their construction, but when he stood nearby observing, they would sometimes include him by giving him simple tasks to carry out. These are examples of institutional practices that children must adjust to but are likely to have had limited previous exposure to. They must learn to adapt their behaviour to fit the expectations, norms and rules of the school they attend, and the function of apprenticeship is there to support them in doing so.

Children quickly begin to recognise signs that support their acquisition of the knowledge and skills they need to get through the school day. For example, Robson and Rowe (2012) observed a little boy showing his finished drawing to an adult. The adult’s simple “mm” response was enough to prompt him to go back and write his name on his work. Similarly, research has found that children associate the presence of an adult with ‘work’ and not ‘play’ (Goodhall & Atkinson, 2017). Giving the example of children distinguishing between ‘work’ and ‘play according to what day it is (they do ‘work’ on some days and not others), Breathnach *et al.* (2017) found that the children decided whether a task was ‘work’ or ‘play’ based on their daily routine and not the requirements of the task. They note that the children drew ‘specifically on the adult-constructed agenda of how the classroom is managed in their responses’ (p446). Whether it be adults reminding children of procedures or following routines imposed by adults, the early experiences of apprentices in school are largely sculpted by adults.

CI learning should, in theory, allow ‘apprentices’ more freedom to determine, or at least be part of creating their own rules and practices. CI learning provides opportunities for ‘children to negotiate with adults and peers access to resources, space and partners of their choosing’

(Breathnach *et al.,* 2017, p443), allowing them to contribute to the establishment of new sets of guidelines. For example, having observed open-ended, imaginative play in the outdoors, Flanningan and Dietze (2017) note that the children, without the support of an adult, assigned themselves roles and collectively worked towards common goals such as defeating villains or finding resources. Working in collaboration with adults on a construction project, Hirst (2019) similarly comments that children assigned themselves and their peers roles. These apprentices worked in collaboration to establish their own rules to maintain play and achieve their self-imposed desired outcomes. Similarly, Chesworth (2018b) describes two young children experimenting with water and gutter piping. The children had just discovered the activity and were discussing what they were doing and planning how to do it next time around. They demonstrated a shared motivation and together worked towards mastering the task. Both apprentices played equal parts in determining the rules and focus of the activity.

However, such shared approaches to apprenticeship may be limited to specific tasks while the overall culture of the class and school remains much more rigid. For example, during the previously mentioned episode of children experimenting with water, a third child joins them and states: "You've made it all wet. Are you allowed to do that?" (Chesworth, 2018b). He is aware that there are expectations of what they are permitted and not permitted to do and questions whether this activity falls into the permitted category. This does not mean that children will not try to find ways around rules; Wood (2014a) describes a group of children standing on blocks (to make themselves taller) so they can get around the rule of not building taller than their tummies and sneaking into a playhouse when the maximum capacity has already been reached. Further research observed a child taking on an authoritative role with her peers, controlling the activity as if she were in a position of power. Instructing her peers in a group game, she was careful to ensure it was always herself or one of her friends who was picked. When she was challenged by another child about this, she forbade him from joining in with the game (Stirrup *et al.,* 2017). She had learnt how to dominate her peers by taking on the role of the teacher and her friends also understood the unwritten rule that she should be followed. Unfortunately for the child who questioned her, he was not aware of this, leading him to be expelled from the activity.

Children's ability and willingness to adhere to such school practices can impact how they are viewed by both other children and adults. For instance, Stirrup et *al.'s* (2017) research found that practitioners classed children as 'good' or 'able' when they 'displayed positive attributes and were responsive to practitioner expectations, such as tidying up toys, sharing or displaying 'manners' at snack and lunch' (p878). When children understand the norms of their class community and act in a way that fits the expectations of adults, they are accepted and praised for their work and behaviour. Following the rules (implicit and explicit), they become institutionalised and start to consider the way they should behave as opposed to doing what they want.

Criticising this institutionalisation of children through the education system, Bradbury (2013) writes:

> 'The inclusion of many values that are associated with neoliberal ideas is significant in discussion of how schools shape pupils, and what is valued in classrooms. To be recognisable as a learner, these children need to perform a complex array of characteristics, at the right times and in the right ways' (p15).

Ball (2013) states that the modern neo-liberal government 'uses comparisons and judgements, and self-management, in place of interventions and direction' (p137). Therefore, without specific instructions, the role of more experienced peers becomes even more significant in guiding children to conform – if that is what they seek to do.

However, cultural norms and practices have existed since long before the introduction of institutions such as schools. Rogoff (2003) cites some examples of apprentices from different backgrounds learning the ways of their communities: children as young as three learning to tend gardening plots and care for younger children (Watson-Gegeo, 1990, as cited in Rogoff, 2003) and eight-month-olds throwing spears and using knives to cut fruit (Hewlett, 1991, as cited in Rogoff, 2003). She notes that in some cultures, such practices may be deemed inappropriate, or even dangerous, but are necessary for that community. With the help of more experienced members, young children must learn the practices of their people and follow the traditions of their communities. Schneidman and Woodward (2015) write: 'Beginning in infancy, children depend on others to learn language, to learn how to act in culturally appropriate ways, and to engage with the physical environment effectively' (p1). Therefore, children's ability to grow and learn, to some extent, relies on adapting and conforming to the ways of their communities – and this includes school. As they become acquainted with these practices, they can then begin to explore other avenues of learning.

3.2.2 Guided participation

Children need time to observe, absorb and experiment with their new environment and accompanying rules, as well as guidance from adults and peers to adapt and learn. Vygotsky (1978) believed that learning could be progressed through the support of More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs) – more experienced adults and peers – and called the area of learning that can be accessed with this support the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD *'is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*' (Vygotsky, 1978, p86, *italics in original*). That is, MKOs can help to advance children's learning beyond what they can achieve alone.

Using the term 'guided participation,' Rogoff (1995) states that social learning goes beyond direct contact activities. It includes face-to-face and distal interaction with others, avoiding activities or constraints that prevent participation and activities where different members have different levels of input, such as observation of others in action. She writes it is a 'system of interpersonal engagements and arrangements that are involved in participation in activities (by promoting some sorts of involvement and restricting others), which is managed collaboratively by individuals and their social partners' (p146). Other members of the community act as role models from whom children, directly and indirectly, learn and practise new knowledge and skills. Learning can be explicit or implicit and happens in a range of social contexts.

Reception children must learn to engage in imaginative and creative activities such as acting out stories and using old boxes to make spaceships, as well as more academic skills such as forming letters correctly and carrying out mathematical functions. This may involve observing peers during an activity, being instructed by an adult or co-constructing a new game together with friends or adults. The level of participation can range from children passively observing others, to cooperatively embarking on learning together, to giving and receiving direct instruction. The extent to which adults and other MKOs may be involved in guiding learning can also vary greatly but what should be noted is the importance of other people in introducing children to new learning. Without this initial exposure, children would have nothing to internalise, independently build upon and later contribute back to the community.

Highlighting the relevance of peer-to-peer 'guided participation' during CI learning, the literature gives examples of a child struggling with transitioning to nursery spending a lot of time observing her peers (Drury, 2013), a group of children building on one another's ideas to cooperatively make dens (Canning 2013) and one child initiating a game of blocks falling 'into the sea' that other children wanted to join in with (Wood, 2014a). Robson and Rowe (2012) describe two children role-playing a family situation, one more experienced than the other. The more experienced child instructs her friend on how to act in her role, giving her advice and direction. These examples demonstrate how children can learn from one another and support each other's learning. Regardless of the extent to which a child is actively involved, the early years setting is full of opportunities for children to use and support each other to progress their learning. Be it passively observing, equally contributing or being instructed by a more experienced peer, through guided participation children are introduced to new skills and knowledge and scaffolded until they can independently apply new learning.

However, children do not always make patient partners in guided appropriation. Chesworth (2016) gives an example of two boys, with substantial funds of knowledge on the topic, re-enacting building a go-kart in school. When a third, less experienced child joins them, 'his continued involvement required him to comply with and perform in accordance with their narrative' (p301). That is, he was allowed to participate but not contribute any of his ideas. In this example, the balance of knowledge and power between participants is much less equal. The third child has less knowledge in the area and, therefore, less control over the activity, leading his more confident and experienced friends to take over and direct him.

Adults, on the other hand, have more experience and training in guiding children. In an AD scenario, Duncan *et al.* (2019) describe a teacher carefully questioning children about characters in a book and the children using a range of language to discuss the actions of different characters. While the adult is directing the learning, the children are still able to give input by offering ideas. Yet, not all adults are as skilled in guiding children's learning. Under pressure to meet government-imposed targets, adults can find themselves steering the direction of learning. For example, Hakkarainen *et al.* (2013) compare the interactions of two student teachers, during CI learning, with a young child who is pretending to be a librarian. The first student follows the child's lead by introducing puppets as customers in the library and co-operatively building on the child's ideas. Taking a more directive approach, the second student enters play as the librarian, confusing the child who thinks she is the librarian, then proceeds to steer the activity towards talking about the books, as opposed to continuing with the role-play scenario. While both students are theoretically using guided participation to extend the child's learning, the CI approach of the first student is more successful due to her tuning into the interests of the child. Hakkarainen *et al.* (2013) describe this second, less successful interaction as 'quasi-heuristic, where an adult actively interacts with a child but instead of following the child's intention, the adult tries to move the child into their idea of play' (p221). That is, a CI activity is turned into an AD task because the adult begins to pursue his or her interests at the expense of the child's ideas.

Research suggests that some early years professionals believe children need, not only guidance from adults but more direction, particularly in academic learning. For instance, in a study of a Greek early years setting, practitioners spoke about children being disinterested and not knowing what to do by themselves, claiming a need for adults to introduce children to new topics of learning (Birbili, 2019). Pyle and Danniels (2017) similarly interviewed Canadian preschool teachers who stated that children need direct adult instruction to learn academic skills and 'that this type of instruction did not occur in the context of play' (p279). In England, research has revealed that practitioners feel under pressure to take more direct approaches when focusing on academic work (Robert-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016a; Hoskins & Smedley, 2019), leaving children less time to pursue their interests. Thus, it appears, both domestically and internationally, there are misconceptions about children making more academic progress when guided participation is dominated by the teacher.

On the contrary, earlier examples of peer-to-peer guided participation demonstrate that children have plenty of ideas and can learn skills through their play (Robson & Rowe, 2012; Canning, 2013; Wood, 2014a; Chesworth, 2016). Returning to the earlier notion of 'in-between pedagogies,' children do not need to be over-instructed but guided in their learning, with the latter often being more effective. Exemplified in Cheung's (2017) contrasting examples of creative learning in a Chinese kindergarten, one teacher takes a 'product-focused approach;' by providing a lot of instruction, focusing on a set outcome and allowing little time for hands-on work. A second teacher takes a more 'teacher-guided approach;' following a series of teacher-led activities, the children are given opportunities to explore and experiment. They report: 'it was evident that her children became more confident to express their creative ideas and to be successful in problem-solving' (p83).

As Wrigley (2016) points out, this need for adults to control and dictate children's learning is stifling creativity and imagination in ECE. Demonstrated by the description given by Hakkarainen *et al.* (2013) of an adult joining in with a child's role-play, effective guided participation does not necessarily require the ideas of an adult. Even in AD learning situations, Duncan *et al.* (2019) give an example of a teacher talking about a book that shows children thriving because they can contribute ideas. Add to this the range of learning that takes place between and amongst children (e.g., Robson & Rowe, 2012) and a more co-constructed approach to learning begins to emerge.

While one party may be more experienced in an area than another, all participating parties should be involved in the creation of learning. Rogoff (1995) writes it is 'incomplete to assume… children develop but that their partners or their cultural communities do not' (p141). Taking a sociocultural view, learning is a two-way process, from which all parties benefit, and in turn, develop their community. While adults support children's learning, at the same time, the adults learn more about the child and can later use this knowledge for future activities. Similarly, other MKOs, such as more experienced peers, can benefit from hearing their less experienced counterparts' ideas and teaching them existing knowledge. Guided participation is a means to provide children with the tools and experiences they need to later merge newly gained knowledge with existing knowledge and create something of their own.

3.2.3 Participatory appropriation

Once a child has learnt new material, it changes how he or she thinks and applies knowledge. 'Participatory appropriation' describes how the individual changes as a result of participation in activities, the impact these changes have on how the individual subsequently behaves and the future decisions they make (Rogoff, 1995). Rogoff (1995) writes that: 'Participatory appropriation is an on-going development as people participate in events and thus handle subsequent events in ways based on their involvement in previous events' (p152). As children learn, they change and their perspective on learning and approach to carrying out tasks evolves.

This process, in turn, alters the task at hand as the child adapts how they approach it. For instance, Hedges and Cooper (2016) witnessed a much younger child (16 months) observing older peers jumping on and from various surfaces. Adapting the knowledge gleaned from these observations to match her own needs, she then had a go at jumping herself. Wood (2014a) goes on to give an example of a little girl using her knowledge of number order and numerals to draw a hopscotch grid using chalk. She uses previously learnt knowledge of numbers, as well as her experiences of hopscotch, to create the grid.

In these examples, the children gained new skills through ‘guided participation’ and then internalised learning to progress their understanding. They applied their ‘funds of knowledge’ and the implicit and explicit input from others, then adapted it to suit their individual needs. To some extent, this concurs with Vygotsky’s (1962) idea of learning initially happening on a social level between people before being internalised by the individual. Considering what this may lead to, in Rogoff’s (1995) view, children then manipulate learning and feed it back into the community to support the learning of others – as learning changes the child, external factors such as tasks and community are changed by the child. For instance, Hirst (2019) observed children calling on their previous experiences while constructing a bird hide. The children advised the builders to make the corners ‘less pointy’ to ensure they would be safe when running around. The children’s application of existing knowledge in a new way impacted their community by making it safer.

Once children are secure in a particular area of learning, they become the MKO and can guide others to learn. For example, Robson (2016) observed three children making potions in a sandpit. Initially child one asks child two what they should do. After he is shown, he then feels confident enough to demonstrate how it is done and instruct a third child who wants to join in. Not only does he consolidate his learning, but he also gives back to the community through his support of another child. As he developed, he helped to develop his community.

With frequent references to children becoming independent learners, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) embraces this type of dynamic learning. Linking with neoliberal traits valued within education, such as being ‘introspective,’ ‘self-regulating’ and ‘self-transforming’ (Francis & Skelton, 2005, p124, as cited in Bradbury, 2013), *The EYFS Framework* (2017b) states children should be willing to ‘have a go,’ ‘investigate’ and ‘develop their own ideas’ (p10). Time, space and a well-resourced environment can provide ‘a nexus for enriching children’s lives and learning experiences’ (Ang, 2014, p185) to explore CI opportunities and allow children to take their existing knowledge, experiment with it and create something new. Participatory appropriation is about allowing children the freedom and time to do so. Without sufficient opportunities to amalgamate ideas and experiment, children will repeat familiar activities, leading to stagnation in learning.

On the contrary, documents such as *Bold Beginnings* (Ofsted, 2017) suggest that, to make more progress and be 'school ready,' children need more direction from adults. Opposing a large body of research advocating play-based approaches (Ang, 2014; Yu *et al.,* 2018), Ofsted (2017) describes the notion of play as 'too rosy and unrealistic' (p16). Rejecting the idea of free-flow learning, the document instead recommends that teachers should ignore 'the perceived tensions between the principles of the EYFS and teaching a whole class directly' as, at times, this is 'the most efficient way of imparting knowledge.' (p16). Research has shown that such expectations of Reception children – particularly in Literacy and Mathematics – have led to more direct teaching, ability grouping and more formal teaching – against the better judgements of the teachers carrying out the work (Robert-Holmes, 2015; Hoskins & Smedley, 2019). Due to the mounting pressure on educators to ensure children meet the ELGs at the end of the Reception year, children are spending more time being directed by adults and less time pursuing their own interests.

Arguing against this approach, Ang (2014) points out that it can 'distract from the richness of children's informal and spontaneous learning from a wide range of social and cultural contexts to which they are exposed in various everyday experiences' (p193). Children need time for independent learning – to practise what they have learnt, use it in different contexts and begin to use their knowledge and skills to mould their community. Referring to Rogoff's (1995) notion that learning is a two-way process, teachers need to gather information from and deliver information to children in ways that are meaningful. The process then becomes a cycle of children and adults learning from each other, using their knowledge to improve their own learning situation as well as that of the community. It relies on social interaction amongst members of the community and views learning as a sociocultural process.

3.3 Concluding comments

As an ethnically and culturally diverse nation, the children attending England's schools bring with them rich and varied previous experiences derived from family and community practices. Research has shown that these prior experiences can form the foundations for building on learning in formal education (Hedges & Cullen, 2012; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Chesworth, 2016; Hedges & Cooper, 2016). However, barriers often stand in the way and opportunities to get to know the children and the skills and knowledge they have gained from outside of school are missed (Moll *et al.,* 1992; Lillemyr, 2011; Campbell-Barr *et al*., 2012). England's classrooms may be becoming increasingly diverse but, as highlighted in the previous chapter, pedagogical approaches and the curriculum appear to be becoming more rigid and veered towards meeting the ELGs. The standardised approach to education expects *all* children to conform to what is valued as being a 'good learner' in the context of English education and policy (Bradbury, 2013; Wood, 2019).

On the contrary, the application of Rogoff's (1990; 1993; 1995) learning roles to the literature (for example, Chesworth, 2016; Robson, 2016; Hirst, 2019) demonstrates how *all* children have valuable prior experiences and are capable of adopting different learning roles. With possibilities to explore activities through a combination of adult and peer support and the application of prior learning, opportunities can evolve from the interests of a single child to become a topic of focus for the whole group. As children participate in such activities, they move through different types of learning roles – from merely observing to leading play – to further their own and their peers' progress.

However, research has shown that policy-promoted practices such as ability grouping (Robert-Holmes, 2019; Robert-Holmes & Kitto, 2019) and overly focusing on the teaching of Literacy and Mathematics using more formal approaches (Robert-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016a; Palaiologou, 2017; Basford, 2019) can dominate in Reception classrooms, leaving little time for the types of open-ended activities that enable children to think and act creatively (Hoskins & Smedley, 2019; Nicholson, 2019). The pedagogical approaches used in the examples taken from the literature sit somewhat at odds with policy expectations and lead back to questions about how Reception-aged children learn and how adults can best support them.

Chapter 4: Methods and methodologies

This research aims to explore the use of child-initiated (CI) and adult-directed (AD) pedagogies in an inner-city Reception classroom where I am the class teacher. Specifically, this thesis aims to highlight how children use aspects of sociocultural learning to enhance their learning in CI and AD contexts. This gives rise to questions about the role of the adult in Reception classrooms and thus, the multiple roles of the adult in supporting children are also examined. This research aims to answer the following question:

- How do Reception children learn during child-initiated activities in comparison with adult-directed lessons?

By addressing the following supplementary questions:

1) How are pedagogical expectations communicated in *The EYFS Framework*?
2) What is the role of the adult in supporting children in different learning contexts?
3) How do children use peer-to-peer interaction to develop their skills and understanding?
4) To what extent do children build on existing knowledge to make sense of current learning?

Applying a sociocultural lens and Rogoff's (1990; 1993; 1995) 'planes of analysis' as a framework of analysis (introduced in the previous chapter and to be discussed in more detail in this present chapter), this research takes a videography methodological approach. This involved filming the children in my Reception class during AD and CI sessions to compare how they learn in these different contexts. Some of the videos were then later shown back to the children to gain their perspective on what took place.

This chapter gives an outline of the research approach and describes and justifies the methodological approaches and methods adopted. It includes:

1) Explanation of the research framework used
2) Description of the research sample and location

3) Overview of data collection methods
4) Discussion of ethical issues

4.1 Research framework

Clough and Nutbrown (2012) state that 'the methodology which drives… research is as much to do with personal values as it is to do with 'rigour' and 'hygiene' in research methodology' (p80). Using the term 'axiology,' Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) discuss the significance of our beliefs and how they influence our research decisions. That is, our research values, and values in general, sit at the core of any project and impact our views on how research should be viewed, conducted and presented. Harvey (2013) suggests that 'rather than seeing our own identities as being fully formed and therefore detached from a project… we invest ourselves into research and acknowledge the impact we have on research' (p86). As the children's teacher, I play a key role in the research and data, and my teaching values are evident throughout.

As already examined in the introductory chapter in some detail, this present project, and the work I do as a teacher, are influenced by ideas of equality and mixed-ability grouping in education laid out in *Learning without Limits* (Hart *et al.,* 2004), funds of knowledge (Moll *et al.,* 1992; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) and a sociocultural view of learning (for instance, Rogoff, 1995; 2003). These beliefs impact my work in the classroom and it would be naïve to think that the motivations behind my research are not similarly impacted.

Taking a constructivist ontological approach, this research takes the view that 'reality is neither objective nor singular, but multiple realities are constructed by individuals' (Waring, 2012, p16). In the context of this research, I acknowledge that, while the children and I took part in the same activities together, our personal experiences varied and, thus, resulted in different realities for different participants. From an epistemological stance, an interpretivist approach that 'does not see direct knowledge as possible' (Waring, 2012, p16) was taken. The procedures followed to try to understand the children's experiences from their perspectives are detailed throughout this chapter. However, I accept that this 'knowledge *was* developed through a process of interpretation' (Waring, 2012, p16, *italics author's own*) and, ultimately, the data presented in Chapter 5 is my interpretation of the children's learning experiences.

Al-Ababneh (2020) writes that ‘research methodologies are based on a philosophical and theoretical view of research that guides researchers in their social science research’ (p76). The descriptions of how knowledge is created and interpreted given in the previous paragraph form the foundations of my approach to carrying out and understanding this research and are evident in my research choices.

4.1.1 Theoretical framework

Acknowledging that my chosen theoretical framework should be evident in every aspect of my research; from research questions to how the data is viewed, it was important to make a selection based on the educational values, and ontological and epistemological paradigms discussed in the previous section (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The theoretical framework acts as the centre point around which other aspects of the thesis are constructed and is, therefore, paramount to the overall structure and presentation. Thus, sociocultural theory was considered an appropriate tool.

Vygotsky (1978) advocated a sociocultural approach to viewing how children learn. That is, children learn through collaboration with others, acquiring and applying culturally relevant skills and knowledge to progress learning. Kozulin *et al.* (2003) write: ‘at the heart of Vygotsky’s theory lies the understanding of human cognition and learning as social and cultural rather than individual phenomena’ (p1). This lens is applied to the overarching aims of this thesis and filters down through the individual components. The supplementary research questions given at the beginning of this chapter, the discussion of the existing literature in the previous chapter, as well as the data findings in the next chapter all focus on sociocultural aspects of learning and how children use sociocultural learning in school.

4.1.2 Conceptual framework

Although recognising that there should be harmony between theoretical and conceptual frameworks, Grant and Osanloo (2014) make a clear distinction between the two. While the theoretical framework is embedded in the content, direction and view of the research, the conceptual framework ‘is the researcher’s understanding of how the problem will be best explored, the specific direction research will have to take and the relationship between the different variables' (p17). A conceptual framework is a practical tool used to structure and focus the research elements and data.

Revisiting Rogoff's (1990; 1993; 1995) learning roles – apprenticeship, guided participation and appropriation – her 'planes of analysis' – community, interpersonal and personal – identify how the learning roles can involve and impact the learning of the wider community, smaller groups and the individual. As far as I am aware, this framework has not been used for research in school before but, as Table 7 demonstrates, the planes and roles can be applied to learning in Reception classrooms.

Planes of analysis	Learning roles	Examples
Community: The participation of individuals, with a range of skills, in an activity intended to support the learning of those less experienced.	**Apprentice:** Children participating in an organised activity aimed at progressing learning. Children with varying levels work together and are focused on the same outcome.	*Observing group practices *Joining in with activities *Learning routines, social norms and processes *Collectively working towards the same goal *Seeking explanations and discussing learning
Interpersonal: The reciprocal development of learning between two or more children who may be equally, more or less experienced than the other(s).	**Guide:** Children participating and collaborating in activities, with a shared focus and purpose. More experienced children and adults guiding those less experienced.	*Being supported to learn *Guided problem solving *Observing peers' learning *Others arranging and structuring tasks *Side-by-side participation *Developing understanding through pair and group work
Personal: The personal learning and development of children through the application of learnt skills and knowledge in unique ways.	**Appropriator:** Children's individual progress and understanding as a result of taking part in group activities.	*Initiating new activities *Developing understanding through participation *Applying knowledge in different ways *Making contributions to the development of activities

Table 7: Planes of analysis in Reception classrooms

Used to identify the roles children play in different contexts, the learning roles focus on 'the actual process by which children participate with other people in cultural activity and how they transform their understanding in the context of activities' (Rogoff, 1993, p145). However, identifying the learning roles only explains one element of teaching and learning. To enable a more in-depth analysis, I combined the identification of the learning roles with recurring sociocultural themes from the data and the categorisation of the observed pedagogies (see Diagram 6).

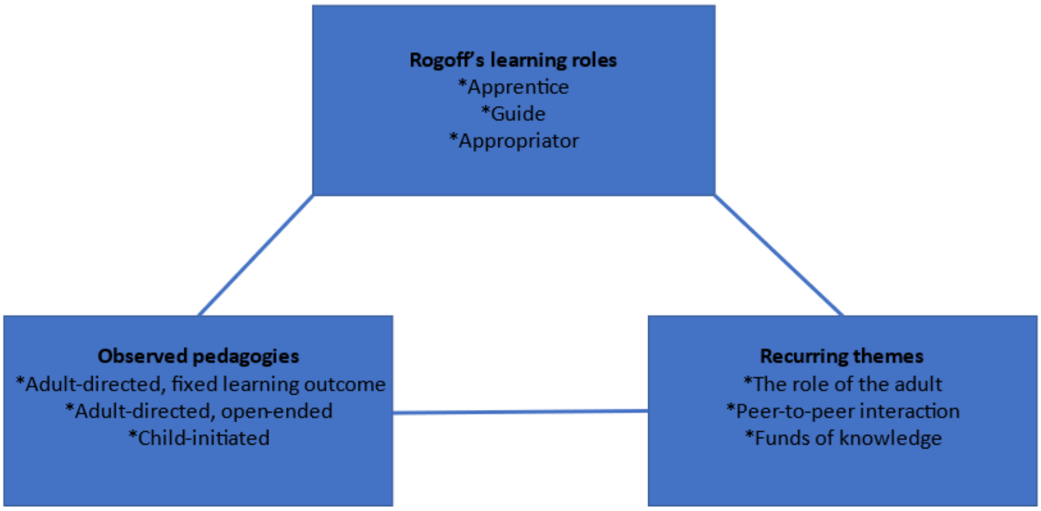

Rogoff's learning roles
*Apprentice
*Guide
*Appropriator
Observed pedagogies
*Adult-directed, fixed learning outcome
*Adult-directed, open-ended
*Child-initiated
Recurring themes
*The role of the adult
*Peer-to-peer interaction
*Funds of knowledge

Diagram 6: A sociocultural framework of analysis

As will be discussed in the findings chapter, the categories of observed pedagogies derive from an amalgamation of definitions given in previous research (Wood, 2014b; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Walsh e*t al.,* 2019) and were highlighted in the data from this research. Also, to be addressed in the findings chapter, Clark and Braun's (2017) thematic approach, was applied to the data to identify the recurring themes. This creates a comprehensive framework for analysis that encapsulates the wider elements of teaching and learning in Reception classrooms.

Rogoff (1993) concludes one of her papers by writing: 'The goal for future work is to examine the conditions in which and processes by which children and other newcomers to sociocultural activities share in collective activity and change in the process' (p150). This research aims to do this by observing the learning of individuals and groups of children, seeing how their learning interlinks with that of their peers and is carried over into different learning situations with others.

4.1.3 Methodology

Taking into consideration the factors already discussed in this chapter and how to best collect data to answer my research questions, this project follows a videography methodological approach. This project intends to capture and compare how children learn in different contexts and this was achieved through combining straightforward filming of the children's learning with Tobin *et al.'s* (2009) 'video-cued multivocal ethnography' approach. This section looks at how these individual concepts interact with one another to form the methodology for this thesis.

Discussing the use of video to capture naturally occurring interactions in everyday life Heath *et al.* (2010) state that, at worst, it allows the researcher to scrutinise the social actions and activities of the participants and, at best, offers 'a profound realignment in the ways in which we analyse human activity' (p3). Adding to this, Karlsson (2012) writes visual methods 'enable the researcher to explore educational settings policies and phenomena in ways that extend the reach of other data collection methods' (p94). That is, video methods offer unique opportunities for analysing and re-analysing data not possible with other approaches.

Participating as the teacher, my experiences of the activities were different from those of the children. I wanted to try to understand the children's realities as they learned and played and, being able to collect and analyse data on actions, speech and even emotion, along with the possibility of re-watching and re-interpreting the data, revealed more about the children and their learning than had I focused on one aspect or only been able to witness the event once.

Additionally, taking a videography approach enables researchers to record elements of data that may be missed using other methods, such as audio recordings. Flewitt (2006) reminds us that, at least from a sociocultural perspective of communication and learning, 'not only language but also images and physical activity can be viewed as socially organized, sign-making activities and as key components in the construction of meaning' (p27). Although verbal communication remains the primary aspect of analysis for this project, body language, facial expressions and physical reactions are also included. Referencing these non-verbal iterations and interactions opens further channels for discussion that may have been missed had they not been captured on film.

As the children's teacher, I was already familiar with them and (thought) I understood their learning. However, this was from a teacher's standpoint and was impacted by policy requirements. As Clough and Nutbrown (2012) point out, research aims to look at things from a different perspective or to 'make the familiar strange.' Through my research, I hoped to find out more about the children's wider experiences through their eyes. Rutanen *et al.* (2018) note that watching video footage several times allows the researcher to 'focus on different aspects of the situation not previously considered, with the possibility of creating new categories sometimes more adapted to the observed phenomenon' (p4). As discussed later in more detail, data analysis entailed repeatedly going over the videos to transcribe the content. This opened new avenues to view the participants and their learning in multiple ways and enabled me to delve deeper and wider into what took place.

Rogoff (1995) criticises developmental research for focusing on individual aspects such as the individual child or the environment. She instead proposes the study of 'activity' or 'event' as the unit of analysis as this 'allows a reformulation of the relation between the individual and the social and cultural environments in which each is inherently involved in the others' definition' (p140). Taking a social constructivist view, the intention of this research is not to focus on one element of the children's learning but to gain a holistic understanding of 'the cultural paradigms of children's lived experience — children's participation in the settings of their lives' (Rogoff & Callanan, 2018, p5) through observing 'the dynamic interplay between children and their environment' (Gray & Winter, 2011, p312). Trying to capture such a broad but equally accurate and detailed impression would have been difficult to achieve using other methodologies but, using videography allowed me to access the data on multiple occasions.

Despite watching the videos several times and developing a better understanding of the activities from the children's perspectives, I was aware that these were my interpretations of the children's learning and intentions. Therefore, hoping to gain more insight and to hear the children's interpretations of their experiences, they were shown the videos and asked to discuss the content. Makin and Whiteman (2006) note that this process of revisiting 'is a means through which children can help adults to understand their thinking, as well as being a process that encourages them to develop their reflective abilities' (p36).

Created by Tobin *et al*. (2009) and used with adults, what they refer to as a 'video-cued multivocal ethnography' technique has since been successfully used in research with children

(Robertson *et al.,* 2015; Chesworth 2016). Clark and Moss (2001) note that 'traditional methods of consultation with user groups require imaginative rethinking if the views and experiences of young children are to be listened to' (p1). Haggerty (2020) identifies the use of cameras as being instrumental in gaining children's perspectives and 'opportunities for participants to view and respond to video observations… as facilitating possibilities for enhanced participant input' (p2). Showing the footage back to the children gave them something concrete and relevant to discuss. In turn, they were able to share more detail about the learning that took place and the intentions behind it.

In line with a constructivist ontological approach, Cohen *et al*. (2011) state 'the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated' (p15). In interpretivism, Pring (2000) highlights the connection between people's actions and their intentions – to understand what a person does, it is necessary to understand why. These additional conversations allowed the children to offer their perspectives and often resulted in conversations during which they discussed more abstract concepts not immediately obvious from the footage.

4.2 Research location and participants

The school in which the data was collected is a one-and-a-half-form entry school in a major, urban city. The school has a higher-than-average number of children who are entitled to free school meals, have special educational needs (SEN) and speak English as an additional language. The background of the pupils reflects the diversity of the local population – 69% of the borough's population belong to minority groups (Tower Hamlets, 2013) and 32% of the borough's residents come from a Bangladeshi background (Tower Hamlets, 2013) as do many of the school's pupils. For the school year 2018-2019, the number of children achieving the Good Level of Development (GLD) in the borough was slightly below the national average (75.6 % versus 79.4%) (DfE/National Statistics, 2019) and the school's average was slightly lower than that of the borough. Children generally enter school working well below the expected level, and make good progress throughout the EYFS and Key Stage 1, but progress drops significantly throughout Key Stage 2 (School Ofsted report – not referenced to keep school identity anonymous).

At the time of collecting data, three mixed Nursery/Reception classes formed part of a larger early years unit. Each class was made up of 15 Reception children and approximately 12 full-time and five part-time Nursery children. A teacher and nursery practitioner were assigned to each class and there were additional staff members to support children with SEN and cover other duties. When data collection commenced, I had been teaching at the school for around four and a half years. I chose to carry out my research in my place of work for several reasons:

1) I was not able to take time out from my full-time job to collect data in another setting.
2) I was able to use my research as an opportunity to reflect on my practice as a teacher.
3) Before collecting data, I had already established relationships with the children and their families.

With regard to point two, I had not intended to examine my practice during the research process. Nonetheless, as the children's teacher, it was inevitable that, in looking at the teaching and learning that took place, my role would come under scrutiny. There is an extensive body of literature on practitioners as researchers (see for example, Fox *et al*., 2007; Lunt & Shaw, 2015; Afolabi, 2021) and, although there is no scope here to fully explore this, it is important to note that 'the boundaries between 'practitioner as practitioner' and 'practitioner as researcher' tend to be blurred and unfixed' (Fox *et al.,* 2007, p73). As Drake and Heath (2010) highlight, conducting this research did impact my practice and thoughts about my work. Angrosino (2012) comments that it can be awkward for teachers to research themselves, and at times, it was uncomfortable. Yet, Harvey (2013) suggests that 'we invest ourselves into research and acknowledge the impact we have on research… *which* also involves considering our identities to be open to adaption' (p86, *italics author's own*). In carrying out this research, I learned about and developed my teaching practice and hope that I have improved as a result (this is discussed more in the final chapter).

In terms of the third point above, as the class teacher, I had already established secure relationships with the children and their parents before commencing research. This came with advantages but also potential problems. Having conducted research in a preschool, Lane *et al.* (2019) note that the nature of their work often made them feel like they were intruding on the children. Due to my role in the school, I did not experience this, but it did mean I was in a position of trust which I did not want to abuse. Issues of children feeling obligated to take part because they are being requested to do so by a person in power have been well documented

(Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Phelan & Kinsella, 2013; Lane *et al.,* 2019). In the case of this research, this was particularly true due to my role as the teacher and was equally applicable to both children and parents. As Phelan and Kinsella (2011) highlight, it was imperative to distinguish between my role as a researcher and the teacher. I had to make it clear that the children were not required to take part and, should they choose not to, this would not impact their experiences under my care as their teacher. The actions I took to overcome this are described throughout this chapter.

The participants were recruited from the children in my Reception class. Parents were given university-approved information sheets about the project (Appendix 1). These were accompanied by a cover letter (Appendix 2), with a school letterhead, giving a more succinct description to introduce key elements of the research. Having shown the information sheet to my Head Teacher, he had expressed concerns that they may be too detailed. A number of the children's parents speak English as an additional language, and we hoped that this simplified explanation would be more easily understood. That noted, it was important that the parents had all the information to make an informed decision. For this reason, I asked the parents to read the information sheets and covering letters and, after a few days, approached each parent/set of parents individually to answer any questions they had. Several of the parents did want to discuss the project further, particularly the use of the video footage, and I was happy to give more information. The parents' queries demonstrated they had read the information sheets and understood what the research process entailed for their children. Finally, if parents felt comfortable and I thought they were fully informed, I then asked them to sign a consent form.

Of the 15 Reception children in the class, one was not approached due to family circumstances – this is something I thought about and discussed with my supervisors, and it was considered in the best interests of the child that they did not take part. Additionally, two parents declined to take part. One because they did not want their child to be filmed and the other because she thought the research would take up too much of her child's time. There may have been some misunderstanding as to how the data would be collected but I did not push for the parent to change her mind. I was concerned that discussing the project further might make her feel under pressure to give consent when she did not want her child to take part – potentially for reasons other than the one she had given.

As well as the 12 Reception children in my class, I asked for retrospective consent from the parents of a Nursery child in another class. Whilst filming a participating Reception child, the Nursery child came to observe and then mimicked her learning. Although I did not film the Nursery child, the observation stuck with me, and I thought it was a useful piece of data. Outside of medical research (for example, Songstad *et al.,* 2017), there is a lack of literature on retrospective consent for studies with children. Therefore, I turned to my supervisors for advice. We agreed that, although the child had not been filmed and his photograph would not be used, because giving background information on the child such as age and level of English was relevant, I should request consent from his parents. Similar to obtaining consent from the other parents, I issued an information sheet and cover letter to the child's parents. In addition, I explained the specific context of the data I wanted to use.

Obtaining consent from the children themselves can be a much more complicated process. While recognising that children should have agency in the research they take part in, Skånfors (2009) highlights the issue of children receiving information in a way they comprehend. To help with this aspect, I introduced the project to the children using a monkey soft toy (whom the children named Ralph) and explained he would be helping me to film their learning. Whenever Ralph was present, I would be using the video camera and, if they did not want to be filmed, they should let me know. This worked during the adult-led sessions when activities were confined to one room and the children either sat on the carpet or at tables. However, when children were pursuing their own interests, they accessed a larger indoor area as well as the garden. Due to this, it was not always possible or practical to use Ralph. Nonetheless, the use of the soft toy to explain the research did seem to help in getting the children to understand that they would be filmed and, if they were not comfortable, could opt out.

Following the initial explanation of the project and demonstrating their understanding and right not to participate, two children stated that they did not want to take part. In subsequent sessions, they did want to be filmed but, during this first session, they did not yet feel comfortable. Discussing visual methods in ethnography but equally applicable to this project, Flewitt (2006) notes that the direction of research can be rather unpredictable. She uses the term 'provisional consent/assent' to describe permission 'as ongoing and dependent on the long-term network of researcher: researched and interparticipant relationships built upon sensitivity, reciprocal trust and collaboration' (p31). Despite having consent from the children's parents, I respected their wishes and did not include them in filming on the first day. As the project unfolded, the children's feelings changed, and they later wanted to participate. Exemplifying Flewitt's (2006) 'provisional consent/assent,' the children's later participation was due to having gained their trust which allowed them to experience participation as a spectator before getting directly involved.

Phelan and Kinsella (2013) and Lane e*t al.* (2019) have questioned the notion of power always being in the hands of researchers or adults. In the case of both these projects, some children were confident about refusing to engage and sometimes even told others to do the same. Phelan and Kinsella (2013) give examples of children avoiding researchers and instructing their friends to not cooperate. While I did not encounter such 'hostilities,' the children did make it clear when they were unwilling to join in. As well as verbally telling me they did not wish to be filmed, there were instances when their actions or body language gave me this impression. For example, while two children were pretending to be witches on broomsticks, I approached with the camera. They then looked and smiled at me before running off.

They either did not want me to be part of their play or to film them. Therefore, I stepped back and moved on, allowing the children's privacy to continue. Noting the unpredictability of research with young children, Chesworth (2018a) calls 'for a decreased emphasis upon the implementation of method towards an openness to uncertainty and an ethical responsiveness' (p851). From an ethical standpoint, there were some instances when I chose to forgo capturing the children's learning and instead prioritise their needs and desires. Regardless of the children's given consent, I was always on the lookout for signs that they were not comfortable being filmed at that moment in time. I believe that this should be respected and, despite having the children's consent, when they appeared to not want me there, I gave them privacy by leaving them alone.

The participating children come from a diverse range of backgrounds and the research population is generally representative of the school population. There is a large Bangladeshi community in the area and most of the children in the class have Bangladeshi roots. Most of the children were born in the UK (except Sahil who moved to the UK during the Nursery year) but have parent(s) or grandparent(s) who immigrated to England. Most of the children had already spent the Nursery year together in the school apart from Sahil and also Prem (who joined from another setting at the beginning of the Reception year).

Although data were collected on all 12 children, to make the process manageable, five focus children were chosen (highlighted in Table 8). I began filming all 12 children and, after three sessions, chose children for whom I had gathered rich data. However, I did ensure that these five children represented the dynamics of the class - a mixture of boys and girls from different backgrounds. The foundations of this research are built upon recognising and using children's cultures to further their education and it was, therefore, important to acknowledge the diversity of the participating children. Finally, the focus children belonged to friendship groups that included all the other children in the class. Thus, by looking at how these children learn and use social interaction in their learning, I was able to gain some understanding of the other participants, too. As the data discussed in the next chapter demonstrates, there are examples of learning from all the children participating in the research.

Table 8 gives a brief introduction to the participants. Each participant was given a pseudonym, from the same origin as their real name, to protect their identity.

Name	**Age (at start of data collection)**	**Family background**
Marami	4 years 4 months	Bangladeshi
Humaira	4 years 11 months	Bangladeshi
John	5 years 3 months	Vietnamese
Anas	4 years 5 months	Iraqi
Sahil	4 years 4 months	Bangladeshi
Jonny	4 years 9 months	English
Prem	4 years 7 months	Bangladeshi
Sayf	4 years 4 months	Bangladeshi
Seri	5 years 1 month	Indian
Aaliya	4 years 11 months	Bangladeshi
Samiya	4 years 7 months	Bangladeshi
Zain	4 years 5 months	Bangladeshi
Adomas	3 years 6 months	Lithuanian

Table 8: Introduction to participants

As previously mentioned, the research was carried out in the school the children attend, during school hours. I had initially considered comparing learning in school with places of interest (such as museums and parks). However, there were concerns about not all children (and their parents) being given the chance to participate, what adults would attend the trips and safety in general. Having carefully considered what I wanted to research, I realised I was interested in different types of learning – particularly more and less formal approaches – and decided to explore this in school where I could gather equally rich data but with fewer ethical and safety issues.

In terms of the daily structure, the timetable below, as dictated by school management, outlines the average day for the Reception children. Made up of a combination of whole-class, structured sessions – particularly for Literacy and Mathematics, AD small group activities, CI learning with adult involvement and independent CI learning, the children were exposed to different approaches to pedagogy throughout the school day.

Time	Activity
9:00-9:40am	Whole-class, structured literacy session
9:40-10:00am	Snack time with Nursery children
10:00-11:10am	Free-flow learning in all classrooms and garden, with Nursery children
11:10-11:30am	Phonics in ability groups
11:30-11:45am	Carpet time with Nursery children (story, nursery rhymes etc.)
11:45-1:00pm	Lunchtime, followed by carpet time, with Nursery children
1:00-2:00pm	Free-flow learning in all classrooms and garden, with Nursery children
2:00-2:30pm	Structured maths session (2x per week whole class and 2x per week group work)
2:30-2:40pm	Tidy up the classroom with Nursery children
2:40-3:05pm	Outdoor PE/circle time/music with Nursery children or guided reading (small groups, only Reception children)
3:05-3:15pm	Get ready to go home

Table 9: Daily schedule

4.3 Data collection

This research project was designed to gather information on how Reception-aged children learn during child and adult-initiated learning situations. All data were collected within the early years setting where the children attend school. The children were filmed during their normal school day and then later shown the videos and interviewed about the content. Commencing data collection, I had been concerned about the level of background noise and the impact it had on the quality of the video recordings. Therefore, I also took notes following each data collection session. However, after watching the first few videos back, I realised this was not a major issue and discontinued my note-taking.

4.3.1 Choosing data collection methods

Data collection methods should be chosen based on their effectiveness in meeting the aims of the research and answering the research questions (Casey, 2006). Filming children's learning and video interviews were selected because they enabled me to collect sufficient data to do this. Table 10 gives an overview of how the collection methods answer the research questions.

Research question	Filming learning	Video interviews
Role of the adult	Shows how the adult supports learning.	Children give their perspective on how adults support them.
Peer-to-peer interaction	Shows children interacting to develop their own and others' learning.	Children discuss how peers help (or hinder) their learning.
Applying funds of knowledge	Shows children using previous learning in a range of contexts.	Children explain where ideas and knowledge originate from.

Table 10: Research questions and data collection methods

Returning to Clough and Nutbrown's (2012) earlier comment regarding values ultimately determining the content and direction of research, it was important for the data collection methods selected for this project to align with my research and educational values. Table 11 outlines how the data collection methods correlate with these values.

Value	Method	Link to values
Learning is sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1962; Rogoff, 1995).	Video footage	Shows interaction and communication – verbal and non-verbal – between children while learning.
Children use 'funds of knowledge' (Moll *et al*., 1992) to develop learning.	Video footage	Shows children applying funds of knowledge in different contexts.
Children use 'funds of knowledge' (Moll *et al*., 1992) to develop learning.	Video interviews	Children have the opportunity to explain the origins of learning and link it to the wider environment.
Equality and mixed-ability grouping in education (Hart *et al*., 2004).	Video interviews	All children are viewed as competent individuals. Their input is valued.

Table 11: Values and data collection methods

Carrying out research with young children, I also had to consider some additional factors when deciding on appropriate collection methods. Two points covered in the literature stood out as being important to me and my research:

a) It can be difficult to collect data on children (Phelan & Kinsella, 2013; Lane *et al.,* 2019) and;
b) Although not always the case, researchers should endeavour to give children a voice – both with regard to the research process and in communicating the findings (Robson, 2010; Fane *et al.,* 2018)

To overcome these issues, Schiller and Einarsdottir (2009) state that 'creative research methods that suit young children's competence, knowledge, interest and context have been developed' (p125). This section discusses how filming and video interviews were used and why they were considered the most suitable methods for both collecting rich data samples and offering opportunities for the children to give their perspectives.

4.3.2 Video footage

Over the space of seven months, from January 2019 until the end of July 2019, the children were filmed throughout one CI and one AD session, on average once every two weeks (see Table 12 for a breakdown of filming. The asterixis indicate which videos were shown back to the children but this is discussed later in more detail). The AD and CI sessions were filmed on the same day to make it more manageable but the day of the week on which filming took place varied so as not to miss any children who might be unavailable on certain days due to interventions etc. As will be examined in Chapter 5, following filming the children's learning and the discussions with the children, I transcribed the content (see Appendix 4 for an example).

Date	Child-initiated	Adult-directed
30th January	Mobile phones*	Literacy – story mountains
12th February	A-frames in the classroom* Multilink® capacity game* Building with Multilink®	Mathematics – weight*
28th February	Wrestlers/superhero figures* Writing story mountains*	Animal habitat pictures
6th March	Flipping sticks* Reading ‘The Three Little Pigs’	Mathematics – cake shop*
22nd March	Climbing ropes Sorting toys* Playing with Duplo®*	Literacy – writing about a trip*
2nd April	Big cats in sand tray* Easter egg treasure hunt*	Guided reading
30th April	Magic show* Last colouring in sheet* Making treasure maps	Phonics*
8th May	Sand tray in the garden*	Making pasta*
23rd May	Sand tray in the garden* Taking turns balancing	Cutting grass
10th June	Making potions* A-frames in the garden Spinning in the garden*	Mathematics – subtraction Aquarium*
28th June	Broomstick* Discussing boxing Rolling tyres*	Aquarium*
8th July	Giving points* Painting in the garden*	Making a wedding dress*

Table 12: Filming schedule

I intended to capture the full range of learning opportunities children experience while in school. Therefore, I filmed whole-class lessons, for example, Literacy and Mathematics, and small group sessions, such as guided reading; both taking place in a separate, smaller room which was set up similarly to a traditional school classroom. The entire session was filmed, usually lasting between ten minutes (for some group activities) to around half an hour (for whole-class lessons). A range of subjects was also filmed including Mathematics, Literacy, phonics, and guided reading.

Additionally, I filmed focus activities – activities organised and led by me – during ‘free-flow’ learning sessions. ‘Free-flow’ means some children engaged in CI activities while adults worked on focused activities with individual and small groups of children. These focus activities were offered in the main classroom area as well as in the garden and I either invited children to take part or they chose to join in. The activities were chosen based on where I was working on the day of filming and the activity I was working on. Throughout my research, I continued to teach and had to work on data collection around my responsibilities. There were no staged activities for filming and, as a result, the data portray an accurate picture of the everyday occurrences of this Reception classroom.

Whereas the whole-class lessons and small group sessions tended to be Literacy and Mathematics based, the focus activities were generally more holistic and open to adaptation depending on the children's needs and interests (this is examined in detail in the next chapter). These sessions included activities such as gardening, imaginative play and art activities. Sometimes they were more difficult to film as they often involved moving around while also supporting children outside of the activity (for example, if they needed help with resolving a disagreement) and, therefore, were often made up of several shorter films.

To capture the children's learning during CI activities, I filmed short clips of individual and small groups of children during 'free-flow' learning sessions. This normally happened in the mornings (because there were more staff members available, making filming easier), over the space of an hour, and took place both inside the classroom and in the garden – again depending on where I was situated. There is more data on the children learning outside in summer and inside in the colder months due to more children choosing to be indoors when it was cold and outdoors when it was sunny. There was no set plan for filming specific children or activities. Whenever I noticed a child or group of children participating in interesting play (that is play that interested me – both play involving elements of sociocultural learning and play I would write observations on for formative and summative assessments), I tried to film them. As with the focus activities, sometimes several clips were taken of one activity, at times featuring the same children and other times different children.

Thus, the collected data show children participating in a variety of activities – from fully adult-led to wholly child-initiated – and covering a broad range of topics – from writing to physical play. In carrying out this research, I hoped to learn more about how children learn when different pedagogical approaches are applied and, therefore, it was important to have data representative of the different learning experiences the children gain whilst in school.

Initially, there were some perceived problems with the videos – some would play on my laptop and others would not. Thinking it was perhaps an issue with the amount of storage on the device, some of the earlier videos were deleted to make space. After some trial and error, I discovered that I needed to download a different program to play the videos and this fixed the problem. Although it has been acknowledged that technological advances can cause problems for researchers (for example, Exlibris, 2020), I could not find any journals on the topic. For this project, technology was useful for collecting, analysing and presenting the data. However, I was learning how to apply new resources and programs as I proceeded with my research. This technical aspect was as much a learning curve as the knowledge gleaned from the data itself.

Returning to the discarded videos, I do have some notes on these earlier activities but have not used them for analysis. Fortunately, I was able to film a large number of videos and collect a substantial amount of data. Therefore, it was not necessary to resort to using the notes on the earlier videos. Subsequent videos of the children's learning provided a much more detailed and informative account of their experiences than the notes and were deemed more appropriate for analysis.

Phelan and Kinsella (2013) note potential issues with obtaining consent and assent using visual methods – particularly in a school setting. They give the example of children gathering data and taking photographs of children who do not/have not been permitted to participate. Although I was filming the children, it was often the case that children who were not participants featured in the videos along with children who were, despite trying not to include them. As part of my teaching role, I would film or (more frequently) take photographs of the children (from my class and the other classes) and, therefore, it was not unusual for me to be doing this, but the footage of non-participating children was not used for data analysis.

This normally was not a problem. However, non-participating children also wanted me to film their learning. It is important to be open and honest with participants (or in this case non-participants) regardless of their age (Punch, 2002; Phelan & Kinsella, 2013) and I believed that pretending to film or lying to the children was unethical. This was particularly the case for the two children whose parents had specifically opted not to participate. I did not want the children to think or tell their parents they had been filmed for research purposes and, therefore, felt I had to refuse their request. At the same time, I did not want these children to feel left out and so suggested that I take their photographs or film them using my school iPad instead. It was important to maintain a distinction between data collected for school purposes and that for research purposes and using a different device for each helped to retain separation.

4.3.3 Video interviews

Within a few days of the activities being filmed, the focus children were individually shown the videos in which they were featured and asked to discuss their learning. Originally developed by Tobin (1991) and Tobin *et al.* (2009) and used with adults, this technique has since been successfully used in research with children (for example, Robertson *et al.,* 2015; Chesworth 2016). Robson (2010) notes one of the advantages of video methods is the possibility to use the footage to give feedback to participants. From an interpretivist standpoint, Pring (2015) writes that we need to understand people's 'intentions and their motives. We need to know how they understood or interpreted the situation' (p117). These video interviews gave me an opportunity to hear about the learning activities from the children's perspectives.

As well as gathering additional information from the children during the interviews, I was able to share the data in a way that was meaningful to them. Using this method gave the children something concrete and relevant to discuss and, having the video prompts helped to remind the children of their learning. They generally enjoyed watching the videos and would often ask to watch more footage. One child even suggested I go to his house to film him there because I had run out of material to show him.

Not all videos were shown due to time constraints (refer back to Table 12, asterixis show those that were). The videos shown were selected mainly because there were opportunities to watch them within a short timeframe following the actual events. If too much time had passed, I thought the children were less likely to have a clear memory of what they were doing and why. Therefore, I avoided carrying out interviews later than a few days after filming. That noted, although videos were chosen primarily due to practical reasons, there were some instances when I wanted to find out more about specific incidents (for example, if there had been a disagreement, I hoped the children would tell me how they felt) and endeavoured to find time to do so.

To start the interviews, an open-ended approach was used with me showing the children the video and asking, "Can you tell me a bit about what you were learning?" This then led to a conversation about the learning that took place in the video but often went off on a tangent with children talking about other related topics or topics perceived to be completely unrelated.

However, not all the children had much to say. Although they liked the videos, it was often difficult to stimulate conversation.

Previous studies have discovered that children's reluctancy or hesitancy to talk can act as a barrier to gathering useful data (Phelan & Kinsella, 2013; Sharman *et al.*, 2016) but the participants in this project did not seem unwilling – just quiet when asked to discuss the content. In response to this, I started inviting pairs of children, both featured in the video, to come and discuss their learning. Returning to Chesworth's (2018a) comment about being more responsive to the children and, if necessary, adapting methods to suit their needs, asking pairs instead of individual children to watch and discuss the video content, made them feel more at ease. This resulted in a much richer dialogue opening up – especially for the more reserved children. In these instances, the children would often start discussing other aspects of school life and these conversations were sometimes more enlightening than the discussions about the content of the videos. When this happened, I generally took a step back and listened to the children, my role being minimal.

Nilsson *et al.* (2015) make the distinction between *having* a child perspective and *giving* the child's perspective – the latter meaning children speak for themselves and the former when adults comment on or have an opinion about children's actions. For this project, the video footage better enabled me to *have* a child perspective of their learning and the video interviews to *give* the children's perspective. Christenson (2004) writes: 'In order to hear the voices of children in the representation of their own lives it is important to employ research practices such as reflexivity and dialogue' (p165). Therefore, when the children engaged in conversation – related and unrelated to the content of the videos – I took this as an opportunity to learn more about the children and their learning from their perspective.

To conclude, combining video footage with video interviews allowed me to watch the children participating in activities, using a range of pedagogical approaches and gain a deeper understanding of the motivations behind the children's actions. This, in turn, provided the data required to answer my research questions. At the same time, the data collection methods sit comfortably with my research and educational values.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations should always be at the forefront of any research conducted – especially when children are involved and the researcher is in a position of power. The steps I took to ensure this research was carried out ethically have been noted throughout this chapter.

Additionally, BERA's (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* were consulted and a detailed research proposal was submitted to the University of Sheffield ethics review panel prior to commencing data collection (Appendix 3). Yet, as previously discussed earlier in this chapter, research is a fluid process and sometimes changes need to be made while carrying out the research. When this happened, I made sure the changes were still covered by BERA's guidelines and the ethics approval granted by the university.

In line with BERA's (2018) guidance, the collected data and work carried out around it were stored on a password-protected USB stick and later transferred over to my university One Drive account.

The next chapter explains my approach to data analysis and presentation before discussing the findings.

Chapter 5. A Learning Spectrum

Congruent with prior studies, the results from this research give evidence of the wide-ranging pedagogical approaches used in Reception classrooms (Wood, 2014b; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Tan, 2018; Walsh e*t al.,* 2019). The examples highlighted in this chapter represent the teaching and learning observed in one Reception classroom. However, the data suggest that early years pedagogy is more complex and malleable than simply taking either an adult-directed (AD) or child-initiated (CI) approach. Throughout this chapter, there are references to the 'in-between pedagogies' – these approaches are neither fully AD, not CI but, to varying degrees, incorporate adult guidance and direction with children's emerging needs and interests.

Referring back to the research framework presented in Diagram 6 in Chapter 4, this present chapter addresses two of the components – the observed pedagogies and Rogoff's (1990; 1993; 1995) learning roles. The data are organised and discussed in relation to the observed pedagogies and Rogoff's learning roles are applied to the data to identify the different ways in which the children applied themselves to learning. Examples of the third component – the recurring themes – are woven throughout this chapter then discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

The chapter begins with an introduction to Braun and Clark's (2017) thematic approach and is followed by an explanation on the presentation of the data. Afterwards, the data is discussed under the headings of three pedagogical approaches – adult-directed, fixed learning outcome (ADFLO), adult-directed, open-ended (ADOE) and child-initiated (CI). Finally, and leading on to the penultimate chapter, this present chapter concludes with a brief discussion on topics highlighted in the data.

5.1 Data analysis and presentation

Vital to this analysis, I transcribed the videos of the children's learning and subsequent discussions. As a starting point for organising the data, the repetitive viewings allowed me to thoroughly examine the content and become familiar with it. Only dialogue was recorded during the interviews and, therefore, only dialogue was transcribed. Some actions (due to the challenges of detailing every movement and nuance) as well as speech were transcribed from the videos. For example, actions and nuances that communicated children's feelings or attitudes toward their peers were included. Aligned with an interpretivist epistemological approach, I wanted to understand the learning from the children's perspectives and their actions and expressions were sometimes more informative than the language they used.

Jenks (2011) states that our interactions with others may seem mundane but are in fact multifaceted and, as noted by Flewitt (2006), much can be learnt from how participants act, react and move. During this research, it was common to see children working silently but still collaborating with others or showing their feelings through their actions and body language. As Patterson's (2018) video footage analysis of Reception-aged children discovered, listening to children can be valuable but observing their actions can be just as revealing.

5.1.1 Categorising learning

As a starting point for analysis and organising the data, and deriving from definitions given in earlier research (Wood, 2014b; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Walsh e*t al.,* 2019), I created three categories of pedagogy:

- **Adult-directed, fixed learning outcome (ADFLO)** – Often linked to the Early Learning Goals (ELGs), the adult sets learning objectives for the activity. Work and support are aimed at getting children to achieve the fixed learning outcome. For example, learning to add, subtract or apply phonics to write.
- **Adult-directed, open-ended (ADOE)** – The adult directs learning in response to the children's needs and interests. Learning and intended outcomes are more flexible than ADFLO lessons and may entail the adult supplying resources, extending the children's ideas or setting up an open-ended activity.
- **Child-initiated (CI)** – The children create activities based on their interests. The adult may join in and extend learning but the original ideas stem from the children.

In response to the data, I further sub-categorised the different types of learning observed. These are outlined in Table 13 and definitions are given in the relevant sections of this chapter.

Adult-directed, fixed learning outcome (ADFLO)	**Adult-directed, open-ended (ADOE)**	**Child-initiated (CI)**
Directed learning	Adapted learning	Co-constructed learning
Instructed learning	Task-orientated	Adult as a resource
Supported learning	Resources provided	Independent learning

Table 13: Categories of learning

The discussion in this chapter is organised under these categories and not chronologically. I chose to do this because it caters to a more succinct analysis of the data. The categories do not cover all pedagogies but highlight the complex nature of teaching and learning. Thus, while being cautious about over-concentrating on categorising pedagogy, it demonstrates the range of learning that took place. Following the advice of Rogoff (1995), each activity is analysed as a whole, examining the various aspects of learning – academic and social – that unfolded during each session.

5.1.2 A thematic approach

Clarke and Braun's (2017) thematic approach was used to analyse the data. Described as 'a method for identifying, analyzing [sic], and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data' (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p297), it was chosen because it 'provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p78). Having a large amount of transcribed data, covering a broad range of experiences, the analysis needed to be flexible to allow key themes, linked to the research questions, to be discovered. Using Clark and Braun's (2017) thematic approach allowed me to do this (see Table 14 for a breakdown).

Phase	Description of process
Familiarising yourself with data	*Watching videos back with children *Making notes on videos and interviews *Transcribing videos and interviews
Generating initial codes	*Searching for different types of pedagogy *Highlighting adult input *Highlighting children learning with and from each other
Searching for themes	*Categorising and naming pedagogies *Identifying key features of the role of the adult *Searching for recurring examples of children using sociocultural learning
Reviewing themes	*Checking the examples in the data match up to the identified pedagogies *Ensuring there are sufficient examples in the data to justify exploring specific themes on the role of the adult and children learning from one another
Defining and naming themes	*Continual adaptation of theme definitions to ensure they fit with the data and overall aims of the thesis
Producing report	*Selecting examples from the data to discuss

Table 14: Phases of analysis

This thematic analysis took what Proudfoot (2022) describes an 'inductive/deductive hybrid' approach. He notes this method can be of:

> 'value to researchers' intent on exploring layered and complex problems which might necessitate both a more open and inductive approach to theme generation and yet at the same time would also benefit from the theoretical rigor offered by the deductive application of themes derived from an existing framework' (p2).

The main themes – role of the adult, peer-to-peer interaction and drawing on previous experiences were deductive in so much as they were sought out specifically to answer the research questions. However, the supplementary themes, underneath the main themes in Table 15 below, were inductive in so much as they arose from the data. Combining an inductive and deductive approach allowed me the openness of listening to the data, as opposed to searching for specific examples, while, at the same time, remaining focused on answering the research questions.

The role of the adult	Peer-to-peer interaction	Drawing on previous experiences
Dynamic and responsive teaching in all learning situations.	Sharing and building on one another's ideas.	Making sense of learning through experiences from home.
The development of language and communication.	Evolving and changing roles in supporting each other's learning.	Drawing on previous learning in school.
A need for active learning to engage children.	Conflict and resolution.	Using popular culture to enhance learning.

Table 15: Recurring themes

Examples of the above themes are woven throughout this chapter and presented under the three identified learning categories: ADFLO, ADOE and CI learning. These themes are then explicitly addressed in the discussion chapter.

5.1.3 Presentation of data

Along with the discussion of the data in the main body of the text, several other forms of data presentation have been used:

1) Screenshots taken from the videos, with added captions and speech bubbles
2) Excerpts of dialogue taken from the transcripts, highlighting different types of learning and adult input
3) Tables showing examples of different types of learning, adult input and use of communication

The phrase 'a picture speaks a hundred words' sprang to mind when trying to describe a situation whereby one child became frustrated during a lesson. This led me to use screenshots of the videos with speech bubbles and captions in my presentation. Cleland and MacLeod (2021) state that it is time to progress 'beyond the "linguistic imperialism" of text and embrace visual methodologies' (first page, no page number given). They conclude that doing so 'opens up new vistas of research possibilities' (first page, no page number given). In the case of this project, this entailed using images to communicate the research findings. Moving away from '"linguistic imperialism"' (Cleland & MacLeod, 2021), incorporating a more visual approach to share data allows the reader to see the children's learning.

Using photographs of the children in my research may help the reader to engage with the data but the topic can be controversial (Nutbrown, 2010; Cleland & MacLeod, 2021). To protect the identity of the children, I covered their faces in the images. Comparing the use of children's images in the Arts with research in Early Childhood Education, Nutbrown (2010) notes the former is more open to taking risks whilst the latter tends to blank out faces due to child protection issues. She asks why researchers anonymise photographs of children carrying out everyday tasks and from whom permission has been granted.

While taking Nutbrown's (2010) point, I chose not to seek parental permission to use unedited pictures because I believe it should be the children's choice. The children would probably have obliged but I do not think they would have understood how this might impact them in the future. Referring to previous research, Velasco *et al.* (2014) asked homeless children to photograph their lives. One twelve-year-old covered his face in the photographs saying, '"I don't want people to recognize [sic] that I am a street kid"' (p144). This is an extreme example but it demonstrates how children can be eager to participate in research while having reservations about revealing their identities. Thus, I did not feel comfortable not anonymising the photographs.

The excerpts of dialogue highlight specific points related to answering the research questions and link to the identified supplementary themes outlines in earlier Table 15. At the start of each dialogue, there are points of interest linked to the research questions and themes, highlighted in yellow and green, and examples of these, also colour-coded, are highlighted within the body of the dialogue. They show examples of how I supported learning, the children used peers to develop learning or how the children applied 'funds of knowledge' to their work.

Finally, the tables predominantly show how I, as the class teacher, supported learning but also give examples of children's ideas and communication.

5.1.4 Learning roles

Throughout this analysis, Rogoff's (1990; 1993;1995) learning roles are used to identify different types of learning. Already applied to the literature in Chapter 3 and introduced as part of the research framework in Chapter 4, as this research has progressed, my understanding of the learning roles in the context of formal education has evolved. Thus, this section gives a brief explanation of how the learning roles, as I have interpreted them, were applied to the data for this research.

Rogoff (1995) writes that ‘in apprenticeship, newcomers to a community of practice advance their skill and understanding through participation with others in culturally organized activities’ (p143). In a classroom environment, as much of the focus of the discussion on apprenticeship in Chapter 3 has demonstrated, this can entail children learning the cultural norms and expectations. Yet, as has emerged from the data for this research, it also applies to children participating in learning activities organised by adults or other children. Apprenticeship situations do not only benefit novices who are learning something new, but also more experienced children ‘who, like peers, are still developing skill and understanding in the process of engaging in activities with others of varying experience’ (Rogoff, 1995, p143). During organised activities, children learn with and from their peers while working towards the same, or similar outcome. In the context of this research, this applies to adult-planned classwork aimed at children achieving a specific learning outcome, children problem-solving together and children’s play.

However, Rogoff (1993) highlights the fluidity of learning roles – children often switch between or simultaneously fulfil multiple roles within one activity. While acting as an apprentice in a whole-class lesson or playing with a group of friends, children may also be involved in guided participation. Rogoff (1990) states that, in guided participation, teachers and children ‘make arrangements for children’s activities and revise children’s responsibilities as they gain skill and knowledge. These arrangements and adjustments facilitate children’s extension of their existing knowledge to encompass new situations’ (p111). In the context of this research, this means giving or receiving support to develop learning and includes exchanges between parties to encourage, correct or question learning.

Finally, while participating in group learning activities, children experience personal and individual changes in understanding. Rogoff (1993) describes appropriation ‘as the process by which individuals transform their skills and understanding through their participation’ (p138). This is the process of children amalgamating their existing knowledge, derived from various sources, to develop their understanding through group learning experiences. Although this learning is unique to individuals, it is reliant on, and developed through, interactions with others. In this research, it can be taking ideas learnt from peers and adults and adapting them or applying existing skills in new ways. For instance, children using skills learnt in AD activities in their play or adding elements of their peers' ideas to their work.

It is these definitions of apprenticeship, guided participation and appropriation that are applied to the data analysed in the remained of this chapter.

5.2 Adult-directed, fixed learning objective

Sitting at the AD end of the spectrum of pedagogy, the first approach analysed is ADFLO learning. These sessions involved the entire class or small groups taking part in activities with specific learning outcomes, linked to the Early Learning Goals (ELGs), to be achieved by the end of the lesson. From the five ADFLO lessons three sub-categories of learning, demonstrating varying degrees and different types of adult input, were observed (see Diagram 7).

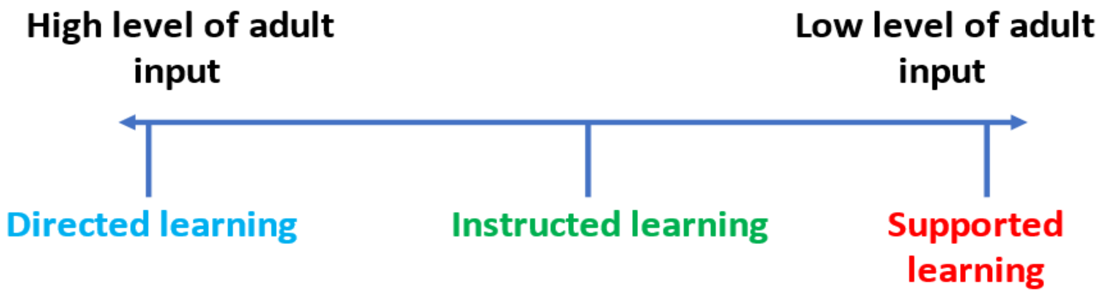


Diagram 7: Adult input ADFLO activities

As demonstrated by the number of times the children and I spoke (see Table 16), the level of adult input varied significantly between activities. Likewise, the content and intention of speech differed depending on the activity but, generally, there was more talk when I was present. The examples discussed in this section demonstrate the ways in which I supported learning and how children interacted with each other to further their understanding and complete tasks.

Activity	Number of times adult spoke	Number of times a child spoke
Comparing weight	73 (59%)	51 (41%)
Guided reading	95 (51%)	90 (49%)
Phonics	27 (42%)	38 (58%)
Writing	31 (36%)	54 (64%)
Story mountains	17 (20%)	68 (80%)

Table 16: Talk during ADFLO lessons

5.2.1 Directed learning

The first sub-category focuses on directed learning during which children worked towards a specific learning objective. I controlled the content and direction of learning through targeted input and questioning, but the extent to which I switched between following the pre-prepared plan and adapting teaching to meet emerging needs varied.

During a whole-class mathematics lesson, the children were split into three mixed-ability groups to discuss and order objects according to weight. It quickly became apparent that many of the children were confusing weight with size. They were using their understanding of size to try to make sense of weight but, in this instance, their reference to previous learning acted as a barrier to comprehension. In response, I gathered all the children on the carpet to address the misconception – with little success:

> - Incorrect use
> - Addressing misconceptions
>
> **Adult:** So, we found out that the phonics mat is the lightest and the wooden block is the…
> **Samiya:** (Holding arms out wide) Biggest….
> **Adult:** But look this (dolphin) is smaller but it's heavier than this (soft toy). Big things can be heavy but sometimes small things can be heavy too…
> **Humaira:** Because this (wooden block) is not squishy.

Despite the additional input, several children were still unclear about what 'weight' meant and were, therefore, unable to move on to order the objects. Even while watching the video back, Sahil continued to discuss this lesson in relation to size:

> - Misunderstanding and incorrect use
> - Modelling and addressing misconceptions

Sahil: We are learning to which one is the biggest. Yeah because they want to see how that big is.
Adult: It was quite heavy, wasn't it?
Sahil: Yeah and John see that's very big and Humaira want to see that's very big.

Some children demonstrated an understanding of weight (Photograph 1) but were given little opportunity to build on their existing knowledge or use it to support those less experienced. Instead, without deviating from a ADFLO pedagogical approach, I continuously modelled the correct use of the terms but did not allow for enough active exploration of the resources or discussion with peers.

This object is so heavy.
This object is heavy.

[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]

Photograph 1: Understanding weight

As apprentices, Rogoff (1995) states that children require active involvement but they were inactive for much of the lesson while I spoke. When they were given the opportunity to hold and compare the objects, this had a positive impact on their understanding:

- Misconception
- Understands after practical experience

Humaira: I disagree. Because this (dolphin) is that long and this feels heavier (domino).
Adult puts one object in each of Humaira's hands.
Adult: Which one feels heavier?
Humaira: Mmm. This one (dolphin).

- Misconception
- Understands after practical experience

Adult: Seri, what do you see that's heavier than the block?
Seri: The chair.
Adult: Okay, we'll try. Go and get it. I know the chair's bigger than the block but I don't know if it's heavier than the block.
Seri holds the chair for a few seconds and then the block.
Adult: Which one feels heavier?
Seri indicates the block.

However, partly due to the number of children and partly due to the concept being new, there was not sufficient time or resources for the children to actively participate and gain the practical experience needed to develop their learning. As Table 16 demonstrates, I dominated the lesson, speaking more than all thirteen children put together. Rogoff (1993) discusses the importance of new activities linking to practices already embedded but, with little prior experience and not enough practical stimulation, the weight activity was of no significance to many of the children.

This caused some of the children, and Zain in particular, to become restless. Zain enthusiastically raised his hand several times but did not get the opportunity to actively take part as often as he needed. As his facial expression and body language in picture 2 (wearing a green jumper) below demonstrate, Zain became frustrated with the process.

I didn't have a turn!

Photograph 2: Zain gets frustrated

The children's dormant roles in the lesson, combined with the amount of instruction, resulted in them becoming disengaged. Instead of adapting my pedagogy in response to the children's needs, I increased my direction in an attempt to get the children to meet the requirements of the ELG. Despite (or because of) this, children new to the concept of weight finished the lesson still unsure and children who had some previous experience gained no new knowledge. As apprentices, the children should have moved along their individual trajectories of learning but, due to lack of activity and opportunities to apply different learning roles, their learning ceased to progress. Yet, this was not always the case with ADFLO lessons as was observed in a video of six children taking part in a mixed-ability guided reading session.

While beginning with an ADFLO pedagogy, responding to the children, my approach was more flexible in this session than the weight lesson. For instance, the children consulted and took a vote on whether or not they wanted to continue reading and their request to play a game to help them remember high-frequency words, although not planned for, was granted. Returning to Rogoff's (1995) point about apprentices actively participating in activities, the children's contributions helped them to feel part of the decision-making process rather than just following instructions.

Talk during the guided reading session was less instructive and used more to facilitate the children's conversation about the story:

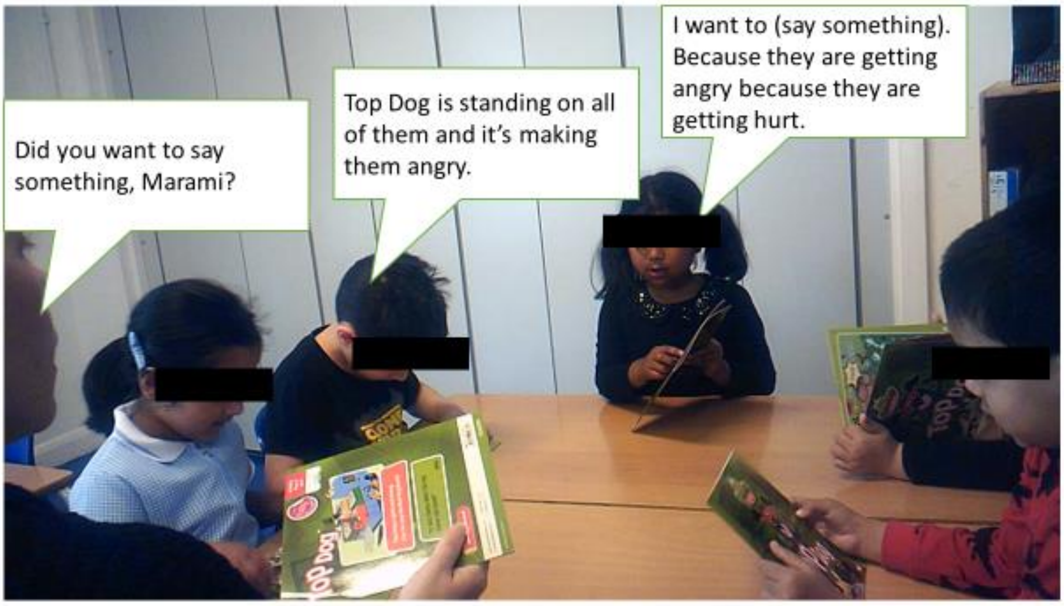
> - Extracting opinions and facilitating discussion
> - Giving views and demonstrating understanding
>
> **Adult:** Looking at the front cover Sahil, looking at the illustrations, what do you think it's about?
> **Sahil:** Top Dog is standing on the top and they are angry.
> **Adult:** I wonder why they're angry. John?
> **John:** I think that's a taekwondo dog because look (points to book) he has a thing on his head (demonstrates with hands on his head).

Much of this lesson was structured around communication and language. The children spoke about the meaning of words, gave examples of their use in different contexts and used extended sentences to discuss their understanding and opinions (see Table 17).

New word	Definition given by child
Rob	"Robbing means stealing."
Dash off	"When you quickly… dash off because… umm… you don't want people to see you."
Pet shop	"You can buy dogs in a pet shop."
Job	"I need a job. I have something to do."

Table 17: Discussing vocabulary

Using guided participation, the children used each other to build bridges between their existing knowledge and skills, and what they needed to find out to successfully participate in and complete the task (Rogoff, 1990) – for example, helping each other by explaining the meaning of new vocabulary and reading words. This helped the children to feel confident about giving their views (see Photograph 3).



[redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]

Did you want to say something, Marami?
Top Dog is standing on all of them and it's making them angry.
I want to (say something). Because they are getting angry because they are getting hurt.
Top Dog

Photograph 3: Giving opinions

The small group, the children's supportive attitudes and their active involvement provided a safe space to take risks. These factors encouraged the children to attempt to read words they were unsure of and explain the meaning of new vocabulary. I was then able to interject to further learning and correct mistakes (see Table 18). Whereas the children's confidence appeared to dwindle throughout the weight lesson, here they were supported with their errors through guided participation and this seemed to encourage them to continue pushing themselves.

Child needs support	Adult input	Child gets it
P-l-ai-n. Plain	Try again. That’s not the ‘ai’ sound.	P-l-a-n. Plan.
We can only read a word with three (letters)	I am going to come back to you because I think you can sound talk that one.	B-u-n. Bun. Ch. Bunch!
D-a-d. Dad.	That’s a ‘b’ (pointing to initial letter).	B-a-d. Bad!
(Looks confused) What does it even mean?	Read it (there is writing on the picture).	Sh-o-p. Shop!
I don’t know what kind of shop is it?	Well, there’s a (picture of) a dog there.	It’s a dog shop.
I can quick.	Check the last word.	K-i-ck. Kick. I can kick!

Table 18: Supporting reading

The children showed elements of appropriation through the application of their funds of knowledge during the guided reading session. Their application of knowledge of size to the weight lesson confused them but their use of previous knowledge to make sense of the reading content, at least in theory, made sense. Looking at the front cover of the book, Anas saw red and blue tins. From this, he assumed that the ‘bad guys’ wanted to steal cans of Pepsi© and, noting the bandanas the ‘bad guys’ were wearing, John made a connection with taekwondo. This shows how the children used previous learning experiences to try to make sense of the task-at-hand.

While the guided reading and weight sessions were both ADFLO, the role of the adult, approach to teaching and learning, and resulting outcomes were considerably different. For the weight lesson, I was focused on the learning outcome but, because many were struggling, the activity spiralled into me dominating the activity. The children were unable to actively participate and, therefore, did not make progress with their understanding of weight. On the other hand, during the guided reading session, my pedagogy was less rigid – responding to the children’s requests, ensuring each child got a turn and extending their language. As a result, the children were engaged and able to use guided participation to support one another and appropriation to develop individual understanding.

5.2.2 Instructed learning

The next sub-category in ADFLO, instructed learning, examines a lesson that entailed me giving instructions and the children completing the task with the support of their peers. The task entailed lots of adult direction but a play-based approach was applied and the children were active throughout.

Set in ability groups with children from other classes, the second top group (working at the expected level or above in Literacy) was filmed during a phonics lesson. The children were split into three groups for a 'phonics quiz' whereby they took turns in their group to write a dictated sentence. When they had finished writing, they pressed a buzzer to earn points for their team for getting the sentence correct, finishing fastest and helping one another.

The children were encouraged to support each other while I interjected to give instructions and support:

- Adult interjecting
- Children supporting each other

Anas: How do you do 'It?'
Sayf: I,T
Anas starts writing.
Adult: Remember finger spaces, Anas.
Anas: It is my. M
Adult: My is a high-frequency word. It's on the board.
Sayf: See (pointing), it's on the board.

The children appeared to enjoy the play-based task and the competitive element of the quiz – smiling at each other in anticipation, enthusiastically beginning to write before I had finished dictating the sentences and wanting to help their peers. This included passing resources to their teammates and strategically placing the phonics mat, allowing them all access to point out sounds to the person writing. Acting as guides, these gestures demonstrated support and encouragement towards their peers. The children approached the task as a collective group and celebrated their successes together too:

- Children supporting each other
- Group celebration

Anas checks his work
Anas: It is a…
Sayf: Fish
Anas looks at Sayf again.
Sayf: Fish. Fish.
Anas looks at Aaliya.
Aaliya: Fish.
Anas finishes writing the sentence. He triumphantly throws his hands up in the air then hits the buzzer and smiles at Sayf. Aaliya stands forward smiling and Sayf and Anas both throw their hands in the air.

Accepting support from his teammates, Anas appeared to be a less experienced apprentice than his teammates but, highlighting the dynamic nature of learning, the roles switched when the other children took turns to write. Rogoff (1995) writes that apprenticeship 'may involve peers who serve as resources and challenges for each other' (p143) and that is what the children in this group did for one another during the phonics quiz.

Overall, Sayf was the most secure in his learning and helping his teammates. Whilst guiding the development of his team, he simultaneously showed elements of appropriation and bringing together previous learning to help with the task. For example, he took the lead in using the phonics mat (a resource they are encouraged to use to support their writing) to point out sounds to his teammates, repeated the adult-dictated sentences to his friends so they knew what to write and spelled out words using the letter names, as opposed to sounds as normally used in school. This led to the other children in the group frequently looking to him for help:

- Looking for help
- Helping and encouraging

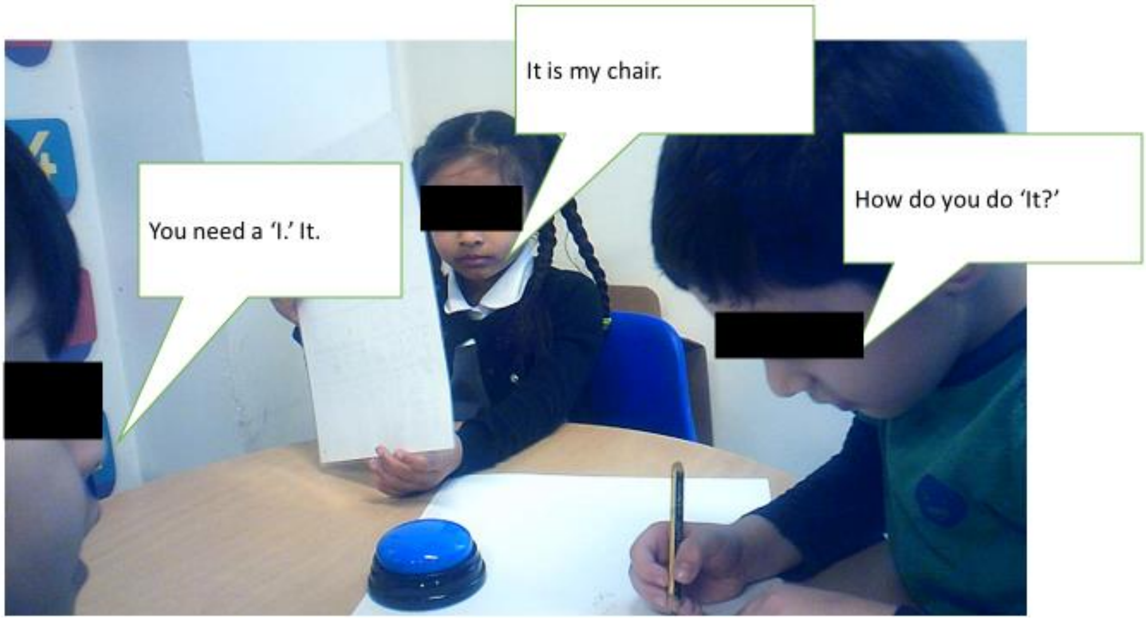
Aaliya: I see the moon. See.
She looks to Sayf for help.
Sayf: 'S' 'ee'
Aaliya finishes writing 'see' then checks her work again.
Aaliya: I see the. The
Again, she looks to Sayf for help.
Sayf: T,H,E
As Aaliya finishes writing:
Sayf: Go! Go! Go!

Based on my input (and helped by the children being set in ability groups), the children all began at a similar starting point for this activity. To differing degrees, all three children demonstrated an ability and willingness to guide the others in the group, creating a more equal balance of power and contribution to the game – even the normally shy Aaliya made attempts to support her teammates.

In the absence of an adult being present to provide support, the children effectively used each other and, despite me directing the activity, actively participated and were motivated to develop their own and their teammates' learning. Something they were aware of as this dialogue between Sayf and Anas demonstrates:

> - Awareness of helping each other
>
> **Adult:** I'm wondering why you guys won and the other teams didn't win.
> **Sayf:** Because we help our team…
> **Adult:** Tell me what happens when it's Aaliya's turn.
> **Sayf:** You give the stuff to her when it's her turn.
> **Adult:** And Anas, you're helping Aaliya.
> **Anas:** I helped her write.
> **Adult:** Mmhmm. And what did you do to help her, Sayf?
> **Sayf:** Umm. I showed her the letters.

The children were focused on the phonics quiz and all talk between them was aimed at correctly writing the sentences and supporting teammates (Photograph 4). Helped by the fast pace and competitiveness of the game, the children did not stray from the task. I had no reason to interrupt the group, apart from telling them what to write next or giving writing prompts.


It is my chair.
You need a 'I.' It.
How do you do 'It?'

Photograph 4: On task

Comparing the children's learning during this session to the previous two ADFLO lessons, they were engaged and motivated to learn (in contrast to the weight lesson) and, unlike the guided reading activity, they needed little adult support. Whilst taking an ADFLO pedagogical approach, the play-based task appealed to the children, motivating them to progress towards the learning outcome and make progress as apprentice writers and team members.

5.2.3 Supported learning

The final two ADFLO lessons followed a traditional primary school lesson format consisting of an introduction on the carpet, children going to tables to complete work and finishing back on the carpet for a plenary. The children were given a task to individually complete and I intermittently gave support to help them achieve the intended outcome. The children were expected to apply their own ideas to the tasks.

During the course of both lessons examined in this section, there were times when some of the children became disengaged and diverted from the given task. For example, while writing about a recent trip, a few of the children began joking about cheese (Photograph 5) and flitted in and out of completing the directed work and chatting about topics of their choice:

> - Chatting about other topics
> - Focusing on a given task
>
> **Jonny**: John. John. Is the camera on?
> John starts making noises and puts his face up close to the camera. Jonny leans over the table and looks into the camera too.
> **Jonny:** Cheese!
> Jonny is leaning over Marami's work but she is focused on her writing. John goes back to his writing, sounding out the word he wants to write and Jonny does the same.
> **John:** How do you write 'or?'
> **Marami:** (points to phonics mat) That's the 'or' sound.

I saw smelly sock cheese.
I saw cheese in... umm... poos.
I saw cheese at Kew gardens.
[redacted]
[redacted]

Photograph 5: Cheese talk

At the beginning of the task, and while I worked with this group, the children were more focused on their writing. They were forthcoming about asking for help and I responded either by giving input or pointing them towards resources (see Table 19).

Child needs support	Adult prompt
How do you write ‘spikey?’	Sounds out word slowly.
How do you write ‘spi?’	It has a trigraph sound in it (the long ‘I’ sound).
Zain is looking around the room.	(Refocusing) I, finger space, saw… Saw is on the board to help you. Go and check.
John has written: Vicki saw ducklings.	And? (wants to extend writing).

Table 19: Supporting writing

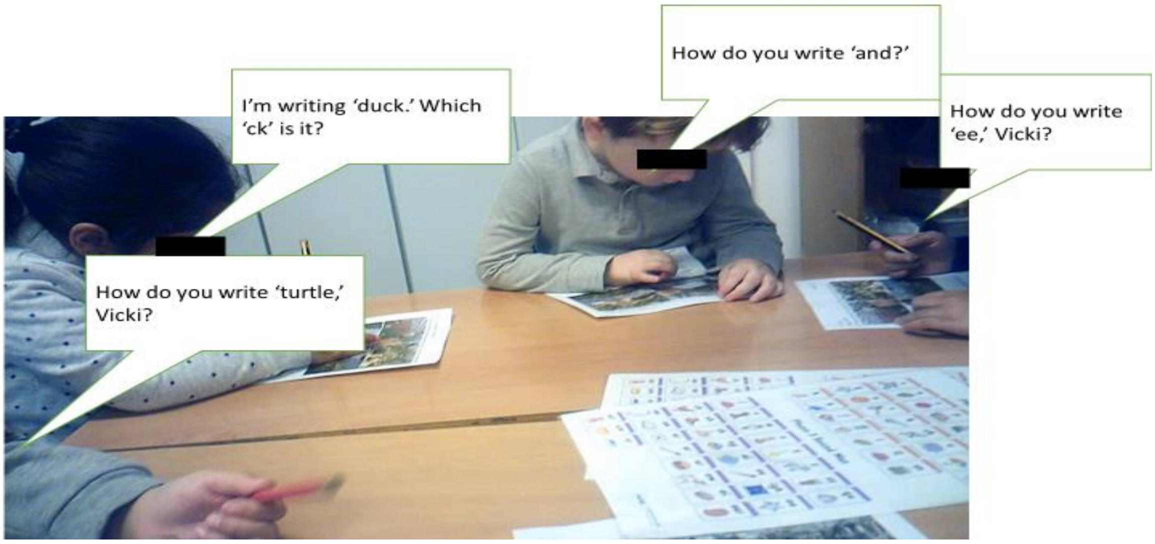
The children were initially enthusiastic about the work. Even John, who had been absent on the day of the trip and was writing about the experience from my perspective, started the task motivated. He remembered that the class had been on the same trip the year before and was able to use his memories from that trip to come up with ideas. Marami similarly began her work enthusiastically, applying her knowledge of phonics to write her chosen sentences.

After I went to work with other groups, the children continued their work for a short period – checking what they had written and looking at pictures of their trip. However, John soon noticed the camera, alerting Jonny and leading to the conversation about cheese. Although the joke ended with all the children joining in, initially there was some disagreement and I had to intervene to dissipate tensions:

- Disagreement between children
- Adult intervenes

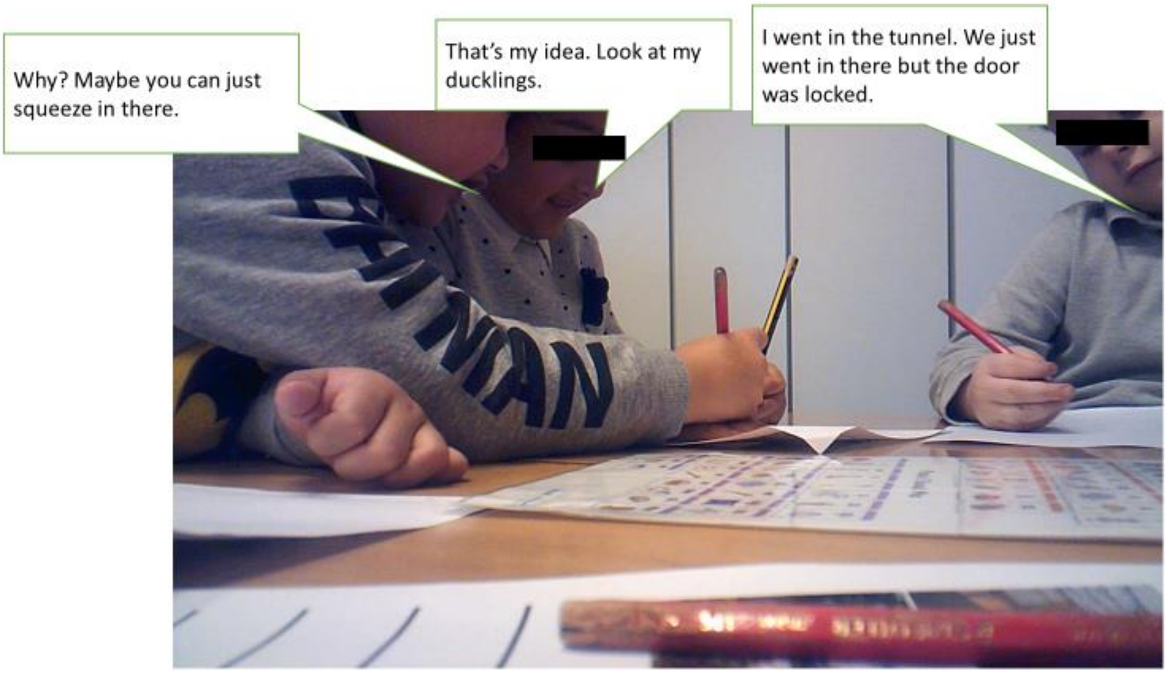
Zain: Vicki, Jonny's sad.
Adult: What's wrong Jonny?
Jonny: Because John said he's not my friend.
John: No, I'm just saying… Because Jonny keeps saying 'cheese.' I'm saying Jonny's not going to learn.
Jonny: Well, John keeps saying that.
Adult: Why are you talking about cheese? We didn't see any cheese at Kew Gardens.
The children start to laugh.

Overall, when I was not present, much of the children's time was spent talking about other topics or trying to attract my attention. While I guided the children, they were able to work on the task but, without my help, they were unable to access the level of work I was expecting. Rogoff (1990) states that apprentices look to 'their partners who have relatively greater skill and understanding' (p39) but none of the children were experienced enough to support their peers and were, therefore, reliant on me to complete the task (see Photograph 6). Even normally confident writers largely remained in apprenticeship roles, frequently seeking adult guidance. Policy pressures to meet the ELG in writing and ensure the children's writing was phonetically plausible had leaked down through me to the children. The task became focused on the accuracy of the children's writing and not recording their experiences.


How do you write 'and?'
I'm writing 'duck.' Which 'ck' is it?
How do you write 'ee,' Vicki?
How do you write 'turtle,' Vicki?

Photograph 6: Seeking adult help

Despite the aforementioned hurdles, there were elements of parallel learning during which the children engaged with one another to develop their work. For instance, spurred by John taking an interest in Marami's drawing, the children later returned to the topic of the trip and a play area they had visited. They spoke enthusiastically about their experiences and John wanted to find out more (see Photograph 7). Unfortunately, there was not enough time for the children to incorporate the content of their discussion into their writing. As is the case with most school lessons, a set amount of time had been allocated to this task and, when the time was up, we had to move on to the next task on the timetable.


Why? Maybe you can just squeeze in there.
That's my idea. Look at my ducklings.
I went in the tunnel. We just went in there but the door was locked.

Photograph 7: Back on task

The children would have benefitted from more time to reflect on and discuss their experiences before going on to the writing aspect of the task. The apprentices would have been able to listen to and emulate the ideas of some of their more confident peers. Instead, I expected the children to quickly move into appropriator roles and write about their experiences. Discussing appropriation, Rogoff (1993) states that 'individuals change through their involvement in one or another activity, becoming prepared for subsequent involvement in other, related activities' (p132). However, the children were not appropriately prepared for this writing task and, therefore, were unable to appropriate.

During the next lesson, the children seemed happy to share their ideas from the offset. They were asked to create stories using Corbett and Strong's (2020) version of story mountains (the children are given an outline of a mountain with some sentence starters and asked to draw pictures to make up a story). Perhaps because the topic and intended learning outcome were less rigid than some of the previously discussed lessons and there was less pressure to write accurately, the children discussed and incorporated a range of topics. For instance, Humaira was observed thinking aloud and enhancing her idea:

- Gentle prompting from adult
- Building on own idea

Humaira: (Looking at adult) So, they fight (shakes her head) With a gun. With two guns.
Adult: Oh dear.
Humaira: Mickey Mouse has got two guns and the bad guy got one gun.
Adult: I think Mickey Mouse is going to win then.

Although I allocated the task and supported the children throughout, the open nature meant they were able to apply concepts familiar to them. Bringing together previous experiences unique to each child, they became appropriators in creating their own stories. Returning to Rogoff's (1993) statement about experiences changing individuals and preparing them for future activities, the children's existing funds of knowledge and prior attempts at story mountains had prepared them for amalgamating their ideas to create original stories.

The children appeared confident about their ideas but remained open to adaptation as they heard and thought of novel ideas. They showed a genuine interest in their peers' stories, engaging in conversation about characters and actions (Photograph 8) and leading them to borrow and expand on one another's ideas:

- Initiates idea
- Builds on idea

Humaira: (to Anas) Mickey Mouse got two guns and he got one gun.
Anas smiles.
Sayf: He's got two guns. He's got two guns.
Anas: Look at my one. My one's…
Sayf: He got. He got a axe.

No, he just burped.
Who's that with you?
Did he kill you? What did he do?

[redacted] [redacted] [redacted]

Photograph 8: Discussing ideas

As well as listening to one another's story concepts, the children drew upon interests developed outside of the classroom. Referring to popular culture, current interests and their peers' ideas, the children drew on a range of sources, from famous characters to everyday experiences such as going shopping (Table 20).

Previous experiences and interests	**Popular culture**	**Adapting peers' ideas**
Wolf	Mickey Mouse	(Building on guns idea) two guns and an axe
Going shopping	Spiderman	(Building on from nowhere land idea) an alien appeared out of nowhere
Being unable to get out without a key	Bad guy	(Building on finally, they get a wolf idea) finally, they saw boxes

Table 20: Origins of ideas

Temporarily diverting from the task, the children began to hide each other's name cards. Starting as a joke involving all four children, it ended in a brief altercation that the children diffused using humour before continuing with their stories:

- Children arguing
- Diffusing situation

Sayf: Why did you do that? (move name cards).
Humaira: We didn't do that.

Marami: Yes, you did.
Humaira: No, I didn't
Humaira makes noises and a grumpy face at Marami.
Humaira: I didn't do that. Stop!
They continue going back and forth. Then, Marami slides Sayf's name card along using her pencil and starts to giggle. Humaira smiles too.
Sayf: Finally, they get wolf.
Marami and Humaira laugh.
Marami: Finally…
Humaira: Finally, they saw his pick.
Sayf, Marami and Humaira all giggle.

Further disagreement also occurred when Humaira and Sahil argued about who got a pen first. To solve the problem, I, along with the rest of the class, did 'eeny, meeny, miny moe' to decide who should use the pen first. The two children involved appeared satisfied with the outcome but, Marami, who had witnessed the incident, disagreed:

- Satisfied with outcome
- Outcome is unfair

Marami: Umm Vicki. I don't think that's fair because Humaira got it first. And then, Sahil gave her the brown and Humaira got the yellow first.
Adult: So, you think she should have used it first?
Marami: Yeah. Because she got it first.
Adult: (Sahil is already using the yellow pen). Well, I think Sahil will be finished quite quickly.
Humaira: I'm going to use the green.
Sahil finishes using the yellow pen and gives it to Humaira. She takes it back to her table to colour her picture.

Rogoff (1990) 'argues that individual effort and sociocultural activity are mutually embedded' (p25). The above examples demonstrate how, within the context of children individually working towards the set learning outcome, as apprentices in a group, they simultaneously learned about and set cultural expectations and rules. They required minimal adult support to resolve the problems and were happy to continue supporting one another afterwards.

As well as sharing ideas, the children supported each other with structuring their stories and the more technical concepts of story writing as this comment from Marami demonstrates:

Marami leans over and looks at Anas's work.

> **Marami:** Anas, you can't do another character. Otherwise, it won't be a real story.

The class had considerable prior experience of making up stories using story mountains and Marami's comment to Anas referred to a frequent discussion we had had as a class about including some characters, actions and settings but not too many or too few of each. Offering Anas assistance, Marami acted as a guide, passing on knowledge learnt during AD learning, to improve her peer's story.

It was evident in the children's confidence and the content they used that they had had opportunities to be apprentices, guides and, to varying degrees were ready to at least attempt to be appropriators and create their own, original content. In contrast, the writing about a trip lesson did not allow sufficient time or input to discuss the trip and instead moved too quickly to the writing element. The lessons followed the same ADFLO pedagogy but the expectations for writing in the trip lesson meant the children needed more input, whereas they were able to access the story mountain work independently. Being sufficiently prepared and having a less rigid learning outcome to work towards, along with less pressure to use phonics, while making up story mountains contributed to the overall success of the lesson.

5.3 Adult-directed, open-ended learning

Moving on from ADFLO lessons, the data show examples of ADOE learning. Rogoff (1990) highlights the importance of guides being responsive to children's emerging needs and adapting activities accordingly. During these activities, the 'in-between pedagogies' were applied, involving the adult in the teaching and learning process but in a manner that was responsive to the children's needs and interests at a particular moment. Once again, this warranted varying levels of input (see Diagram 8), dependent on the children and activity.

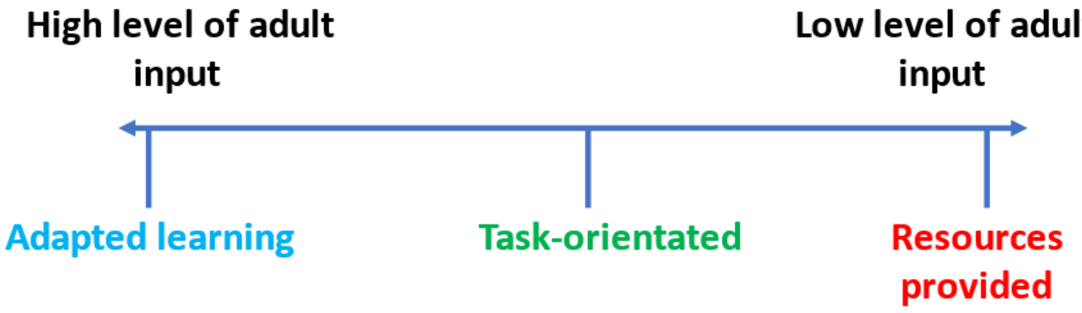


Diagram 8: Adult input ADOE learning

As per Table 21, there was less talk – from adults and children – during the ADOE activities in comparison with the ADFLO lessons. However, what this table does not encapsulate is the increased physical activity and talk between children, away from the camera. Non-verbal learning is discussed in the analysis of individual sessions but not all child-to-child communication was captured on film.

Activity	**Number of times adult spoke**	**Number of times children spoke**
Cake shop Mathematics	61 (48%)	65 (52%)
Making pasta	37 (46%)	44 (54%)
Cutting grass	26 (50%)	26 (50%)
Repairing dress	31 (60%)	21 (40%)
Aquarium	26 (50%)	26 (50%)

Table 21: Talk during ADOE learning

5.3.1 Adapted learning

The first example involved six children using pictures of cakes in a practical mathematics activity. There was a loose objective – to use mathematics to solve problems – but without having to work towards a specific outcome, I was able to adapt the lesson in response to the children's needs. The children applied mathematical functions, outlined in the ELGs, that had been previously taught in structured sessions – speaking about 'more' and 'less,' comparing quantities, working out how many they needed to subtract or add so that two children would have the same amount, halving equally between two children and selecting a quantity fewer than a given quantity.

Rogoff (1993) writes that in appropriation, children ‘puzzle out how to manage a situation on the basis of their own and shared history’ (p145). Helped by the small number of participants and responsive approach, the children were able to access previous experiences of learning – from structured lessons and application in free-flow activities – to select and apply various mathematical functions.

Having to switch between different mathematical functions instead of repetitively practising the same thing over and over (as was the case when the children were working towards a specific ELG in mathematics) meant the children were consistently challenged and their attention was held throughout most of the lesson (Photograph 9).

Because they got a lot and they got less.
We have to take four away.
It’s not fair because they got four and we got eight.
I’ve got less and they’ve got more.

Photograph 9: Motivated to learn

As with the earlier discussed guided reading session, this activity demonstrates how small group work, along with a flexible approach to pedagogy, can be effective in engaging children and supporting opportunities for the practical application of mathematics. This was evident when some of the children later watched back the video and were able to clearly remember their learning:

> **Jonny:** So, I’ve got five (cakes) and they’ve got seven. And then, umm… it wasn’t fair for us, eh… They had more than us…
> **Samiya:** (Remembers the two quantities she and Marami had). Emm, five equals seven.

While I was able to be more responsive to the children, I was still in control of the lesson and directed using a combination of closed and open-ended questions to challenge the children and check their understanding (Table 22). The closed questions allowed me to check that the children understood the mathematics they were using and were able to apply the functions correctly. Requiring a higher level of mathematical thinking, the open-ended questions required the children to explain their answers.

Open questions	Closed questions
You have those cakes and they have those cakes. What can you tell me about that?	How many more cakes do you have?
(Gives two different amounts of cakes to two pairs of children) What do you say about that?	How many cakes do they have left?
Why is that not fair?	Who has more out of you and your partner?

Table 22: Adult's questioning

Not being required to meet a set learning objective meant I was able to move towards an 'in-between pedagogy' and adjust the activity according to the children's needs. I read their responses and made changes to keep them engaged:

- Losing interest
- Gaining back interest

A couple of the children look like they are starting to lose interest.
Adult: Now, I've got two more challenges for you. (The children sit up and Marami, Samiya and John smile. Jonny still has his head on the table). The first challenge is you and your partner are going to add them together and find out how many you have altogether.
Samiya starts sliding her cakes towards Marami's cakes so they can add them.

Despite this, nearer the end of the activity, it became evident that the children had exhausted their enthusiasm. While the idea of a challenge had initially piqued their interest, a second was too much:

- Losing interest
- Adult trying to focus

As Jonny counts, he loses interest in touching each cake and loses count.
Adult: (models) I think you did that a bit quickly. So, as you count Jonny, you touch each one.
Jonny stands up to start counting again. John appears to be getting a bit restless and starts fidgeting with the cakes.

> **Adult:** John. (I say John’s name to get his attention and focus him on the task. John stops).

The children started eagerly but this type of instruction can be intense, leading them to quickly tire. However, overall, the lesson was successful in getting the children to select and apply previously learnt mathematical skills, albeit for a short time. The activity was still weighted towards me directing and the children acting as apprentices but, as appropriators, they had to make ‘links between situations on the basis of their understanding of the previous and current situations’ (Rogoff, 1993, p145) to choose and apply mathematical functions. Likewise, guiding the children, I altered the activities to hold their attention and introduced problems to extend learning. The activity was not aimed at meeting a pre-determined learning outcome and this allowed some flexibility, but there was no deviation from mathematics or using the given resources. Hence, the children and their wider needs and interests (outside of mathematics) were not followed.

Conversely, throughout the next activity, the children predominantly followed their interests and directed learning. During free-flow learning, resources had been set out for the children to cut out and stick shapes, but a group of children instead made different ‘meals’ before taking the ‘food’ off to cook in the home area. Instead of insisting that the children use the resources to make shape pictures, I joined in with their play.

Having extensive experience of observing family members at home and playing with food resources in school, the children acted as appropriators, speaking about complex food-related topics (Photograph 10) and demonstrating an understanding of how to prepare food. Rogoff (1993) writes that ‘appropriation is not a solitary process… It occurs as individuals, often with others, and always in the context of sociocultural activity (p145). In this instance, the children merged familiar sociocultural activities from home with practices in school to participate in an activity with friends and learn from each other.

We are making food in a restaurant.
I'm making healthy pasta so you don't be ill.
Wow! This is lots spicy.
I got rainbow pasta. I used food colouring.

Photograph 10: Talk about food

As with the story mountain lesson, the children were motivated by their topic of learning and interacted with one another to exchange food preferences. For example, with adult prompting, they engaged in an extended conversation about ingredients:

- Adult stimulates conversation
- Children respond to each other

Adult: What ingredients do you need for that?...
Humaira: Peppers.
Adult: Red peppers? Green peppers?
Humaira: Green peppers.
Samiya: Red peppers. Green and red.
Adult: What other ingredients?
Samiya: Some flour and some baking powder, rice…
Adult: But then that's quite dry. You need to make a sauce as well. What will you need for the sauce?
Samiya: Tomatoes.
Adult: Is that what you have at home?
Marami: I like to put sweetcorn in my pasta.
Adult: I like to put sweetcorn in my pasta as well. This sounds like quite a healthy pasta with peppers and sweetcorn.
Humaira: Are peppers healthy?
Adult: They are healthy. They're very healthy…
Samiya: These are the pepper (shows pieces of paper to adult)… After, I'm going to get a yellow pepper too.
Adult: I quite like onions in my pasta too.

Samiya: There's also onions in there too.
Marami: I love onions in pasta.

Although the children predominantly spoke about food-related topics, the normally shy Aaliya began talking about her cat. This suggests that the relaxed environment made her feel comfortable about broaching a subject meaningful to her. Adopting an 'in-between pedagogy,' I was able to engage in conversation about cats without the pressure of working towards a specific learning outcome, within a set timeframe. Throughout the activity, I was involved but gave no specific direction. I built on the children's language skills, made suggestions to extend learning and attempted to engage the quieter children (Table 23). While the children could have carried out this activity without me, Rogoff (1993, p146) asserts that children's participatory appropriation and application of more sophisticated strategies often come with collaboration with adults. Although the children were experienced in this area, my participation resulted in richer dialogue and extending the activity by taking the 'food' to the home area to cook.

Building on language	Extending learning	Engaging quieter children
Samiya talks about the food being healthy. Adult introduces the concept of vitamins. Samiya then later uses vitamins in her talk.	Adult asks children about the ingredients they are using to encourage talk about the task.	Aaliya has been quietly cutting up pieces of paper. Adult asks about what she is making to bring her into the conversation.
Aaliya talks about using food colouring in her pasta. Adult introduces and explains tricolore pasta.	Samiya talks about the ingredients she is using. Adult asks about a sauce and the ingredients she will need for that.	Seri has been quietly working on her dish. Adult asks her to talk about what she is making. Seri replies, "rice" and adult probes further.
Humaira tells adult that 'recipes' cannot eat the food. Adult models using the word 'cook,' saying, "cooks need to eat too."	Samiya and Humaira start talking about cooking the food. Adult suggests taking their work over to the home area to role-play.	Samiya interrupts when adult is asking Seri about her work. Adult replies, "I'm just talking to Seri."

Table 23: Supporting imaginative play

Throughout the activity, the children flitted in and out of different learning roles – apprentices when learning about new foods and food-related language, guides when explaining to each other about the food they eat at home and how they prepare it, and appropriators when drawing on their previous knowledge to build on the activity.

Even when there was disagreement, the children were able to resolve the issue themselves. For instance, a situation arose whereby Samiya and Marami were arguing about what type of drink should be served with the food. With little adult scaffolding, Humaira was able to diffuse the situation and create a situation appropriate for their present context:

- Conflict
- Resolution

The adult asks what we can have to drink. Marami suggests water and Samiya suggests tea. They keep repeating their suggestion as if in competition.
Adult: I think there's an argument between tea and water.
Humaira: I know what to do. We could have tea and water.
Adult: That's a good idea.

Humaira's input was limited but effective, pacifying her peers and avoiding the need for adult intervention. Samiya and Marami had been asserting the norms they were used to in a different social context (at home) but, with Humaira's support, they were able to form a new social norm, appropriate for their present situation.

Contemplating how they came about partaking in this activity, Humaira and Marami later watched the video back and commented:

- Assuming adult-directed activity
- Clear about origins of idea for activity

Humaira: And so, we was making some food because… umm… I think because… I think because grown-ups telled them to make some food and that's why we're…
Marami: (interrupts) No grown-ups told us to do that. We just wanted to make that.
Humaira: Yeah.

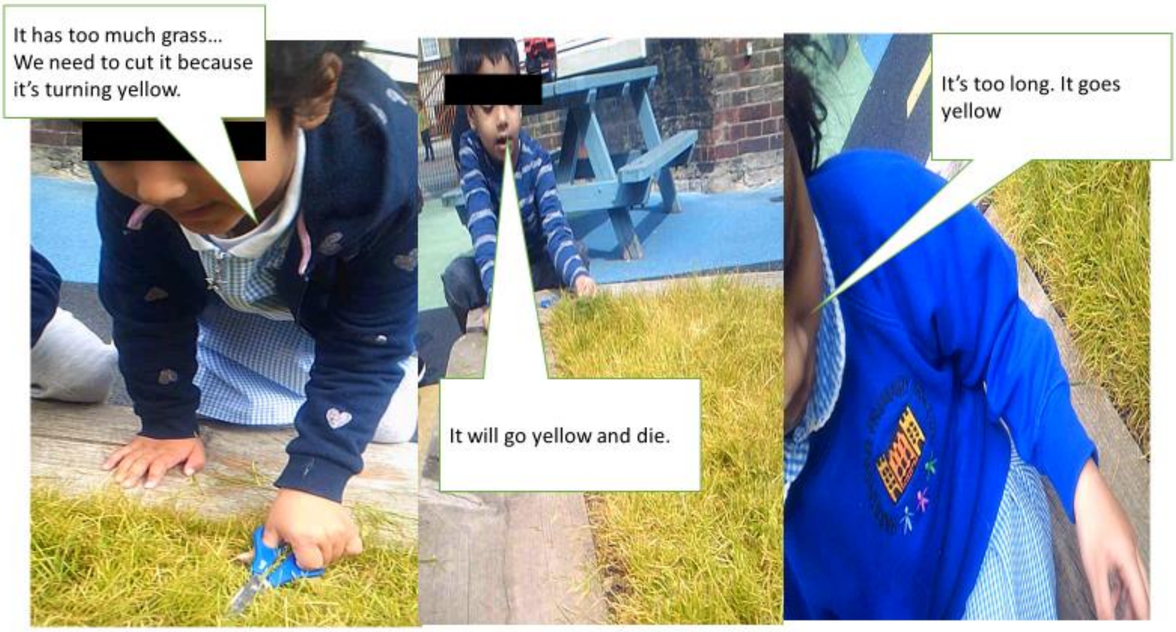
Perhaps being used to pedagogies closer to the AD end of the spectrum when I was present, Humaira automatically assumed her learning had been directed by an adult. This highlights the connection children can make between the presence of adults and their being in charge of learning – even though this was not the case with this activity.

The two activities discussed here differ due to one being adapted by me and the other by the children. The pedagogical approach to the cake mathematics lesson was more AD, whereas the paper food-making activity took more of an ‘in-between pedagogical’ approach, but both showed the children actively engaged in learning. During the cake mathematics lesson, this was achieved by making changes to hold the children’s attention and meet their individual needs. In the case of the children making paper food, the children used the resources in a way that was meaningful to them and allowed me into their play to enhance it. In both situations, I played a role in supporting learning. However, there were more examples of the children adopting the roles of guides and appropriators while making food than in the cake activity.

5.3.2 Task-orientated

While the outcomes of the previously discussed activities were open, the next category to be discussed – task-orientated – entailed the adult instructing the children to carry out a task, supplying resources and allowing the children to work out how to do it (whilst still supporting when required). Rogoff (1990) states that ‘the apprenticeship system often involves a group of novices (peers) who serve as resources for one another in exploring the new domain and aiding and challenging one another’ (p39). During these task-orientated activities, there was an expectation that the children use each other to develop learning and complete the tasks.

For this activity, scissors had been left out for the children to trim the overgrown grass in the garden. Children from both Reception and Nursery, and all three early years classes, were keen to have a go. The activity was simple but spurred some interesting conversations. For example, with adult support, the children discussed the condition of the grass and why it needed to be cut (Photograph 11), and took notice of and spoke about their surrounding environment while they worked (Photograph 12).


It has too much grass... We need to cut it because it's turning yellow.
It will go yellow and die.
It's too long. It goes yellow

Photograph 11: Talk about grass

I want to see the bumble bee. I saw it that way. A bumble bee!
But what if it stings you?

Photograph 12: A bumble bee

Despite the task being straightforward, some of the children found the cutting difficult – either using scissors generally or because they were not used to using scissors for this purpose. For instance, Marami, who could competently use scissors to cut paper, initially struggled:

- Learning how to cut the grass
- Adult input to support

Adult: (Demonstrating how to cut the grass). If you hold it up like this (holding grass with one hand), then you can cut it like that (and cuts with the other).
Marami: Oh, it's easy if I do it like that.
Marami uses one hand to hold the grass and the other to cut the ends but is finding it quite difficult. She looks around at how the other children are doing it. The adult demonstrates again how to hold the grass with one hand and cut with the other.
Marami then tries cutting a smaller chunk of grass and has success.

This example illustrates how a child can quickly move between different learning roles. Marami would normally not need assistance with using scissors but found cutting the grass difficult. As a less experienced apprentice in this situation, she listened to adult guidance and observed her peers, then was able to successfully join in.

The children applied previous learning to the activity and helped each other to build on their understanding. For instance, a younger child noticed numerals along the scissors to help with measuring. The child recognised the numerals and made the connection with counting but did not use the correct terminology. With the help of Sahil, a more experienced child, and the adult, she was supported in addressing this misconception:

- Applying existing knowledge
- Clarification from others

Younger child: I have found counts.
Adult: Oh, you've found numbers. What numbers are on it?
Child begins to say number names. Sahil joins him and starts saying the number names too.
Adult: Those are on there so they can help you measure how much you want to cut as well.

Me modelling the correct term for 'numbers' and Sahil reciting the number names indirectly supported the apprentice. Sahil was the 'expert' at this particular moment but still 'developing breadth and depth of skill and understanding in carrying out the activity' (Rogoff, 1990, p39).

While trying to access the activity, Sahil could not fit into his desired space which almost led to conflict:

- Sahil determined to get his way

- Adult alleviating situation

Sahil comes over to join in with cutting the grass but he wants to cut a patch where other children are already working.
Adult: Perhaps you could go over there for a little while? (pointing to a space)
Sahil: Don't want to.
Adult: So, what else could we do to solve this problem?
Sahil: Mmm, tell them to move.
Adult: Maybe you could chat to the person.
Sahil: (Distracted) A bumble bee.

Without the pressure of having to achieve a set learning outcome or following a restrictive pedagogy, the children and I were able deviate away from the task and explore other avenues of interest. This meant that, when the opportunity for disagreement arose, it was avoided by going off-task. This simple activity acted as a springboard for conversation about the activity itself as well as things the children encountered while they worked. There were also opportunities for the children to build on their existing knowledge and skills, and to support each other in doing so.

The next example was taken from a whole-class, structured lesson without a set skill or knowledge-based learning outcome to work towards. The children were asked to repair a damaged wedding dress and were supplied with resources to create decorative pieces to add to the dress. The lesson was task, as opposed to learning-outcome orientated, and set in a context meaningful to the children.

Initially, a few of the children were unsure about what was expected of them. Humaira looked confused as she watched the other children gather resources and John asked what they needed to make. As apprentices, they needed time to take in information, ask questions and process what was being asked of them. After some clarification and the opportunity to observe their peers, both children successfully commenced work.

There was relatively little interaction between the children throughout the activity. They were mostly concerned with working on their individual pieces but did show an interest in borrowing ideas from their peers. For instance, a theme of flowers emerged with several children seeing their peers' flowers and deciding to create their own. Although there was little interaction between the children, Rogoff (1995) suggests that this observing and copying ideas from peers serves as a form of guided participation. Yet, the flowers were not all the same. Some children drew and/or cut flowers out and others made them out of beads. This example shows how the children were able to adapt the ideas of others and originally apply them.

Applying ‘in-between pedagogies,’ I allowed the children to explore and experiment with the resources, but ensured they had the resources they needed and made suggestions to further learning and keep them busy (see Table 24). With the exception of requesting specific materials, the children demonstrated independence throughout. This type of creative, open-ended activity with limited set requirements gave the children confidence to try out their ideas.

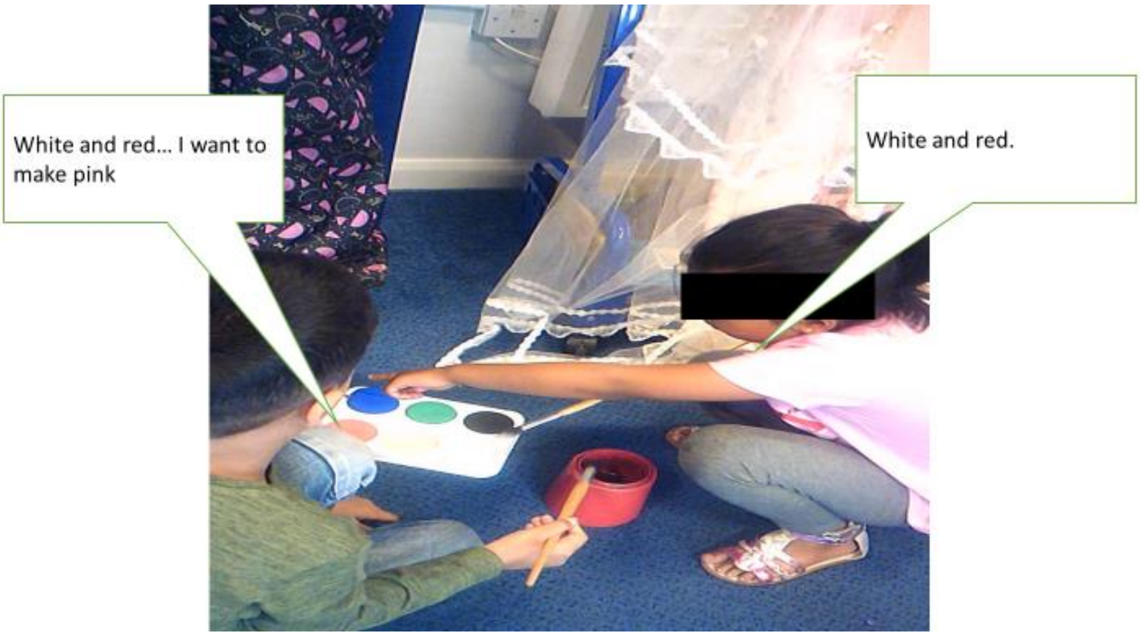
Ensuring children have resources	Extending learning
“John has glue over there so, once he has finished, maybe you can use it to stick your beads on.”	“Jonny, maybe you could do some drawing while you’re waiting for the glue.”
“There are more scissors down there if you need them.”	“Those are nice flowers. What would be really nice is, if you could cut them out and then we can put them on different places on the dress.”
“So, that bit (of the wedding dress) has already got lots of paint on it, but what about the top?”	“When you put that (paintbrush) in and take it out, wipe the excess water off. The excess water comes off like that so it’s not dripping everywhere.”

Table 24: Supporting dress repairs

While most of the children worked on decorative pieces to later be added to the dress, some took turns painting the dress in pairs. Following Humaira’s lead, she and Sahil were clear about working towards a shared goal of painting the dress pink (see Photograph 13). This was particularly evident while watching the video back:

- Working towards a shared goal

Humaira: Because there was two paintbrush and we both done the same colour. If we didn’t do the same colour, we wouldn’t do it.
Sahil: We both paint pink there and the other put other paint there.


[redacted]
White and red… I want to make pink
White and red.

Photograph 13: A shared goal

Rogoff (1995) writes that ‘apprenticeship relates a small group in a community with specialization of roles orientated toward the accomplishment of goals that relate the group to others outside the group’ (p143). In the context of the wider class and activity, Humaira and Sahil saw it as their responsibility to get the colour of the dress correct while the others worked on producing the decorations.

The children did not explicitly discuss their experiences of weddings and wedding dresses. They did, however, demonstrate some understanding of the features of a wedding dress – despite interests in drawing superheroes and houses etc, they all made flowers, bows and love hearts. They were also eager to please me with John asking “Do you like it so far?” and another child checking my favourite colour. These examples show that the children already had an idea of the type of patterns the dress should be decorated with and that the bride should like it. Thus, while not directly referring to past experiences, it was obvious that the children did have some prior knowledge and applied it to the task.

5.3.3 Resources provided

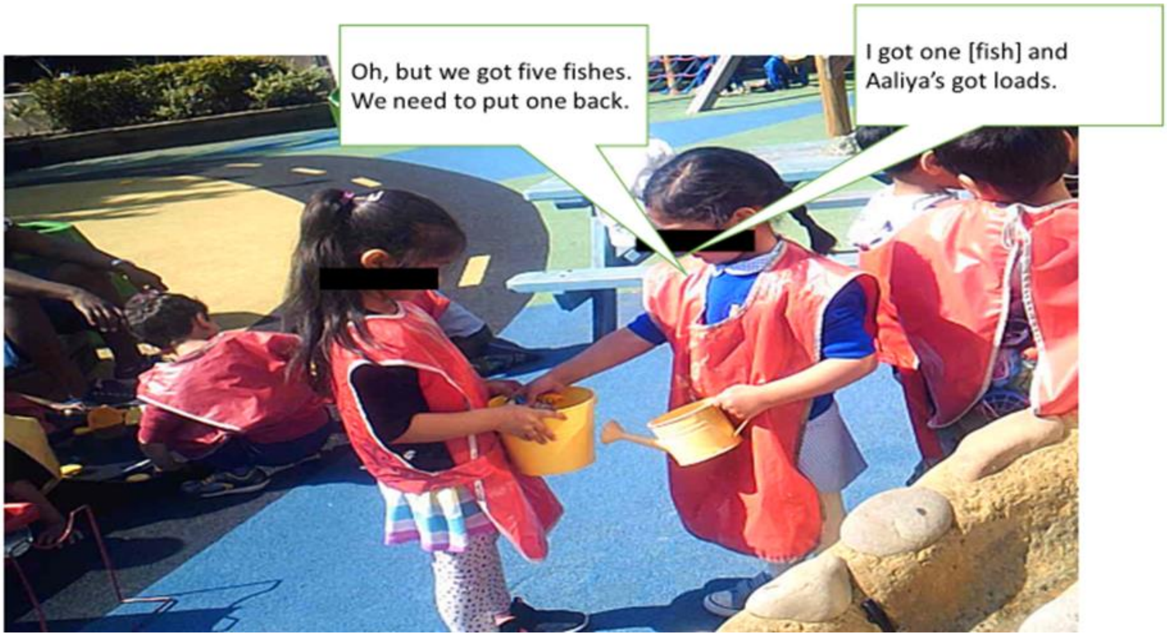
Moving towards the CI end of the spectrum of pedagogies, the final activity discussed in this section involved the least amount of adult input. Over a period of a couple of weeks, I set up resources and built on learning around the water fountain in the garden. This progressed to the children using guttering, large trays, buckets and toy sea animals to make an aquarium. The open-ended nature of the activity and the flexible application of 'in-between pedagogies' allowed the children to problem solve, take part in small-world play and learn to share resources. The children were given adult support when required but, at the same time, were not burdened with being overly directed.

While the activity became popular with many of the children, some needed verbal and non-verbal prompting – from both me and other children – to get started (see Table 25).

Adult prompting	Learning from peers
John stands holding a toy fish, seeming to not know what to do with it. The adult says, "perhaps the fish wants to go down the slide."	Sayf places some toy fish on the top of the guttering while his friend pours water on. John has been observing this and goes to pour his bucket too.
Sayf is holding a watering can full of water. He places a toy fish on the guttering and steps back. I say, "You'll need water to help it go down."	Marami and Aaliya walk past each other and curiously peer into the other's watering can and bucket. After a few seconds and feeling satisfied with what they have seen, they continue in opposite directions.
Sahil spots a piece of guttering lying on the ground. He picks it up and then looks around. "Do you need one of these (stand)?"	Sahil wants to fix the guttering. He observes another child doing it.

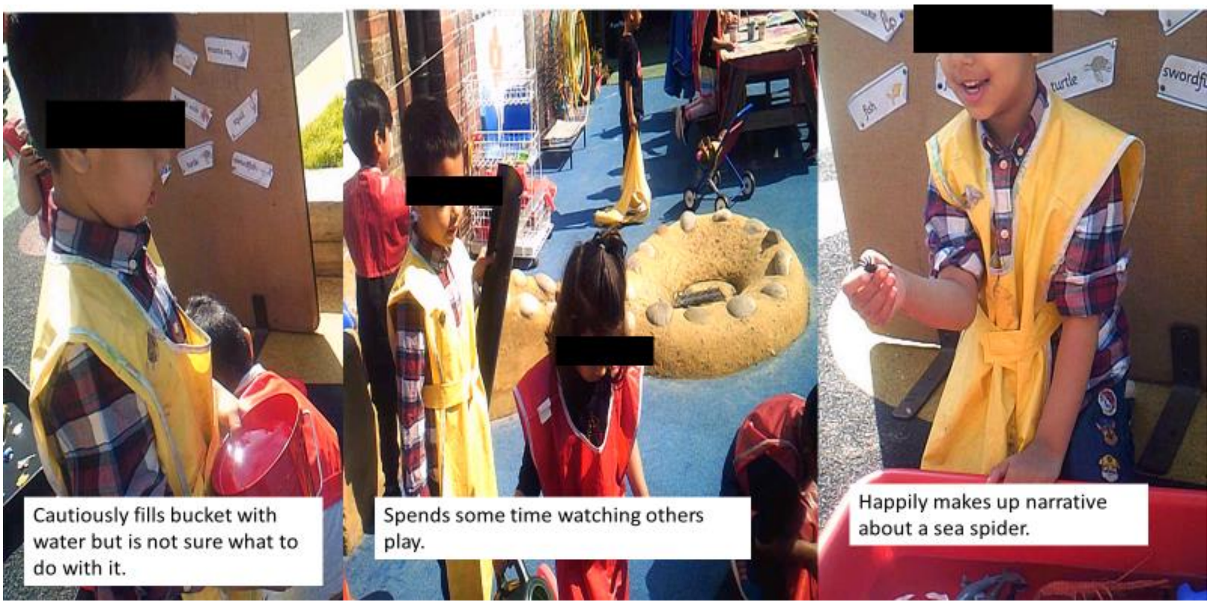
Table 25: Prompting learning in the aquarium

In guided participation, Rogoff (1995) recognises the importance of such small gestures in promoting the involvement of children in learning. As with the earlier example of Sayf and I supporting a younger child's understanding of numbers, it was discreet suggestion and time to observe others, as opposed to direct instruction, that helped to progress children. All the children mentioned in the above table returned to the activity several times, using their knowledge in different ways and building on their previous experiences. They began as apprentices – often observing on the periphery to begin with, sometimes acted as guides – encouraging others to join in and giving them support and became appropriators – experimenting with different ideas using the available resources. For example, Marami applied her knowledge of halving, learnt during an ADFLO lesson, to ensure that she and her friend had an equal quantity of fish (see Photograph 14) and Sahil introduced a narrative about a spider in the sea.


Oh, but we got five fishes. We need to put one back.
I got one [fish] and Aaliya's got loads.

Photograph 14: Halving fish

When I initially asked Sahil to join in, he was reluctant. Following this, he observed some of the other children and cautiously began to participate on the periphery. Finally, he fully immersed himself, actively seeking to try out new ideas (see Photograph 15). It is evident that, as Sahil's confidence grew, he enjoyed the activity more. Watching the video afterwards, he enthusiastically spoke about his experience saying, "We were learning how to… how to play the water!" He and Zain even asked to watch the video a second time, enjoying watching themselves learning.


Cautiously fills bucket with water but is not sure what to do with it.
Spends some time watching others play.
Happily makes up narrative about a sea spider.

Photograph 15: Gaining confidence

Despite the wide range of toys available to the children, there were instances when conflict arose due to two children both wanting to use the same thing at the same time. For example, John got frustrated in an argument over a toy with Jonny (see Photograph 16). Although the intensity of the situation escalated quickly, I was able to intervene and support the children to work out a plan for taking turns. Similarly, when both Sayf and Jonny wanted to play with the same fish, there were tensions. I introduced additional resources and, although both children were intent on the original fish, Sayf then moved on to another toy, dispelling the potential for further disagreement. As with other disputes filmed during the course of this research, any ill-toward the children had towards each other was quickly forgotten and they were happy to continue with the activity and working together.

No, I didn't
You did.
Noooo!!!
John and Jonny argue over a toy.
John becomes frustrated.

Photograph 16: John gets frustrated

The flexible approach to resources and direction of learning during the aquarium activity allowed the children opportunities to explore other avenues of learning within the context of the wider activity. For instance, applying their knowledge of mathematics, creating storylines and learning to share resources. Following the children's interests, the aquarium was made available for several weeks. The children sporadically returned to the activity, working with different people and on different themes each time. The data demonstrate how the children were able to bring previous experiences, from a range of sources, and apply them to their learning. Using a range of 'in-between pedagogies,' I was able to support the children when needed while still allowing them the freedom to explore their interests.

5.4 Child-initiated learning

The third and final category examines how children learn when they initiate learning. This does not necessarily mean there was no adult involvement but, when there was, the 'in-between pedagogies' were used. This allowed the children to control the activities and direction of learning while receiving the guidance they needed. Diagram 9 below gives an overview of the sub-categories covered in this section.

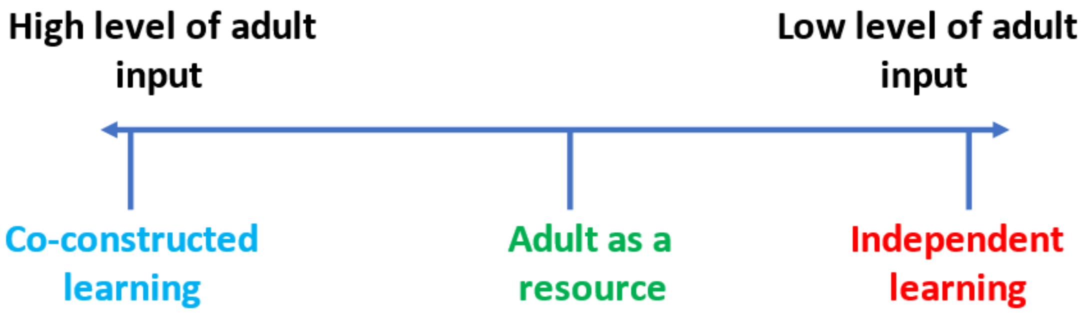

High level of adult input
Low level of adult input
Co-constructed learning
Adult as a resource
Independent learning

Diagram 9: Adult input independent learning

As Table 26 highlights, less verbal communication took place during CI learning in comparison to the more AD approaches. Typically, the CI activities involved more physical action and less talking. That noted, when I did participate, as is the case with co-constructed learning, there were lots of rich opportunities for learning through talk.

Activity	Number of times adult spoke	Number of times children spoke
Sand food	22 (52%)	20 (48%)
Sand volcano	29 (52%)	27 (48%)
Easter Bunny hunt	15 (45%)	18 (55%)
A-frames	15 (44%)	19 (56%)
Treasure maps	7 (33%)	14 (67%)
Balancing toy	7 (33%)	14 (67%)
More copies	3 (38%)	5 (62%)
Pinging matchsticks	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Three Little Pigs	0 (0%)	2 (100%)
Spinning wrestler	5 (62%)	3 (38%)
Witch role-play	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Magic show	2 (15%)	11 (85%)
Capacity competition	0 (0%)	5 (100%)

Table 26: Talk during CI learning

5.4.1 Co-constructed learning

A co-constructed pedagogical approach does not differ significantly from ADOE learning in so much as children and adults build on ideas together. Where there is some variation is, with co-construction, the original ideas stem from the children, whereas the earlier examples came from the adult. Spontaneous activities inspired by the children's interests or something that happens at that moment, the children and the adult then take these concepts and cooperatively work to develop learning.

A popular place for co-constructed learning, the children were eager for me to engage in imaginative play in the sand tray with them. For instance, as Marami and Samiya poured sand through a mill, I walked past and they invited me into their play (see Photograph 17).

No, just pretend.
We're making you lunch.
Adult is not hungry.

Photograph 17: Inviting the adult to join

The activity centred around the children preparing things for me to eat and drink. I responded to the children's ideas, sometimes introducing a problem to expand learning (see Table 27). This encouraged the children to think of solutions and sustained play. I developed learning in a way that was responsive to Marami and Samiya's actions and did not try to direct play towards specific learning outcomes.

Children's actions	Adult creates problem	Children respond
Samiya hands adult a cup of tea.	Adult says: "I think somebody's put salt in my tea instead of sugar."	Samiya scoops up 'sugar' to add to tea.
Samiya scoops up sugar to add to tea.	Adult says: "But I need the salt out." I think I need a fresh one."	Samiya tips out the 'tea' and starts from scratch. "Well, we'll change it," she says.
Children go quiet.	"It would be nice if there was a biscuit to go with my tea."	"Okay. I'll make biscuits," says Marami.
Samiya makes a bowl of "normal soup" for the adult.	The adult asks: "What's normal soup? What ingredients are in it?"	Samiya and Marami start discussing what ingredients they will use.

Table 27: Problem-solving to extend learning

As with the earlier discussed paper food-making activity, it was evident that the children were drawing on experiences of preparing food at home. Samiya and Marami were confident about contributing their own and building on each other's ideas to sustain play. Following the children's lead, I likewise contributed ideas about food and built on theirs, as this dialogue highlights:

- Adult joins in with learning/discussion
- Children build on one another's ideas

Samiya: Emm. This is normal soup.
Adult: What's normal soup? What ingredients are in it?
Samiya: Emm. Sugar. No, wait. Not sugar…
Marami: I think you can put tomatoes in it.
Samiya: There's tomatoes and some… powder.
Adult: What kind of powder? I hope it's healthy.
Samiya: Powder… Powder… and vegetables.

Having experience in this subject, the children could have pursued this as an independent activity but, and not always the case (examples are discussed in the independent learning section), they wanted me to join in. I used this as an opportunity to extend the children's learning and encourage them to think about what they were doing. I worked together with the children to build on their play, listening to their ideas and commenting or questioning to get the children to consider their actions.

The second co-constructed example describes how two children and I worked together to co-construct a narrative about volcanoes. Once again in the sand tray, Anas and Sayf were taking turns to fill a dump truck with wet sand which triggered a complex storyline:

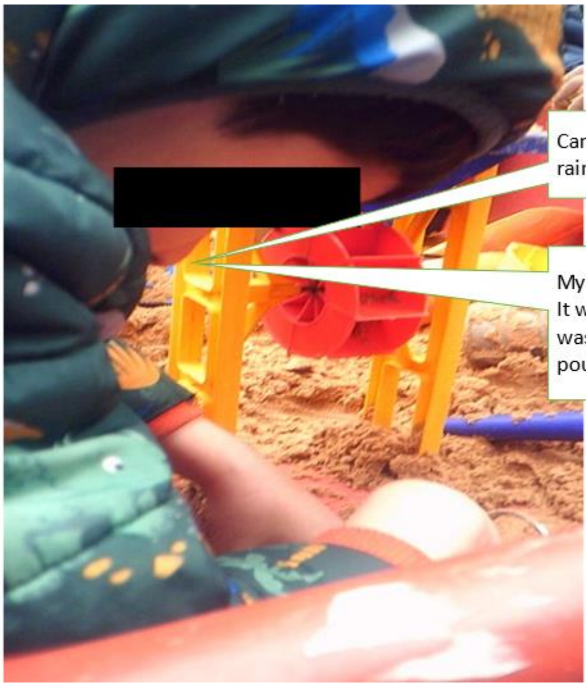
- Adult encourages children to expand on ideas
- Children develop narrative

Adult: I like the way you're working together.
Sayf: We're making a volcano in a truck.
Adult: A volcano in a truck? I've never heard of that before.
Sayf: Cause they're going to escape.
Adult: Who's going to escape?
Anas: The star…
Anas and Sayf begin to scoop all the sand out of the truck.
Adult: Ah, the volcano's erupted and all the lava's coming out. Your hands are going to get burnt with the burning hot lava!
Sayf: The star's died!
Adult: It's died?
Anas: No. It's still alive.
Adult: Oh, phew!
Sayf: Quick, save it. Put it back in.
Anas puts the star back inside the truck and he and Sayf start piling sand on top again.

Adult: Quick! You can save the star.
Anas: He’s a villain star.

Sayf and Anas, with some adult probing, fed off one another’s ideas to develop a rich narrative incorporating various interests. For example, frequently engaging in play that involved ‘goodies’ and ‘baddies,’ the children had been introduced to the term ‘villain’ during an earlier structured session and Sayf later explained that his older sister had taught him about volcanoes at home. Acting as appropriators, they were able to take these previously learnt concepts and apply them in an original way to their sand play.

Similar to the grass cutting activity, the children became interested in things going on in the surrounding environment while playing. For instance, it started raining and, making links with water breaking his mother’s mobile phone, Anas queried about the rain breaking the camera (see Photograph 18). Drawing on his previous experiences and knowledge of technology, Anas thought the rain might break the camera.


[redacted]

Can that go in the rain? That camera?

My mum’s iPhone got broken... It was a bottle of water and it was in my mum’s bag and it poured on my mum’s iPhone.

Photograph 18: Making connections

Despite the children working cooperatively together, some instances could potentially have led to disagreement, not over the direction of play, but the practical aspect of using sand:

Adult: You have sand on your face Sayf.
Anas: It was just me who did it (points to toy) but it was just an accident.
Adult: Ah, so you say 'sorry Sayf, it was an accident.'

The issue was quickly resolved but the next example required more adult support:

- Conflict between children
- Adult helps to resolve

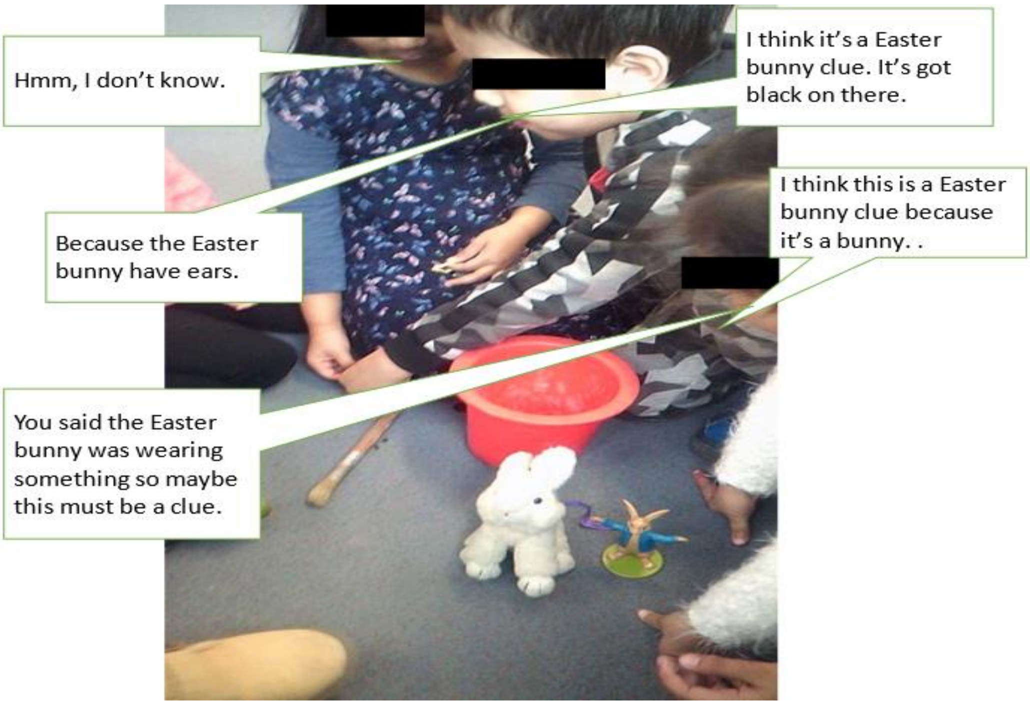
Suddenly, sand is flicked over Anas.
Zain looks up shocked.
Adult: Sayf, what just happened there? Because look, there's sand all over Anas. Anas, talk to Sayf.
Anas: I feel sad that you put sand on me.
Sayf does not respond.
Adult: So, Anas is telling you that he feels sad, Sayf.
Sayf: I put sand on him.
Adult: So, what do you think should happen Sayf?
Sayf: Say sorry.
Adult: What do you think should happen Anas?
Anas: Use an 'I statement.' I feel sad that you threw sand on me. I want you to say sorry.
Sayf: Sorry.

This once again draws attention to the children learning the cultural norms and expectations of the class. The school promotes the use of 'I statements' to talk about being physically or emotionally hurt. Anas demonstrated an understanding that this is how he is expected to express his feelings and Sayf responded accordingly with an apology.

Both the making food and volcano dialogues highlight the natural progression of conversation surrounding the respective activities. I implicitly extended learning throughout but all participants played equal roles in developing the narratives. Moving slightly off-centre on the spectrum of pedagogies, towards a more CI approach, in both cases the children were in control of the activities. My role was as a guest participant, invited to join, not direct, their play.

In both these activities, the children appropriated through an amalgamation of prior experiences. However, through my involvement, additional problems were introduced for the children to consider. Rogoff (1993) states that, in guided participation, 'the process of communication requires people to seek a common ground of understanding from which to proceed, with extensions from the common ground requiring adjustments or growth in understanding' (p135). In these activities, food preparation and volcanoes were the common ground – topics in which the participants were well-experienced. The adjustments and growth in understanding came from me questioning the children's thinking, explaining new concepts and helping to resolve conflict.

In the final example of co-constructed learning, inspired by an Easter egg hunt arranged by adults, Humaira and her friends had looked in the garden for Easter Bunny clues before returning to the classroom with a bucket of objects. When I questioned some of the clues, Sahil and Marami began discussing their legitimacy and what they could mean, whereas Humaira went silent (see Photograph 19).


Hmm, I don't know.
I think it's a Easter bunny clue. It's got black on there.
I think this is a Easter bunny clue because it's a bunny. .
Because the Easter bunny have ears.
You said the Easter bunny was wearing something so maybe this must be a clue.

Photograph 19: Humaira goes quiet

Despite Humaira's hesitancy, I continued to include her in the conversation, in a non-pressurising way, but with little success. That is until the end of the activity. Having taken some time as an apprentice to listen to her peers and think about the clues, Humaira re-joined the conversation, appearing more confident about sharing her ideas. I then validated her idea by expanding on it:

- Humaira is ready to contribute
- Adult validates Humaira's idea

Humaira: I think this (Minion© keyring) is maybe for he's bag.
Adult: Oh, maybe he likes the Minions©.
Humaira: Yeah. I think it's from he's bag.
Adult: Ah, maybe the bag where he carries all the eggs.

Being used to appropriating or guiding during CI activities (as later examples demonstrate), Humaira was at first taken aback when she did not immediately have answers. Whilst still being encouraged to participate, she persevered and took the opportunity to learn from others. Rogoff (1993) states that 'novices are active in their attempts to make sense of activities and may be primarily responsible for putting themselves in the position to learn' (p135). Humaira intentionally continued with the activity to learn from her peers and eventually felt confident enough to share her opinion. Watching the video back, she was better able to explain which items she thought were clues and why. It was evident that she had learnt from her peers and was then able to incorporate her ideas.

Using the knowledge they had gained from the Easter egg hunt, the children became appropriators in a self-created task. Rogoff (1995) writes: 'through engagement in an activity, individuals change and handle a later situation in ways prepared by their own participation in the previous situation' (p142). Following the hunt for clues, Sahil and Marami applied existing understanding, from a range of sources, to explain the rationale behind the clues they had found. Humaira needed some additional time to gather her ideas and develop her understanding but was later able to demonstrate a degree of appropriation when she discussed her ideas.

As with the other two examples in this section, the activity evolved from the children's interests and focused on imaginative play. As CI activities, the children remained in control while I extended learning through questioning and challenges. Without my participation and the use of 'in-between pedagogies,' it is possible the activities would have ended prematurely. However, these examples demonstrate how 'in-between pedagogies' – dictated by children's interests and supported by adult guidance – can effectively facilitate children's learning.

5.4.2 Adult as a resource

Situated between co-constructed and independent learning (the category to be discussed next) on the spectrum of pedagogies, the data reveal examples of children engaging in independent activities while utilising the adult as and when needed. This predominantly entailed assisting in resolving problems, supporting the development of skills, obtaining resources and providing an audience. Easily overlooked, these may not exemplify the most innovative use of the adult's time but demanded a large chunk and were integral to ensuring the children had the resources, skills and environment they needed to pursue their learning interests.

For instance, I had set up sheets over A-frames to make dens and some of the children had stuck pictures on the sheets. Samiya accidentally knocked a picture off and I asked her and her friends to fix it. I remained on the periphery for the duration, making suggestions to support learning and ensuring children were treated fairly. For instance, I told Samiya she needed a new piece of masking tape to stick the picture back on and explained what masking tape was. I showed the children how to hold and carry scissors safely, suggested that one child held the masking tape while another cut and helped a younger child to join the activity when she was being excluded.

When the younger child approached with scissors to help, both John and Samiya told her they were not required. After I stated that the younger child only wanted to help, Samiya took a more inclusive attitude:

- Adult ensures everyone gets to join in
- Samiya takes over making sure everyone gets a turn

John: (to younger child) We already got scissors. We don't need two.
Samiya: We don't need two scissors.
Adult: I think she wanted to help, John.
Samiya: Yeah, she wanted to help…
John is holding the masking tape up with one hand and trying to cut it with the scissors in his other hand. The younger child is standing beside him with her scissors ready to cut the masking tape too.
Samiya: (looking at John) Let her (younger child) cut it now.
The younger child cuts the masking tape.

The Reception children had already formed a cohesive friendship group and were reluctant to allow the younger child to join. Amongst a group of apprentices, following my actions, Samiya quickly became the 'master' in the group. Her inclusion of the younger child demonstrated a maturity that some of her peers lacked and 'a broader vision of the important features of the culturally valued activity' (Rogoff, 1990, p39). Subsequently, Samiya took control of the activity in general, not only ensuring fair access to the task but also giving out instructions to her peers to enable them to complete it (Photograph 20).

[redacted]
Stop! Let her cut it now.
I need scissors to cut it. Can you get me scissors?
That's fine (enough making tape). No, don't John.
Give me a big one (making tape).

Photograph 20: Samiya takes control

Although Samiya largely coordinated the activity, other children noticed the benefits of working cooperatively too:

> **Adult:** So, it's better if two people do it.
> **Humaira:** We're doing it with three people… Samiya holds it, I pull it out and John cuts it. I hold it then he (John) cuts it then he (Samiya) gets it.
> **Adult:** Ah, so it's a three-people job.
> **Humaira:** Three people.

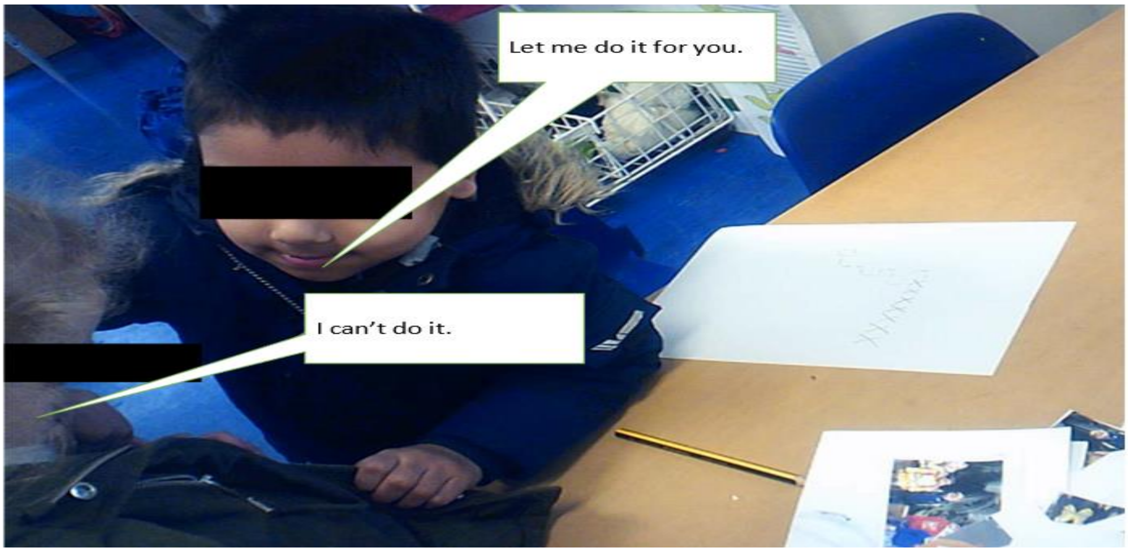
Achieved with little adult intervention, the children gained practical skills, such as transporting scissors correctly and using masking tape but, more importantly, learned about the value of inclusiveness and supporting one another. Had I taken a more AD approach, Samiya would not have had the opportunity to lead the activity. Conversely, had I not been involved, the younger child would have been left out. Thus, taking an 'in-between' approach to supporting the children during this task helped to meet the wide-ranging needs of the participating children.

During the following activity, some of the children had made treasure maps and wanted to show them to me (Photograph 21). I began to ask questions and make comments about Sahil's map but, having shown it to me, he seemed eager to move on to the next stage of his work – searching for the treasure.

[redacted]
I'm making a treasure map. 'X' marks the spot.

Photograph 21: Sahil's treasure map

When Samiya approached saying she too had made a map and the treasure was hidden in the garden, Sahil and the younger child wanted to put their coats on to go outside. The younger child asked for help with her zip but I told her to first try doing it by herself. Overhearing this, Sahil jumped out of his chair and demonstrated that he could zip up his coat and then proceeded to zip up his friend's coat too (see Photograph 22).


[redacted]
[redacted]
Let me do it for you.
I can't do it.

Photograph 22: Sahil can do it

This example illustrates how children can be self-sufficient when they support each other – not just for practical tasks, but to develop learning too. Sahil and Samiya may have been eager to show me their work but I had little input in expanding learning. It was evident the children were building on their interests, had an end goal in mind and were capable of doing so independently. This noted, the children did appear to thrive on demonstrating their skills and knowledge to me. My presence in itself was, to some extent, a contributing factor to the progression of the activity.

One area where my help was required was resolving arguments. As evident in examples across the various pedagogies (see earlier aquarium activity and writing about a trip task), the data show that the children benefited from adult input to avoid or dissolve confrontation. This was particularly the case when children had to take turns or share. For instance, a group of children wanted to use a balancing toy in the garden. As a younger child played on the toy, five Reception children waited to have a turn. Some of the group became impatient. Zain insisted the child taking a turn needed to hurry up and Jonny began messing around, knocking a box off John's head to get a reaction (Photograph 23).

Hey! That's not funny.
You've had a long turn. It's our turn now..

Photograph 23: Growing impatient

A few of the children saw me coming towards them (including Zain and John) and this is likely to have prevented the situation from escalating. Zain immediately stopped putting pressure on the younger child and John did not take matters further with Jonny. As the younger child got off the toy, both Zain and Sahil went to get on next. This held the potential to ignite another argument but, probably due to my presence, Zain let Sahil go first. The children's reaction suggests that they were capable of controlling themselves and understood how to take turns but sometimes chose not to – especially when they thought no adult was watching.

Comparing this, along with the aquarium activity, to activities where I supervised and gave more direction, the data indicate that the children were more likely to push boundaries to satisfy their own goals when left to their own devices. When the children were focused on following instructions, there was less opportunity to think about what they hoped to achieve and how they might do so. This does not mean that children should always be directed to avoid conflict, but it does explain the frequency at which sharing and turn-taking caused issues and justifies the time I spent diffusing arguments.

The children taking turns was the focus of learning during this activity. After the preliminary altercations, and with me nearby, the children displayed behaviours implicative of sharing but, at the same time, continued to push their own agenda – albeit more discreetly:

> - Taking turns
> - Pushing own agenda
>
> Another younger child comes over and moves closer to the toy. Zain nudges him out of the way. Sahil gets off and Samiya gets on.
> **Samiya:** Now, it's my turn.
> **Zain**: (pointing to himself) Then, it's my turn.
> The younger child continues to hover around the toy waiting for a turn. Zain moves around in front of him, guarding the toy as Samiya has her turn.

The above dialogue highlights Samiya and Zain using language associated with turn-taking but continuing to pursue their personal interests. It is not until I became directly involved that the children started to consider others in the group:

> - Adult supports turn taking
> - Considering other children
>
> The younger child is trying to get on the toy while Samiya is still on it.
> Zain looks to the adult for help.

Adult: (to younger child) After Samiya, it's Zain's turn.
Samiya gets off the toy and Zain gets on.
Adult: Samiya you have just had a turn. Now, it's Zain's turn. After Zain, whose turn is it?
Sahil points to the younger child.
Adult: Then, after it will be…
Zain/Samiya/Sahil: Prem!
Adult: That's good taking turns.

The children moved from pursuing their own interests to begin thinking about taking turns (but still with themselves at the forefront) and finally considering the needs and participation of others. Rogoff (1990) argues that children not only need to learn the skills and knowledge required by their communities, but also how to behave within their communities. The children were testing boundaries and needed adult guidance to ensure fairness and to help them to understand the cultural expectations of the school environment.

The final activity in this section similarly started with two children in competition over resources. Several children were sitting at a table using colouring-in sheets. As I approached, Humaira began to protest:

- Arguing among children
- Adult solves problem

Humaira: Umm Vicki, I found that one (colouring in sheet) because Marami already drawed with it.
Marami: No, I didn't.
Humaira: Yes, she did. She drawed… She drawed one.
Adult: So, you want one like that (the one Marami is colouring)?
Humaira nods her head.
Adult: Should I go and get you a copy?
Humaira turns to face the adult, smiling and nods her head.

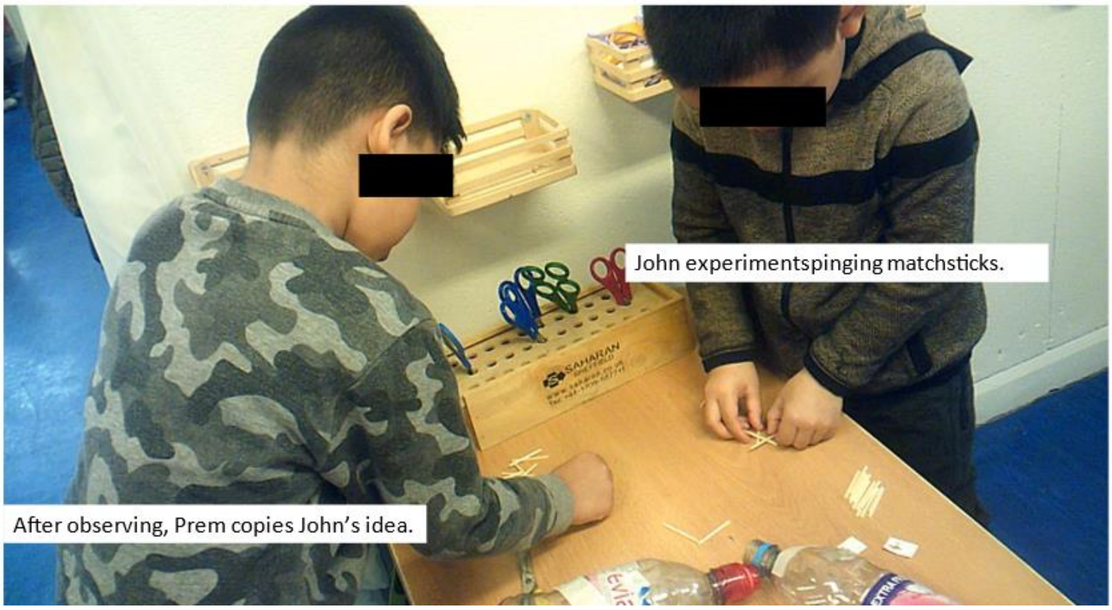
Quickly solving the issue, I obtained more copies and, in doing so, pacified Humaira and Marami. The simple act did not go unnoticed by the children with Marami shyly commenting: "I like it when you're inside because I like you" and later, watching the video back, saying the additional copies made her feel "good because, well, Humaira had one too." This demonstrates children's awareness and appreciation of the small, often considered insignificant, things adults do for them in school.

The mundane tasks I carried out did not result in exciting narratives as in the co-constructed learning examples or rich dialogue as in the ADOE activities. However, these simple acts proved to be pivotal in ensuring the children had the resources they needed and were able to work harmoniously with their peers. My guidance and provision, although minimal, contributed to the children's development and gave them what they needed to engage in more sophisticated learning, both at that moment and carrying forward to future experiences. The examples discussed here are centred around children learning how to be part of their school community, as opposed to academic learning. Rogoff (1995) writes that apprenticeship 'focuses attention on the specific activity involved, as well as on its relation to practices and institutions of the community in which it occurs' (p142) and, therefore, learning what is acceptable behaviour within the school community is part of the children's learning journey.

5.4.3 Independent learning

At the far end of CI learning on the spectrum of pedagogies, this final section examines the children learning independently, with friends and, in some cases, rejecting the adult's attempt to participate. Often quite brief examples, this section looks at how the children approached learning, with peers and alone, when there was no (or very little) adult input.

The first examples given here entailed one child pursuing a self-directed activity and another child taking an interest and copying. For instance, John experimented with matchsticks, balancing and pinging them in the air. This was an activity that John had developed himself and, while trying out different ways of pinging, a matchstick hit and caught Prem's attention. Prem then observed John for a short time before trying to recreate the activity (Photograph 24). In a similar situation, Aaliya sat reading 'The Three Little Pigs' while a younger child with little English observed her. When Aaliya moved on, the younger child took her place and sat imitating Aaliya's reading.



[redacted] [redacted]

John experimentspinging matchsticks.

After observing, Prem copies John's idea.

Photograph 24: Pinging matchsticks

Aaliya and John acted as appropriators applying previous knowledge in new ways. Having heard the story several times at home and in school, Aaliya drew on her skills of handling books and memory of the story she was reading to give a detailed recount. With John, there was no indication as to where he had seen the idea, but it was evident that he was confident in his learning.

Prem and the younger child were both new to these experiences and, without any interaction, a form of silent guided participation occurred. Neither Aaliya nor John offered any intentional support but were most likely aware of their less experienced peers observing. Talking about the video later, John said, "I think Prem wanted to… I think Prem was a bit interesting." John was not prepared to actively guide Prem but he was aware of, and okay with, Prem using his idea.

I did not participate in either of these activities and, maybe because there was no adult support, both episodes were brief. Had I gotten involved in these activities, I could have facilitated interaction between the children and potentially supported them to have cooperatively developed learning. However, following a fully CI pedagogy, opportunities for expansion were missed.

There were times when I tried to join in with the children's independent learning but it was made clear that my involvement was not wanted. For instance, having observed Anas spinning a toy wrestler around (Photograph 25), I thought that he wanted someone to play with. I picked up another figure and tried to engage but, apart from fighting with the figures, Anas was not interested (Table 28).

[redacted]
Anas is happy to play alone.

Photograph 25: Solitary play

Adult attempts to engage	Anas's response
"Hulk looks like something bad has happened to him."	No response.
Adult picks up Hulk figure and goes to fight wrestler.	Using wrestler, knocks Hulk to the floor.
"I think I need a better way to defeat this guy."	Moves wrestler forward to attack Hulk.

Table 28: Attempting to engage

In another situation, Humaira and Samiya used a broom to pretend they were witches (Photograph 26). As I approached, Humaira noticed, smiled and ran away. She made it obvious she did not want me (or perhaps filming) to be part of their game. Watching the video back, Humaira and Samiya were open about explaining the activity but seemed a little sheepish about doing so, frequently looking at each other and giggling.

[redacted] [redacted]
Humaira notices adult and runs away.

Photograph 26: Privacy to play

The superhero and witch ideas most likely stemmed from activities the children had been participating in, with friends, at school. However, although other related activities were usually open to other children and adult participation, it was evident that these particular activities were personal to these children. Rogoff (1995) writes that appropriation refers ‘to the process by which individuals transform their understanding and responsibility for activities through their own participation’ (p150). The individual building of understanding normally happens within the context of group activity but, in these instances, the children wanted privacy to internalise and practise new skills and knowledge.

In other examples, the children were more transparent about how they adapted and applied learning. For instance, following a performance the children had given, some younger children had set up chairs like a theatre. Humaira then joined and directed the others in performing a magic show (Photograph 27).

[redacted]
Now, you give this to me.
You, get up.
Give me another car.

Photograph 27: Humaira gives instructions

When later discussing the show, Humaira explained that she had taken her peer's idea of performing and expanded on it. Thus, while being more experienced and generally directing play, Humaira was still able to learn from her less experienced peers. Rogoff (1995) writes that 'apprenticeship as a concept goes far beyond expert-novice dyads' (p143). This example demonstrates how teaching and learning can be multi-directional, with all participants, regardless of age, knowledge, skills or experience, having the potential to contribute and gain from group learning situations.

Drawing on a range of experiences from both in and out of school, Humaira in particular simultaneously demonstrated elements of appropriation (Table 29)

Play ideas	**Derived from**
Magic show	Watching Peppa Pig©
Performing a show	Assemblies in school/peer's suggestion
Magic show-related language	Watching Peppa Pig©

Table 29: Drawing on previous experiences

Inspired by Peppa Pig©, Humaira attempted to perform a range of magic tricks, used language specific to magic shows and was keen to adopt language and ideas from others:

- Demonstrates understanding of magic show practice and language
- Adopts new language and ideas

Humaira: Welcome to the show and gentlemen…
Humaira performs – juggling and making things disappear…
Another child: Close your eyes!
Humaira: (repeats) Close your eyes!
Humaira: She’s going to make one of the cars away.
Adult: Oh, she’s going to make it disappear.
Humaira: Which one did I disappear?

Amalgamating existing knowledge from various sources with new concepts and language acquired throughout the show, Humaira’s appropriator role allowed her to apply and experiment with previous learning while, at the same time, expanding on her learning – with almost no adult input.

In another example of Humaira adopting an appropriator role, she ‘hosted’ a game with her friends who had to race to fill bowls with multilink cubes (Photograph 28).

You did. You were the first one. Yay!
Who winned?

Photograph 28: Humaira hosts a game

Earlier in the week, the children had been introduced to the game in a structured lesson to learn about capacity. In the original game, the children worked in teams to fill their bowls and then count how many cubes they had used. Similarly, Humaira re-enacted the game, counting down how much time the children had left and declaring the winner. Attracted more to the competitive element, she left out the part where the children had to count the cubes and added the use of a calculator on which she pretended to record the results.

Later speaking about the activity, Marami made a connection between the game and measuring capacity and Humaira demonstrated a good understanding of capacity and how it linked to the game:

> - Making connections with measuring capacity
> - Understanding how capacity links to game
>
> **Adult:** And poor Samiya didn't get any points.
> **Humaira:** Yeah, because she gotted the big pot so she didn't winned any points…
> **Marami:** This activity I was measuring with Humaira and Samiya.

All the children joining in the game knew how to play but, what separated Humaira from the others was her initiation of the game, application of previous learning and introduction of new elements (for example, the calculator). She was able to take what she had learnt in an AD lesson, combine it with other ideas and use it in her independent learning.

With the exceptions of trying to interact with Anas's wrestler play and introducing a new word to Humaira in the magic show, I had no direct involvement in any of the activities discussed in this section. Although my lack of participation meant missed opportunities for expanding learning at the time the activities took place, they provided opportunities to observe, look for gaps in learning and take note of children's interests to later explore. In each of these cases, I had either previously introduced ideas and/or later expanded on what the children were doing (Table 30).

Children's interest	Prior input/experiences	Expansion on learning
Pinging matchsticks	None	Using balancing toys to flip objects and measure how far they travel
Reading 'The Three Little Pigs'	Reading story as a class	Making houses out of different materials
Playing with toy figures	Providing resources	Writing/making up stories about superheroes
Witch role-play	Voicemail/visit from witch at Halloween	Making potions using natural resources
Magic show	Performance for parents	-
Capacity competition	Measuring capacity using cubes	Recording findings

Table 30: Indirect support

Rogoff (2016) writes that children's learning 'is a process that is integrated, not bounded off from the actions of adults or of the broader world… *and* involves active, interrelated roles of children and their social, cultural worlds' (p184, *italics author's own*). Children work together with adults and peers to share ideas and develop learning. They observe others and the surrounding environment and bring together experiences from a range of sources to create new knowledge. This sometimes entails deliberate cooperation, while at other times, involves absorbing what is going on. Children adapt their learning role dependent on the situation, their understanding and those involved and flit in and out of different roles within the context of a single activity. Thus, learning is complex and dynamic and adults and pedagogy must be responsive to children's needs as they evolve.

5.4 Concluding comments

Three key points emerge from this data as being recurring and relevant to answering the research questions:

1. Pedagogy sits on a spectrum and adult support varies according to the situation and children.
2. There is pressure on teachers and children to cover content that will enable children to meet the requirements of the ELGs.
3. Social learning and learning to socialise are just as prevalent and beneficial to children's progress as academic teaching.

Points one and two have been widely discussed in the existing literature and in earlier chapters (see for example, Wood, 2014a; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Tan, 2018 for pedagogy and Robert-Holmes, 2015; Bradbury, 2019a; Nicholson, 2019 for ELG pressure). They are briefly covered in this concluding section before narrowing in on the social elements of learning. This topic is of personal interest to me and serves to answer the supplementary research questions.

Firstly, the data highlight the diversity of pedagogical approaches applied in this Reception classroom. Not only were different types of activity observed but, within the context of a single activity, various teaching tools were used to stimulate children and extend their learning. Returning to the concept of 'balancing pedagogies,' and represented in Diagram 10, the data from this study suggest early years pedagogy is not about balancing CI and AD teaching and learning but balancing the distribution of time, support and resources according to the requirements of individual children. Thus, the evidence shows adult input is most successful when pedagogy suits the needs of the child and is not dictated by the preferred style of the adult or government policy.

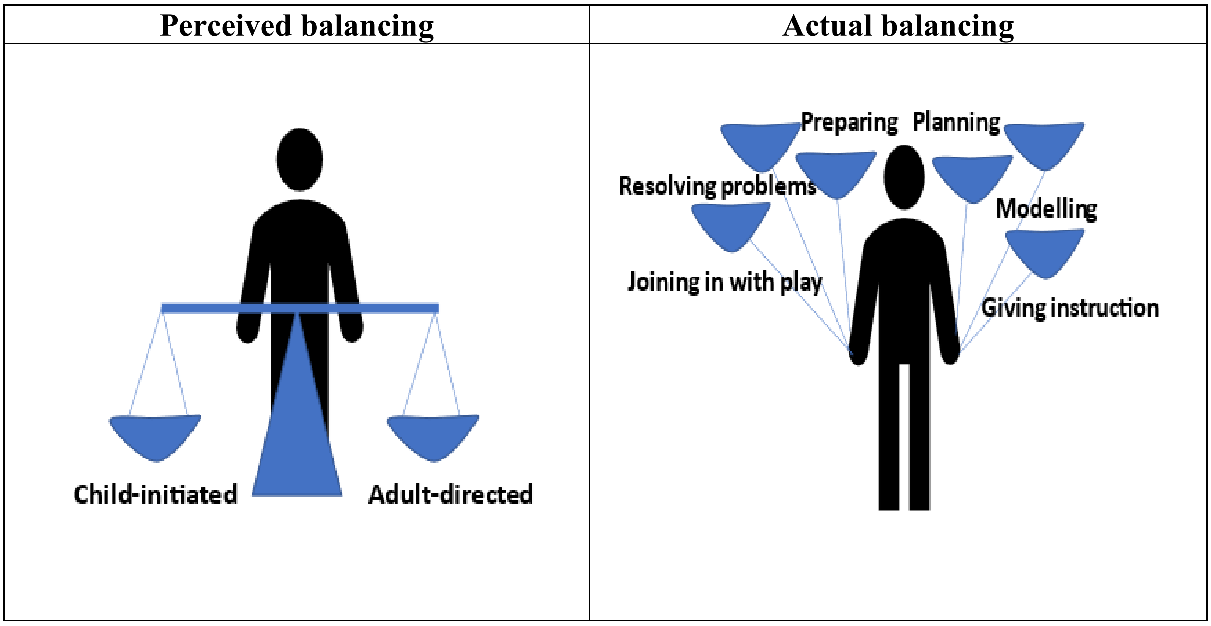

Perceived balancing
Actual balancing
Child-initiated
Adult-directed
Preparing
Planning
Resolving problems
Modelling
Joining in with play
Giving instruction

Diagram 10: Balancing pedagogies

Addressing the question of which method is best – CI or AD – the data indicate that these two extremes are arguably the least effective approaches for supporting Reception children's learning. While the weight lesson demonstrates how children can become uninspired and lose interest when the adult directs too much, some of the examples of CI learning ended prematurely or did not develop to their full potential. It was the 'in-between pedagogies' – from opportunities to actively contribute and participate during AD lessons to CI play in which I participated – that aroused the children's interest while also providing opportunities for me to challenge the children's thinking. Rogoff (1990) writes; 'the day-to-day engagement of children and adults in shared activities contributes to the rapid progress of children in becoming skilled participants in the intellectual and social lives of their society' (p138). Sharing, as opposed to directing, experiences, knowledge and skills can result in a more cooperative and beneficial approach to pedagogy.

Returning to the existing literature, Wood's (2014a) pedagogical concepts of 'guided play,' whereby adults respond to children's needs and interests while joining in with their play, and 'educational play,' which entails adults using play to teach specific concepts, best motivate children while, at the same time, progress learning. Similarly, Pyle and Danniels's (2017) continuum of play-based learning details how children can learn in different contexts, with varying levels of adult input, as long as this is done in a way that interests them – notably through play. Using 'playfulness' (Sproule *et al.*, 2019) as a focal point for all learning – regardless of the pedagogy – while applying these 'in-between pedagogies,' combines the motivation associated with CI learning with the structure and purpose linked with AD methods. Thus, it is the 'in-between pedagogies' that best support children's learning.

Secondly, there are several examples of me, as the teacher, trying to push the children towards meeting learning objectives linked to the ELGs. This was particularly the case with Literacy and Mathematics during structured lessons – for example, the lessons on weight and writing about a trip. Although some of the children showed signs of struggling with the task during these sessions (for instance, being unable to do the work without adult help or confusing different concepts), I persevered with teaching the content. This was not because the children were especially interested, but because I needed the children to meet specific learning objectives and, ultimately, the requirements of the ELGs.

As a teacher, I like to think that my priority is always the children. This will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter but, while examining my findings, I noticed I did not always follow the children's needs or interests, but sometimes gave precedence to the learning objectives. In turn, I put pressure on the children to produce work that they were not invested in or ready to do. Although not the focus of this research, external pressures – through government and school policy – do impact pedagogy and it is important to highlight examples of how it does in research.

Likewise, it is useful for researchers to compare their findings with others. The pressures of meeting the ELGs to produce favourable data (Basford & Bath, 2014; Robert-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016; Bates, 2018) and getting children 'school ready' (Robert-Holmes, 2015; Kay, 2018; Bradbury, 2019a) have been well-documented in the literature and my own research correlates with some of this earlier work. Yet, despite these concerns about the current early years system and the pressure both staff and children are under being highlighted in the literature, little has been done to rectify it. Therefore, as an academic community, we need to continue to address these problems through further research.

Finally, applying the research framework (Diagram 6) introduced in Chapter 4, this chapter has addressed two components. Firstly, it has identified and discussed the various pedagogies observed in this Reception classroom and, secondly, it has highlighted the different learning roles children adopt using Rogoff's (1990; 1993; 1995) learning roles. However, as exemplified by the data, these two elements alone do not give a complete picture of how Reception children learn. Woven throughout the findings are examples of children supporting one another, solving disputes, learning to share, taking turns and working as a team. At the foundations of the children's learning are the relationships they had built with each other and with me. Therefore, focusing on the third and final component of the research framework, the penultimate chapter looks at these sociocultural aspects and how they facilitate learning in this Reception classroom.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This thesis addresses the question: How do Reception children learn during child-initiated (CI) activities in comparison with adult-directed (AD) lessons? With a focus on pedagogical approaches, and congruent with previous research (Wood, 2014b; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Tan, 2018; Walsh *et al.,* 2019), the findings chapter has highlighted the complexity of teaching and learning in Reception classrooms. However, as this research has unfolded, it is has become apparent that, beyond pedagogy, the sociocultural elements of teaching and learning are equally as important. Across the spectrum of pedagogies observed – child-initiated (CI), adult-directed, open-ended (ADOE) and adult-directed, fixed learning outcome (ADFLO) – the data suggest that human relationships and interactions are imperative to effectively facilitating children's learning. This penultimate chapter answers the following supplementary research questions:

1) What is the role of the adult in supporting children in different learning contexts?
2) How do children use peer-to-peer interaction to develop their skills and understanding?
3) To what extent do children build on existing knowledge to make sense of current learning?

The first supplementary research question: How are pedagogical expectations communicated in *The EYFS Framework* was answered in Chapter 2. However, it is worth noting here how, in contrast to *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b), the discussion on the data for this research focuses around the human, or sociocultural, aspects of teaching and learning as opposed to what I refer to as the scientific elements, such as pedagogy and curriculum. To some extent, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) acknowledges the benefits of developing sociocultural learning. For instance, it states that 'children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships' (p6). But it is evident that other elements – namely assessments, data and 'school readiness' – take precedence. Conversely, following the data, this chapter is concerned with how children and adults use human interaction to develop learning.

Through an examination of the data from this present study and the existing body of literature, this chapter begins by looking at the role of the adult in supporting children's learning. This is followed by a discussion on the use of peer interaction to further learning before going on to consider how children use existing knowledge to enhance learning and make sense of new content.

6.1 The role of the adult

The data demonstrate the significance of adults in supporting *all* types of learning. In adult-directed (AD) situations it may be obvious but, even when the adult is not directly involved, there is still a role to play. There is evidence of me carrying out several functions within each pedagogical approach, but certain methods were observed more frequently during some types of learning than others. Table 31 below gives an overview of how I was involved in different situations.

All types of learning	**Adult-directed, fixed learning outcome (ADFLO)**	**Adult-directed, open-ended (ADOE)**	**Child-initiated (CI)**
Resolving conflicts	Introducing and modelling new concepts	Engaging children in conversation/activities	Providing resources
Asking questions	Preparing lessons and materials	Giving instructions	Creating opportunities for children to adapt and build on
Introducing and modelling language	Supporting children to meet ELGs	Extending learning	Extending play through the introduction of problems
Providing resources	Directing learning/giving instructions	Giving clarification	Joining in with play
Observing learning for future planning	Giving prompts to correct mistakes	Making suggestions	Following the children's lead

Table 31: Adult involvement

As the examples in the above table illustrate, the functions carried out during ADFLO lessons are linked to the adult controlling learning. Moving towards the 'in-between pedagogies,' in ADOE sessions, while maintaining some control, the adult's role becomes more responsive to the children. Lastly, the adult is a provider of resources during CI play and, when directly involved, works cooperatively with the children. Additionally, woven throughout are common features related to safety, language and understanding, and activity preparation.

The wide-ranging tasks adults carry out has already been acknowledged through a discussion on the literature (for example, Magraw, 2011; Wood, 2014b; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Yu e*t al.,* 2018) in Chapter 1. Therefore, this section focuses on the role of the adult within the context of the research questions. Across the spectrum of pedagogies, this research demonstrates the importance of the role of the adult with regard to adapting teaching, engaging children in active learning and supporting language acquisition. How these elements were facilitated in different pedagogical contexts is discussed in this section.

6.1.1 Responsive approach to teaching

The data show several instances when the teaching method or activity was adapted to better support the children's learning. For instance, introducing a challenge in the cake mathematics activity to regain the children's interest, giving more adult input in response to the children not understanding the concept of weight and developing their conversation about food while using shape cut outs to make 'food.' These examples differ in *how* I adapted the teaching but the reason *why* changes were made is the same. Having observed the children's emerging needs and interests, I responded accordingly – during both CI play and AD learning situations.

As previous research has found (Waller, 2007; Craft *et al.,* 2012; Canning, 2013; Shin & Partyka, 2017; Chesworth, 2018b), the CI, play-based activities allowed me to take advantage of spontaneous teaching moments and follow the children's interests. Applying 'in-between pedagogies,' this entailed cooperatively developing narratives around the sand tray and challenging their thinking during the Easter Bunny and paper 'food-making' activities. As other research suggests (Wood, 2014b; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Walsh e*t al.,* 2019), this responsive approach of combining the children's emerging interests with targeted adult input resulted in engaging learning for the children.

At times when the children did not want me to participate – such as the action figure and broomstick activities – I later provided resources or introduced related activities to expand on the children's ideas. Although not immediately as effective as direct adult involvement, I was able to gather information on the children's interests. Shin and Partyka (2017) write that 'play and the learning process needs to be flexible and based on careful observation and reflection in order to meet the rapidly changing needs' (p127). The aforementioned examples enabled me to learn about the children's interests and then later develop learning in a way that was meaningful to them.

On the contrary, ADFLO approaches have been criticised for being too rigid to support the type of flexible learning described above (Ang, 2014; Wrigley & Wormwell, 2016). Linked to getting children to achieve the Good Level of Development (GLD), studies have shown that covering the content of the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) often takes priority over responding to children's interests (Bradbury, 2019a; Church & Bateman, 2019; Hoskins & Smedley, 2019). As reflected in this research, dictated by a management-enforced timetable, I did not allow the children enough time to prepare for, or to finish, the trip writing exercise and relentlessly pursued teaching the weight lesson despite its unsuitability. Clearly weighted towards an AD approach, teaching moved away from responding to the children's needs to responding to policy requirements. Congruent with earlier research (Robert-Holmes, 2015; Robert-Holmes, 2015; Bradbury, 2019a; Hoskins & Smedley, 2019; Archer, 2022), my traditional early years values were compromised to instead focus on producing favourable data.

However, this research did observe some examples of responsive teaching during ADFLO situations. For instance, the cake mathematics and guided reading sessions had fixed learning outcomes but took consideration of the children's needs. Pramling *et al.* (2019) comment that adults' 'participation requires responsivity to children's perspectives, but to provide new developmental incentive, they also need to be able to plant the seeds of new directions' (p170). In these situations, 'the seeds of new directions' were the set learning outcomes but the delivery of the teaching was responsive to the children's perspectives. Therefore, these findings show how it can be possible to make adaptations to ensure a more responsive approach in ADFLO lessons – albeit not to the extent of ADOE activities.

Returning to the 'in-between pedagogies,' the findings illustrate how the ADOE activities in particular provided opportunities to extend learning through the children's interests. Similar to Woods's (2014b) 'guided participation' and Walsh *et al.'s* (2019) 'appropriately participatory' role, examples such as the aquarium and cutting grass show how teaching the children to use scissors or apply mathematical functions can be imbedded into play that is responsive to children's interests. Walsh *et al.* (2019) note the value of 'playful activities as learning opportunities to foster children's learning dispositions, knowledge acquisition and skill development' (p1169). The combination of responsive adult intervention and the openness of the ADOE activities meant children’s wide-ranging learning needs and interests – from physical and language development to academic skills – could holistically be developed.

The data demonstrate how satisfying the paradox of both meeting policy requirements and responding to individual needs and interests can be achieved (Murray, 2017). As Sproule *et al.* (2021) highlight, adults can be responsive to children’s emerging needs and interests while ensuring they cover the content of the ELGs and give children experience of AD pedagogies through the application of play-based, AD activities. Hoskins and Smedley (2019) describe an early years environment that pushes ‘children towards achieving academic milestones, a process that often felt hollow and target driven’ (p82). Yet, as prior studies have found (Bradbury, 2019c; Archer; 2022), the findings illustrate how teachers might resist the standardised approaches favoured in policy and instead incorporate approaches more traditionally associated with ECE such as responsive teaching.

6.1.2 Active and engaged learning

As previous studies have found (Tayler, 2015; Broström, 2017; Fluckiger *et al.,* 2018; Sproule *et al.,* 2021), when the children were active during tasks – for instance, writing story mountains, exploring the aquarium and searching for the Easter Bunny – they were engaged and stayed on task. Evident across these activities, Fluckiger *et al.* (2018) state that the most stimulating lessons entail exploring, experimenting, researching and active involvement. Congruent with prior research (Cheung, 2017; Alvi & Gillies, 2021; Fisher, 2021), although there are examples of these attributes across the spectrum of pedagogies, the findings suggest the children were most active and engaged when they had input into the direction of learning.

The ADFLO weight lesson was dominated by adult input and the children had little opportunity to actively explore the learning materials or discuss learning with peers. The lack of hands-on involvement turned the children into Freire’s (1970/2017) ‘“receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher’ (p45). Similarly, in the case of the school trip writing lesson, the work was set at an inappropriate level, acting as a barrier to the children independently completing the task and leading them to explore other topics of interest. During both of these lessons, the children became distracted and disengaged from the learning.

Robert-Holmes (2019) states that government reforms have put Literacy, Mathematics and formal pedagogies at the forefront of ECE. As evident in the findings, I remained focused on the requirement that children 'use everyday language to talk about… weight' (DfE, 2017b, p12) and 'write simple sentences which can be read by themselves and others' (DfE, 2017b, p11) despite their obvious loss in interest. Fisher (2021) states that, under pressure to meet government data requirements, 'policy and guidance advocating more formal approaches to learning are more likely to appeal than those that advocate play, exploration and active learning' (p8). This is particularly evident with the weight lesson when, in response to the children not understanding my input, I gave further input. In conflict with the Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning (CoETL), such as active learning, laid out in *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b), and as other research has revealed (Robert-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016a; Robert-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016b; Nicholson, 2019), policy requirements took precedence over professional judgement about what was best for the children.

However, other examples of ADFLO lessons – writing story mountains, phonics quiz and guided reading – demonstrate that, when children are able to actively participate, they can remain motivated to learn. These activities facilitated 'an active and constructive process in which learners engage in shared activities by considering each other's tools, materials, ideas, and abilities' (Alvi & Gillies, 2021, p137). As prior studies have shown, allowing the children opportunities to explore topics meaningful to them (Barriage, 2016; Chesworth, 2016) while teaching through the medium of play (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Sproule *et al.,* 2019; 2021) ensured they were engaged throughout these ADFLO sessions. Demonstrating that active and engaged learning is not exclusive to CI activities, as with Sproule *et al.'s* (2021) study, these structured activities, adopted an active, play-based approach and allowed for some flexibility.

It is widely recognised that CI play can promote active learning (Lee *et al.,* 2015; Theobald *et al.,* 2015; Broström, 2017; Hoskins & Smedley, 2018). From this research, the examples of Humaira re-enacting a capacity competition and leading a magic show demonstrate how the children were able to engage with one another and get practically involved in learning activities. However, concurrent with other research (Wood, 2014b; Cheung, 2017; Walsh *et al.,* 2019), this study found that, when I did not participate in CI activities, they often ended prematurely and opportunities to develop learning were missed. For example, there was no interaction between John and Prem while they flipped matchsticks or between Aaliya and the younger child when they read ‘The Three Little Pigs.’ Without adult input to facilitate cooperation between the children, the activities quickly ended and the children moved on.

As with the examples above, research has shown that, without adult support, some children can struggle to initiate or develop play (Wood, 2014a; Cheung, 2017; Church & Bateman, 2019). Therefore, ADOE activities, and the ‘in-between pedagogies’ can balance the children’s need to be actively engaged in learning that they have some control over with the support that adults can offer to sustain and progress learning. For instance, Sahil needed initial encouragement to play in the aquarium, I presented a challenge to the children to maintain their enthusiasm during the cake mathematics activity and introduced ideas when the children were making paper food to extend the activity. Tayler (2015) writes: ‘Being active in leading and prompting learning help infants and young children to advance more rapidly than through their solo devices’ (p162). These examples of ADOE learning demonstrate how active learning does not only constitute children *doing* learning, but also adults actively seeking out ways to ensure children *are* learning.

Adding to the existing body of research that acknowledges the pivotal role adults play in supporting children’s engagement in learning (Tayler, 2015; Broström, 2017; Fluckiger *et al.,* 2018), the data show that children can be active and engaged in learning across the spectrum of pedagogies. However, considering the two extremes, if the adult dominates the activity or children are left without any support, they can become disengaged and learning stagnates. Thus, the ‘in-between pedagogies’ allow children the freedom to experiment while still providing guidance to facilitate active and engaged learning.

6.1.3 Developing communication and language

As communicated in government documentation (DfE, 2017b; Law *et al.,* 2017) and highlighted in the research (Tompkins *et al.,* 2013; Mourão, 2014; Wasik & Jacobi-Vessels, 2017; Kultti, 2022), the data demonstrate the importance of adults in supporting language development. Across the spectrum of pedagogies, there are examples of me introducing and modelling vocabulary and grammatical structures, supporting children to give their opinion and facilitating conversation. Underpinning progress in all areas of learning, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) states that children must be given ‘opportunities to experience a rich language environment' (p8), but this research shows that some environments lend themselves better to developing communication skills than others.

Examining the data from this study, the more AD an activity was, the more talk occurred during the session. For instance, during the guided reading session, I spoke a total of 95 times and the children 90. As previous research has demonstrated (Tompkins *et al.,* 2013; Mourão, 2014; Wasik & Jacobi-Vessels, 2017), during this activity, adult direction and modelling was crucial to the children's progress. Adult support helped the children to not only acquire new vocabulary, use correct grammar and express their views, but also facilitated discussion between the children. However, as Law *et al.* (2017) caution 'the quality of input that children receive is likely to be more important than the quantity' (pvi). During the weight lesson, there was a lot of talk but, as demonstrated by the number of occasions I spoke (73), in comparison with the number of times the children collectively spoke (51), much of the talk was instruction-orientated and the children had few opportunities to contribute. This suggests that, while adult talk can be beneficial to children's language learning, too much of the wrong type can be detrimental.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of pedagogies, research has revealed that CI play can be overlooked as a tool to support language acquisition (Hoskins & Smedley, 2019; Adamson *et al.,* 2021). Concurrent with Neaum's (2020) recent study, the example of John pinging matchsticks highlights minimal communication between children during wholly CI activities. Without an adult present to develop language or encourage interaction, the children appeared to want to work in silence. However, the data also show instances, such as the magic show and capacity competition, of children using topic-specific language without adult encouragement. As similarly highlighted by Chesworth (2018b) and Craft *et al.'s* (2012) observations of children's language during CI activities, the examples from this study suggest that peer-to-peer rich language activity is possible when children pursue a topic of interest to them and view communication as beneficial to them and the activity.

However, the findings suggest that CI activities with adult involvement and ADOE learning (the 'in-between pedagogies') offer the richest opportunities for developing language. For example, while I worked with the children to cut the grass, work out Easter Bunny clues and set up the aquarium, we were able to cooperatively develop language in relation to the activities. As with earlier research (Tompkins *et al.*, 2013; Stanton-Chapman, 2015; Pramling *et al.,* 2019; Kultti, 2022), these findings point to adults using children's emerging interests, play and previous experiences to support language acquisition. To do so, Wasik and Jacobi-Vessels (2017) recommend *scaffolding* rather than *directing* language learning and Kultti (2022) advocates a 'play-responsive' approach. That is, adults should take a dynamic approach to responding to children's interests, through play, to progress communication skills. Likewise, the findings from this research suggest that the 'in-between pedagogies' are optimal for guiding children to build on their existing communication skills through activities that are meaningful to them.

6.2 Peer-to-peer interaction

As demonstrated in the previous section, adults play an important role in progressing children's learning. However, the data from this study show that children can learn a lot from each other, too. Referring to the examples in Table 32, this entailed children working collaboratively to develop learning, adapting their friends' ideas and directing peers to achieve shared goals.

Collaborative learning	Borrowing ideas	Children instructing
Working together to fix the sheet back on to the A-frame	Borrowing and adapting ideas when writing story mountains	Marami instructing Anas about not having too many characters in his story
Jointly developing a narrative about volcanos	Prem copying John flipping sticks	Instructing how to spell words during phonics quiz
Supporting each other during phonics quiz	Copying Aaliya reading a book	Samiya ensuring everyone gets a turn while fixing the A-frame
	Observing and copying play ideas in the aquarium	Humaira instructing friends during magic show

Table 32: Learning from peers

As with previous research (Battistich & Watson, 2003; Einav & Robinson, 2011; Syrjämäki *et al.,* 2017), the examples in the table above highlight some of the benefits of peer-to-peer learning. Across the spectrum of pedagogies, with and without adult input, the children demonstrated that they are able to develop one another's learning in a range of contexts. However, as Broadhead (2009) and Blank and Schneider (2011) similarly found, through child-to-child interactions, the potential for conflict can arise.

This section discusses the different learning roles adopted by children, why disagreements occur and how they are resolved, and how children build on each other's ideas.

6.2.1 Roles in learning

Throughout the findings chapter, Rogoff's (1990; 1993; 1995) learning roles were applied to the data to identify how the children adapted to progress learning. Concurrent with Rogoff's (1900; 1993; 1995) research, across the spectrum of pedagogies, the examples from this study show that children do not hold fixed roles as apprentices, guides or appropriators but delve in and out according to the situation, their existing knowledge and the peers they are working with. However, as per the findings from this research, different pedagogical approaches can encourage some learning roles and characteristics while hindering others.

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The findings show that ADFLO lessons can prevent children from adopting more assertive learning roles. As Cheung (2017) found, the rigid structure can inhibit children from making decisions and taking the initiative. For instance, the weight lesson demonstrates how too much adult input can act as a barrier to children moving beyond inexperienced apprentice roles. Concurrent with Kirova and Jamison (2018) and Kulju and Makinen (2021), this indicates that children benefit from opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction to develop advanced learning skills. Kirova and Jamison (2018) 'argue that more capable peers can be important sources for scaffolding young children's… experiences in preschool classroom contexts' (p254). The data from this research suggest that, when children are able to share ideas with peers, they can exhibit more sophisticated learning characteristics such as independence, cooperation and leadership skills.

In contrast, other ADFLO lessons encouraged children to use their peers as sources of information. For example, the writing story mountains lesson and the phonics quiz show how children can use elements of guided participation and appropriation to further their own and their peer's learning. Broström (2017) writes that, through active learning, children 'not only appropriate existing knowledge and shared goals but also influence their environment and construct new knowledge and ideas' (p11). As the above examples demonstrate, without me dominating the lesson, the children were eager and adept at exchanging ideas and supporting one another's learning. Similar to Robson's (2015) findings, my constant presence in the weight lesson acted as a deterrent to the children taking control but, given time and space – even within the context of ADFLO lessons – they exhibited behaviours, such as offering suggestions and listening to advice, associated with working as part of a team.

In wholly CI situations, the group of apprentices performing a magic show and participating in the capacity competition are examples of children guiding and appropriating learning. Displaying elements of the CoETL such as 'developing their own ideas' and 'making links between ideas' (DfE, 2017b), these examples, along with earlier research (Robson, 2015; Flanningan & Dietze, 2017; Chesworth, 2018b; Hirst, 2019), suggest that CI situations can offer children the flexibility needed to try different learning roles and apply higher levels of thinking. As with other research (Wood, 2014a; Chesworth, 2018b), the magic show and capacity scenarios show how, through the application of previously acquired skills and experiences, children can collaborate to become creators of their own imaginative activities in play-based situations.

When the 'in-between pedagogies' were applied, children benefitted from the freedoms associated with play-based learning to assert and express themselves, while also having an adult to guide. For example, adult input helped Samiya to lead her peers when fixing the A-frames and Sahil to become confident about trying out new ideas in the aquarium. Bradbury (2013) found that free-flow environments can foster learning characteristics such as decision-making and responsibility. However, as previous research suggests (Drury, 2013; Wood, 2014a), children can sometimes lack the experience or confidence required to independently pursue or develop CI activities. In the instances of flipping matchsticks and reading 'The Three Little Pigs,' the children did not move beyond observing and copying. In comparison, during activities in which I participated, the children were able to develop skills to help them become effective communicators, collaborators and critical thinkers. For instance, using 'I statements' to solve disputes around the sand tray, working together to fix the A-frames and thinking about why the grass needed cut.

Congruent with previous research (Hart e*t al.,* 2004; Chesworth, 2018b; McGillicuddy & Devine, 2020), the findings from this study suggest that, if children are to learn from each other and experiment with different learning roles, they need opportunities to interact with peers who have had different previous experiences. For instance, Sayf was able to share his knowledge about volcanoes with Anas and Sahil supported younger children to zip coats up and recite numbers correctly. As discussed in the opening chapter, my approach to teaching was influenced by Hart *et al.'s* (2004) *Learning without Limits* and I did not use ability groups or limit children to specific learning expectations. Nevertheless, as per school practices, the children were separated into phonics groups according to ability.

Research has shown that practices such as ability grouping and labelling (as emerging, expected or exceeding against the ELGs) are becoming increasingly common in ECE (Ang, 2014; Bradbury, 2019a; Robert-Holmes & Kitto, 2019) and can prevent children, particularly those in lower-level groups, from accessing the full range of experiences available (McGillicuddy & Devine, 2020). Whilst acknowledging that only one element of the children's school lives was organised into ability groups – phonics (and the children were working at the 'expected' level or above) – the data from this project show the children working cooperatively, taking the initiative and encouraging one another. Describing ability grouping in phonics as a 'necessary evil,' Bradbury's (2018) research found that teaching children in mixed ability phonics groups was ineffective due to children having varying prior experience in the subject. In the case of this research, the children were keen to help their peers but equally appreciated the input of their peers. The children all working at a similar level in phonics contributed to them taking on equal roles in the phonics quiz. The shared goal and shared experience in phonics ensured the children worked harmoniously.

6.2.2 Conflict and resolution

When children begin formal education, they must learn how to interact, share and work with one another. Being inexperienced in these areas, disagreements frequently occur as children navigate their way around new surroundings and establish their positions within the classroom community. Although most of the participants from this project had been attending the same setting together for around 16 months when data collection started, the data show they still needed support with sharing resources, taking turns and resolving disputes. As Broadhead (2009) highlights, in a classroom environment with lots of children and few adults, this can be a difficult task.

Comparing the frequency of disagreements, as per Table 33, this research discovered that arguments are as likely to occur during ADFLO activities as they are when ADOE or CI approaches are applied. Across the spectrum of pedagogies, there were low-level disagreements about topics such as cheese in the trip writing lesson and whether to serve tea or water while making paper food. These incidents were either quickly resolved amongst the children themselves, with little adult intervention or did not escalate and, therefore, did not require a resolution.

ADFLO	ADOE	CI
Arguing about cheese during trip writing lesson	Bickering over whether they should serve tea or water in paper food-making activity	Getting sand on other children incident in the sand tray
Moving name cards and disagreement about who had the pen first in story mountain lesson	Sahil getting frustrated about finding a space to cut the grass	Excluding the younger child from taking part in fixing the A-frames
	Arguing over resources in the aquarium	Arguing about taking turns on the balancing toy

Table 33: Sources of conflict

Acar e*t al.'s* (2017) research found that children were more likely to have positive interactions with peers during CI rather than AD learning but the data from this research show that the activities with the most (directed) and least amount of adult direction (fully CI) did not incur any conflict at all. During the weight, guided reading and phonics lessons, the level of adult control prevented the children from talking about anything beyond the given task. In the flipping matchsticks, reading 'The Three Little Pigs' and action figures activities, there was little to no peer-to-peer interaction, reducing the potential for conflict. In both the wholly CI and heavily AD activities, a lack of interaction about topics of meaning to the children simply avoided conflict from occurring.

However, research highlights the value of children experiencing and being supported to resolve conflicts in a safe environment (Chesworth, 2018b; Macfarlane *et al.*, 2016; Broadhead, 2009). Emphasising the role of play-based approaches in children learning to respectfully come to agreements, Macfarlane *et al.* (2016) state that play supports children in gaining skills such as coping with risks and challenges, engaging in social interactions and problem-solving, learning to cope with failure, and building social capital. At the same time, Robson and Rowe's (2012) study shows that Reception-aged children can find conflict resolution difficult and, therefore, usually need adult support to restore peace. Bringing these two components together, as the findings from this research demonstrate, activities in which the 'in-between pedagogies' were applied, not only incurred the largest number of disagreements and most serious arguments, but also enabled children to experience solving disputes, with guidance, in a safe environment. For instance, supporting the group of children repairing the A-frames to include the younger child and helping the children waiting to use the balance toy to take turns and share.

As one of the prime areas, *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) acknowledges the importance of nurturing personal, social and emotional development (PSED). It states PSED helps children 'to form positive relationships and develop respect for others; to develop social skills and learn how to manage their feelings; to understand appropriate behaviour in groups' (p8). In this research, there were several instances when I paused work on 'learning' (both academic and play-based) to dissolve disputes and help children with their PSED. For example, helping Humaira and Sahil to agree on who should use the pen during the story mountain session and working with John and Jonny to take turns with resources in the aquarium. While these 'interruptions' warranted my attention, as other early years staff have reported (Nicholson, 2019), I felt like I should have been focusing on academic learning. Harris (2008) writes: 'educators struggle to meet the dual demands of a punishing performativity- and accountability-driven regime alongside the personal, social, emotional and learning needs of their pupils' (p367). As with other early years professionals (Brooks & Murray, 2019), I felt compromised in so much as I had to choose whether to follow my values – the well-being of the children – or policy expectations – getting the children to achieve the GLD.

Holding a sociocultural perception of learning, I stand with Harris's (2008) view that a *collective* rather than *individual* approach to developing children's learning characteristics is beneficial. She states: 'placing students and relationships at the centre is crucial to creating the collective energy, internal motivation and commitment necessary for re-establishing schools as humane centres of inclusive people development' (p367). The data from this study show that, for young children, this includes taking time out from academic learning and set learning objectives to help children resolve disputes and scaffold reconciliation.

6.2.3 Sharing and jointly developing ideas

Despite the numerous disagreements between children, and highlighted in examples in the literature (Canning, 2013; Chesworth, 2016; Patterson, 2018), this study found that, overall, the children were keen to work together and support the learning of their peers. For example, co-constructing narratives around the sand tray, exchanging ideas while writing story mountains and giving direction throughout the phonics quiz. As with the spectrum of pedagogies, the data show that children learn from each other in a wide range of contexts – from observation to co-construction – and these encounters can be motivators for children's learning.

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Similarly shown in the literature (Bodrova, 2008; Kirova & Jamison, 2018; Kulju & Mäkinen, 2021), this study witnessed children observing and copying peers to procure and experiment with ideas during wholly CI activities – for instance, flipping matchsticks and reading 'The Three Little Pigs.' Noting the role of observation in informal learning situations, such as CI play, Paradise and Rogoff (2009) state that 'children learn by watching, listening, and attending, often with great concentration by taking purposeful initiative, and by contributing and collaborating' (p102). In these examples, the observers noticed peers doing something of interest to them, observed then tried for themselves. However, without adult involvement, they did not move beyond their initial curiosity to contribute to the original activity or to collaborate with the children who had generated the ideas.

Progressing beyond observing and copying, this study saw children taking the ideas of peers and adapting them to create something new. During the story mountain lesson in particular, the children listened to their friends' ideas and then adapted them for their own use. Broström (2017) writes: 'Learning happens in activities where the child is an active participant and interacts and communicates with other people' (p3). Despite the story mountain lesson being ADFLO, the children were able to actively participate and interact with their peers. This resulted in the children sharing, merging and adapting each other's ideas.

In the case of 'the in-between pedagogies,' the examples of Sahil playing in the aquarium and Marami learning to cut the grass, show children progressing to participating in their chosen activities and offering their ideas. Rogoff (2014) uses the term 'Learning by Observing and Pitching In' (LOPI) to refer to the learning children naturally acquire when they take part in group activities. Through participation in tasks of relevance and interest to them and their communities, children organically pick up new skills and knowledge. As evident in the examples from this data and in the literature (Craft *et al.,* 2012; Canning, 2013), peers and their ideas can be beneficial in supporting LOPI, but often adult input is required to help children to enter activities, communicate with peers and give their input. Thus, the ’in-between pedagogies’ can support children to progress from being observers to participators in activities with peers.

Particularly evident across the ‘in-between pedagogies,’ the data show the children cooperating to reach a shared goal. For instance, co-constructing narratives on food and volcanoes, developing play around Easter Bunny clues and aquariums, and working together to fix the A-frames. Congruent with previous research (Hamann *et al.,* 2012; Arvola e*t al.,* 2020), these examples demonstrate how young children can be motivated to support peers when working towards a shared goal. Hamann *et al.* (2012) state that children feel ‘a normative obligation or commitment to be especially helpful when in a collaborative activity with another person’ (p143). However, comparing the examples given above with the wholly CI activities suggests that the children often felt more obliged to cooperate with peers when an adult was encouraging or instructing them to do so.

Without my participation in the aforementioned activities, as the examples given in the section on conflict and resolution demonstrate, some of the children would have found it difficult to cooperate effectively to achieve a shared goal such as co-constructing a narrative or repairing the A-frames. As with earlier research (Drury, 2013; Wood, 2014a; Palaiologou, 2017), this highlights the need for adults to guide children to find shared interests and include others in their play before they can begin to work towards shared goals.

6.3 Drawing on previous experiences

As previous research has found (Moll *et al.,* 1992; Hedges *et al.,* 2011; Chesworth, 2016; Walsh e*t al.,* 2019), the data from this study show children accessing and applying existing knowledge and skills to make sense of new learning (Table 34).

Initiate play	Make sense of learning	Inspire future activities
Humaira using capacity activity from ADFLO lesson to play a game with friends.	Anas seeing blue and red cans on book cover and thinking they are tins of Pepsi©.	Children were pinging matchsticks. The adult gave balancing toys and objects to measure how far they travelled.
Humaira amalgamating a show put on for parents with an episode of Peppa Pig© to perform a magic show.	John seeing the characters' bandanas and making a connection with taekwondo.	Children played a capacity competition. The adult provided resources to record findings.
Sayf using information he had learnt about volcanos from his sister to develop a narrative.	Several children (wrongly) making a connection between 'big' and 'heavy,' and 'small' and 'light.'	Children pretended to be witches. The adult provided resources to make potions.
Marami using her knowledge from an ADFLO lesson to halve toy fish with Aaliya.	Anas making a connection between rain and electronics breaking after his mum's phone had broken.	Children played with superhero figures. The adult worked with them to make up stories.

Table 34: Utilising previous learning

Like much of the existing body of literature on the application of funds of knowledge (Moll e*t al.,* 1992; Gelir, 2019; Cun, 2021), this study found that children often use home encounters to support learning in school. Additionally, the children were observed adapting activities they had learnt in school, often in ADFLO situations, and applying them in their play, as well as using ideas from popular culture to create play opportunities. This section examines the various sources from which the children drew inspiration and understanding to enhance their play and learning in school.

6.3.1 Applying home experiences

As with earlier work examining funds of knowledge (for example, Moll *et al.,* 1992; Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2007; Saubich & Esteban-Guitart, 2011; Rodriguez, 2013; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014), this study found that children use experiences with family members and the everyday tasks they carry out together to develop learning in school. For instance, as with Chesworth (2016) and Cun's (2021) research, food preparation featured as a popular activity for the children to re-enact in school. During these CI and ADOE activities, the children applied skills they had observed and possibly helped with at home to their play and, supported by an adult, developed narratives around meal preparation.

Much of the research on funds of knowledge focuses on household tasks associated with specific communities (Moll e*t al.,* 1992; Cun, 2021) and values linked with different nationalities and religions (Riojas-Cortez, 2001; Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2007; Saubich & Esteban, 2011). For example, Moll e*t al.* (1992) give examples of chores related to agriculture, cooking and household management, and Saubich and Esteban (2011) discuss exercises about animals native to a child's home country. Rodriguez (2013) writes: 'The pedagogical choices made by the teacher are guided by the direction, inspiration, and interests of the students to present problems of importance to their communities and develop solutions that are likewise relevant to community life' (p13). That is, teachers should gain an understanding of valued practices within the community in which they teach and use this knowledge to plan culturally appropriate activities for the children with whom they work.

Applying this community-based approach to funds of knowledge to this research, many of the children come from a Muslim, Bangladeshi background. Yet, the data show no examples of children showing any interest in practices typically associated with either Islam or Bangladesh. Moving away from a general, community focus on funds of knowledge, the data show that the children displayed funds of knowledge specific to their individual experiences with their families. For example, Sayf's interest in volcanoes stemmed from a conversation with his sister, John's knowledge of taekwondo, applied in the guided reading session, derived from doing taekwondo with his mother and Aaliya's discussion about cats came from her pet cat having recently visited a veterinary practice.

Acknowledging a more personalised approach to funds of knowledge, research has honed in on children's individual experiences, interests and funds of knowledge (Hedges *et al.,* 2011; Hill & Wood, 2019). As was the case with this research, Hedges *et al.* (2011) state that children's funds of knowledge may not necessarily be rooted in home practices but could stem from family hobbies and experiences. Highlighted in other research (Chesworth, 2016; Marsh *et al.,* 2019), as well as the findings from this study, children's funds of knowledge learnt from family and home are not necessarily based on their ethnicity, religion or family heritage, but on their present-day shared interests and experiences with family members.

The findings suggest that funds of knowledge should not be focused on educators learning about community practices and values to incorporate into learning, but getting to know children and their families. As the data and previous research (Chesworth, 2016; Hill & Wood, 2019;

Marsh *et al.,* 2019) demonstrate, teachers being aware of children's current interests, where they stem from and how to develop them can be beneficial to children's learning. However, studies have shown that staff are often bound by institutional constraints which can act as barriers to understanding children and their individual needs (Gonzalez e*t al.,* 2005; Kinos *et al.,* 2016).

From this study, the examples of children using funds of knowledge from home all occurred when the 'in-between pedagogies' were applied. The 'in-between pedagogies' allowed for flexibility in learning and provided opportunities for me to listen to the children and learn about their lives outside of school. Conversely, during the ADFLO lessons, the focus was on achieving set learning outcomes and, as previous research has found (Bradbury, 2019a; Hoskins & Smedley, 2019), under pressure to cover the content of the ELGs and get children to achieve the GLD, I was less likely to stray from the lesson plans. As evident when the children began talking about cheese in the trip writing lesson, I re-focused them on the writing task as opposed to finding out more about their interest in cheese.

Viewing the children in terms of their progress towards meeting the learning outcomes during the ADFLO lessons, the relationships were 'one-dimensional' (Moll e*t al.,* 1992). As Theobald *et al.* (2015) found, the children became their ability in meeting the learning outcomes and other skills and interests were side-lined. In contrast, when the 'in-between pedagogies' were applied, the relationships were 'multi-stranded' (Moll *et al.,* 1992). Moving away from predetermined outcomes and acknowledging a broader set of skills and qualities, I was better able to see and cater to the children's wider needs. Thus, in agreement with Ang (2014), this research demonstrates that the narrow focus on a specific range of skills (the ELGs) can potentially lead to failure in recognising children's funds of knowledge, wider skillsets and achievements.

6.3.2 Previous learning in school

Taking a broader view of where children's funds of knowledge originate from, this research observed children applying skills and knowledge, that they had previously learnt in school, in different contexts. For instance, Humaira adapted a lesson about capacity into a competition for her friends and Marami used her understanding of halving to equally share the toy fish between herself and Aaliya in the aquarium. Marsh *et al*. (2019) write: 'As they move across dynamic social and cultural contexts, children encounter everyday/informal knowledge and scientific/curriculum knowledge that enables them collectively to build concepts, skills, and new understandings with peers, adults, tools, and materials' (p3). As is the case with the examples given from this study, the children amalgamated mathematical concepts learnt during ADFLO lessons (scientific/curriculum knowledge) with social practices, such as playing games and sharing (everyday/informal knowledge), to create new learning activities.

The children were also observed re-enacting and adapting significant school events to use in their play. For instance, a group of children produced a magic show after having performed an Eid show for their parents and another group collected and discussed Easter Bunny clues having participated in an Easter egg hunt at school. Participation in these activities triggered an interest in the children and they later went on to merge these experiences with other knowledge to apply to their play. Hill and Wood (2019) write: 'peer cultures and relationships are fundamental to learning leading development as children collectively co-construct interests and inquiries' (p2). Having participated in these adult-organised events together, the experiences became a form of collective funds of knowledge and a springboard from which to begin experimenting with applying experiences of school events in different ways.

The examples given from this research demonstrate how structured activities, such as ADFLO lessons and special events in school, can inspire children to merge AD learning into their independent play. Karabon (2019) states that the results of this combination may appear to lack rigour but, in fact, can be 'full of sophisticated elements such as problem-solving and social-emotional skills, collaboration, cultural connections, and individual interests' (p8). For instance, when halving the fish, Marami not only demonstrated mathematical skills, but also an awareness of fairness. Likewise, inspired by an Easter egg hunt, the group of children later used reasoning and problem-solving to explain the clues they had found. Drawing on existing, shared experiences and ideas, the children were able to apply their knowledge in new ways and incorporate different skills.

The EYFS Framework (DfE, 2017b) states that children should 'develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things' (p10). However, research has shown that often children need adult support to generate ideas (Robson & Rowe, 2012; Hakkarainen *et al*., 2013; Wood, 2014a; Cheung, 2017). Robson and Rowe (2012) write that adults play ‘a significant role in facilitating children’s initial engagement in activities, and at supporting their speculative thinking and use of prior knowledge’ (p349). This study demonstrates how the input adults give in structured teaching and learning situations can be transferred over to free-flow learning situations. As previous research as shown (Drury, 2013; Wood, 2014a), the findings suggest that having a bank of ideas, stemming from a range of sources, can help build children’s confidence to try out new activities. The data also suggest that, having a bank of shared experiences and ideas, can encourage children to join in with friends. For instance, the children participating in Humaira’s capacity competition, the group producing a magic show and the group collecting Easter Bunny clues.

School is a significant part of young children’s lives and, as the data show, the funds of knowledge children acquire during school activities and events can be beneficial to their wider school experiences. Despite this, few studies have examined how children use school-acquired learning in different ways (Karabon (2019) and Papandreou & Tsiouli (2020) being the exceptions). The school in which this research was carried out caters to a diverse group of children. Based on their personal backgrounds, the children carry with them rich and unique experiences that can be shared and developed in school. At the same time, the findings from this research demonstrate how the shared experiences children have in school can act as collective funds of knowledge from which children can jointly develop new activities. Having common funds of knowledge from which to base play can help children come together to learn.

Much of the research, discussed in the previous section, on funds of knowledge from home and family, emphasise the importance of community and culture (Moll *et al.,* 1992; Saubich & Esteban-Guitart, 2011; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). As acknowledged by Arnott (2021) and exemplified in the data, children working towards shared goals, resolving conflicts and supporting each other, demonstrate how Reception children can form their own culture and community. Rogoff (2016) states that studies on culture predominantly focus on ethnicity but, acknowledging the diverse cultural groups children participate in, suggests examining ‘ways of life’ to be more appropriate. The findings from this study suggest that children’s school ‘ways of life’ and how they use funds of knowledge learnt in school warrant further investigation.

6.3.3 Popular culture

Further demonstrating the diverse range of previous experiences children draw on to enhance learning, across the spectrum of pedagogies this study observed children drawing on ideas from popular culture to enhance their work and make sense of current learning. For instance, Anas seeing red and blue tins on the front cover of the guided reading book and inferring that they were cans of Pepsi©, Humaira using ideas from Peppa Pig© in the magic show and the children using characters from popular television programmes and films in their story mountains.

Congruent with earlier studies (Ashton, 2005; Hesterman, 2011; Bjartviet & Panayotidis, 2017; Cremin *et al.,* 2018; Wiwatowski *et al.,* 2020), this study highlights how funds of knowledge derived from popular culture can stimulate imaginative play and narratives. For instance, Anas's action figure play, Humaira's Peppa Pig© magic show and Samiya and Humaira's witch role-play. Concurrent with Lane *et al.'s* (2016) study, these examples show that children are often unable to conjure up imaginary scenarios, but access memories of lived experiences to develop imaginary play. In the previously given examples, the children were able to draw on concepts they had learnt about from popular culture, merge them with ideas from other sources and imagine something new to enhance their play and stories.

Furthermore, as with previous learning in school, children generally access the same popular culture and, therefore, have a shared understanding from which they can collaboratively expand as a group. Papandreou and Tsiouli (2021) state: 'Pop-culture subjects, hobbies and leisure activities are frequently shared at school, often reflecting children's deeper interests and shaping the context for co-construction of new meanings during collaborative play' (p14). For example, the data show group play around superheroes and witches and, with all participants having some prior knowledge of the topics, they set off on a more equal field than if only some children had previous experience with the subject. Hill and Wood (2019) state: 'peer cultures, relationships and interactions are central to play and learning' (p1) and having these shared foundations can give children the confidence to join in with group activities. For instance, during the magic show, Humaira worked with younger, Nursery children. However, having all participated in the Eid show together and watched Peppa Pig©, they had a solid foundation of shared experience from which to base their imaginative play.

However, studies have shown that children's popular culture funds of knowledge can be controversial and teachers might not feel comfortable exploring these topics in school (Edwards, 2016; Karabon, 2017; Hill & Wood, 2019; Grieshaber *et al.,*2021). This present study witnessed children discussing guns and engaging in superhero play but they were not discouraged from using these ideas. Instead, I joined in with superhero play and set up related activities to extend learning. In agreement with Edwards (2016) new concepts of play, such as superheroes and fighting, are needed to reflect the changing environment in which children live and learn, and this is reflected in my practice. Reflecting on earlier discussed ideas of education being used to control or shape children (Ball, 2013; Bradbury, 2019b) and Robertson and Hill's (2015) questioning of the purpose for whom children should be playing, I believe children should, at least sometimes, be given opportunities to follow their interests. As Bjartviet and Panayotidis (2017) state, 'by monitoring children's activities, controlling play scripts, and limiting their time to play, adults can deprive children of valuable learning opportunities' (p116). By accepting that children do access popular culture and using their experiences of it as a source of learning, the findings demonstrate how popular culture can enhance, and not hinder, learning.

Particularly demonstrated by the children's enthusiasm during the story mountain lesson, Nuttall *et al.* (2019) state that teaching is 'more likely to foster children's learning when it is anchored in children's interests and experiences' (p790) and this sometimes entails teachers engaging with subjects outside of our comfort zones. To summarise, Ashton (2005) notes popular culture is not just fun but:

> 'stretches the imagination, creates spaces in a fantasy world, helps with the acquisition of knowledge, is social and collaborative, provides opportunity for critical reflection, is lively and entertaining and appeals to many children who might otherwise be marginalised by more culturally "appropriate" texts and artefacts' (p35).

The findings suggest that, by not utilising popular culture funds of knowledge, adults miss out on opportunities to engage children in learning that stimulates, ignites imaginations and encourages group learning. In turn, children miss out on opportunities to participate in activities (popular) culturally relevant to them, collaboratively work with peers and use their expertise in popular culture subjects to develop ideas and learning.

Rogoff *et al.* (2014) state that studies examining culture should move away from a focus on particular social groups towards 'individuals' participation in multiple communities – which may overlap or conflict' (p83). Children are members of multiple communities – home, family and school – but also participate in virtual communities – television programmes, the internet and popular toys. Children draw on these wide-ranging funds of knowledge for inspiration and it needs to be acknowledged that, as technology progresses, children and their cultures are increasingly being influenced by popular culture.

6.4 Concluding comments

Viewing the data through a sociocultural lens, the observed pedagogies cannot be considered in isolation from the sociocultural belief that people, and interactions with people, drive learning. Revisiting Rogoff's (2003) description of how people learn, she states: '*people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in light of their cultural practices and circumstances of their communities – which also change'* (p4, *italics in original*). Through the application of the research framework introduced in Diagram 6, Chapter 4, this study has shown how children need appropriate pedagogical experiences to learn, but that they equally need to build relationships and interact with adults and peers, opportunities to observe and learn from others, and participation in group activities to collaboratively develop ideas and apply existing knowledge in new ways.

Bringing together the findings from the previous chapter with the discussion from the present, pedagogy alone is not enough to progress learning. As the themes examined in this chapter demonstrate, how children learn is not only impacted by pedagogy but also by several other factors. Thus, to answer the research question, the children in this Reception classroom learn when different pedagogies are applied according to individual situations and needs. Yet, regardless of the pedagogical approach, adult input must be responsive to the children's interests and actions, allow them to actively participate and provide opportunities for the development of communication and language skills. Children learn from one another through shared interests and borrowing ideas, working on solving disputes and opportunities to take on different learning roles. Additionally, children draw on their previous experiences from a range of sources to make sense of current learning and to inspire new ideas. Finally, woven throughout these factors, relationships – adults getting to know the children they work with and children being able to mix with and learn from peers – sit at the foundations of how children learn in this Reception classroom.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Given the trajectory towards the application of more adult-directed (AD) pedagogies in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in recent years, along with the imponderable question of how to balance child-initiated (CI) play with AD instruction, the overarching aim of this thesis was to examine how Reception children learn in different contexts. To focus the study, the following supplementary questions have been addressed:

1. How are pedagogical expectations communicated in *The EYFS Framework?*
2. What is the role of the adult in supporting children in different learning contexts?
3. How do children use peer-to-peer interaction to develop their skills and understanding?
4. To what extent do children access existing knowledge to make sense of current learning?

Through a policy analysis of *The EYFS Framework*, a review of the existing body of literature and an empirical study of Reception-aged children learning in school, the previous chapters have already addressed the research questions. This final chapter concludes by reflecting on the research process and looking forward to possible future implications.

7.1 Reflections

Whilst writing up this research much has changed. Personally, I had my first children and this made me consider how aspects of my research may impact them now and in the future. I have also since left teaching for the time being.

Regarding the school where this research was carried out and where I worked, the year following data collection, the Reception and Nursery children were separated into different classes. Due to the increasing formality of Reception and pressure to get children to meet the requirements of the Early Learning Goals (ELGs), I requested and was given the role of Nursery Teacher. From my experience in Nursery, I believe there was more time to concentrate on children's basic needs and develop their interests and skills in a more traditional early years manner.

Finally, at the time of writing this paper COVID-19 had been causing immense disruption globally to children's education (for early research on impact see Atiles *et al.,* 2021; Charney *et al.*, 2021). In the early days of the pandemic, the UK government prioritised younger children returning to school to support their well-being and need to socialise (BBC, 24th May 2020). However, the rhetoric quickly changed from looking after emotional health to 'catching up' with academic subjects. For instance, just before all year groups returned to school in September of the same year, the Department for Education released a press statement addressing the need to fill gaps in knowledge and catch up on missed learning (DfE/Williamson, 2020). It appears well-being was quickly replaced with academic demands in the English education system. Therefore, perhaps not so much has changed in this area but the effect of COVID-19, for many, at least highlighted the importance of ECE and education in general.

7.1.1 Research in the workplace

As previous studies have found, conducting research in your place of work can bring challenges (Arber, 2006; McBeath & Austin, 2015; Ellis & Loughland, 2016). There is no scope here to discuss the full range, but this section looks at the tensions I experienced while carrying out my role as a researcher and simultaneously researching myself (in my capacity as a teacher).

On a practical level, first and foremost, I was in school to support the children. This meant I sometimes had to stop filming to sort out problems and, because the children knew me as a staff member, they often came to me for help. As Arber (2006) states, there were times when my insider and outsider identities collided, and I had to prioritise my work over my research – even if I felt more inclined to do the opposite. In some ways, the relationships I had with the participants were advantageous in so much as they were comfortable in my presence and mostly behaved as though I were not filming. On the other hand, fulfilling my obligations as a teacher while simultaneously collecting data was not easy.

From a theoretical perspective, although not the intention of this research, by looking at teaching and learning in the classroom where I taught, it was inevitable that my practice and values would come under scrutiny. Studies have shown how reflection on teaching practice can be a valuable exercise (Meech, 2008; Lange & Meaney, 2013) and I strive to be a reflective and reflexive practitioner. I try to consider implications and outcomes while planning and think about how things can be improved afterwards. However, I have to admit to feeling uncomfortable when watching the weight lesson in particular. I like to think that I put the children's best interests first but it is apparent that policy requirements were the driver behind me pursuing this lesson. This is not the teacher I want to be. This noted, the content has featured significantly in my findings, and I have taken lessons away to improve my teaching.

Briefly mentioned at the end of the findings chapter, I value sociocultural approaches to education and considered myself to be focused on the children's needs and interests. However, possibly becoming more obvious having had some time away from the classroom, looking back at the data, a lot of my actions were aimed at getting the children to meet the requirements of the ELGs. Although not something I like, it has made me more aware of how policy requirements impact both how and what I taught.

At the same time, I was pleasantly surprised by how much the children gained from other AD activities. On commencing this research, I had begun to question my values on how children learn and, as a teacher, I was starting to discover that the children enjoy and learn more from AD learning than I had assumed. As previous research has found, there is a need for CI and AD learning and, perhaps more importantly, all the 'in-between pedagogies' (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Tan, 2018; Yu *et al*., 2018; Pimlott-Wilson & Coates, 2019; Walsh *et al.,* 2019).

7.1.2 A sociocultural approach

Taking a sociocultural view of learning, Rogoff's (1990; 1993; 1995) 'planes of analysis' were applied to the existing body of literature as well as the findings from this study. These planes are threaded throughout the thesis, giving structure and allowing data from this present study to be compared with that from earlier research.

However, merely labelling the children as different types of learners during various activities was not enough to stimulate an in-depth discussion of the data. Therefore, as per Diagram 6 featured in Chapter 4, I merged Rogoff's (1990; 1993; 1995) 'planes of analysis' with aspects of sociocultural learning and categories of pedagogy to allow for a more thorough examination and discussion of the data.

I liked using a non-restrictive framework around which to structure the research as it opened avenues that may have been missed had I chosen a more rigid approach (for instance, the significance of funds of knowledge from various sources). Returning to Clough and Nutbrown's (2012) comment about research giving the opportunity to look at things from a new perspective and 'make the familiar strange,' this amalgamated model enabled me to bring together different but connected elements of the teaching and learning that took place and examine it outside of the classroom.

7.1.3 Limitations of the research

There are several limitations to be noted in this study. Firstly, the small sample size – 13 children and myself as the sole adult – whilst giving an in-depth view of learning in one Reception classroom, cannot be judged as depicting learning across Reception classes in England. All schools must follow *The EYFS Framework* but how each setting understands and enacts policy will vary. Additionally, people – staff and pupils – respond to and initiate teaching and learning differently dependent on their prior experiences, existing skills and knowledge and values. Thus, in line with constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, the findings discussed in this paper are representative of this specific group of children, in this school and during a set timeframe.

Secondly, using film to capture the children's learning was a useful tool as it allowed me to later watch learning I had not noticed at the time of filming. However, as discussed in the methodology chapter, it was more difficult to obtain material of children-only play. Ethically, I had and wanted to be honest with the children and, therefore, did not secretly film their interactions, but this does mean it is likely that rich learning samples were missed.

Finally, in the relatively short period between collecting data and producing this thesis, the ECE landscape has changed in England with regard to policy. The new *EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2021) came into place shortly after this project took place and some adjustments have been made (these are discussed in the implications section). This said, the content of the curriculum may have been adapted but expectations surrounding how children learn have largely remained unchanged. Similarly, a change in curriculum content does not change how Reception children learn. This research has demonstrated that children need experience of both CI and AD pedagogies to make progress. Furthermore, the 'in-between pedagogies,' combining children's interests and ideas with adult input, are often the most effective in motivating children to learn while simultaneously teaching them new content. Therefore, regardless of curriculum content, these 'in-between pedagogies' are likely still the best approach to teaching Reception children.

Limitations aside, the findings from this project present interesting points about how the children in this Reception classroom learn and open up avenues for possible further exploration.

7.2 Looking forward

Whilst it can be helpful to reflect on the research and research process, Kearney and Lincoln (2018) state the purpose of the modern Doctorate, while still contributing to the academic body of knowledge, should be oriented towards reinforcing economic growth, tackling global challenges and steering social transformation. That is, research should inform, incite change and bring improvements in the area in which the research has been carried out. Therefore, this final section of the final chapter discusses the findings from this study in relation to the contribution to the existing body of knowledge, implications and possibilities for future research.

7.2.1 Contribution to the knowledge

Returning to Rogoff's (1993) comment that 'the goal for future work is to examine the conditions in which and processes by which children and other newcomers to sociocultural activities share in collective activity and change in the process' (p150), this piece of research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on early years pedagogical approaches through the examination of how children learn in a Reception classroom. Specifically, the data gathered for this project:

1. Identifies specific pedagogical approaches and gives concrete examples of teaching and learning when they are applied.
2. Builds on previous work on funds of knowledge to encompass a wider range of sources from which children draw inspiration.

3. Has created a new framework for researching and analysing data on early years learning (presented in Diagram 6, in Chapter 4).

Congruent with a growing body of literature (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Tan, 2018; Yu *et al.,* 2018; Pimlott-Wilson & Coates, 2019), this study highlights the diversity of pedagogical approaches used in the early years – in particular, the application of the 'in-between pedagogies' to further learning. Likewise, the data, along with several previous projects (Craft *et al.,* 2012; Canning, 2013; Wood, 2014a; Flanningan & Dietze, 2017; Chesworth, 2018b), give examples of and discuss how children learn during CI play. However, where this research differs is it addresses the issue of there being insufficient data on how young children learn during more formal lessons. Research has highlighted the increasingly formal approaches being applied in Reception classrooms and problems connected to this (Murray, 2017; Bradbury, 2019a; Robert-Holmes, 2019; Robert-Holmes & Kitto, 2019) but little is known about what the teaching and learning that takes place in these lessons looks like.

It has been identified that some children struggle with CI, play-based learning and may make more progress when adult direction is given (Wood, 2014; Stirrup *et al.,* 2017; Kinkead-Clark, 2021). Therefore, as this project, as well as earlier work (Robertson & Hill, 2015; Kinos e*t al.,* 2016; DfE, 2017b), has discovered, it is important to adapt teaching to meet the needs of individual children. There are often negative connotations connected to AD methods in ECE and the data and previous studies (Gmitrov & Gmitrova, 2003; Cheung, 2017; Bates, 2018) show that too much direction and control can be detrimental to learning.

Conversely, this present study also found that children can and do learn in more formal lessons. Broström (2017) writes: 'Clearly, care, play and aesthetic activities are fundamental for young children, but regardless of the risks of school-oriented preschools, there is a need for further development of our understanding of children's learning in preschool' (p4). Responding to a lack of research examining how children learn when AD teaching practices are applied, this research gives examples of AD teaching being enjoyable and beneficial if activities are 'playful' (Sproule *et al*, 2019), active, and responsive to the children's needs and interests.

Furthermore, this thesis brings together data on the various sources of funds of knowledge from which children draw inspiration and understanding for their learning in school. As with prior studies, this study found children apply skills and knowledge learnt from home and family

(Moll *et al.,* 1992; Hedges *et al.,* 2011; Chesworth, 2016; Hill & Wood, 2019), as well as ideas from popular culture (Bjartviet & Panayotidis, 2017; Karabon, 2017; Cremin *et al.,* 2018; Wiwatowski *et al.,* 2020). Additionally, this research highlights how children make use of prior learning in school – often from more AD lessons – to enhance play and learning. Perhaps with the exception of Karabon (2019) and Papandreou and Tsiouli's (2021) research on the application of mathematics in play contexts, there is little research available on funds of knowledge derived from experiences in school.

Although the purpose of Rogoff's (1900; 1993; 1995) work is to examine learning within communities, she and her colleagues 'call for research on how children everywhere learn to navigate across and participate in the distinct cultural settings of their everyday lives' (Rogoff *et al.* 2018, p5). In the modern-day world, school is a major part of children's lives and, within the context of their classroom lives, this project has demonstrated that children begin to form a joint culture by amalgamating their prior experiences. This present study highlights a more extensive range of funds of knowledge from which children draw inspiration and shows how they apply their understanding from these experiences.

Finally, the data from this research have led to the creation of a new framework for researching and analysing early years (and potentially beyond) teaching and learning. Referring back to Diagram 6 in Chapter 4, I amalgamated aspects of Rogoff's (1900; 1993; 1995) 'planes of analysis,' themes of sociocultural learning and categorised pedagogies to produce a comprehensive model for analysing teaching and learning. Taking a scientific (focusing solely on pedagogy) view of the data alone does not paint an accurate picture of how Reception children learn. Reflecting the complex nature of early years pedagogy, combining the science (the categorisation of pedagogies) with the more human (sociocultural) aspects of learning (Rogoff's (1900; 1993; 1995) 'planes of analysis' and the recurring themes) has resulted in a more open discussion, that acknowledges a wider range of skills, techniques and values. In the future, this framework could be applied in different settings and with different age groups.

7.2.2 Implications of the research

Moving away from the dichotomous view of CI or AD approaches, this research has demonstrated that a spectrum of pedagogies is needed in the early years. While accepting that CI methods are appropriate and effective, this study argues that they are neither the only effective nor always the most appropriate approaches. In a similar vein to earlier work (Wood, 2014b; Tan, 2018; Yu *et al.,* 2018; Pimlott-Wilson & Coats, 2019), this research has demonstrated that the 'in-between pedagogies' often best suit the learning needs of young children.

The 'in-between pedagogies' are concerned with altering the type and level of adult guidance according to individual needs. Currently, rhetoric around pedagogy in early years policy focuses on 'balancing pedagogies' (Ofsted, 2015; DfE, 2017b) or ensuring children experience a range of approaches – in particular formal pedagogies in the Reception year. This study recommends that pedagogical discourse should move away from a blanket approach to giving children experience of all pedagogies towards promoting the 'in-between pedagogies' and ensuring children experience the most suitable pedagogies for their needs.

Whilst writing up the findings for this project, a new *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfE, 2021) was published. There is no scope to fully discuss the details here but, in an accompanying document, *Development Matters* (DfE, 2020), there is recognition of the wider range of roles adults play and the pedagogies they apply. Under a section entitled 'Pedagogy,' it states: 'Effective pedagogy is a mix of different approaches. Children learn through play, by adults modelling, by observing each other, and through guided learning and direct teaching' (p10). It appears policy may be adapting to reflect the spectrum of pedagogies needed to support young learners.

Regardless of this recent acknowledgement, this study found that teaching and learning methods only partially make up how children learn. The discussion chapter demonstrates how the role of the adult, peer-to-peer interaction and prior learning play important roles in developing children's understanding. Furthermore, underpinning these concepts, solid relationships with adults and peers sit at the foundations of children learning and being motivated to learn. Unfortunately, all too often there is not sufficient time to work on building relationships and getting to know the children (Moll *et al.,* 1992; Hoskins & Smedley, 2019). The policy analysis chapter reflected on past policy as well as *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) and, comparing *The EYFS Framework* with earlier policies such as *Aspects of Primary Education* (HMI/DES, 1989), there was less interference from the government (Kwon, 2002) and the academic expectations of children were not as challenging in the past. Presently, the Department for Education does not dictate the extent to which formal methods should be applied but research has shown how those working in ECE are under immense pressure to get children to achieve the GLD and produce data favourable results (Hoskins & Smedley, 2019; Bradbury, 2019a; Robert-Holmes, 2019). The demands of trying to ensure *all* children are given experience of the learning outlined in the ELGs – particularly in Literacy and Mathematics – can push teachers towards formal lessons, leaving less time for more open-ended learning opportunities.

However, as the examples from this study demonstrate, and congruent with previous research (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Sproule *et al.,* 2019), adults can use more CI play with adult input or make directed lessons more interesting through play-based instruction and building on children's interests. That is, although still bound by policy requirements, those working in ECE can bend, break and distort their pedagogy to better meet the learning needs of the children. In doing so, policy requirements can be met while simultaneously following more traditional early years values and respecting the individuality of the children.

7.2.3 Building on the research

With a focus on pedagogical approaches but also taking into consideration other factors, this project has looked at how the children in one Reception classroom learn. Whilst the gathered data and related discussion are quite illuminating, research often brings more questions than answers and, therefore, can lead to further research being carried out. Deliberating future research possibilities, along with examining the data using different frameworks and lenses or observing and comparing how other classes of children learn, two topics in particular warrant more attention:

1. With recent changes to policy and recognition of a wider range of pedagogical approaches, what does learning look like in Reception classrooms now?
2. The data highlight a dearth of research on the concept of funds of knowledge stemming from in-school learning. How do children apply school-acquired prior learning in new contexts?

Firstly, as mentioned earlier, in September 2021, a new *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*, and accompanying non-statutory guidance, *Development Matters*, came into effect. As well as *Development Matters* (DfE, 2020) describing a wider range of pedagogies, the new *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation* (DfE, 2021) has also made adaptations to the ELGs. Notably, children are now required to work with numbers to ten, as opposed to the previously stated twenty (but still verbally count to twenty), in Mathematics and some clarity has been given with regard to children's application of phonics (children are expected to learn some of the Phase 3 digraphs but not all).

Concurrent with past studies (Kay, 2018; Hoskins & Smedley, 2019; Robert-Holmes & Kitto, 2019), this piece of research has highlighted the connection between the increasing formalisation of the Reception year and pressures to get children to meet the requirements of the ELGs – particularly in Literacy and Mathematics. Will these changes in the ELGs for Literacy and Mathematics make a difference to the learning experiences of Reception children? Do they open avenues to steer away from formal methods and follow children's interests more?

Conversely, the guidance in *Development Matters* (DfE, 2020) on what Nursery-aged children should be able to do now resembles the expectations of the ELGs more. The previous version gave learning guidance in age brackets from birth through to sixty months plus (BAECE, 2012) but this more recent publication has a section for learning statements for under-threes and one specifically for three-to-four-year-olds (DfE, 2021). The presentation and singling out of the Nursery year seem to be moving in the direction of standardising Nursery education. Reflected in a recent Ofsted (2022) report, *Best Start in Life Part 1* examines factors that contribute to successful ECE. However, what the document refers to as early years education only covers children's education from birth to age four. Children in Reception, aged four to five, are not included in Ofsted's ECE. Is the Reception year being further pushed towards primary school? Bradbury (2019a) asks: is the Nursery Year becoming the new bridge between early years and formal schooling? Will this lead to more formal methods being used with even younger children?

Secondly, as earlier research has found, this project observed children relying on their previous experiences or funds of knowledge to make sense of current learning, find common ground with peers and inspire new ideas. An established body of literature investigating funds of knowledge brought from home and family (Moll *et al.,* 1992; Chesworth, 2016; Gelir, 2019; Cun, 2021) and stemming from popular culture (Ashton, 2005; Hesterman, 2011; Bjartviet & Panayotidis, 2017; Cremin *et al.,* 2018; Wiwatowski *et al.,* 2020) already exists. However, apart from research examining children's use of mathematics in play (Karabon, 2019; Papandreou & Tsiouli, 2020), there is very little information on how children apply knowledge gained in school in different contexts. Returning to Rogoff's (2016) comment about studies on culture moving away from a focus on ethnicity to exploring 'ways of life,' this thesis has begun to shed light on children's funds of knowledge associated with school but there are possibilities for further research in this area. *The EYFS Framework* (DfE, 2017b) aims for children to develop their own ideas and use new knowledge in different ways but to what extent is this happening? Are there enough opportunities for children to do so given the restrictive nature of the ELGs?

Finally, in response to increasing pressures to formalise teaching and learning, the roots of this research stem from an interest in how Reception children learn. As discussed in great detail throughout this paper, there are common elements that lead to successful learning for young children. At the same time, the data also show that children are unique and have individual learning needs. Thus, while certain aspects of teaching and learning are likely to ensure progress, they must frequently be altered. Simultaneously, policy requirements are continuously updated to reflect the values of the serving government and their aims for the country as a whole. Neither pedagogy nor policy remains stagnant and, therefore, it is important to continue observing, questioning and researching how children learn.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Information sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Research project title:
A comparison of teacher and child-directed learning

Invitation paragraph:
Your child is being invited to take part in a research project and as his/her parent/guardian, you are being asked to decide on their behalf. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Permission has been granted from the school and the Board of Governors before approaching you and an information session will also be held on (date and time TBC), in school so that you can ask about anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you want your child to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Purpose of the project:
In recent years, children in the Reception Year have been getting less time to play and pursue their own learning and more time in more formal teacher-directed lessons. With a focus on social interaction with peers and adults to support learning and looking at how children use power to get what they want, this project hopes to look at, and compare, how children learn in both structured (for example, literacy, maths and phonics) lessons in comparison with non or less structured sessions (free flow learning and play). I am carrying out this research to fulfil part requirement of a Doctorate of Education and would like to observe and learn from the children in these different learning situations. The data collection will begin after the Christmas holidays, in January 2019 and will finish just before the summer holidays, in July 2019.

Why has my child been chosen?
As the focus of this research is on Reception-aged children, I am requesting to work with all (15) Reception children in the class. Being the children's class teacher, and having regular access to their learning, I would appreciate the opportunity to be able to collect data on the children's everyday learning and use this to inform my own research.

Does my child have to take part?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to give permission for your child to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason. There are also elements

(such as using your child's anonymised photograph for academic papers and conferences) that you can opt out of. Opting out of the project completely, or individual elements, will not impact your child's learning or school experiences in any way.

What will happen to my child if he/she takes part?
Your child will be filmed, approximately once per week during a structured lesson and once per week during free flow learning sessions, between January and July. Before starting data collection, the children will be introduced to a soft toy who wants to learn about their learning and film them so he can take it back to his school for his friends to learn too. Whenever the soft toy wants to film, he will be present in the room. This is to help make the children aware of the process and to give them the option of opting out.

What does my child have to do?
As well as being filmed while he/she learns, your child may also be interviewed by the soft toy so he/she can give their own perspective on their learning. This will involve a child or children watching a video of their learning and talking about it. Again, they will be given the option of opting out of doing this.

The data will be gathered while children are going about their normal school day. Practices such as filming and photographing learning are common practice in Early Years teaching and the children are used to this. However, the purpose of the data collection is being used for different purposes – a research project and not to assess the children's learning. Therefore, it is important that both parents/carers and children are informed about and willing to take part in the process before this data can be gathered or used.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages of taking part?
There are no foreseen possible risks or disadvantages of your child taking part in this project. However, if any unexpected discomforts, risks or dangers were to arise, you would be informed immediately.

What are the possible advantages of taking part?
Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will shed light on how children learn in both structured and non-structured sessions and help to inform practice.

What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?
If this is the case the reason(s) will be explained to the parents/carers

What if something goes wrong?
In the event that you feel concerned about or wish to make a complaint about the project or the way it has been conducted, in the first instance, please contact me at your earliest convenience. Following this, if you feel the issue has not been resolved, you can contact my supervisor or the Chair of the Ethics Review Panel at the university (contact details at the bottom of this page).

In the event that serious issues arise during or following the participation of your child in the project, you can contact myself or the previously mentioned members of staff at The University of Sheffield for support in resolving the problem.

Will my child's taking part in the project be kept confidential?
All the information collected about your child during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Only I will have access to data that identifies your child. Before being shared with university supervisors or being published, the data will be anonymised. He/she will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. The children's names, the name of the school and other identifiable information will be changed and the children's faces will be blurred or concealed in stills of the videos used for the thesis, academic publications and conferences to ensure anonymity. However, it should be noted that I will be named as the other author and the information that I am the class teacher will be given.

Will my child be recorded, and how will the material be used?

The audio and/or video recordings of your child's activities made during this research will be used only for analysis. Although photographs (with your permission) will be used in my thesis, academic papers and at conferences, no recordings will be played or shown. The children's faces will be blurred in these photographs and these will only be used for university and academic purposes. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings

An iPad will be used to record videos and a recording device will be used to record the interviews of the children talking about the videos. Collected data will be stored on a password protected USB stick specific for this project and stored in a safe place. Only I will have access to the information on these devices. Following the completion of my thesis, I will hold on to this data for the purpose of use in academic papers and conferences. The consent sheet will give options to opt out of some of these elements should you wish to do so.

What will happen to the results of the project?
The results of the project will be published in a thesis, as part fulfilment of requirements for a Doctorate of Education issued by the University of Sheffield. I hope that this will be completed in October 2020. However, this is an optimistic estimation and it may take longer.

Out with the contribution to my thesis, collected data may be used in academic papers, such as journal articles, and for presentations at academic conferences, such as university presentations. In these cases, the data will be anonymised as is the case with the thesis.

Who is funding the project?
No funding is being received for this project.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?
This project has been ethically approved via the Department of Education's ethics review procedure at the University of Sheffield. The University's Ethics Review Panel monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the university.

Contact for information
Researcher: Vicki Frodsham, email: vfrodsham1@sheffield.ac.uk
Supervisor: Anna Weighall, email: anna.weighall@sheffield.ac.uk. Tel: (0114) 222 3633
Chair of Ethics Review Panel: David Hyatt, email: d.hyatt@sheffield.ac.uk. Tel: (0114) 222 8126

Thank you for your time and consideration. It is much appreciated.

Appendix 2: Cover letter

Dear Parents and Carers

As part of her Doctoral thesis, Vicki would like to carry out some research with the Reception children in the Star class. She is looking at how children use social interactions and power in both teacher-led and child-led learning situations.

This will involve filming the children while they are learning. The film will later be watched by Vicki so she can gather data from it. She would also like to show the films to the children so that they can talk about and explain their learning. They will also be filmed while doing this to capture their responses.

The data gathered from this research will be used in her Doctoral thesis and in papers submitted to academic journals. The films will not be shown to anyone but Vicki is also asking for permission to use stills, with the children's faces blurred, to present her data – though you can opt out of this.

Please be aware that you can opt for your child to not take part in this project and this will not impact his/her learning in any way.

There is a longer information sheet attached to this letter. Please read this for more information and speak to Vicki about signing a consent form if you are happy for your child to take part in this research.

Thank you for your time and consideration
Head Teacher

Appendix 3: Ethics approval

Downloaded: 02/02/2023
Approved: 24/01/2019

Vicki Frodsham
Registration number: 160102534
School of Education
Programme: EdD Early Childhood Route

Dear Vicki

PROJECT TITLE: EdD Thesis: A comparison of teacher and child-directed learning
APPLICATION: Reference Number 023350

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 24/01/2019 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 023350 (form submission date: 21/12/2018); (expected project end date: 21/07/2019).
- Participant information sheet 1052994 version 2 (20/12/2018).
- Participant consent form 1052997 version 1 (10/11/2018).
- Participant consent form 1052998 version 2 (20/12/2018).

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

ED6ETH Edu Ethics Administrator School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy:https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics integrity/policy
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

Appendix 4: Transcription sample

Guided Reading

Marami, Anas, Humaira, John and Sahil are sitting at a table waiting for instructions for guided reading. Adult takes a book from a folder and shows it to the children.
Adult: Did we start this book before the holidays?
Children reply no.
Humaira: We didn’t do this.
John: That’s a new one. We haven’t read it
Adult: So, we are going to start reading it today but before we do…
While the adult is talking, Anas is reading the title of the story.
Anas: Top Dog.
Adult: Anas, tell us the title.
Anas: Top Dog.
Adult: So, the title is ‘Top Dog.’
Looking at the front cover, Humaira comments.
Humaira: Top Dog has got lots of dogs.
Adult: Looking at the front cover Sahil, looking at the illustrations, what do you think it’s about?
Sahil: Top Dog is standing on the top and they are angry.
Adult: I wonder why they’re angry. John?
John: I think that’s a tae kwon do dog because look (points to book) he has a thing on his head (demonstrates with hands on his head).
Adult: Oh, so he’s got a bandana on. So, you’re looking for clues. Marami, did you want to say anything?
Marami shakes her head.
Humaira: I want to. Because they’re getting angry because they’re getting hurt because they’re stamping on them because he wants to be a bit high (Looking at illustrations on front cover, demonstrates using hands).
Adult: oh, he wants to be taller than all of them.
Anas: The top dog is standing on all of them and it’s making them angry.
Adult: now let’s read the blurb at the back because that will give us a clue about what it’s about. Blurb: Tog Dog is quick and strong. Can he stop the Bad Dog Bunch? I’m not sure what the Bad Dog Bunch is…
John: I think that’s the bad guys.
Adult: Which ones?
Sahil: (pointing to front cover) This one.
John: (also pointing to front cover) That one. That one. That one.
John pauses and thinks about which characters are bad guys. He then takes the book and turns it over to examine the back cover.
Adult: Do you want to look at the back of the book to see if there are any other clues?
Adult gives a book to each child.

Marami: They are wearing masks.
Adult: You think that's Top Dog?
Marami: No, this is Top Dog. Those are the bad guys.
The children look at the front and back covers and start pointing out/saying which characters are bad guys.
Adult: Let's look at the back. What's going on in this picture? Anas?
John interrupts.
Adult: It's Anas's turn, John.
Anas: (looking at picture) I think they want Pepsi.
Adult: If they want Pepsi, they should go to the shop and buy Pepsi. What do you think they're doing John?
John: Umm. I don't know.
Adult: Okay guys, let's pop the books back in the middle (of the table) because we've got some clues in here (an envelope) first.
Humaira: (smiling) Vicki, can we play the monster game.
Adult: Yes, we can play the monster game.
Humaira starts cheering and clapping her hands.
Adult: I am going to ask Sahil to read this for me, please.
Sahil reads 'Top Dog' with help from adult with the capital 'D.'
Adult shows 'Top Dog' to the group.
Adult: I can see some capital letters. Can anybody tell me why there are capital letters?
Humaira: (puts her hand up) Because it's a name.
Adult: So, let's try to remember that these words say 'Top Dog' then we don't need to sound them out.
Humaira: (holding the sides of her head) Top Dog. Top Dog. Top Dog.
Adult hands out words to each child to read.
Humaira: He got to read one and we didn't. That's not fair.
The children immediately start sounding out the letters to read the words.
Adult leans over to help Sahil read the 'sh' sound.
Humaira and John look at each other's words and help each other.
Adult: In 5,4,3,2,1. Okay, when I shoot you, I want you to tell me what your word is.
Adult shoots John.
John: Shock.
Adult goes to ask Marami but then turns back to John
Adult: Do you know what a shock means?
John: Yes, (thinks for a moment) it means like shocking.
Adult: It's a bit like a surprise.
Adult demonstrates sneaking up on someone and giving them a shock.
Humaira starts laughing.
John: You actually just did the dying noise.
Adult: Okay, who am I going to shoot next? Anas?
Anas: Mmm, plain.
Adult: Try again. That's not the 'ai' sound in the middle, it's the 'a' sound.
Anas: Plan.
Adult: Plan. I have a plan. I know what to do.
Adults shoots Marami.

Marami: Dash off.
Adult: Do you know what ‘dash off’ means?
Marami: When you quickly…umm… dash off because… umm you don’t want people to see you.
Adult: It means I’m in a hurry. So, I say “Ah! Look at the time. I’m going to be late. I need to dash off.”
Adults shoots Humaira and Humaira smiles as she opens her piece of paper.
Humaira: Job.
Adult: Job. What’s a job?
Humaira: I need a job. I have to do something.
Adult: What’s my job?
Humaira: Your job is to teach children to do work.
Adult shoots Sahil.
Adult: Sahil, what do your words say?
Sahil: Pet shop.
Adult: What can you buy in a pet shop?
Sahil: Dogs.
Adult: Yes, you can buy dogs. Now put them (pieces of paper) in the middle.
Children put their pieces of paper in the middle of the table and Humaira begins to smile.
There is one last word to read. Adult holds it in her hands, covering the end part.
Adult: This is a long word so I’m going to split it up. John, can you read it?
John: robb… ing. Robbing.
Adult: Robbing. He was robbing the bank.
Humaira: What’s robbing?
Marami: It means stealing.
Adult: Robbing is another word for stealing.
Adult picks up another piece of paper. Seeing that one of the words on the piece of paper is quite long, Marami gasps.
Adult: Marami is making the dying noise. Why’s that?
Marami: Because we can only read a word with three (letters)
Adult: I tell you what, I am going to ask Sahil and Humaira to have a turn (there are three words) then I am going to come back to you because I think you can sound talk that one.
Adult covers the first two words so Sahil can concentrate on the first word.
Sahil: d-a-d. Dad.
Adult: (Pointing to initial letter) That’s a ‘b.’
Sahil. B-a-d. Bad.
Adult: Bad. Are you bad?
Sahil shakes his head, smiling.
Adult: Are you ready Humaira?
Humaira: d-o-g. Bad dog.
Adult: Now, let’s go back to Marami.
Marami: b-u-n. Bun. Ch. Bunch.
Adult: Bad dog bunch. Like a bunch of bananas or a bunch of children. It means a group.
All of the words are in the middle of the table. The children start sliding the words towards themselves (as they do in the monster game). Adult has some pictures to match the words though.

Adult: Wait a minute, please.
Humaira: I thought were playing the monster game.
Adult: We are but we need to do this first.
Adult distributes pictures to the children.
Adult: I want you to put the picture beside the word that it matches.
The children look at their pictures. Most of them pick their pictures up to look more closely.
Humaira looks confused, looks at John and starts to laugh.
Humaira: What does it even mean?
Adult: (there is writing on Humaira's picture). Read it.
Humaira: sh-o-p. Shop!
John thinks he has found the word that matches and picks it up. He holds the picture and word in his hand. Sahil picks up the word 'shock' to match his picture.
Adult: (Pointing at Sahil's picture). That's not shock. Shock is when you go (gasp).
Marami picks up the word she thinks matches her picture. She can't reach it so the adult passes it to her. Adult gives John another picture to match. Anas has quietly picked up the word he thinks matches his picture. Humaira looks around her and picks up a word.
Humaira: Is this right? I don't know.
Adult shakes head.
Adult: That doesn't look like a shop.
Humaira picks up another word to read it. Sahil has picked up 'bad dog bunch.'
Adult: That is 'bad dog bunch.' (Pointing to picture) What's he doing? He wants to steal things. What's another word for stealing?
Marami is looking at Humaira's picture.
Marami: I don't know what kind of shop is it?
Adult: Well, there's a dog in there so what kind of shop do you think it is?
Humaira: It's a dog shop.
Adult: So, what would be a word for stealing, Sahil?
Sahil goes to take a random word.
Adult: Leave that and tell me Sahil.
Humaira as picked another word and matched it to her picture.
Humaira: Is that right?
Adult supports Humaira to sound the word out.
Humaira: j-o-b. Job. She smiles.
John is looking at his picture.
John: I don't see dogs.
Adult: So, who are they? They have a special name.
Adult takes Sahil's picture. Guys, Sahil needs a little help with this one.
Humaira: (Puts up hand). I know. Stealing.
Adult: We learned a new word today for stealing. What was it?
Marami starts excitedly waving her hands.
Marami: I know!
Anas: Rob.
Adult: Rob. So Sahil, (adult lays out the remaining words) which word is rob or robbing?
Sahil points to the word.
Adult: John you're not sure on that one. Ask your friends for some help.
John: Help me, please (mumbles)

Adult: Hold it up so we can see. Who are they?
Humaira: They are dog. Bad dogs and the name in the book and I don't remember.
While Humaira is talking, John picks up a picture to match his words.
Adult: Have you got it now John? So, who are they John?
John: (reads) Bad Dog Bunch.
Adult: We have got two words left. Let's read this one together.
John: (immediately) Shock.
Marami does an impression of being shocked (as the adult had earlier)
Adult: And this one is (group sounds out together) 'dash off.'
As the group is reading it out, Humaira points to one of Anas's pictures.
Adult points to one of Anas's pictures.
Adult: I think these guys are dashing off.
John is standing up and leaning across the table to look at the picture.
Sahil: What is 'shock?'
Adult: Shock is when you get a fright or a surprise.
Humaira begins to laugh.
Adult: So, try to remember these words. Pop them back into the middle (of the table).
Humaira is hiding her word in hands and giggles as she hands it over.
Adult: We only have two HFWs and then we will play the monster game. (Holding up 'this'). What HFW is this.
Humaira puts her hand up gasping.
Adult: Humaira?
Humaira: (looks questioningly) Sock?
Humaira and the other children giggle.
Adult: Not sock. I don't know where you got that from. So, most of the time this ('th') makes the 'th' (as in three) sound but sometimes it makes the 'th' (as in that) sound. Anybody know this word?
Marami immediately shoots her hand up. Anas says something that isn't heard properly by the adult.
Adult: Anas?
Anas: Is it 'this?'
Adult: Yes, it is 'this.' This is ridiculous. What's this word?
Adult gets children to individually read the word and gets faster as she does so. The children all start saying "this, this, this…" quickly and waving their arms around.
Adult: 5,4,3,2,1 and stop. Okay, what about this word? (holding it up)
John: They.
The adult moves the word around the other children so they can read it too.
Anas has not been paying attention and needs a little help. Next it is John's turn and he pretends he doesn't know initially.
Adult: Come on John.
John: they.
Next it is Humaira's turn. She is giggling and holding her hand over her mouth.
Humaira: Sock.
All the children begin to laugh.
Adult: 5, ,4, 3, 2, 1. Humaira, what's this word.
Humaira: they.

Adult puts the two HFWs in the middle of the table ready to play the monster game. Normally there are more words so the game has to be adapted for the smaller number.
Adult: So, normally you take the words but this time, I just want you to tap it and say the word.
Adult demonstrates tapping and saying ‘this’ then withdrawing hand. The children are excited about playing the game. Anas has his hand up in the air ready and taps a word.
Adult: Right, put your hands on your legs. Marami, ‘they.’
Marami quickly taps ‘this.’
Adult: Take a minute to think about it next time. That was ‘this.’ John, ‘this.’
John taps and says the word.
John: I made it (before the monster caught him).
Adult: Humaira, ‘they.’
Humaira taps and says the word.
Humaira: that was easy.
Adult: Anas, ‘this.’
Remembering how they normally play the game, Anas slides the word away and says it.
Adult: remember we are just tapping it. Sahil, ‘they.’
Sahil quickly taps and says the word.
Suddenly, the adults says “Humaira, ‘this.’”. Before Humaira has moved, the monster gets her. The children all laugh.
Adult: Let me check to see if we have enough time to start reading the book.
Adult goes to check time. John holds his hands by his head and starts singing John starts singing made-up words. Humaira copies him. John starts making noises and Anas copies him.
Adult: Let’s read a couple of pages? What do you think? Read a couple of pages? (Some children say yes, others say no) or leave it until next time?
Marami: Leave it until next time.
Adult: Sahil, what do you think?
Sahil: Read it.
Adult: You want to read some. John?
John: I want to read some.
Humaira: Leave it for next time.
Adult: Anas, what do you think? Two people want to start reading today and two people want to leave it for next time.
Anas: Today.
Adult: So, what happens then?
John: We winned.
Humaira: No!
John does a ‘victory dance.’
Adult: We will read two pages and that’s all.
Adult gives each child a book. The children get their books and start looking at different pages.
Adult: We are starting on the red page, page two. Anas, you need to go back. You’re not at the beginning.
John reads the first sentence and Humaira repeats after him. The children are given some time to read the first page. Adult gives Sahil some support.
Adult: Now stop. I am asking Anas to read out page two for us.

Anas looks between the two pages, deciding which one he has to read. Marami points to the correct page.
Adult: the red one Anas.
Anas: This is Top Dog. Top Dog is qu-i-ck.
Adult: Why does Top Dog need to be quick?
Humaira: Because he is… The time is finished.
Adult: Maybe he needs to dash off because he's going to be late. Let's read the blue page everybody.
Children independently read the next page. John finishes quickly and sits quietly. Adult supports individual children and points out a digraph in a word to Sahil and Humaira.
Adult: I am going to ask Sahil to read the first sentence.
Sahil: I can f-l-i-p.
Adult: Say the sentence, please.
Sahil: I can flip.
Humaira: Can you read the next one?
Humaira: I can quick.
Adult. Not quick. Check that last word.
Humaira: I can k-i-ck. Kick. I can kick.
Adult: There you are. Marami, can you read the last one?
Marami: I can s-p-i-n…
Adult helps with the final word.
Adult: (to group) The last word has two digraphs in it. (sounds out 'things'). John, tell me about Top Dog.
John: Top Dog can flip and kick and…
Adult: He can spin things. So, I think you're right. Maybe he does do martial arts.
The children start closing their books and standing up.
Humaira: I am Top Dog.
Adult: You're Top Dog?
Children laugh and head to the door. Adult calls them back and gives them name of children from the next group to bring back.