The University Of Sheffield.

'We don't necessarily be having to sit at a table, having a conference, to have a serious conversation': Learning with Parents about Talking with Young Children

By:

Janet Morris

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Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education

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Abstract

This thesis explores adults' conversation with young children in their homes and communities through collaborative research with parents and considers what can be learned, together, through the process. Inspired by concerns that focus on levels of children's language development were associated with deficit perceptions of parents, the research takes a bioecological perspective. It therefore explores the nature and purposes of adults' conversations with children and the conditions in which conversations may thrive or be hindered, including structures and processes beyond adults' behaviours, beliefs or attitudes. The research design was a collective, instrumental case study, drawing on a purposive, largely convenience, sample of four parents to explore the conversational environment around three children aged between 3 and 5 years old. Data were collected using qualitative methods, including conversation logs compiled by the collaborating parents, which included written notes, audio and video recordings. Semi-structured interviews facilitated joint reflection on the conversation logs and specific episodes of conversation, chosen by the parents. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interviews and the conversation logs and specific episodes of conversation were chosen for further analysis, as critical incidents, to illuminate and crystalise the findings. Sustained, back and forth episodes of conversation, characterised by togetherness and displaying quality features associated with language growth were identified in each case, especially with the collaborating parents who were able to 'tune in' to their children's communicative practices. Sustained conversations occurred where there was a 'coming together' of the conversational partners in a 'third space', enabled by conditions conceptualised as a delicate, shifting ecosystem, vulnerable to influences associated with 'modern ways'. This thesis also contends that the collaborative process of joint focus on episodes of conversation in the home, with the child at the heart, provides insights into children's communicative practices and individual funds of knowledge-based interests.

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Research:

Influences, Theoretical Underpinning, and Research Question

This study aimed to explore what could be learned about adults' conversation with young children in their homes and communities through collaborative research with parents. It further aimed to explore the value of such an approach for the families involved and more widely in relation to parental engagement approaches aimed at supporting children's early language development. My research has been influenced by my background, my experience as a teacher in the early years, and more recently, as a teacher educator, and the research that has informed my professional learning in the field. In this chapter I will explain how these influences have shaped my fascination with the area of study and my rationale in conducting the research. My thinking has also been influenced by some key theories which l will introduce and examine before presenting the research question.

1.1 Situating my study in the Current Body of Research

My research sought to address what seemed to be competing discourses in the literature (reviewed critically in chapter 2) in relation to adults' conversation with children in the home and how educators, seeking to work with parents to enhance early language development, may navigate the messages presented. The first body of research is the highly influential body of scientific, child development research in early language development. Such research has emphatically established the language-building potential of sustained conversations within the home and emphasises the impact on language development if such conversations are lacking, with the dominant message of a lack, or gap which needs to be addressed. In contrast, there is continuing reference, in relatively contemporary research and practice guidance (Jones and Twani, 2014; Fisher, 2016), to the socio-cultural research of Tizard and Hughes (1984) and Wells (1985), demonstrating that rich conversations could be found in all of the homes they studied. There seemed, therefore, a dissonance between the discourse that children's language skills are declining because parents do not talk to their children and the possibility that rich conversations were

indeed taking place in the home, but educators may be unaware of them. Furthermore, if conversations with children in the home needed encouragement, it would be of value to understand the contexts in which they tended to thrive, and what hindered them.

The final body of literature that influenced my research was the research into effective and ethical approaches to parent partnership. This body of literature emphasises the importance of equitable, collaborative approaches to working with parents which recognise, value, and build upon the knowledge and skills of families as well as the challenges they may face. Tizard and Hughes (1984) theorized that children's conversations in school were hindered by the challenge of traversing between the two very different communication environments of home and school, and contemporary classroom research (Hadley *et al.,* 2022) is beginning to agree. Potentially, approaches where educators build on home communication practices could hold potential for increasing opportunities for children to have sustained conversations both at home and at school, and for children to be able to traverse the two with greater ease.

Therefore, my research was positioned to explore the nature of and influences on adults' conversations with young children in their homes and communities. It was envisioned that sustained conversations *would* be taking place in each of the families studied and may offer insights into topics or contexts motivating to the child, information which may be of value to educators wishing to enhance interactions in school. It was further envisioned that highlighting sustained conversations taking place at home as well as factors, beyond individual parental behaviours, which may hinder sustained conversations could enhance educators' understanding of influences on the home communication environment and thereby challenge deficit perceptions of parents and add support to calls for more equitable partnership with parents.

1.2 Influences on the Research

My interest in the area of study area stems from my work as a nursery/reception class teacher and early years lead from 2001 to 2011 when, during a professional development event, I was fortunate to hear Professor Charles Desforges talk passionately about his work

on parental involvement (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). During this talk, he discussed his own academic success, despite coming from a working-class background, attributing much of his accomplishment to the everyday conversations and arguments (about rugby) that took place in his home with his father and brother. This resonated with my own experience. I was brought up on a housing estate with high levels of economic deprivation, in an area which still has one of the lowest levels of educational attainment in the country. Family legend attributes my own early language and mathematical skills to daily shopping trips with my nanna and my constant chat from the pushchair. My last year as early years lead coincided with the National Year of Communication and the Hello Campaign (https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/42538/hello-campaign-for-the-national-year-of-communication which sought to highlight the impact of children's language and communication on their overall learning, social development, wellbeing, and life chances. Ensuring that all of the children in my setting made progress in language and communication became a key priority and Desforges' message, based on the findings of the EPPE study (Sylva *et al*., 2004), emphasising the contribution of parents/caregivers to their children's learning and development, was seductive. Potentially, enabling parents to support their child's early learning at home, with a particular focus on language would, together with high-quality provision in our setting, provide the foundations for longer term success in school. Although the parental engagement activities we planned, such as parents' workshops, newsletters, and invitations to come into the setting were well received by many, we were always left realising that the parents we had most wanted to reach had not attended. This realisation drove my intent to investigate more effective and inclusive approaches to engaging with parents.

Two highly influential reports for the then government (Field, 2010; Allen 2011) highlighted the importance of 'good' parenting, including providing a stimulating home learning environment for children's future school success. However, it was the emphasis on the potential for changing parenting practices that informed policies and messages targeted at parents. The recommendation that parents needed educating led to a focus on advising parents on their role in preparing their children for school. Press reports at the time seemed to pick up on a deficit view of parents coming from government advisors (e.g., Paton, 2012)

focussing on telling parents (quite sternly) what they needed to do in the home, including making sure they talked to their children (Garner, 2012).

More recently, as a teacher educator, I became aware of student teachers returning from practice reporting as a matter of fact, as if it were an unquestionable truth or 'common sense,' that language levels were low because parents don't speak to their children at home. There is undoubtedly widespread concern amongst teachers about children's language development (Speech and Language UK, n.d.), especially in light of the lockdown measures during the COVID-19 pandemic (Tracey *et al.,* 2022). However, the students seemed to have received the message from their school placements that children who were not talking at the expected level in nursery or Reception could not talk well, that we know the reason why this may be, and the solution would be a simple one. Such views resonate with the findings of Ellis (2020) that practitioners make assumptions (often negative) about parenting practices. Unfortunately, such assumptions can be detrimental to building relationships with parents (Brooker, 2011; Goodall, 2014), whereas experiences that support practitioners in understanding the diversity of children's home life can enhance attitudes that are more supportive of effective relationships with parents (Hedges and Gibbs, 2005).

In contrast to my students' deficit views, I was influenced, during my own training, by the research of Tizard and Hughes (1984), who demonstrated that everyday experiences at home offered valuable learning opportunities and that rich conversations were taking place between the nursery aged children and their mothers in each of the homes studied. However, the finding that influenced me the most was the finding that the rich conversations the children participated in at home were not replicated with their teachers at nursery. This led me to consider that greater continuity between home and school, through more equitable approaches to working with parents, would be of benefit to children's learning and wellbeing. An example of this philosophy in action is the 'Parents Involved in their Children's Learning' (PICL) approach, developed and championed by the Pen Green Centre (Whalley *et al*., 2007; Whalley *et al*., 2017), which has influenced my research approach and is discussed below.

The final influence relates to the methodological approach that I took to the research. As already mentioned, the area I was brought up in suffered high levels of economic deprivation, with our estate having the highest birth rate in Europe and many problems for social researchers to focus on. My family's perception was that those who were to be studied were 'other.' Therefore, it was important to me that my research approach saw parents as active collaborators with expert knowledge of their own family situation, that the research would be research *with* parents rather than research *on* them, and would be of some benefit, either directly to the parents themselves or in informing educational practice.

1.3 Theoretical Considerations

In planning my study, I was influenced by several key interrelated concepts and theories that I will now examine in relation to the intentions of my research.

1.3.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Bioecological Model

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) takes a holistic approach to development with the child at the centre. It conceptualises an ecosystem in which human development occurs within a series of nesting 'systems' of influences (Shelton, 2018). Bronfenbrenner's original theory (1979) recognises the interaction between multiple influences on human development and was notable for its emphasis on environmental influences on development, including community, local environment, policies, and political systems (David, 2006). Radical at the time, it highlighted the influence of political decisions creating societal pressures on parents. These included oppression through poverty or racism, the availability of high-quality community services and resources (David, 2006), or parents' economic situation and working conditions which may affect parents' capacity to care for their children. The theory has relevance for my study which is concerned with a key influence on a child's language development i.e., verbal interactions with the adults around them in the home and community, and it sought to identify and highlight the conditions within children's immediate environment for sustained conversation. I sought to identify both factors within the home, but also structural factors beyond, acknowledging wider influences operating.

Over time Bronfenbrenner refined his theory and represented it as the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), which emphasises the primacy of the processes proximal to the child (the Microsystem) as having the most direct influence, referring to them as 'primary engines of development' (p. 798). These proximal processes are the child's enduring interactions and relationships in their immediate environment, including the family, childcare, and educational settings. A further refinement was the reiteration and enhanced emphasis on the child as an active participant in their development, with capacity to influence their own environment and hence development. Bronfenbrenner theorised

that the influence would vary depending on characteristics of the child including disposition, resources, and demand characteristics – i.e., whether they invite or discourage interaction. Notably, Bronfenbrenner considered relationships to be the core of child development, emphasising the need for all agencies and the community as a whole to support families and create an environment where children would be nurtured. Bronfenbrenner's theory has further relevance for my study as it recognises the quality of the relationship between the components of the microsystem, which includes parents and educators, naming this system the mesosystem. Bronfenbrenner emphasised the need for communication and trust between home and school and called for parents to be encouraged and supported with affection and admiration (David, 2006). In taking a collaborative approach, my study was designed with such attitudes in mind, recognising parents as experts in their own children and identifying conditions that support sustained conversation already in place, to potentially build upon.

1.3.2 Participation and Funds of Knowledge

At the heart of the Pen Green PICL approach (Whalley, 2017), lies the understanding that greater continuity between home and school practices develops a two-way flow of understanding which benefits children's learning and requires practitioners to have greater understanding, and appreciation of both the experiences and practices in the home, and the challenges facing families. Greater continuity between home and school and a partnership approach to working with parents (though conceptions of parent partnership vary, discussed in the literature review) is widely accepted to be of benefit to children (Tickell, 2011; Bertram and Pascal, 2014; EEF, 2018) and is reflected in current statutory requirements for the education of children in the early years (DfE, 2021). Collaboration is considered good practice in working in partnership with parents (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Bertram and Pascal, 2014; Nutbrown, 2018), and greater equity in the partnership, requiring the empowerment of parents as well as educators was pioneered by Wolfendale (1992), who emphasised the contribution of valuable experiences in the home. However, the more radical argument, that the starting point for home-school partnership lies with educators actively seeking to develop greater understanding and appreciation of practices in the home to co-produce learning experiences, has its roots in the philosophy of Freire (1970, cited in Whalley and Dennison) which held that, as educators, we must:

> Be humble…perceive our own ignorance and give up the idea that we are exclusive owners of truth and knowledge… identify with others…'naming the world' is not the task of an elite…value the contribution of others and listen to them with humility…have no fear of being displaced…have faith in others and believe in their strengths.
> Whalley and Dennison (2017, pp161-162) adapted from Freire, 1970, pp. 68-72)

Freire's philosophy influenced the development of the funds of knowledge (FofK) approach to engaging with parents, families, and communities to improve educational attainment, particularly of underrepresented or disadvantaged groups (Moll *et al.,* 1992; González *et al*., 2005). Embedded in the FofK approach is the intent to develop knowledge and practice that challenge deficit views of children and families (especially those from particular cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds), to develop mutual trust between educators and families so they may influence or even co-produce curriculum content, enhancing learning. The underlying concept is that 'People are competent, they have knowledge and their life experiences have given them that knowledge' (González et al. 2005, p.i), and that learners will bring with them unique knowledge sets due to their roles in their families, communities and culture. Projects based on a FofK approach have been shown to further the exchange of learning experiences between home and school (Subero *et al.*, 2017), especially in literacy (Cremin *et al.*, 2015; Pahl and Burnett, 2013) and potentially enhance home-school relationships (Greenwood, 2020). As educators become researchers into the lives of their families and the children in their settings, they can develop a more complex view of families and connect with, relate to, and be responsive to learners' home cultures and experiences. It is therefore of increasing interest in early childhood education (Chesworth, 2016, Early Years Coalition, 2021; Tatham-Fashanu, 2021; Chesworth, 2022a; Hedges, 2022).

Funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; González et al. 2005) influenced my research in a number of ways. Firstly, FofK challenges deficit discourses of parents and families, seeking to highlight home practices complementary to school practices. My research aimed to explore the nature of conversation in the homes, families, and communities of my parent collaborators, attempting to demonstrate language-building, sustained conversations. I envisioned this as challenging deficit conceptions, showing that parents *do* talk with their children, and that contexts particular to the home environment are supportive of this.

Secondly, the funds of knowledge approach can be operationalised as a method to enhance parent partnership, as it challenges the traditional power imbalance inherent in home/school relations and aims to support more mutually respectful relationships (González *et al.,* 2005). Although I was not researching as a current practitioner, I inevitably brought my practitioner history with me. One of the insights of the collaborative process I sought to gain, was its potential value in relation to enhancing continuity between home and school. Finally, a consideration of FofK also influenced my methodology as the recognition that parents have unique insights into their own family practices, which should be recognised and respected, underpinned the choice of the collaborative approach to the research.

1.3.3 Third Space Theory

Although I include Third Space Theory here, I had only scant awareness of the theory at the outset of my research. However, in analysing the conversations between the parents and their children, particularly the more sustained conversations and their emergence in the milieux of family life, the relevance of the theory became evident and will be considered further when analysing and discussing my data. Third Space Theory is also relevant to my research as it has been conceived in relation to children's experience of navigating differences between home and school practices (Levy, 2008), to educators engaging with parents in spaces between home and school such as family literacy projects (Pahl and Kelly, 2005), the creation of a dialogic space between parents and practitioners (Cook, 2000; Smith, 2011) and within the research space itself (Little and Little, 2022; Hawley and Potter, 2022).

There are many conceptions of Third Space, but Bhabha (1994) saw Third Space as a space 'in between' (p.1). A post-colonial cultural theorist, himself influenced by Freire's philosophy, Bhabha theorised Third Space as a metaphorical space where a colonised culture carves out a space in the colonial culture in a process of 'hybridisation.' In contrast, Soja (1996) and Oldenburg (1989), also influential in the development of the theory, relate Third Space to physical spaces, with Oldenburg outlining the qualities that would identify a space as Third Space; a space to belong, to be able to express yourself and your culture, be equal, feel comfortable, be welcomed.

Moje et al. (2004) consider Third Space in relation to education in three ways. The first is the educator creating a bridge with knowledge and discourses often marginalised in school settings, recognising and valuing the range of discourses available to learners as a valuable resource in education. Their second conception considers Third Space as providing opportunity for students to navigate their way through and succeed. Both of those conceptions could be conceived as seeking to ease learners and their families into ultimately conforming with the dominant culture of school. However, their final conception of Third Space sees Third Space as a transformational space, of 'cultural, social and epistemological change' Moje *et al.,* 2004, p.44), where funds of knowledge or discourses from competing spaces are brought into conversation with one another. For Gutiérrez (2008), Third Space Theory offers potential for social change, where traditional issues of power and hierarchy are addressed.

Third Space, then, has come to be understood as the space in between two or more discourses or conceptualisations (Levy, 2008) where new ways of knowing are developed or new understandings are created (Hansen *et al*., 2021). Understanding Third Space in this way resonates with Bakhtin's (1984) conception of genuine dialogic interaction where 'truth' is born when individuals collectively search for it, influencing one another from their differing experiences, perspectives, or world views. Third Space Theory does not offer a specific model for educators engaging with parents. Rather it suggests an approach which aspires to create a space where parents and educators can engage in genuine dialogue, recognising and being changed by the contributions of each other with the potential to promote respectful, equitable relationships.

1.4 Research Aims and Research Question

This study aimed to explore what could be learned about adults' conversation with young children in their homes and communities through collaborative research with parents. It further aimed to explore the potential value of such an approach for the parents themselves, and more widely in relation to parental engagement, with a view to supporting children's early language development. Consideration of the aims of the research led to the development of the research question:

What can be learned about adults' conversations with young children in their homes and communities through collaborative research with parents, and what may be the value of the insights gained?

Subsidiary questions included:

- What is the nature of the conversations taking place? What purposes can be identified?
- What are the characteristics of these conversations? Who leads? How do they develop? Are they pleasurable? Does that matter?
- What conditions and contexts promote sustained conversations with young children? What hinders?
- What may be the value of insights gained through the collaborative process, both for the parents themselves and for understanding approaches to parent partnership?

1.5 Summary of Chapter 1

This introduction has demonstrated that underpinning my research is an intention to understand, value, and highlight parents' contributions to their children's early learning, focussing specifically on language and communication through researching adults' conversations with children within the home and community. It also seeks to expose potential hindrances, contributing to a greater understanding of wider, more structural influences at play. Furthermore, it recognises the value of parents and educators coming together to support language development and seeks to explore the potential of the collaborative research process as an approach to parent partnership.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

Following this introduction, the literature review will explore the literature relating to the value of sustained conversation in the home and community, its contribution to language development, and why parents may be the targets of initiatives to improve children's talk

and conversation via the home communication environment, before considering collaborative approaches to partnership with parents. The methodology section will follow, with explanation and justification for the approach and methods chosen, ethical considerations, and the methods of data analysis used. Following on, each case will be presented, analysed, and discussed, before further cross-case analysis and discussion which summarises the findings in the final conclusion and proposes the contribution the research makes to knowledge. To complete the thesis, the limitations of the research are considered as well as implications for policy and practice, ideas for further potential research, and a personal reflection.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to Literature Review

I will use this literature review to first establish the potential of early language development to influence children's educational trajectory, including relevance to children who may be considered to be disadvantaged and why early language development may be a target for intervention, including at government level. Then, in considering how language develops in young children, I will seek to establish the importance of conversation within the family and community and consider how language and the purposes of talk and conversation may be perceived differently between home and school. I will discuss the importance of parents (defined as principal caregivers) in children's early language development and why educators and governments may seek to engage with parents to influence the home communication environment. Finally, I will consider, critically, models of working with parents in relation to children's language development. This will include critique of both traditional approaches of educators and recent government initiatives and an exploration of innovative approaches which emphasise collaboration and strive towards authentic partnership.

2.2. The Importance of Children's Early Language Development to their Educational Trajectory

The Importance of Children's Early Language Development to their Educational Trajectory

Early language development is crucial to a child's life trajectory, including social and emotional development, educational attainment, and ultimately life chances (Bercow, 2008; Gross, 2008; Law *et al*., 2009; Roulstone *et al*., 2011; Law *et al*., 2017; EEF, 2018a; ICAN/RCSLT, 2018; Gross, 2021). Acquiring language is essential to children's ability to learn, providing a foundation for thought, pre-literacy skills, and the ability to access the curriculum (Lindsay *et al.*, 2010). The influence of oral language development on wider cognitive domains creates a cascade effect resulting in a significant impact on overall

development and subsequent educational achievement, ultimately influencing career and life chances (Law *et al.*, 2017). Unfortunately, some children start school without the necessary language skills to support their educational journey. Statistically, children with the lowest income levels enter school with a 19-month gap in vocabulary in comparison with their most advantaged peers, with vocabulary at age five being associated with resilience to the statistical association between suffering socioeconomic deprivation in childhood and poverty in the future (Waldfogel and Washbrook, 2010). Recognition of this vital role in children's early language development underpins its prominence in the recent revisions to the statutory requirements (DfE, 2021) Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) which regulates the provision of the education and care of children in England and defines what providers 'must do, working in partnership with parents and/or carers, to promote the learning and development of all children in their care' (p.7). The non-statutory (but government-endorsed) curriculum guidance (DfE, 2020) exemplifies the weight apportioned to early language development advising providers to deliver, 'High quality early years education, with a strong focus on communication' (DfE, 2020, p. 6). It is therefore important to understand the conditions that support and promote children's early language development, and the relevant research and literature will now be considered.

2.3 Establishing the Value of Adults' Conversation with Young Children in the Home and Community

2.3.1 Influence of Interaction and Conversation on Children's Language Development

A wealth of evidence (Hoff, 2006; Roulstone et al., 2011; Weisleder and Fernald, 2013; Law *et al., 2017;* Ang and Harmey, 2019) asserts that language development is influenced by the quality of the child's communication environment, where both the quantity and quality of interactions with caregivers (both at home and in any early care and/or education setting the child experiences) have a significant part to play. In their major systematic review of the evidence underpinning strategies to promote improvements in early language development, Law *et al*. (2017) establish, beyond doubt, the sensitivity of language development to early childhood experiences, particularly the child's unique language environment.

Children begin to acquire language, to produce their first utterances which develop into words, by building representations of the sounds they hear (Hoff, 2006). However, it is through interactions with others that infants are able to carry out their language investigations, extracting the sounds they surmise to carry meaning or have an effect, to begin to build their vocabulary and linguistic skills (Pace, Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff, 2016). This back and forth of communicative interaction, provides the feedback which confirms the meanings of words as well as offering the infant further data for processing (Rowe, 2012; Hoff, 2013; Fernald and Weisleder, 2015). In this interactionist model, language directed to the child in positive, early, and sustained interactions lays the foundation for language development and cognitive growth. Through video recordings and analysis of the speech heard by children in the home, Shneidman *et al*. (2013) were able to reinforce the finding that it is speech directed to the child, whether by the primary caregiver, other adults or older siblings within the environment, rather than overheard speech, that develops word learning.

Having acquired 50 – 100 words, children begin putting their words together into short phrases, and both caregiver input and interaction continue to be important (Law *et al., 2017;* Rowe and Snow, 2020). The repeated patterns of interaction related to everyday routines such as dressing, mealtimes, and book reading with gradual expansion, provide further language data for the child to experiment with. Caregiver input that offers diversity in the vocabulary used with toddlers, including less frequently used words which may be considered more sophisticated, is associated with growth in toddlers' vocabulary (Huttenlocher, 2010), enhancing gains resulting from the quantity of child-directed speech (Rowe, 2012). Other aspects of linguistic input quality-associated language growth in toddlers include greater complexity in more extended adult contributions (Hoff, 2006) and employing more 'wh' questions (Rowe, Leech, and Cabera, 2017). Usually between the ages of two and three, children start to produce longer, more complex sentences and their communications begin to be recognised as conversations (Rowe and Snow, 2020; Law *et al*., 2017). This is associated with growing independence and children's motivation to speak for themselves. Hart and Risley (1999) suggest that when children take part in these conversational interactions, the particular context motivates them to respond and to practise relevant responses, taking turns in the communication, and, in a later

reinterpretation of their work (2003), they argue that such interchanges have wide-ranging influences on language development. The importance of back-and-forth exchanges with caregivers has been confirmed by recent evidence from neuroscience (Romeo *et al.,* 2018). Warm, responsive, contingent interactions stimulate the development of the language processing centres of the brain, creating a cascade effect on language development. The 'back and forth' of early conversations provide more than just the basic data for children's language investigations, they influence brain architecture itself.

During the preschool years (approx. 3-6 years), language development continues to benefit from caregiver input. However, at this age, there is a shift in what constitutes the quality of input associated with language development. Increased exposure to diverse vocabulary in more complex sentences (Huttenlocher *et al*. 2002) and interactions that involve the child retelling, recounting, or reminiscing become increasingly important (Hoff, 2013; Law *et al., 2017;* Rowe and Snow, 2020). These interactions enable the child to progress from commenting on the here and now to developing a narrative, recounting past events, or discussing experiences not present. Here, language-promoting quality is characterised by adults offering rich, diverse vocabulary, giving explanations of more complex ideas, using decontextualised language, and featuring a wealth of open questions (Hoff, 2013). Such exchanges, where children are encouraged to elaborate and express their ideas through dialogue, further develop vocabulary, but also the understanding of decontextualised language that is important for abstract thinking, important to cognitive growth, and school success (Rowe, 2013).

However, more recently, in their major review and contemporary re-evaluation of quality caregiver input, Rowe and Snow (2020) reiterate the contribution of interaction itself (including in the 3-5 age range and beyond) to the consideration of what constitutes quality input that is supportive of language growth. Although studies (and interventions) had tended to focus on the linguistic and conceptual quality of language input in the preschool years (as discussed above), Rowe and Snow (2020) reconceptualise the research and separate out the interactive features of language input as an aspect of quality in itself. At the age of five and beyond, the back and forth of conversation continues to influence the

language processing ability (Romeo, 2018) and language growth of children. Parents who talk more with their children will necessarily use more diverse language (Anderson *et al.,* 2021) and as children get older, parents increase the sophistication of their own language, carefully scaffolding the child's language (Rowe and Snow, 2020), and having conversations about past and future events; features that are not associated with any particular socioeconomic groups. The features of interactional quality that promote language growth are those which support the involvement of the child in the interaction: shared attention where the adult responds contingently to the child and discussions of the child's interests and parents are potentially very well placed to provide those qualities (Tizard and Hughes, 2008; Fisher, 2016). Significantly, the other dimensions of quality, the increasing sophistication and challenge of the language input, carefully adapted to the child's level of language development are 'possible *only* (my emphasis) if there is consistent access to supportive interactions with adults' (Rowe and Snow, 2020, p.9).

2.3.2 Language-Promoting Environments

As has been shown, looking at the conditions that promote language development across the age range from 0-6 years, children's early language development is dependent on the interactions they have with their caregivers, beginning with the preverbal stage, through gestures and utterances and extending into conversation (Hoff, 2006; Roulstone et al., 2011; Weisleder and Fernald, 2013; Law *et al.,2017;* Ang and Harmey, 2019). For optimal development, children need to be part of a rich oral environment comprising reciprocal interactions, and the nature of these interactions needs to change and respond as language development progresses (Rowe, 2018; Rowe and Snow, 2020). Central to language-promoting environments are the opportunities for children to engage in repeated but varied language use (Cabell *et al.,* 2015) in 'socially meaningful, contextually rich interactions' (Law *et al*., 2017, p.4). The back and forth of conversation not only provides further contexts for language development but also stimulates brain development (Romeo *et al.,* 2018). The social environment enables the human potential for language to be realised, providing the communicative experiences which provide both the models of, and motivation for, language acquisition and supporting the development of a solid understanding of the meanings of

words and their contexts for use, and all of this is best provided by 'relaxed, playful and loving conversations' (Evangelou *et al*., 2009 p. 28).

However, the trajectory of children's language development depends on the environments in which they are growing up. Rowe and Wiesleder (2020) situate this development within the Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), introduced in section 1.2. The context in which a child develops language is seen as a:

> Set of nested systems surrounding the child, ranging from national policies and the cultural norms that shape the broader environment to the particular communicative interactions in which children experience language being used.
> (Rowe and Wiesleder, 2020, p.201).

The focus of my thesis is the development of an understanding of the conditions in which talk and conversation may flourish within the home, family, and community within the microsystem, recognising that more remote influences may also have a part to play. Therefore, my research methodology involves collaborating with parent participants, reflecting upon the conditions that both support and hinder sustained conversation, including factors beyond the behaviours of individual parents.

2.3.3 Different Perceptions of 'Quality Conversations', the Potential for Barriers Between Home and School, and the Benefits of Greater Congruence

The focus of my research is conversation with children in the later stages of the EYFS, who had all begun their school careers and were attending either a nursery or reception class. Here, children will potentially encounter more formal 'academic' language (Theakston, 2015), such as increased diversity of vocabulary (Huttenlocher *et al., 2002),* increased complexity of language, more questions, and communication in more abstract ways (Rowe, 2017). Such characteristics of language input are associated with effective teachers but are also associated with more middle-class parent-child interactions and higher status is given to these more 'sophisticated' or 'schoolified' conversations (Hoff, 2006; 2013). The ability to participate in those more formal interactions has been shown to be important to school success (Rowe, 2012), with children entering the educational system well-versed in such

interactions already advantaged. Furthermore, difference or disconnect between home and school communicative practices may inhibit children from entering into conversations with educators (Tizard and Hughes, 2008; Fisher, 2016).

When referring to quality in caregiver input beyond toddlerhood, too great an emphasis on those more linguistically sophisticated features of caregiver input implies a deficit in the home language practices of some families or groups. It may also suggest that the 'normal, everyday' conversations I was seeking to explore may not, in fact, offer the language building potential I envisaged. However, Rowe and Snow's (2020) re-evaluation of caregiver language input (discussed in 2.3.1.), has a number of implications for my study. They argued that the quality of caregiver input cannot be judged on one dimension, e.g. linguistic sophistication. Rather, they offered three dimensions of quality input, predictive of language learning: interactive, linguistic, and conceptual. Importantly though, they considered these features along the trajectory of early childhood and argued that:

> Input best designed to promote language learning is interactionally supportive, linguistically adapted, and conceptually challenging for the child's age/level. (Rowe and Snow, 2020, p.1)

Therefore, their analysis points to the continuing importance of conversations with parents and other adults in the home and community for children's language learning in the later stages of the EYFS, with quality features complementary to those of educators. Parents' awareness of the child's linguistic expertise, preferences, and interests, together with their shared understandings of past and future experiences, offer opportunities for conversations potentially meaningful and motivating to the child. Conversations in the home are more likely to have meaning for the child as they emerge from everyday situations, to be led by the child (Fisher, 2016), and prompt them to ask questions, leading to explanations that act as a vehicle for novel vocabulary to be introduced (Rowe and Snow, 2020). Importantly, in drawing attention to connected, responsive, one-to-one interactions, Rowe and Snow's (2020) analysis highlights aspects of quality linguistic input that are unrelated to parents' own linguistic expertise or educational level. Similarly, Hindman *et al*. (2016) emphasise distinct complementary contributions of language-stimulating environments at home and school. Whereas school offers trained educators, learning resources, and the educative

drive, the home offers the potential of 'extended, one-to-one interactions with highly invested caregivers' (p. 137).

However, many early education settings are unable to provide the quality interactions necessary to provide a language-rich environment (Mathers and Siraj, 2021), a priority for improving attainment in language and communication for children in the EYFS (Laws, 2017; DfE, 2021). Rich adult-child sustained back-and-forth conversations are rare, with evidence that the educator tends to talk far more than the child (Hadley *et al.,* 2020), and less verbal children more likely to miss out on interactions with educators (Fisher, 2016; Hadley *et al.,* 2020*).* Primarily focused on identifying effective pedagogical approaches for early childhood educators, Ang and Harmey's (2019) focussed literature review of caregiver strategies shown to improve children's early language development, clearly identifies the key features of adults' interactions with children aged 2-5 years that are most associated with language development. Many are those features associated with the language input provided by caregivers in the home. The review confirms that it is opportunities to engage in 'rich and socially meaningful interactions' (Ang and Harmey, p. 5) that have the greatest impact on children's early language development. They highlight the importance of the key skills of listening to and responding to the child's lead and interests with warmth; supporting and building on their communicative attempts; modeling language and conversation and creating an emotionally supportive environment. Importantly, opportunities where joint engagement may enable sustained interactions to occur are needed.

Ang and Harmey (2019) do highlight the importance of the complexity and diversity of language used within sustained interactions for children in the later stage of the EYFS. However, in order to develop vocabulary, children need multiple opportunities to hear, use, and develop an understanding of new words through repeated opportunities in different contexts. Positive outcomes were also noted with strategies that enabled children to make links or 'conceptual connectedness' (Ang and Harmey, p.18). Interestingly, the teacher using child-friendly definitions for new words in the classroom was noted to be associated with improved vocabulary (Zucker *et al.,* 2013). These findings indicate that early childhood educators' interactions with children could be enhanced by greater teacher knowledge of

what interests the child and how best to communicate with them. Moreover, sharing curriculum themes, ideas, and resources could prompt conversations at home, offering further opportunities for children to make sense of the new words in more meaningful contexts and their more familiar communicative style.

In this section, I have discussed and critiqued the research relating to 'quality' in terms of caregiver language input. Although there are many wider benefits to warm, connected adult-child interactions (Evangelou *et al., 2009),* the 'quality' I refer to is that which is associated with children's language learning and development, or language-building conversations. For my study, it was important to establish the contribution of everyday conversations in the home, and the highly contemporary research considered here emphasises the quality aspects of sustained, connected, and meaningful conversations. Therefore, in exploring adults' conversation with children in their homes and communities, I focussed on conversations with at least five conversational turns. The evidence considered also demonstrates that both educators and parents have the potential to engage in language-building conversations, and input in both contexts would give children multiple opportunities to hear new words repeated in meaningful as well as academic contexts (Hindman *et al.,* 2016). Barrueco *et al.,* (2015) highlight the value of everyday conversations at home to develop understanding of words and concepts in context. However, the child's engagement in conversation is key, therefore it would be beneficial to understand contexts and conditions in the home that foster sustained conversation (Hindman, *et al.,* 2016; Fisher, 2016; Rowe and Snow, 2020), an area my study seeks to address. Furthermore, approaches which involve parents and foster congruence between school and home, between the scientific approach, with its focus on the precise, technical, academic quality of language to be boosted, and the cultural beliefs, practices, and expectations of families (Hindman *et al.,* 2016) has potential for further benefit to children's language learning.

2.3.4 The Value of Conversation Beyond Language Acquisition

Through conversation, children not only learn their language(s) and how to operate it/them, but they also develop awareness of the cultural processes and customs at play. As they participate in conversation, they learn to share their ideas, thoughts, and opinions and to

listen and respond to those of others. Social interaction provides motivation for communication, and shared narrative enables children to construct meaning and understand the world and their culture around them (Vygotsky, 1978). Through being involved and included in conversation in the family, home, and community, children begin to participate in their language(s) within their unique family culture and to develop their sense of self. Elaborative talk, where the child relays and reflects on their experiences or is involved in joint reminiscence of shared experiences, not only develops language, it supports the child in coming to understand their social and emotional world (Fivush *et al., 2007;* Evangelou *et al., 2009).* Responsive adults are necessary to support children in finding their voice, discovering and understanding their place in their world, and being confident within it (Harter, 2015), and children's conversations with adults provide opportunities for this to take place.

The detailed ethnographic study of the tape-recorded conversations of four-year-old girls with their mothers by Tizard and Hughes (1984) provided insights into the nature of conversations in the homes that they studied in the early eighties. In addition to the finding that the informal everyday experiences at home were valuable educational learning experiences where the children pursued things that mattered to them and tried to make sense of their world, they found a key feature of the conversations in the home, was the shared history between the parent and children, which enabled the children to relate to past experiences and future possibilities (Tizard and Hughes, 1984). The conversations provided great insight into the things that interested children, or that they were curious about. The opportunities for one-to-one conversations within the home environment were also noted, but of particular significance were the findings that the conversations at home related to contexts which were highly meaningful to the child, as well as the closeness of the relationship between the mother and child, highlighting their interest in one another.

Extensive evidence has shown that children thrive in 'warm, positive relationships characterised by contingent responses' (Evangelou *et al.,* 2009 *p.4*). The communicatively contingent responses of adults to the child's initiation, previously discussed as contributing to language development, therefore resonate with the well-established work on the importance of relationships in children's personal and social development (Dowling, 2014;

Whitebread *et al.,* 2015). For example, children develop empathy through engaging in conversations relating to their own feelings and the feelings of other children, as well as discussion on what is socially acceptable (Laible and Thompson, 2007). Similarly, positively inclined conversations between adults and slightly older children (aged five to six) which affirm children's emotions can support the development of self-esteem (Reese *et al.,* 2007). More recently (Law *et al.,* 2017b), such contingent responses and interactions have been shown to play a part in self-regulation and school readiness. The development of self-control is influenced by children's language development (Roben, Cole, and Armstrong, 2013), as is executive functioning (Matte-Gagne and Bernier, 2011). So, although conversation offers a highly effective way for children to cultivate their language skills, it is more than a vehicle for language acquisition (Evangelou *et al.,* 2009). Conversation can be seen as a prime context in which emotions and emotional well-being, as well as prosocial behaviour and personal and cultural identity, can develop.

2.3.5 Summary: Reiterating the value of conversation within the home and community as worthy of study

The evidence considered so far demonstrates that early language development relies upon social interaction, from birth, with caregivers who are sensitive and responsive. These reciprocal, enjoyable interactions with communicative purpose provide the basic building blocks of language development. As these early interactions develop into conversations, they offer a vital and highly effective way for children to develop their speech, language, and communication skills, providing opportunities to test and trial their understanding of new words and increasingly sophisticated language forms and how they are used to develop the vocabulary and linguistic skill linked to future academic attainment. However, conversations offer more than a vehicle for language development. They offer opportunities to enable children to enter and take part in family and community life, developing cultural as well as linguistic expertise. Conversation with responsive adults build on a child's earliest interactions with their caregivers, emphasising the give and take, the back and forth, 'the dance' of connection important for the development of self and positive relationships. Conversation matters, as does the nature of those conversations. My

research centres on understanding the nature of conversations taking place with the children in the home and community and the conditions under which conversations in the home and community thrive, as well as the hindrances that may exist. Learning more about the nature of the conversations and the contexts and topics that lead to sustained conversations offers a potential bridge between the world of parents and educators.

2.4. Parents as targets for intervention in raising attainment.

So far, this literature review has established the important role of children's early interaction with their caregivers in providing the language environment which offers the foundation for learning, particularly literacy learning, well-being, and ultimately life chances. Strategies to enhance the communication skills of children and young people have been central to calls to improve educational attainment and promote social mobility (Bercow, 2008; Gross, 2008; Law *et al*., 2009; Roulstone *et al*., 2011; Law *et al*., 2017; EEF, 2018a; ICAN/RCSLT, 2018; Gross, 2021). As I have asserted, the evidence informing this policy agenda has largely been the domain of developmental psychologists and researchers into early speech and language development and related pathologies. However, successive government focus on parents as targets for intervention in raising educational attainment via the foundational influence of early language has also been informed by the research of educationalists into parents' engagement in children's learning and development and what has become known as the Home Learning Environment (HLE). I will now explore why parents and the home environment may be considered a focus for strategies to improve children's language development, before establishing that understanding the contexts in which sustained conversation may thrive within the home and community is worthy of study.

2.4.1 The Influence of the 30 Million Word Gap

Significant to any consideration of early language development, particularly when considering concerns for more disadvantaged children, is Hart and Risley's (1995) research. Carried out in America and beginning in 1982, this research focussed on very young children, at home, learning to talk. Following up on birth announcements, Hart and Risley tracked the children of 42 families from different backgrounds (welfare to professional

class) from babies of 7-9 months to children of 2 ½ years. Visiting the families once a month for an hour, they recorded interactions around the child to determine the number of words heard by the child per hour. They also investigated the type and quality of interactions such as questions vs. commands and the growth in words produced by the children. Their first study indicated that there was a significant, statistical correlation between those children who were exposed to a large and varied, or more complex vocabulary at home and their subsequent language and literacy development. This was then extrapolated to calculate that, by the time they were three, the poorest children heard 30 million fewer words than their most advantaged peers and established the widely reported '30 Million Word Gap' (Hart and Risley, 2003). Whilst there are criticisms of this work, both methodologically (Sperry, Sperry, and Miller, 2018) and politically (Cushing, 2022) it has had an immense impact on policy both in the USA and around the world, including the UK.

A key difficulty with the emphasis placed on Hart and Risley's study is the misunderstanding, misinterpretation, or misuse of the data that leads to the impression that children in families on lower incomes will *necessarily* experience lower quality language environments. In fact, within the statistical averages of the data, there were individual families in both the lower and higher income groups who were bucking the reported trend. In other words, some lower income families in the group provided the most words, with some higher income families being found to provide the least words. This is consistent with Roulstone *et al*. (2011) in the UK, Sperry, Sperry, and Miller (2018) and Gilkerson *et al.* (2017) in the USA who demonstrate wide variations in the home communication environments amongst each of the income groups studied, with high quality language environments in lower income families and vice versa. This nuance is lost in the widely reported representation of the findings of Hart and Risley (2003) as an eye-catching, large, and specific gap fuelling value judgement about language and culture (Bahena, 2016) and feeding into a deficit view of poorer families, or families in which it was perceived that talk was not valued.

Despite being aware of such sensitivities, prominent developmental psychologists in the field of early language development (Golinkoff *et al.*, 2018) insist there is a danger in playing down the word gap. They contest that if the argument that the gap in the quality of home communication environments does not exist or is not important were to be accepted, there

would be no impetus for funding for strategies to address it – thereby letting government(s) off the hook and hitting the children who need help the most. Golinkoff *et al.* (2018) draw on the findings of Hoff (2013) to reaffirm that a statistical gap does exist and that a convincing range of evidence points to socioeconomic differences in both the quantity and quality of language evident in parent–child interactions. To reduce inequality, they argue, the gap must be addressed rather than downplayed. Hirsh-Pasek (cited in Kamenetz, 2018) does acknowledge and regret the *perception* of deficit that surrounds the conception of the word gap, suggesting that action on early language development should be presented as 'building a foundation'. Subsequent re-examination of the literature in relation to caregiver quality input (Rowe and Snow, 2020) across early childhood, emphasises the foundational contribution of sustained back-and-forth interaction, as a quality feature in itself, which is not associated with parent education or socioeconomic status. Furthermore, recent meta-analysis of research into the associations between the quality and quantity of parents' linguistic input and children's language development (Anderson *et al.,* 2021), demonstrated that the positive relationship between quality input and language outcomes can be seen across a wide range of demographic groups. However, Cushing (2022) argues deficit conceptions, including 'word gaps' and conceptions of 'language rich and language poor' environments have become normalised and Daniels and Taylor (2022), demonstrate how they pertain in policy and practice in England, including the EYFS. Therefore, implied deficits in the home learning environment and the targeting of parents as a strategy to improve educational attainment will now be considered.

2.4.2 The influence of the promise of improvements to the Home Learning Environment (HLE) via the involvement of parents in children's education.

In a major review of the research into the value of the involvement of parents in their children's education commissioned by New Labour (1997-2010), as part of a wide range of strategies to improve educational attainment and reduce inequalities, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) reported the key finding that:

> Parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant, positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation (p. 4)…The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups. (p.5)

Evidence emerging from a further highly influential study, the 'Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Study' (EPPE) (Sylva et al, 2004), informed Desforges and Abouchaar's (2003) assertion. The longitudinal study of three thousand children was designed to investigate the nature and impact of effective provision for learning in preschool education in different settings. However, an unexpected finding led the researchers to explore the contribution of support for learning that was taking place in the home. In one of the settings, offering less than ideal early years practice, the children nevertheless achieved high levels of learning and development. The research team concluded that it was a high-quality home learning environment (HLE) which was correlated with the improved attainment, with particular gains in language and social development (Sylva *et al.,* 2010). Importantly, the research showed that this association is independent and could be seen when other child and family characteristics, including family income, were controlled for. Importantly, the evidence also demonstrated that although, *statistically,* the higher quality home learning environments were more frequently associated with the homes of families of higher socio–economic status (SES), this was a trend and not inevitable. Just as in the research on language environments previously discussed (Hart and Risley, 2003; Roulstone *et al*., 2011; Waldfogel and Washbrook, 2011) there was a high degree of variance within the samples. High-quality learning environments were found in some lower SES families and vice versa. This finding has been interpreted as demonstrating that it is what parents *do,* rather than who they *are*, that makes the difference (Sylva *et al*., 2010).

The 'it's not who you are, it's what you do' argument is beguiling; it contends that language development and attainment are both malleable and can be enhanced by parental actions, independent of income levels. It highlights that some families are able to buck the statistical trends via their actions (Siraj, 2010), therefore insinuating it *should* be possible for all families. Unfortunately, such an interpretation feeds further into deficit perceptions that families who are then perceived not to attend to their home learning (or home communication) environment simply lack knowledge or are uninterested (Cronin *et al.*, 2017, Wyness, 2020). The conception of the malleability of the home learning/home communication environment drove subsequent policy, including current policy, on improving parental involvement to raise educational attainment and promote social mobility (Field, 2010; Allen, 2011; Goodall *et al*., 2011; Grayson, 2013; DfE 2018). A focus is

placed on parents' actions and behaviours as children's language skills are 'shaped and nurtured by the child's home learning environment' (DfE, 2018, p.6). However, the concept of *the* home learning environment needs to be unpacked a little here, and the question raised as to whether the dominant 'schoolified' conception of a high-quality home learning environment, defined within the EPPE study as activities which 'stretch a child's mind' is the *only* one which deserves to be promoted. The following section takes a closer look at the concept of the home environment and its impact on language learning.

2.4.3 Contribution of the Home Environment to Children's Language Learning

In researching the contribution of the support for learning provided at home to children's attainment, the EPPE project team used a research questionnaire (Melhuish *et al*., 2008) as a proxy for the home learning environment (HLE). In other words, the researchers demonstrated a correlation between a particular series of focused learning activities (chosen by educationalists), such as playing with numbers and letters, singing songs, and sharing rhymes with learning gains. Surprisingly, in this very particular, widely used questionnaire, talking with your child or having conversations with them was not one of the activities. However, it has subsequently been acknowledged that interactions with caregivers underpin each of those core activities and that the features of the HLE questionnaire also correlate with a high-quality communication environment (Roulstone *et al.*, 2011). However, it is possible that, taken at face value, these findings may tend to suggest that it is *only* the presence of these particular, school-like, educational activities, highly valued by educators, that promote development and learning.

Less frequently reported research (Waldfogel and Washbrook, 2010; 2011), shows that there is more to the environment at home that promotes development and learning than the provision of such recognisable learning activities. Looking at large, longitudinal data sets of children's development (in both the UK and the USA,) they found that half of the influence of the home environment could be attributed to 'parenting style' (the other half being attributed to the 'educative' activities provided). Maternal sensitivity and responsiveness, including appropriate maintenance of behaviour, sometimes referred to as nurturance, was the particular parenting style associated in the study with lower gaps in

literacy, maths, and overall school readiness. In other words, there is equal, independent value to the areas of development associated with school success provided by nurturing relationships as with the provision of specific home learning activities. The implication here is that any home learning activities must be provided in the context of warm and supportive relationships. Here we can see that the sensitive, two-way interactions, so important to the development of responsive relationships and vital to children's development, particularly language development, also impact directly upon learning outcomes in academic domains and is independent of family demographics or maternal education. Furthermore, strategies that support parents' confidence in nurturance, often referred to as 'positive' parenting, should be a component of approaches seeking to improve educational attainment through parental involvement (Grayson, 2013)

More recently, research summaries looking to inform policy around the HLE take a more holistic view and recognise the importance of interactions and relationships both within the home and the wider community, suggesting wider responsibility for children's development, including language development (Smees and Sammons, 2016; O'Toole *et al.,* 2019). Smees and Sammons (2016) stress the complex relationship between the HLE and the home environment overall. They emphasise the need to look beyond the provision of overtly educative activities and stress the foundational importance of a stable home environment, responsive parenting, and motivated, confident parents - arguing that families may require multiple strands of support to ensure this. *O'Toole et al.* (2019) consider the parents' role to 'set the scene' for learning with warm, supportive relationships and enriching experiences.

Recognition of child development occurring within a complex web of interdependent interactions and relationships (processes), both proximal and more distal to the child, represents a bioecological (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) perspective (section 1.2). Children thrive in caring, responsive environments with secure attachments (Axford, 2018). Their cognitive development is enhanced by environments providing opportunities for play, talk, and stimulation, where they can safely explore the world around them without their activities being overly restricted or receiving harsh remonstrations (Goswami, 2015). Conditions of social inequality make it more difficult for some families to provide such conditions. Higher levels of family mental health problems and substance misuse, both risk

factors for poor child development, are seen in countries with greater levels of social inequality, and social inequality is more entrenched in the UK than in many other developed countries (Pickett and Vanderbloemen, 2015). Indirect impacts of disadvantage such as the role of stress and the difficulties of everyday life make the provision of a nurturing home environment more difficult to achieve, as well as the material impact of lower income such as lower quality nutrition and materials to support play and learning (Axford, 2018). Nurturing, stimulating, environments are most likely to be found in safe, caring communities, supported by positive local and national policies (Greenwood *et al.,* 2017). Widening out the responsibility (or not) for child development is a political decision and Bronfenbrenner (1979) pioneered programmes of comprehensive family support and called for communities and society as a whole to create an environment in which children could be nurtured.

Within their strategy to improve educational attainment and remove the attainment gap, The Scottish Government has chosen to adopt the wider interpretation of the evidence relating to the HLE. In their guidance for parents (Education Scotland, 2023) they recognise the importance of nurturing relationships within the family and community, the provision of community resources, and the central role of loving interactions and conversation:

> The home learning environment is the combination of everything you and your family do and the spaces your child has access to that affect your child's development and learning. This includes the opportunities your child has to play and interact with books, objects and everyday experiences to help them make sense of their world. The most important feature though, is their interactions with people who provide the love, security, encouragement, conversation and positive role models to help your child to thrive. A good home learning environment encourages children and young people to have positive attitudes to learning, to be curious, and to have confidence in themselves. (Education.gov.Scotland, n.d)

The conservative government has announced its intention to halve the number of children in England not reaching the expected levels of language development and early literacy skills by the end of reception (DfE, 2017). Sitting within their social mobility programme, a key strategy (DfE, 2018) is a focus on improving the home learning environment (HLE), defined as the 'physical characteristics of the home, but also the quality of the explicit and implicit learning supports they receive from their caregivers' (p.6). This definition, in

contrast to the definition adopted by the Scottish government, focuses attention more acutely on the home, specifically caregivers' behaviours and the learning support they offer. Indeed, the strategy, collated by the National Literacy Trust and Public Health England (DfE, 2018) describes itself as a behaviour change model, calling on professionals, community services, and businesses to focus on influencing parents to improve the home learning environment and promote language development.

Although describing itself as a public health approach and acknowledging the potential barriers some families may face, the emphasis of the report is very much on providing educational messaging and behavioural 'nudges' (p.16) for parents and is targeted in areas of the highest deprivation. The educational message for parents centres on a 'simple' message of 'Chat, Play, Read', with key strategies promoted for different ages. Inherent in the choice of the term 'chat' is an emphasis on the importance of natural conversation, especially its reciprocal, back-and-forth nature. In the age 3-5 section this includes reminders encouraging parents to chat with their children about their day; asking open questions; talking about things that have happened in the past; or may happen in the future and introducing new words, representing the evidence on quality and quantity of linguistic input (Rowe and Weisleder, 2020). The one-way transmission of expertise approach is exemplified by the emphasis put on the development of apps and a media campaign to 'nudge' parents with suggestions of learning activities. Although the strategy report (DfE, 2018) states, 'any approach must understand and seek to address the barriers faced by parents' (p18), the repetition throughout that the actions are 'simple' underplay the conditions that may make the activities more challenging for some families.

2.4.4 The Influence of opportunities and resources within the community.

The National Children's Bureau's (NCB) 'A Better Start Programme' takes a wider perspective on the potential of community resources and local services to support families in providing a better start for their children. Pioneering a Systems Change Approach (NCB, 2021) based on Brofenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), they intend to mobilise services, organisations, individuals, resources, and processes to interconnect and maximise child development. Projects based in five of the most deprived boroughs in England worked with local parents to develop and test ways to improve their children's holistic

development, including speech, language, and communication. Information, education, and raising awareness of parents' vital role in their child's development are part of the offer, but so too is promoting and supporting the co-production of services and resources within the community. This includes opportunities which encourage parents and children to spend time together and interact, such as story trails, accessible walking routes, safer parks, improvements to local nature areas, etc. (NCB, 2021). Such an approach goes beyond assigning responsibility to individual parents and families and takes a broader public health/community development approach, where opportunities for interaction and conversation are enabled throughout the child's environment leading to overall improvements in language development (Greenwood *et al.,* 2017).

2.4.5 The influence of requirements on educators in the EYFS to engage with parents

In response to the government's intention to improve outcomes in language and communication, recent reforms to the EYFS (DfE, 2021) have placed increased emphasis on children's language development. Educators in the EYFS have a statutory requirement 'working in partnership with parents…to promote learning and development' (p.7). In addition to educators' own efforts to ensure natural, back-and-forth conversations (Fisher, 2016; DfE, 2021; Mathers and Siraj, 2021) in a language-rich environment with opportunities for shared reading and role play (Mathers, 2023), caregiver language input at home continues to be significant in language growth (Rowe and Snow, 2020). Therefore, efforts to support parents to provide an enriched home communication environment to support language development are encouraged (Mathers, 2023). This literature review will now consider research relating to ways in which educators work with parents, highlighting the processes at play in this complex dynamic. I will first discuss conceptions of ways of working with parents to enhance children's learning and development, and critique approaches which promote the educator as expert, before considering authentic parent partnership in the EYFS. Finally, I will reflect on the implications of the development of effective and ethical relationships in relation to children's language learning in the later stages of the EYFS.

2.5 Conceptions of ways of working with parents to enhance children's learning and development

Throughout the literature, there is some confusion about what 'working with parents' means or is intended to achieve. The terms parental involvement, parent engagement, and parent partnership, are often used interchangeably and cover the continuum from involving parents in the life of the school to engaging parents in their own child's learning (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). However, as has been established, it is parents' engagement in their own child's learning that offers the well-established potential of benefits to learning, development, and well-being (Desforges 2003; Sylva *et al*., 2004; Tickell, 2011). Within early childhood education, there is widespread understanding that a key focus for enhancing children's learning is the development of family-focussed relationships (Bertram and Pascal, 2013), and a recognition that 'children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents' (DfE, 2021, p.6). The term parent partnership is widely used, representing an aspiration for the relationship between the child's family and their educator with the purpose of furthering the child's learning and development (Tickell 2011; DfE, 2021). The EYFS (DFE, 2021) 'seeks to provide partnership working between practitioners and parents' (p.5), and a child's key worker '*must* seek to engage and support parents in guiding their child's development at home' (p.16).

The word partnership implies an equal relationship between parent and educator as co-educators with a shared purpose (Cronin *et al.,* 2017). True partnership would value the parent's contribution to the child's learning and development; the experiences and resources they bring, including 'rich social and cultural insights'(p. 88), and would encourage an active role for parents in the planning and delivery of the child's education. Moreover, it offers the opportunity to challenge stereotypical views through a deeper understanding of the context and experiences of those families and to enhance relationships between the educational setting and the family (Early Years Coalition, 2021). An exciting possibility inherent within this vision of a true partnership between home and school is a co-constructed understanding of the child and family. The FofK approach, introduced in section 1.2, embodies those principles as it underpins educational theory and practice which "engages with the knowledge and skill sets available in the households of students"

(González, Wyman and O'Connor, 2011, p.481). It encourages approaches to teaching which, rather than blindly applying theory to practice across the board, develop understand and build on the practices and capacities of families and communities.

However, in reviewing the extensive literature on working with parents, MacNaughton and Hughes (2011) conclude that, largely, little thought has been given to developing such mutual dialogue. Careful reading of the statutory framework for the EYFS (DFE, 2021) suggests that, although parental knowledge is recognised to be of value in initial assessments, and practitioners should 'respond' (DfE, 2021, p.18) to parents' observations, it is predominantly the sharing of educator knowledge that is considered to have the potential to achieve the desired impact on children's learning and development via the HLE. The message portrayed would confirm Whalley's (2013) assertion that much of the extensive work in the UK in working with parents, particularly since 2008, has been underpinned by the belief that educators know best.

2.5.1 Critiquing traditional approaches to ways of working with parents

Traditionally, strategies for working with parents have been predicated on the assumption that schools, teachers, and experts know best and have sought to inform, guide, or teach parents about how to support their child's learning. The influential Plowden Report (CACE, 1967) highlighted the role of parents in preparing their children for school, and their ongoing encouragement in securing educational success. Such gains, they argued, offered hope to schools, policymakers, and 'interested parents'(p. 36). However, in focussing on the perceived attitudes of different groups of parents and urging schools to focus on influencing those attitudes, they made clear distinctions between those who were interested in their child's education and those who, they perceived, were not. This sends the message that society knows best, with schools being required to play their part in rectifying the situation by engaging with parents to improve parent behaviours. Such assumptions seem not to question the educator's or the State's role in intruding into the home and their right to seek to influence the home or, as it came to be seen, the home learning environment, or to 'intervene' to increase parents' skills (Jarvis and Georgeson, 2017). Neither does it question the notion of parents as part of the 'improving educational attainment agenda,' particularly

discourse around improving the attainment 'gap' (Jarvis and Georgeson, 2017; Wyness, 2020).

Unfortunately, assumptions that led to a distinction between interested and non-interested parents, may have furthered the discourse around conceptions of parental attitudes, behaviours, and even attributes as those of good parents or not-so-good parents (Cronin *et al.*, 2017). Such a discourse may also lead educators to view certain parents in deficit terms, requiring them to seek ways to address the perceived problem. Inherent in this model is a power imbalance which acknowledges the primacy of the educational setting and establishes the requirement of the 'good' parent to not only understand and comply with its expectations but also to be seen to do so. A good parent is expected to be a responsible parent (Wyness, 2020), including a responsibility for 'educating' within the family in the image of the educators. However, if the primary focus is on school learning, the contribution made to children's informal learning at home and other community experiences is marginalised (Feiler, 2006), a consequence a FofK approach (Moll *et al*., 1992; González *et al*., 2005) would seek to address. Such an imbalance of power and a hierarchy of conceptions of knowledge hampers work with parents (Hughes and McNaughton 2000, Whalley, 2017) and communication could be enhanced by a recognition of and attention to the politics inherent within their interactions (Hughes and McNaughton 2000; Goodall, 2017). Parents and educators see things differently and use different language to discuss children and their learning (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). Parents' knowledge of their child and their development may be undervalued by educators viewed as 'subjective…personal… emotional' (Hughes and Mac Naughton, p.246), in contrast to the professional knowledge of the educator, informed by the science of child development and required to view the child in the light of the expectations of the EYFS.

Unsurprisingly, the targeting of particular families to improve their parenting behaviours can be seen as stigmatising. Sime and Sheridan (2014) argue that traditional approaches can have a particularly disempowering impact on working-class families. Drawing upon the findings of their study which focused on relationships between working-class parents and their childcare setting in Scotland, they argue that engagement, as we know it, is 'based upon a cultural deficit model' which seeks to 'impose middle-class values' (p. 329). Attempts

at engagement in relation to raising attainment in language and literacy development can be a particular focal point for dissonance between home and school. Emphasis on the development of specific, predetermined skills, underpinned by an 'autonomous' model of literacy (Street 1998, 2008, cited in Cremin *et al.,* 2015), sees literacy as a set of skills to be transferred, with parents expected to play their part in supporting that transfer. Parents' role would be to support 'notions of school-based literacy' (Cremin *et al*., 2015 p.1) rather than building on existing home practices. Such an approach can be seen very clearly in phonics programmes (see https://floppysphonics.com/free-resources/ for an example) or, in the context of my research, talking about particular things (Gross, 2019) or 'teaching' particular decontextualised vocabulary. Arguably, an overemphasis on such specific competencies can lead to the perception of some children and families as deficient, e.g. that they don't talk to their children, or the quality of their vocabulary is insufficient. Cremin *et al.* (2015), reflecting on their own funds of knowledge (Moll *et al*., 1992; González *et al*., 2005) based project, argue that school-centric approaches create this mismatch. Crucially though, they see the missed opportunity to build upon the opportunities for learning that take place at home and within the wider community.

Influenced by the funds of knowledge approach (Moll *et al*., 1992; González *et al*., 2005), my study takes shared understanding of parental practices in relation to conversation with young children as its starting point. In seeking to highlight and explore the sustained conversations taking place in each of the families studied, it attempts to engage with the knowledge and skills of children and the practices of their families, focusing specifically on language and communication. It envisages that collaborative exploration with parents may offer possibilities for identifying interests, practices, and capacities that may be built upon in school. In developing understanding of different, but complementary contributions of parents, it seeks to challenge the educator as expert model.

2.5.2 Towards effective approaches to working with parents through collaboration and greater equity in partnership relationships

Almost twenty years ago, Feiler *et al*. (2006) were able to demonstrate that parents from a wide range of backgrounds, including those who may be considered disadvantaged and/or 'hard to reach', were keen to learn how to support their children's education. Through an exploration of ways enabling knowledge to be exchanged as a two-way process between school and home, they demonstrated that engagement could be high, in both parents and educators, especially when they were consulted on the most helpful ways for this to occur. The adoption of a more collaborative approach led to a range of responsive strategies being developed where parents' contributions to their children's learning were 'rich and extensive' (Feiler *et al.,* 2006, p. 465).

In their innovative 'Building Communities: Researching Literacy Lives' project Cremin *et al*. (2015) showed that positioning teachers as researchers and undertaking learning visits into the homes of their families enabled them to identify the knowledge, skills, and attitudes their children bring with them to school. Based on the funds of knowledge (FofK) approach (Moll *et al*., 1992; González *et al*., 2005), these visits furthered the teachers' understanding of the 'cultural, linguistic and social assets children bring with them from home' (p. 169). Inherent in the FofK approach is the intent to support the connection of the learners to the intended learning material, but also for educators to respond with more relevant learning opportunities (Moll, 2005). Through their involvement in the project, the teachers were able to use this knowledge to enhance their classroom practice to become more connected and responsive, more inclusive. Many of the teachers found that undertaking these home visits as learners, rather than experts, led them to question previously held assumptions and enabled the building of stronger relationships with families based on greater reciprocity. As educators become researchers into the lives of their families and the children in their settings, they are able to develop a more complex view of families and to connect with, relate to, and be responsive to learners' home cultures and experiences. Further theoretical consideration of the FofK approach is provided in Section 1.3.2 along with further explanation of how my research was informed by the approach.

Similar roots in the work of Freire (1970) underpin the approaches to working with parents of Whalley and the Pen Green Team which incorporates values of equality and democracy and sees parents as 'co-educators.' (Whalley, 2007, 2013; Whalley *et al*., 2013).

2.5.3 Effectiveness of more collaborative approaches to working with parents

Whilst ethical values of care or democracy may drive a more collaborative approach to working with parents, effectiveness must also be considered. Building on family literacy work with families in a wide range of circumstances (Nutbrown, Hannon, and Morgan, 2005; Nutbrown, Bishop, and Wheeler, 2015; Nutbrown *et al.,* 2022) including fathers in prison (Nutbrown *et al*., 2017), Cathy Nutbrown and her collaborators have demonstrated the effectiveness of working *with* parents. Most recently Nutbrown (2018) and her colleagues (Nutbrown, Bishop, and Wheeler, 2015; Nutbrown *et al.,* 2022) emphasise the importance of approaches to working with parents where practitioners enhance children's learning at home through the co-production of knowledge:

> We did not 'intervene' in families, nor work 'on' them as passive subjects, but embraced them as key and valued partners in enhancing their children's learning through co-produced knowledge. (Nutbrown, Bishop and Wheeler, 2015, p.266)

In light of the effectiveness of their approach, they propose collaboration and coproduction as a model for *any* parental engagement. Drawing upon international literature on effective parental partnership, involvement, and engagement, Nutbrown (2018) emphasises the building of relationships as crucial and advocates for the need to:

> Incorporate and build on the culture of their local communities and create meaningful synergies between families and early years practitioners. (Nutbrown, 2018, p.102)

Similarly, Pen Green's 'Parents' Involvement in their Children's Learning' (PICL), with the key principles underpinning their approach including 'a belief in parents' commitment to their children…(and)…of all our teachers, parents are often the smartest' (Whalley *et al.,* 2013 p.xii) has proven highly successful in promoting engagement with their families, with 89% taking part each year and parents reporting increased confidence in supporting their child's

learning. Whereas the research of Nutbrown and her colleagues has predominantly focussed on working with parents to improve the home language and literacy learning environment, the Pen Green approach goes beyond influencing parents' behaviours at home, to the coproduction of a shared understanding of the child, feeding back into the setting to influence the learning experiences provided.

In the EYFS, one of the guiding principles is a recognition that children learn and develop well when educators respond to children's individual interests, and they are therefore required to include knowledge of children's interests in planning learning experiences (DfE, 2021). It is here that an approach to pedagogy informed by FofK offers potential to enhance teaching and learning in the early years. Although not recognised in statutory guidance, there is an increasing recognition (Early Years Coalition, 2021) and promotion (Chesworth, 2022b) of the value to children's learning, development, and well-being of understanding, valuing, and building upon children and families' abilities, knowledge, and practices within the curriculum (FofK approach discussed in Section 1.3.2). However, in England, there is also an expectation (OFSTED, 2022) that educators in the EYFS will create their curriculum with reference to a top-level plan based on statutory educational programmes (DfE, 2021), carefully sequenced towards statutory expected outcomes for children. High-stakes accountability in England may lead them to play safe and place the emphasis in the delivery of their curriculum on structured pedagogic approaches, leaving little room in practice to respond to children's interests (Wood and Hedges, 2016), especially in Reception. Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness (Chesworth, 2022a) of the potential to incorporate academic goals with the social and cultural contexts of children's learning and development through co-creating curriculum with children and families. Contemporary research (Chesworth, 2016; Hedges and Cooper, 2018; Hedges, 2022; Chesworth *et al*., 2022) underpins a curriculum-making approach (Chesworth, 2022a,b) where educators value and build upon children and families' funds of knowledge (González *et al*. 2005) tuning in and responding to children's ideas and interests. Children's interests, ideas, and preoccupations are seen as a driving force for learning (Hedges, 2022), demonstrated multimodally through play and interactions (Chesworth, 2019). However, children's interests are also a driver for interaction and conversation (Hedges, 2022) motivating children to engage with responsive adults in meaningful experiences. Therefore, sharing

understanding of children's conversations at home, including both what they talk about - their interests and fascinations, and their communicative practices - offers potential to both enhance continuity between home and school and feed into the curriculum, especially in relation to communication and language.

2.5.4 Working with families in challenging times

Having long argued that models of good practice in working with parents should be more collaborative (Goodall, 2011), even equitable and participative (Goodall 2018), Goodall, a long-time advocate, now questions the very place of parental engagement when faced with conditions of structural and widening inequalities (Goodall, 2021). Although I have focussed concerns from the literature about the negative effects of educators' deficit perceptions of parents, especially particular groups of parents, more recently there is increasing evidence of early years settings (Early Education, 2020) and schools (National Education Union, 2021) being very aware, showing great concern, and even providing practical support for the challenges faced by their families in the 21st century (Wyness, 2020; Hannon *et al*., 2022). Within the context of reduced and fragmented support for families, a cost-of-living crisis, and the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown (Tracey *et al.,* 2022), it is important to consider that initiatives to increase parental engagement may place additional burden on families (Lareau, 1994). However, attesting to the benefits to children of working in partnership with parents to support language learning is undeniable. Rather than abandoning parental engagement initiatives, Nutbrown *et al.*, (2022) argue that appropriate approaches must be found. For Goodall (2021), appropriate ways of working with parents and researching those ways should:

> Be more critical, both of the system within which it takes place but also…of the presumptions on which it is founded. (Goodall, 2021, p.98)

A key presumption to be challenged is the fundamental premise, which seems to be taken for granted, that parents have a responsibility (Wyness, 2020) to cooperate in the drive to raise educational attainment and eliminate underachievement (OFSTED, 2013). Rather, it is important to recognise, value, and support what parents do for their own children, for its own sake (Goodall, 2021). Prioritising the educator's agenda, focussing on how to improve

the home learning/home communication environment in very specific ways gives insufficient recognition to the contribution parents and the home environment already make. Muschamp *et al.* (2007) argue for a broader view of the parental role to include the 'everyday' support parents provide from a social capital perspective that underpins and reinforces school learning, including the emotional support and encouragement they provide for their children. Such a perspective is increasingly recognised in other countries around the world (Sammons *et al., 2015;* Rouse and O'Brien, 2017; O'Toole *et al.,* 2019; Kambouri *et al*., 2021).

The work of Tizard and Hughes (1984) sought to offer that broader view, demonstrating that simple day-to-day activities offered educational value, including the conversations between the mothers studied and their children at home. The evidence considered in section 2.2 suggests that those everyday conversations add to the learning foundation, being crucial to children's holistic development including building the language foundation, but also supportive of social and emotional development and well-being (Whitebread, 2015) as well as knowledge of the world, particularly the social world (Tizard and Hughes, 1984).

Although Tizard and Hughes (1984) warn that such rich interactions are not guaranteed to take place at home, giving 'some mothers, perhaps if very depressed, or some childminders' (p.77) as the only examples of limitations. Their concern was to stress that the rich conversations took place in all of the homes studied. Whilst this finding challenges the concept of language poverty or deficit, it continues to support assertions that such rich interactions will necessarily, and perhaps naturally, be taking place in the home (Fisher, 2016; Hedges, 2022). In the twenty-first century, children's experiences are very different to those studied in the 1980s by Tizard and Hughes (1984). Not least, those four-year-olds would now almost certainly attend a full-time Reception Class, with most mothers working outside of the home, parents juggling work commitments and a diversity of care arrangements (Muschamp *et al.,* 2007); the influence of mobile technology (Olusoga, 2019) and the aftermath of Covid-19 (Tracey *et al., 2022).* Whilst, as previously discussed, campaigns focussing on influencing parental behaviours insist the advice proffered is 'simple', they do require episodes of sustained interaction which, it is important to recognise, will be influenced by individual circumstances (Greenwood *et al*., 2017). Any

work with parents, as well as research into parental engagement, must place 'individual families and their cultures at the heart of engagement' (Nutbrown *et al*., 2022, Chapter 8) but go further, and consider critically, wider system and societal influences on the family (Goodall, 2021). Therefore, my research attempts to explore both the nature of adults' conversations taking place in the homes and communities of children and the conditions surrounding them with a view to identifying potential structural influences at play.

2.5.5 The Quality of the Partnership Relationship

In considering appropriate ways of working with parents, the quality of the relationship created between parents and professionals is central (Muschamp *et al., 2007;* Rouse, 2012; Goodall, 2017; Rouse and O'Brien, 2017; Whalley *et al.*, 2017; O'Toole *et al*., 2019; Nutbrown *et al.,* 2022). Any initiative seeking to engage with families has a greater chance of success when relationships of 'trust, respect and partnership' are present (Fehrer, 2014, p.5), which essentially comes down to the relationship between individual educators and individual parents (Muschamp, *et al,* 2007). Through ethnographic research over time in a range of Irish early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings, Garrity and Canavan (2017) explored, in close focus, the process of relationship development between practitioners and parents, illuminating 'the dynamic, evolving, and complex nature of the relationship' (p.19). Their research demonstrated that shared interest in the child at the heart of the process was supportive of relationship development, with parents valuing involvement in decision-making about their child in a collaborative way. Similarly, Nutbrown *et al.* (2015) attribute the effectiveness of their approach to prioritising the one-to-one relationship established between parents and practitioners working together to coproduce learning opportunities in the home.

Underpinning authentic parent partnership in education would be the key belief that families are 'pivotal in the lives of their children and therefore should be empowered to engage'(Rouse, 2012, p. 21) with educators who recognise the strengths that families bring as experts in their own children, and value them as equal partners. Authentic partnership would reflect collaboration, mutual respect, and reciprocity (Rouse and O'Brien, 2017) which are inherent in a funds of knowledge (Moll *et al*., 1992; González *et al*., 2005) inspired

approach. In such a relationship, when applied to a focus on influencing parents' behaviour to enhance the home learning/home communication environment, empowerment could be seen as the educator providing the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources that enable active participation (Rouse, 2012; Nutbrown *et al.,* 2022). However, empowerment should also include emphasis on the ongoing benefit to their child's development of parents' contributions and the ongoing less 'schoolified' features, which provide the foundation for learning, including the place of warm and supportive relationships in which parents offer enriching experiences and interactions. (O'Toole *et al., 2019).*

Essential to building relationships with parents is the understanding and valuing of the family funds of knowledge, belief systems, and culture (as previously discussed). However, Garrity and Canavan (2017) also observed that relationships with parents grew within an 'ethic of care' (p.747) which recognises and supports the wider needs of families, including creating opportunities to foster social capital. As the relationships developed, practitioners developed confidence in responding in highly personalised ways, unique to the family. Indeed, many schools in the UK report taking direct action to support their families, for example establishing family liaison/support posts and even direct support such as setting up food banks (Adams, 2019). The Pen Green approach (Whalley *et al., 2017)* goes beyond recognition and appreciation of the diversity challenges faced by the families they serve in a deprived area of Northampton. Integral to their work with parents is a commitment to include parents in the development and delivery of a wide range of support services based in and around their centre, which aim to empower rather than to blame.

A pioneer in both initiating ways of working with parents to enhance learning and researching the process in the UK, Wolfendale (1992) led the way in considering the conception of empowerment in parent partnership, calling for the key principles of 'rights, equality, reciprocity and empowerment' (p.2) to underpin any work with parents. Within this empowerment model, initiatives in working with parents would embody equality and reciprocity as discussed, but also offer parents opportunities to 'learn, to grow and explore possibilities... and…influence' (p.3). However, in conceptualising empowerment, Wolfendale (1992) also highlighted the wider responsibilities of community and society in

supporting the family, as well as the place of political will to provide the necessary resources. An empowerment-focused perspective would recognise :

> That with the appropriate resources, parents from all kinds of social and educational backgrounds can develop and maximise their competencies and potential as parents (p.47).

Analysis of effective home-school partnerships from a bioecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) discussed in greater detail in Section 1.3.1 recognises the importance of the relationship between parent and educator. Authentic parent partnership relationships, based on equality and reciprocity would recognise the different but complementary roles of the parent and the educator, maximising linkages within the mesosystem in order to enhance the proximal processes both at home and at school to optimise the child's holistic development. However, it would also look further, to the involvement of the wider community and society in providing opportunities that support and care for families, enhancing their capacity to provide the nurturing interactions, so vital to language learning, but also the holistic development of the child.

2.5.6 Working with Parents Summary

It is generally agreed that the combination of improvements in the home learning environment (HLE), together with the provision of high-quality early years education and care, offer great promise in promoting the educational attainment of all children - with particular benefits for disadvantaged children (Bertram and Pascal 2014; Sammons *et al., 2015;* Payler, 2017; DfE, 2021). Influencing parenting style and behaviours to support provision of a high-quality home communication and learning environment have been identified as targets for action with great potential, and further research is indicated into the process of effective engagement with parents to bring about the desired improvements (EEF, 2018).

Schools' focus on raising attainment through recruiting parents as fellow educators, with a tendency toward the primacy of the knowledge and perceptions of the educator, can create unrealistic expectations of parents as well as deficit perceptions which, in turn, may harm the quality of relationships between parents and educators. However, recent qualitative research is building a body of evidence indicating that approaches fostering collaboration with parents offer promise. Effective parent partnerships are likely to be founded on more equitable relationships built on trust, a shared interest in the child, appreciation of the diversity of family contexts, and support rather than judgement. Authentic partnerships enable the two-way flow of knowledge and understanding between home and school where educators recognise and appreciate the diverse contributions of families, as well as the capacities of children. They enable the co-construction of understanding of the unique child which opens the possibilities for the creation of meaningful experiences and interactions and enhancing continuity between home and school practices.

Undoubtedly, the relationship between parents and educators is complex, with differing priorities, expectations, and understandings. However, even with the very best of intentions, focusing on parents' behaviours alone may perpetuate deficit discourses and any research into parental engagement must consider the wider community and societal context (Wolfendale, 1992; Goodall, 2021). In researching adults' conversations with their children, my research seeks to explore conditions and contexts in the home and wider community which may promote sustained conversations as well as those which may hinder. It also explores the collaborative research process itself as an equitable and reciprocal experience, with the potential for coproduced learning and knowledge.

2.6 Conclusion to Literature Review: Locating my research within the potential for a language development partnership

In this literature review, I have reviewed three bodies of literature in consideration of the role and potential value of partnership between parents and educators in supporting the language development of children in the early years of their education. Literature in the fields of child development; speech, language, and communication; and epidemiology

highlights the importance of the quality of the child's communication environment and responsive interactions with their primary caregivers. However, it may also engender deficit conceptions in parenting practices, with some parents perceived as failing to offer their children the necessary quality in conversation within the home that would enhance educational attainment. In contrast, sociocultural theorists dispute a deficit view, arguing that if a gap exists, it is the failure of the education system to recognise, value, and incorporate the language practices of the home and community, thereby disadvantaging certain groups. More recently, the two fields seem to be coming closer together with the recognition that, even without the quality features traditionally valued by education (i.e., conversations in the image of the educators), the interactional and relational features of conversation in the home are foundational to establishing the motivation for sustained two-way interactions, essential to language building. The final body of literature reviewed relates to models of engagement between educators and parents and proposes that equitable, respectful collaboration which recognises and values the distinct, complementary contribution of the experiences provided in the home and community (as embedded in the FofK approach) have the potential to ease children's navigation between home and school practices.

My research attempts to contribute to the understanding of the complementary roles of parents and educators in young children's language development in the later stages of the EYFS. It seeks to explore *with parents* the perceived nature, value, and purposes of conversations with their young children as well as factors which may support or hinder conversation. The fundamental aims are to understand and highlight the unique contributions of families, which may be complementary to educative approaches. In researching with parents, I aim to respect the family and acknowledge the pressures of family life, challenging deficit discourses. The research seeks to explore hindrances to, but also the potential for, and enablers of, language-stimulating conversations within the family and community. It is motivated by the potential of a flow of knowledge between home and school, in relation to conversation with their children, as a valuable strategy in supporting children's language learning. Therefore, my study further aims to explore the possible value of the insights provided through the collaborative research itself.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Overview of Chapter

Methodology can be considered 'the activity or business of choosing, reflecting upon, and justifying the methods chosen' (Wellington, 2015 p.33). In this chapter I will explain my research and the decisions and choices I made, taking a critical and reflexive approach. I will first explain the factors influencing the aims and methodological approach I took and consider the research paradigm(s) in which my project sits. I will then justify my research design and the research methods I chose, taking into consideration the suitability of the methods to explore the research question, whilst also aligning with the values and principles guiding the research. In particular, I will consider, in depth, the approaches of collaborative and participatory research and critically analyse where my research lies in relation to these approaches. I will also explain and justify the decisions I made in response to the difficulties I encountered due to the national lockdown caused by COVID-19 throughout 2020 and the implication of those changes in relation to my original aims.

3.2 Drivers of the Research and Ethical Reflexivity

Coe (2017) suggests that it is not necessarily adherence to a particular paradigm or worldview of research that will determine the approach a researcher will take. Nevertheless, they must understand their own position in relation to their views on the nature of reality (ontology) and how knowledge of reality can be gained (epistemology). Furthermore, it is important to examine and understand the values that will underpin any enquiry (axiology). Creswell (2014) refers to these influences as shaping a researcher's worldview, or positionality (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012), which then informs the choices made in designing and carrying out their research. Throughout my thesis, I will take a reflexive and reflective approach and begin here by recognising that my research aims and questions, as well as the methodological approach I planned and undertook, have been influenced by my awareness and understanding of key paradigms and approaches to research, but also my own personal history, politics, and ethical perspective as:

> We do not enter a research project as a neutral vessel, rather we take with us our values and politics, gender, ethnicity, etc. We also take our assumptions, categories, feelings and previous experiences. This is inevitable but it is important that we should reflect on and be transparent about the way this impacts on our research.
> (Munn-Giddings, 2017, p.72)

Before presenting and discussing my research strategy in detail, I outline my own researcher positionality and how practicalities, including the COVID-19 pandemic, affected the design of my study.

3.3 Researcher Positionality

3.3.1 Professional Experience

Before becoming a teacher in early years, I had been working in the professions allied to medicine for seventeen years and was trained to use the evidence of large-scale randomly controlled (ideally double-blind) trials to inform my clinical practice. These early experiences inevitably influenced my epistemology (the way that I understand knowledge to be produced) leading to an underlying desire to be certain of 'what works', intending to use this knowledge to offer effective therapies or interventions to improve practice. Concerning my more recent research interests (influences on language development of children in the early years, including the role of parents), such an approach would translate into seeking to find 'hard' evidence of effective 'interventions', e.g., ways of engaging with parents to influence precise parental behaviours, which would, in turn, have an impact upon children's language development. This scientific, positivist approach to developing knowledge implies a realist ontological perspective based on the belief that the controlling of variables and elimination of bias, becoming an objective outsider, yields the 'true' picture (Cohen *et al.,* 2018).

As discussed in my literature review, such scientific (positivist) approaches have yielded the 'hard evidence' for the potential benefits of enhancing the home communication environment as well as detailed guidance on specific parental behaviours around interactions with their children which are most likely to bring about those intended benefits

(see for example, Leech and Rowe (2020). However, to produce such 'hard' evidence of effectiveness in relation to parental engagement, standardised approaches such as the teaching of pre-determined skills and knowledge in a specific programme or intervention, tend to be applied so that their impact can be quantified (Barrett, 2009, cited in Whalley, 2017; Jarvis and Georgeson, 2017). Attempting to apply standardised approaches aimed at parents' behaviours seems to be at odds with the growing body of literature suggesting that respectful partnerships, built on the recognition of parents' contributions, knowledge, and strengths, should underpin any approaches to working with parents, enabling a two-way flow of understanding (Wolfendale, 1992; Nutbrown *et al*., 2007; Pahl and Burnett, 2013; Whalley *et al., 2017;* Goodall, 2018; Nutbrown *et al.,*2022). In considering their position on the evidence available, the Education Endowment Fund (EEF, 2018) notes the effectiveness of programmes to promote parental engagement to be disappointing overall, recommending that further research is needed into the process.

My research idea stemmed from my experience as an early years lead and teacher, seeking to develop understanding of the opportunities for language-building conversations in the home and community, and conditions that may enable or hinder them. In doing so it aimed to identify strengths that may be built upon, but also contribute to the understanding of structural influences which may act as hindrances to those conversations, enhancing understanding of potential challenges for parents. I was also keen to explore research approaches that respected parents as active participants, enabling the co-construction of understanding within their own family situation (Nutbrown *et al*., 2015; Nutbrown, 2018). Therefore, in order to research with participants and co-construct knowledge and understanding in the natural setting of the home and community, naturalistic, qualitative research (Denscombe, 2017) was necessary. Qualitative research offers the opportunity to complement positivist research (Bryman, 2016), offering in-depth understanding of the social phenomena to answer those 'what' and 'how' questions (Silverman, 2021). To explore an approach to research which addressed power dynamics in research, I was drawn to the participatory approach advocated by Whalley *et al.* (2017). Flewitt and Ang (2020) suggest that qualitative methods of data collection, which recognise the involvement of the participants, align with a participatory approach and are accessible to both non and new researchers. Furthermore, participatory approaches also appeared to address one of the

axiological drivers of my research, that it should be of value, and I will now unpack what I mean by value.

3.3.2 Purpose and Potential Value of the Research

It is generally held that the purpose of any research is the advancement of knowledge, as in the following quotation:

> Research is, after all, producing knowledge about the world – in our case, the world of educational practice. (Merriam, 1998, p. 3, cited in Yazan, 2015)

However, Merriam's definition suggests the purpose of research to be the production of knowledge for its own sake. Just as other doctoral researchers surveyed by Clough and Nutbrown (2012), I was troubled by a desire for my research to be of some practical value, which as an education researcher, would suggest some change to educational practice. Inherent in participatory research, is the promise of the possibility for change or action. At participant level, greater self-awareness may be generated through dialogue, reflection, and active involvement in the research process, thereby acting as a catalyst for individual change (Flewitt and Ang, 2020), or even collective action.

At the outset of the research, I envisaged that the knowledge co-produced with parents of children attending one particular partnership school setting had the potential to be of value in several ways. At the very least, for the parents themselves, I imagined that exploring conversation with their young children in their own home could provide insights into the conditions that support or hinder conversations in their own individual context which may subsequently empower them to make changes should they wish. For the setting, I imagined that insights gained in the collaborative process with the parents had the potential to improve practitioners' awareness of the unique contributions of the parents as well as possible constraints, fostering the two-way flow of understanding which may enhance relationships. Furthermore, fostering practitioners' understanding of the nature of conversation within the homes of the children in their class and the conditions that enabled it to thrive there, including the subjects that engaged the children, may also offer possibilities for fostering continuity in communicative practices between home and school

and thereby support interaction and conversation with the children at school. A more ambitious possibility envisioned was that the research may have the potential to provoke and support local action at school or community level, such as the co-creation of new opportunities for language-building interactions. However, this potential for local 'action' was only a possibility in my intended design, where the research was focussed on the experiences of parents whose children attended the original research site, and I will return to a consideration of where the actual research conducted sits within a continuum of the participatory approach in section 3.4.

3.3.3 Practicalities

Integral to the original conception of participatory enquiry is the role of the researcher as an insider, or at least coming alongside the community in which the research is situated (Denzin and Lincoln (2017) and contributing to the potential to bring about action resulting in change for the better. Despite the welcome of the partnership school and my willingness to dedicate time to building relationships, the practicalities of travel and the limitations on my time reinforced my position as an outsider and limited the potential for local action. When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in March 2020, I had already approached two more local partnership nursery schools, but their closure and the unprecedented pressures on schools and families at that time, made school-based research impossible. The only way for the research to continue was online via personal contacts. As a result, my subsequent participants were located in different parts of the country and the research focussed purely on the families. This change led me to question if the research undertaken could be considered participatory, and the following section offers a consideration of definitions and understandings of participative and collaborative approaches, followed by an evaluation of my project in terms along a continuum of participatory approaches.

3.4 The Continuum of Participatory Approaches: Participatory Research, Collaborative Research, and Co-production

3.4.1 The Origins of Participatory Research

The origins of participatory research in education lie in South America, with the democratic perspectives of critical theorists such as Freire (1970), focusing on the social realities and empowerment of marginalised communities. From a critical perspective, research can and should be undertaken by 'ordinary' people rather than remaining the domain of the elite few and must incorporate a call for action. Participatory research as an approach to human enquiry (Reason, 1994; Heron and Reason, 1997), draws on those original ideas and Reason (1994) sees research itself as:

> 'A participative process, about research *with* people rather than *on* people…about inquiry as a means by which people engage together to explore some significant aspect of their lives, to understand it better and to transform their action so as to meet their purposes more fully (p.1)'

Therefore, participatory research can be seen to have a political edge, traditionally carrying with it the intent to empower those whose voices tend not to be heard, democratizing knowledge and aiming to provoke change for the better. Participatory research emphasises collaboration between the researcher and the researched, being respectful of local practices, and giving voice to the community in which the research takes place. Inherent in the definition is the importance placed upon learning from one another as well as the prospect of local improvement.

As discussed, I have been influenced by the participatory approaches of the Pen Green Team (McKinnon, 2014; Whalley *et al*., 2017), predominantly because of the human and ethical stance of their research. However, there is also an epistemic argument for adopting a participatory approach to research - that the unique insights of participants contribute to the quality of the knowledge produced. Indeed, Bergold and Thomas (2012) argue participatory research is a requirement when attempting to research with 'those whose lifeworld and meaningful actions are under study'(p.192), to offer deep insight into the unique contexts and dynamic nature of those actions. Their perspective on participatory

research places the focus on collaboration rather than action or change, emphasising the epistemological value rather than the political intent.

Miller and Crabtree (2005) pioneered and promoted a participatory approach to community medicine, arguing that within the traditional, positivist discourse of medicine, uniform approaches are dominant and likely to miss the hidden complexity of day to day lived experiences of patients at local level. There is resonance here with my research in that I was focussing on the intersection between the medical/scientific research of developmental psychologists (Ang and Harmey, 2019; Rowe and Snow, 2020), the 'what works' agenda promoting parental engagement (EEF, 2018) and the day to day, lived experiences of families with children in their early stages of their school careers. I envisioned that my research may shine light on the complexities of influences on conversation with young children within their home and community, with the potential for action or change. However, once the opportunity for advocacy and local influence was lost, it was important to question whether my research could, in fact, be considered participatory.

3.4.2 The Continuum of Participatory Approaches

Confusion about what constitutes 'genuine' participatory research and the terminology used to define it is not uncommon (Pickard *et al*., 2022). Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation is frequently referred to as a way to understand gradations in participation and to evaluate projects making participatory claims. Designed to consider citizen's participation in urban planning processes, the model depicts a hierarchy of participation where citizen participation equates to citizens' power in determining outcomes. On the lower rung, non-participation involves passive involvement (participants to be cured or educated), moving through informing and consulting (considered degrees of tokenism), to partnership, delegated power, and, finally, citizen control. In applying a hierarchy of participation specifically to the business of research (Holman, 1987; Fletcher, 1988, Fletcher 2014), important questions to consider are: where does the power lie? Who owns the research? Who benefits from it? What are the characteristics of the relationships? Inherent are the ideals of democracy and social justice running throughout the process, from initial intent to acting on the impactions of the findings. Such ideals suggest the need for the

insider researcher to be embedded in the community of study, where there is a prospect that action can result. Alternatively, the outsider researcher must have the skills, time, and resources to align with the community, build relationships, and act as a researcher activist (Fletcher, 1988).

Therefore, there are challenges in applying Arnstein's model directly to mainstream, academic research, as it would suggest that *true* participatory research or best practice would *always* be represented at the top, with power and control resting with the participants. Flewitt and Ang (2020) contend that the majority of participatory research projects will necessarily fall somewhere along a continuum, depending on both the research aims and individual circumstances, and that it is important to acknowledge at the outset that the research may not lead to any action or resolution. Nevertheless, they argue that research may still be considered participatory as long as the researcher holds the belief that participants are key stakeholders with the right to authority in the study. As such, participants are 'recognised as experts in their own lives and that they are enabled to express their views in ways of their choosing and their views are prioritised' (p. 88). This requires a 'mindset' (Pickard *et al*., 2022, p. 83); a belief in the value of the contributions of the community to be researched. Adopting such a mindset, the researcher recognises, respects, and welcomes the two-way flow of knowledge and the learning that may take place, recognising that the particular insights provided by the participants enable greater depths of understanding. Therefore, in considering participatory research, the researcher is taking both an ethical/political stance and an epistemological stance, since participatory research:

> Requires an epistemological and methodological framing that recognises the significance, usefulness and relevance of involving research partners as equal partners in the production of knowledge and foregrounds the unique insights they offer into their lives and communities. (Flewitt and Ang, 2020, p.82)

Encompassing much of the participatory philosophy, including seeking to address power relations in knowledge production, 'co-production' in research has emerged as a theory and practice of researching '*with* communities…offering greater control over the research process and providing opportunities to learn and reflect from their experience' (Durose *et al.,* 2012, p.2). Rather than a hierarchy, where best-practice may seem to be positioned with

participant, citizen or community control of the research, Durose *et al*. (2012) emphasise the need for researchers to understand that the way they carry out their research will determine the way they represent and are accountable to their community of participants. Whether the research is referred to as co-production or participatory, normative perspectives (Durose *et al*., 2012; Flewitt and Ang, 2020; Pickard *et al*., 2022) consider that levels of participation will vary in practice with projects falling somewhere along a continuum, their place influenced by the aims of the research as well as the particular context and situations of the study. Therefore, the researcher's reflexivity is vital in working towards co-production or participation (Durose *et al*., 2012). It 'enables us to highlight the political dynamics of our endeavours' (Orr and Bennett, 2009, p.85-87 cited in Durose *et al*., 2012). For that reason, I evaluated the research that I actually carried out, reflecting on the comparative responsibilities of myself (as the doctoral researcher) and the parent participants for different aspects of the research process.

3.4.3 Evaluation of Project Approach within a Continuum of Participation

My guiding principles throughout the research were to recognise the parents as experts in their own family life and to ensure a research approach which offered choice and flexibility to enable them to share their experiences and express their own interpretations. In section 3.7.1 I discuss how flexibility was achieved by using a 'research menu' approach (Flewitt *et al.,* 2018). During the research, parents identified, and reflected upon, particular episodes of conversation and made decisions over which of those episodes would be the focus of our shared reflections. In this way, the parents were acknowledged as collaborators and the findings were co-created between us, with an emphasis on 'experiential and practical knowing' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017, p192). Once the data collection began, every attempt was made to ensure a collaborative approach, recognising and valuing the potential learning taking place for both parties – to research *with* rather than *on* (Heron and Reason, 2006). A constituent of the enquiry was the opportunity for the parents to inquire into their own situation, offering the potential to gain insights which may empower them to make changes should they wish. This 'action turn' (Ospina *et al*., 2008) was maintained in my study, despite the enforced changes. Table 1 demonstrates the comparative responsibilities of myself and the collaborating parents for different aspects of the research process. The ticks represent the level of participation achieved for each aspect.

	Doctoral Researcher	Parents
Understanding field	✓✓✓ Scoping and review of academic literature in the field. Professional understanding.	✓✓✓ Experiential understanding of the unique context, child, and family.
Defining the issue to be researched	✓✓✓ Necessarily defined in advance to submit a proposal to university for ethical approval.	✓ Some refinement in each home. Developed iteratively through the period of data collection.
Forming questions	✓✓✓ The research questions were planned before the research as part of submission for ethical approval.	X Research questions were determined in advance and did not change in any significant way
Contributing to how the topic should be researched Key Decisions	✓✓✓ Determined overall methodological approach and research design. Suggested possible methods of data collection. Enabled and supported parents to choose a suitable method of data collection.	✓ Once the data collection began, the parents made key decisions concerning the data collection methods they used in different circumstances and the episodes they chose to focus on.
Dealing with problems	✓✓✓ Throughout the process, worked collaboratively to support data collection.	✓✓✓ Constantly problem-solved issues relating to data collection to find a method that worked for their family.
Collecting data -	✓✓✓ Interviews	✓✓✓ Conversation logs
Analysis and interpretation of data	✓✓✓ Detailed thematic analysis and 'scholarly' interpretation of data.	✓ Reflections on the data collected in the home were integral to analysis and interpretation.
Reporting, publishing	✓✓✓ Full responsibility for reporting and publishing thesis for EdD	x
Making use of the research findings	✓✓✓ Findings and process of collaborative research enhanced professional learning.	✓ Indications that the parents used the insights gained in their own family setting.
Key: ✓✓✓ Full contribution ✓✓ Some contribution ✓minimal contribution x No contribution		

Table 1 Responsibilities and Contributions to the Research Process
Adapted from Marsh *et al.* (2015)

Therefore, having carefully and reflexively reviewed the research I carried out, in the light of the theoretical perspectives discussed in this section, it can be seen that the essence of a participatory, collaborative approach was maintained.

3.4.4 Research Paradigm: Ontological and Epistemological Considerations

Having discussed the logic and rationale that Punch (2011) argues would lie at the heart of any research strategy, I will now explain where I see my research in relation to the major research paradigms.

Epistemology

Although it is more usual to consider ontology (the nature of reality) before considering epistemology (how we come to understand reality – develop knowledge), my intent throughout, on co-producing knowledge with parents, has been the dominant influence on my research strategy and needs to be considered first. Seeking to research *with*, rather than *on* people, driven by the axiological considerations discussed, requires that I appreciate that the knowledge I was seeking to generate would be a co-construction of the perceptions of both myself and the parents. The parents' reflections on conversation with their child relied upon their interpretations, and our joint reflections enabled further interpretation before my final analysis was presented in this thesis. As such, I take a subjectivist perspective to epistemology, recognising that the knowledge generated will represent a 'reconstruction coalescing around a consensus' (Guba and Lincoln, 2011 p. 166).

In turn, the axiological consideration of seeking participation, has implications when thinking about the nature of the knowledge generated (Reason, 1994; Heron and Reason, 2006), as well as its value, how such value is determined, and by whom (Ospina *et al*., 2008). Inherent in my research question, is the search for at least two different types of knowledge. The first is generalisable, theory-building knowledge, as may be generated by traditional qualitative research with post-positive rigour (Guba and Lincoln, 2011). Such generalisable knowledge would have academic value, add to the body of knowledge of the home communication environment and be reportable, therefore available to other researchers and educators. It is possible to see in the structure of my research question, that from the outset, the predominant purpose was to co-produce theory-building knowledge about the nature of, and influences on, conversation with very young children in their home and community. However, the participatory intent also placed an emphasis on 'experiential and practical knowing' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017 p.192). Such local knowledge

through participation (Ospina, 2008) would not necessarily be generalisable, but may offer value to the parent participants themselves. Indeed, that constituent of my enquiry, to explore the value of the insights gained to the participants themselves, strengthened through the project.

Ontology

Having emphasised the importance I placed on being actively involved rather than objective in the research, the ontological perspective most commonly associated would traditionally be one of interpretivism (Cohen *et al*., 2018). However, I was troubled by the ontological perspective of interpretivism that reality is a *totally* 'human construct' (Wellington, 2015, p. 26) which suggests that such a study would generate only personal perceptions of the phenomenon under study, a construction of 'reality'. Critical realism considers this conflation of epistemology and ontology to be an epistemic fallacy (Anderson, 2013; Fryer, 2020) and sees a world that exists independently of our knowledge of it. This separation of ontology from epistemology recognises that whilst knowledge is socially constructed, structures, objects, or interactions found in the social world would have an impact on people independently of their understanding or perceptions (Gorski, 2013). Furthermore, 'critical' refers to a recognition of the structures that influence the social world, seeing them as generative mechanisms, which, although they may not be directly observable, can be reasonably considered to influence the actions of agents in the social world (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, critical realism allows for, indeed requires explanation and the consideration of causality through interaction with the phenomena in its real-life setting, seeking to identify and understand actual existing entities that are likely to have influenced people's experiences. Such a perspective enables a more assertive representation of the findings of qualitative research. As the section which follows will demonstrate, I therefore designed my research tools to enable an understanding of things, people, relationships, events, and structures which may influence the parents' experiences of conversation with their young children. I further included in my data analysis a layer of interpretation through the lens of critical realism, by reflexively reviewing the themes identified in the data (Braun and Clark, 2021), to consider possible structures and entities as well as individual behaviours and understandings.

3.5 Research Design

Although typified by flexible design, when planning and conducting qualitative research, Robson and McCartan (2016) recommend that the novice researcher studies and employs one of the main traditions: case study, ethnography, or grounded theory. However, research design does not necessarily follow a neat and uncomplicated route (Sikes, 2004). Indeed Wellington (2015, p.3) recognises it can be 'messy, frustrating and unpredictable'. The ultimate design will be shaped not only by the ontological and epistemological perspectives of the researcher as well as their values and ethics but also by practical circumstances as they seek to find the most appropriate way to address their research question.

As Sikes warns:

> To present a research design as being a straightforward, technical matter of 'horses for courses', with researchers 'objectively' choosing the most appropriate, if not the only possible, methodology and procedures for a specific research project, would be misleading and even dishonest and immoral. (p.17/18)

In this spirit, I will demonstrate how my research strategy evolved throughout data collection and analysis, influenced by the opportunities and challenges I encountered, including the COVID-19 pandemic and my endeavours to respond reflectively and iteratively. Case studies and ethnographies have many similarities (White *et al*., 2009), limitations on both my own time and the time demands that could be made of the parents meant that the case study approach seemed the most suitable. However, the adaptations I made to my research design due to difficulties in recruiting participants and the impact of COVID-19, influenced the nature of the case study research I undertook. Therefore, I will now outline my original research plan and the specific adaptations made before defining and characterising the qualitative case study research undertaken.

3.5.1 Original Research Plan and Adaptations

Originally, I intended to focus on research with parents from one particular school. It was chosen because it was located in an area with high levels of economic deprivation with a head teacher who was keen to support the research, as supporting children's early language development and working with parents were key aspects of the school's development plan. Initially, I had planned a focus group as well as the more in-depth individual, collaborative research in the home. However, my approaches to parents in the original research site failed to yield any participants for a focus group and only one participant for the individual research in the home. At the point where the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I had approached two further nursery schools, but due to their closure in March 2020 and ongoing social distancing measures through the summer term, school-based research became impossible. Therefore, it was decided to adapt the research design to centre on the individual, collaborative research with parents, to recruit participants through personal connections, and to carry out the interviews remotely via video conferencing. These enforced changes influenced the nature of my sample (discussed in section 3.5.4), but they also changed the nature of the case study. The research changed from focussing on a particular parent population, in a particular location, to a series of distributed, individual cases (discussed in detail below). However, in terms of the data collection, the only change was that the interviews were carried out online rather than in person. Despite my initial trepidation with the technology, for the parents in this study, interviews online worked very well. They offered flexibility in when the interviews took place and improved accessibility by removing the need for each party to physically travel to a suitable meeting place.

3.5.2 Qualitative Case Study Research

Although there is 'no single understanding of 'case study'…and…what constitutes a case is disputed' (Schwandt and Gates, 2018, p. 341), it is generally held that case study research is an empirical research approach where focus is brought to the in-depth study of a particular 'case' of something, and it is the particularity of the case that is important (Moore *et al*., 2012; Starman, 2013; Yin, 2014; Ellinger and McWhorter, 2016; Harrison *et al*., 2017; Yin, 2018). Stake (1995) advises the case can be either a particular child, family, or situation (an

intrinsic case study) or a particular issue (an instrumental case study). The purpose of my research was to explore conversation with very young children within the particular, natural context of their own home and community, and to represent the findings holistically. I was therefore drawn to an instrumental case study research design because:

> A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident. (Yin, 2014, p. 16)

As the phenomenon I wished to explore was adults' conversation with very young children in their homes and community, it would be impossible to separate the phenomenon from the context, and a qualitative approach, with data gathered in situ, would be needed. Qualitative case studies share many characteristics with qualitative research more generally (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), including the search for an in-depth understanding through an inductive analytic process, resulting in a rich description of the situation under study. However, for Merriam (1998, cited in Yazan, 2015), it is the delimitation of the case that defines a qualitative study as a case study. The researcher must be able to 'specify the phenomenon of interest and draw its boundaries' (Yazan, p. 139). In my study, the phenomenon of interest, conversation with very young children, is bounded by place and context. Initially, this was the home and local community of children aged 3-5 in one particular locality, but it was always intended that I focus on different families as this would offer 'better understanding, and perhaps better theorising' (Stake, 2005 p. 446). However, due to the challenges of recruiting participants and the lockdown due to COVID-19, my study became a multiple or collective case study (Stake, 2005) where subsequent cases were studied in different locations. Nevertheless, the focus of study remained the phenomenon, and so the instrumental case remained bounded by the home and community of children aged 3-5. The case was further delimited by time, with the enquiry taking place over a series of no more than five interviews with each participant.

Baxter and Jack (2008) offer a useful categorisation of case study research based on the purpose of the case study: to describe, explore, or explain. Although Robson and McCartan (2016) caution that the particularity of case studies has implications for the generalisations that can be made, Yin (2018, p.21) argues that 'case studies can…offer important insights

not provided by RCTs (randomly controlled trials) which focus purely on effectiveness.' Therefore, case studies offer the opportunity to offer explanations, but in the natural, unique, and dynamic context where the investigator has no control (Cohen *et al*., 2018). Willis (2007), cited in White *et al*. (2009) argues that case study design can also accommodate a critical perspective as case studies are about 'real people and real situations…and illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study' (p.21). Yin (2018) further argues that case studies are particularly suitable where the intent is to consider causality, to seek to understand and explain the 'how' or 'why' (p.4) of a contemporary social phenomenon. Case studies are, therefore, congruent with a realist ontology. As my research sought to go beyond the description of the lived experiences of the phenomenon of interest (conversation with young children), to explore and understand what may influence it, and offer some explanation of the conditions in which conversation with very young children may thrive or be hindered, a case study offered the most suitable approach for my study. Therefore, my study design can be seen to be a collective, instrumental case study, employing qualitative research methods. The phenomenon under study is adults' conversation with young children and the case, or unit of analysis, is the conversational environment surrounding those young children in their homes and community.

3.5.3 Recruitment of Participants

Participants at the initial research site, the partnership school, were recruited with the support of the school which advised and enabled me to recruit through their existing processes for engaging with parents. This included meeting parents at a parents' breakfast, parents' group coffee mornings, and spending some time in the reception class - meeting parents at the beginning and end of sessions. I provided information on the project which could be included in the school newsletter, for the website, and be shared via word of mouth or social media, and in parent meetings and events. I produced an information leaflet and a short video for parents who may have low literacy levels or who had missed any of the face-to-face contacts. I also produced a letter, with a tear-off slip to go home in the book bags of children in the reception, inviting parents to take part in the research. Despite our best efforts, by the end of the Summer term of 2019, only one participant had completed the collaborative research in the home, giving the first full case study. This

spanned the summer holidays and was completed in the Autumn term of 2019. The restrictions on face-to-face contact due to the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated that I move the research online and recruit subsequent participants through personal contacts. Ethical approval was achieved for the research to take place remotely and for me to recruit through personal contacts, including family. The parent participants in Case 2 were recruited through personal family contacts in the North of England and are extended family members. The final parent participant (Case 3) was recruited through personal contacts at a local partnership school, where I am a governor.

3.5.4 Sampling Strategy

My sampling strategy was purposive, where sampling is driven by the aims of the study and the research question (Bryman, 2016) so that a sample is chosen from whom the most can be learned (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, the participants were chosen because they had experience of the phenomenon under study (conversation with their young children aged 3-5). As discussed, recruitment was difficult and further affected by COVID-19 so the resultant sample must also be considered a convenience sample, in that it was made up of those who were 'merely' accessible (Cohen *et al*., 2018). My sampling strategy and how it developed is congruent with qualitative case study research. As Stake (1995) notes, the research question is the most important driver of the design of the study and the route taken is not necessarily that imagined at the outset.

3.5.5 Information about the Participants

The following table gives contextual information about the participants in the study.

Case	Family Information
Case 1 Ms A and Caitlin	Caitlin Age 5 (62m) White British Lives: Coastal Challenge Town, with Mum, Dad, and elder sister (age 8). Dad crane driver, Mum works part-time from home as an accountant.
Case 2 Ms K, Mr P and Frieda	Frieda Age 3 (40m) White British Lives: City, North of England with Mum – works part-time as a retail assistant. No siblings. Dad shares parenting. Works full-time as a student engagement coordinator, partner, Sophie, works full-time teacher.
Case 3 Ms N and Nathan	Nathan Age 5 (61m) White and Black Caribbean Lives: South East London with Mum, Dad, elder sister (age 10), elder brother (18). Dad Transport Manager, Mum does not work outside the home at present.

Table 2 Information about the participants in the study

3.6 The Pilot Study

Before beginning data collection, I piloted the data collection tools (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) with a colleague's partner who had a child of the same age as the participants. As a result of their feedback, I designed a more explicit Conversation Log proforma (Appendix 2a) which included details of the suggested recording methods and the reflective prompts. Following their feedback, I was also able to provide more detailed advice to the parent participants regarding methods of recording.

3.7 Methods of Data Collection 1: Research Menu and Conversation Logs

The methods of data collection were chosen to achieve the key aim of the study, which was to explore, in depth, with parents, conversations with their very young children in their homes and community. To build up this holistic picture, the parents were asked to develop conversation logs comprising of episodes of conversation with their young child within their

home and community that they had observed, both 'in general' and 'in particular', and to reflect on those episodes at the time and later in discussion with me during semi-structured interviews.

3.7.1 The Development and Use of 'Research Menu'

Marsh (2015) and Scott (2018) have demonstrated that parents can be active participants in research, playing an invaluable role in both the collection and interpretation of data. In line with the participatory mindset and to achieve co-production of knowledge, the methods of data collection needed to be as flexible as possible to ensure that the parents had some ownership and choice in how and when they collected the data (Flewitt and Ang, 2020). At the initial meeting with the parents, I outlined the suggested methods, emphasising flexibility. However, to support them in their research and to focus reflection on the key aims of the project, the parents' choices were detailed in a very brief structured 'research menu' based on work by Flewitt *et al.* (2018). The research menu outlined their choices of methods of recording the episodes of conversation but also provided a structure for their reflections, and an example can be seen in Appendix 2a.

3.7.2 Conversation Logs

The parents were asked to observe, record, and reflect on sustained conversations with their child both 'in general' during the course of the day, for about a week, and 'specifically' i.e., particular, chosen episodes of sustained conversation with their children. Therefore, as well as noticing and noting the range of contexts in which sustained conversations occurred over time, they also identified specific episodes of conversation which they would reflect on later and discuss in greater depth with me in the semi-structured interviews. Their notes on conversation in general were recorded in the General Log (Appendix 2a) and the specific episodes in the Specific Log (See logs in Appendix 3).

The parents were asked to record the 'specific' episodes in one of three ways; by video, audio, or simply by observing and (as soon as possible) writing or voice recording some reflective notes. Prompts, derived from the research questions, were provided to support their reflections in both the 'General Log' and the 'Specific Log' proformas provided (see Appendix 2). The parents were aware I was interested in them exploring 'sustained

conversations' and I explained during our initial meeting that conversations were considered to be sustained if they met the criteria for a back-and-forth exchange of at least five conversational turns (Blinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek, 2019). It was intended that the 'general log' would highlight potentially fruitful contexts and may signpost opportunities to record sustained conversations. However, this would not always be the case and the self-chosen episodes for discussion later could be either such 'successful conversations' or other occasions where the interactions were perhaps less successful, but the parents wished to explore them further.

During an initial individual meeting with each parent, I outlined the possible ways to record the episodes, as detailed in the research menu. Although the recordings were to be included in the data set, they were primarily intended as the focus for joint reflection during the semi-structured interviews. We discussed how this may be achieved without interrupting or interfering with the interaction to avoid derailing the conversations, and the participants developed their own ways of achieving this. However, it must be recognised that using a recording device will always influence such interactions (Cohen *et al*., 2018).

To try to capture their reflections in the moment, participants were provided with some reflective prompts, linked to the research questions (see Appendix 2) and encouraged to report their reflections as soon as possible. The prompts covered: where the conversation took place, when the conversation took place, who the conversation was with, and what the conversation was about. They also then supported reflection, asking the parents to consider what they noticed about the conversation: Was it successful? Sustained? What interested them about it? Anything surprising? Why was it significant? Anything else of relevance to the research?

Again, a range of possible ways of reporting their reflections was suggested. This could be written notes, notes on their phone sent by email or WhatsApp, or as an alternative to written methods, parents were given the opportunity to report via voicemail messages to my Smartphone dedicated to data collection. This assumed that participants had access to Wi-Fi or phones with unlimited data. Therefore, to avoid excluding potential parents, I

planned alternative arrangements including loaning a digital camera and a 'pay as you go' mobile phone.

3.8 Methods of Data Collection 2: Semi-Structured Interviews

After a period of data collection (usually a week – but varied due to the parents' other commitments), I met with the parents to review their conversation logs in a discussion and joint reflection on the episodes of conversation reported. These discussions, focusing on the data collected, were designed to be as open and flexible as possible to enable the participants' perceptions and insights to be discussed and discovered. From now on, these joint discussions or research conversations will be referred to as *interviews* to avoid any confusion with the reported conversations within the family.

The cycle of parent data collection followed by semi-structured interview was repeated at least once more. However, if the participant was willing and wished to continue, the cycle was repeated until we both felt we had reached data saturation and no further insights could be gained. Ethically, it was important not to abuse the goodwill of the participants or to take up too much of their time. However, as there was potential for the parents to benefit from insights into conversation with their child, I also had a responsibility to continue if the parent perceived this to be of value. In each case, the parents continued beyond the initial agreement of two cycles. The final interview included questions about the parent's experience of the project and their perceptions of any learning that had taken place over the course of the research.

I chose interviews for their power to 'illuminate' the experiences of the parents (Gillham, 2005, p.8). Guided by the principle of collaboration and co-construction, the discussions were planned to be as naturalistic and informal as possible. Cohen *et al*. (2018) suggest that a naturalistic, conversational style builds trust. This was essential to both establishing the collaborative approach but also in capturing quality data that relied on parents being prepared to share aspects of their family life. Throughout the process, I intended to develop a relaxed, informal conversational style to develop rapport and ensure the participants felt comfortable and at ease. Developing rapport is frequently linked to

achieving good data (Wellington, 2015; King *et al.*, 2018). However, Wolgemuth *et al*. (2015, p.161) also argue that establishing rapport can make participants feel 'valued and listened to'. This was extremely important when recruiting participants from the initial partnership school, as the parents were wary of outsiders, particularly those who may wish to judge them and their parenting. For me, establishing rapport was important ethically (as I was asking the participants to give up a lot of their time) as well as epistemologically, to capture their insights and co-produce knowledge.

> We think differently when we are in dialogue with another: conversation itself becomes the site for the creation of new knowledge. (McNiff, 2017, p.26)

As a parent myself, and previously having been an early years teacher, as we prepared for the research conversations, informal chat developed around family life and began to support the development of rapport, and this developed apace as we progressed through the collaboration. However, research conversations are never 'ordinary conversation' (Robson, 2011). The structure of the discussion that distinguishes such a research conversation as an interview (Wellington, 2015) and how an interview is structured has implications for both the data captured and the balance of power within the interaction (Cohen *et al*., 2018). In the light of my intention to try to promote greater equality, discussions needed to be sufficiently open to reflect the choices the parents had made and to capture their reflections and interpretations. Unstructured interviews provide the opportunity to develop such rich understandings (Newby, 2014), and may allow unforeseen themes to be identified (Wellington, 2015). However, they may be lengthy and guided solely by the lines of enquiry that develop rather than the research question (Robson, 2011), and generate large volumes of potentially disparate data Robson (2011).

Whilst exploration of parents' perspectives and their own lines of enquiry was an intention of the research, it was necessary to strike a balance to ensure that the research questions were also explored. Therefore, a flexible interview schedule (Bryman, 2016), as brief as possible (Newby, 2014), was devised (Appendix 2b). It was designed to strike a balance between providing the necessary structure to ensure consistency across the cases in relation to the research questions and offering the necessary flexibility to enable responsiveness, as well as deeper probing and clarification where needed. Although every

attempt was made to ensure that the interviews were carried out in a relaxed, conversational manner they must therefore be considered semi-structured interviews (Wellington, 2015).

3.8.1 Conduct and Recording of the Interviews

It was important that the interviews be conducted at a time and in a location that was convenient to the participants (Gillham, 2005; Bryman, 2016). Therefore, they were scheduled individually with great flexibility around the parents' family and other commitments. However, as previously indicated, conditions of the COVID-19 Lockdown meant that the interviews for Cases 2 and 3 were required to take place remotely and, will therefore, be discussed separately.

3.8.2 School Based Interviews

The interviews in Case 1 were carried out in person, on-site, at the partnership school initially intended as the research site. It was important that the school-based interviews could be carried out with privacy from other parents or members of staff and away from distractions or noise (Bryman, 2016). This proved difficult in a busy school, but the school made the special-needs sensory room available, which although not physically comfortable, offered total privacy and the necessary flexibility in availability.

The school-based interviews were recorded using the voice recorder of a dedicated passcode-protected Smartphone. Permission was obtained from the participants for the recording, and I ensured that in each interview the participants were comfortable to continue, being mindful not to take up too much of their time. The Smartphone used was dedicated for research purposes and only used for data collection during the research project which included the interviews and to receive audio, video, or written data from the participants. Data were removed from the phone to a password-protected computer at the earliest opportunity.

3.8.3 Remote Interviews

All of the interviews for Case 2 (pt.1 and pt.2) and Case 3 were conducted during the first COVID-19 Lockdown restrictions of 2020, online via Skype. Skype allows the online meeting

to be recorded, which I did having obtained permission in each case. I also recorded the meeting using the voice recorder on the dedicated Smartphone, with permission, as a backup. Meeting remotely necessitated that the audio or video recordings of the conversations be sent to me before the scheduled interviews so, that I could have them available to play through my computer to enable joint viewing and reflection during the interview. The opportunity afforded by this preview of the recordings proved to be highly beneficial. It enabled me to familiarise myself with the content, creating some 'puzzlement' (Bryman, 2016), leading to possible lines of enquiry for clarification, but also for discussion during the interview.

3.9 Credibility and Trustworthiness of the Research

Because the terms 'validity' and 'reliability' arise from positivist traditions, qualitative researchers often suggest they should not be applied to their research and alternatives may be needed to consider rigour and trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004; Morse, 2015). Nevertheless, the concept of validity, the question of whether the data can be trusted and are appropriate to answer the research question (Denscombe, 2014), though it may be characterised in different ways - must be considered. Drawing on the suggestion of Guba and Lincoln (2005), Lincoln *et al*. (2018), refer to 'authenticity' as an alternative to the positivist conception of validity. They encourage a qualitative researcher to ask themselves: 'Are these findings sufficiently authentic…that I may trust myself in acting upon their implications?' (p. 138). In considering that question, I must reflect upon the methods chosen, the conduct of the research, but also – and in contrast to positivist research - the process of interpretation (Lincoln *et al*., 2018).

In choosing qualitative methods and taking a collaborative stance with the parent participants the internal validity can be seen to be high, since the human 'instruments' of data collection are well placed to capture insight into the social reality. The joint reflections offer further credibility in understanding parents' perspectives, to uncover the complexity of human behaviour, and support a trustworthy and holistic interpretation of the experiences in the natural setting of the home and community (Merriam, 2016). The inclusion of multiple methods of data collection, typical of case study design, is frequently portrayed as

ensuring rigour (Yin, 2018), as they offer the opportunity for triangulation. In triangulation, different methods, with their individual strengths and weaknesses, different data sources, or even different theoretical perspectives can be 'played off' against one another to increase the 'accuracy' of the findings (Flick, 2018, p. 446). From an interpretivist perspective, determining the accuracy of an objective reality would not be possible, therefore triangulation came to be seen by qualitative researchers more as the way in which the utilisation of multiple methods can provide greater range and depth to findings. Comparing observation findings to interview findings is often suggested as a means of 'checking' findings (Bryman, 2016). However, prioritising my independent interpretation of the recordings of episodes of conversation would not be congruent with the spirit or mindset of my study to value and respect the insights of the parents. Nevertheless, the opportunity for further review and analysis of the recordings afforded, indeed required of me as a doctoral researcher, added supplementary perspectives, enhancing the findings.

Guba and Lincoln (2005) contend that rigour in qualitative research also requires 'prolonged engagement' (p.205) with the investigation of the phenomena under study so that the co-constructed understandings developed from the interpretations of the data can be trusted. It is therefore important that the researcher is honest and transparent in sharing details of both the conduct of the research but also the strategies employed in the analysis of data (Denzin, 1989, cited in Flick, 2018) and will be considered in section 3.1.1. Merriam (2016) contends that rich descriptions of the cases allow the reader to understand how interpretations were made and the conclusions arrived at. Reflexivity throughout makes implicit the researcher's values, stance, where perspectives or views may influence the decisions made, and interpretation of the data (Bryman, 2016). However, central to integrity is the careful consideration of the ethics of any project, and the ethics of my project are detailed in section 3.1.0.

3.9.1 Generalisability

Case studies cannot be considered to be generalisable, i.e., the findings would not be statistically representative across the whole population (Bryman, 2016). But that is not the purpose of case studies (Stake, 1995). Rather, case studies (especially qualitative case studies) offer 'particularisation' where in-depth 'particulars' of the case are studied (p.8). In

my study, the cases were 'exemplifying cases' (Bryman, 2016, p.62) as they offered the opportunity to examine intensively the 'everyday or commonplace' (Bryman, 2016, p.62) experience of the phenomenon under study and explore the social processes at play. However, wider 'naturalistic generalisations' (Stake, 1995, p.85) can be made, as the findings will be relatable or transferable to others in similar circumstances. To have user generalisability in this way, the researcher must provide sufficient detail of the cases studied along with sufficient evidence-based descriptions of the findings (Merriam, 2016). Pertinent details are provided at the beginning of each case and a summary is provided in Table 2 in section 3.5.5.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are fundamental to all good research and an ethical approach is generally considered one which ensures the quality of research whilst at the same time protecting the rights of participants (Denscombe, 2014; Wellington, 2015, Flewitt and Ang, 2020). Therefore, the researcher has a responsibility to ensure that research is carried out with integrity and is conducted in such a way that the findings have validity and contribute to the development of knowledge to justify the involvement of the participants who contribute their time, thoughts, and efforts. Whilst Hammersley and Traianou (2012), controversially, emphasise the researcher's responsibility to knowledge, others consider our primary responsibility to be the people we study (Wellington, 2015; Flewitt and Ang, 2020). The guidelines covering education research in the UK (BERA, 2018) reflect a balance of the researcher's responsibilities to conduct research with consideration of the participants, the contribution to knowledge, and the impact on the researcher themselves, encapsulated by the Academy of Social Sciences (cited in BERA, 2018, p.10): 'All social science should aim to maximise benefit and minimise harm.' Through this methodology section so far, I have detailed how I endeavoured to ensure the research was of high quality, to add to knowledge, but also to be of value to the participants themselves. Wiles (2013) argues that an ethical approach goes beyond achieving ethical approval and requires ethical literacy, where researchers actively engage with ethical issues as they inevitably occur during the research process. Carrying out qualitative social research, with its focus on gathering rich data in natural settings - where relationships are built over time, presents particular

dilemmas (Ryen, 2011). Flewitt and Ang (2020, p.33) offer a model for ethical decision-making which recognises the interplay between the legal and regulatory frameworks covering research, fundamental ethical values, and the researcher's own moral values. I will now consider my research in the light of each aspect to demonstrate my ethical stance.

In planning my research, I carefully considered the guidelines for educational research published by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and received ethical approval from the University of Sheffield. The guidelines cover the responsibilities of researchers to ensure high-quality research whilst protecting participants' rights and incorporate key core principles, many of which are representative of fundamental values. Throughout my research, I was guided by the core principles of respect, autonomy, and dignity; my collaborative research approach, which valued parents as active partners with expertise to contribute, was integral to that. Conversely, that approach asked a lot of the parents and throughout the research, I needed to ensure that I remained vigilant to the possibility of abusing the goodwill of the participants for my own purposes to achieve the award of a doctorate.

Fundamental to the principle of autonomy is the concept of voluntariness (Wiles, 2013) and I was very careful to ensure that the participants entered the research willingly and that I obtained informed, voluntary consent. For the participants to give truly informed consent I needed to provide sufficient information so that they were aware of what they were agreeing to, and that the information was provided in a way that they could understand (Wiles, 2013). The research requested a high level of commitment from the participants, and I needed to be transparent with the participants about what was involved. I provided a full information sheet and consent form before the research began to give them time to digest, but I also took time out of the initial meeting with the participants for further discussion and to enable the participants to ask any questions, so they fully understood. I also appreciated that the consent should be considered provisional (Flewitt and Ang, 2020) and advised the participants of their right to withdraw from the research, encouraging them to keep the information letter which included that information. One potential participant decided not to continue after the initial discussion, and a further participant dropped out of contact after the first week's data collection. After a text and phone call were not returned,

I decided that it would be unethical to pursue her further. With my remaining participants, I checked at the end of each interview that they were happy to continue into the next week. However, a further aspect of voluntarism I needed to consider was power. As the initial recruitment was conducted in collaboration with the school, there was a risk that parents may perceive an element of compulsion to take part or that a refusal may be viewed negatively by school. Therefore, I ensured that, in all communication with parents, I emphasised that the project was being conducted by a visiting member of the university, rather than a member of school staff, and it was their free choice to take part (and greatly appreciated). As two of the parents were family members, it was also incumbent on me to be vigilant for any waning in their enthusiasm for taking part.

Two further fundamental principles are those of beneficence (to be of some value) and non-maleficence (to cause no harm). Key here was my responsibility to balance the potential benefits of the research with any possible adverse consequences for the participants and to minimise these. As previously discussed, the ethical balance in my project was improved by the potential of the research for the parents' learning to offer benefit to the families in terms of the insight they may gain and possible action they may take. However, this cannot be assumed (Flewitt and Ang, 2020) and it cannot be disputed that the major benefit of the project is to me as the researcher and the knowledge generated. The tremendous efforts made by the participants were recognised throughout the project and every effort was made to treat them with respect and gratitude. Important here was the atmosphere in which the research was conducted, and I ensured that the meetings were scheduled at a convenient time. When the research was school-based, this was directly after school drop-off or directly before school pick-up time. Although this limited the number of interviews I could do in a day, it was important to prioritise and respect the participants' time. I also tried to ensure that the participants were comfortable and relaxed and took time to build trusting relationships.

Whilst qualitative research may be considered as generally low in risk to participants (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012) my research related to issues of parenting and family life and was therefore sensitive and potentially intrusive (Cohen *et al*., 2018). Harm may include emotional discomfort (Flewitt and Ang, 2020), and it was important that the research

should not impact too greatly on family life. This included the time the parent participants dedicated to recording in the home and the time spent in interviews. It was also important the recordings themselves did not cause the children emotional discomfort including embarrassment. Flewitt and Ang (2020) refer to a situated and dialogic framework (p.42), where the ethics in research situations are discussed and negotiated in trusting relationships, based on care and compassion for those involved. I was aware that the parents were keen to provide me with the data that they thought I needed, and it was my responsibility to emphasise that this should not come at a cost to family life and that their verbal recollections or reflections would always be welcome in place of a recording or a recording that was discontinued.

The right to privacy, including the consideration of anonymity and confidentiality are further fundamental ethical principles (Wiles, 2013). Participants were informed about how and where the findings of the research would be published and that their contributions would be anonymised with pseudonyms. However, the nature of qualitative data, with its rich descriptions and the need for the case studies to link demographic characteristics, offered the possibility that participants could be identified to people who knew them by the detail that they shared. Therefore, I ensured that they were informed of this in the information letter. Within this particular research, I also needed to consider the possibility that the participants may share information that may open them to criticism of their parenting from others. Wellington (2015) reminds us that ethical considerations must run throughout the project, and I remained vigilant in analysing and reporting the data, considering any potential impact on participants. As previously discussed, participants were advised of their right to withdraw from the project at any time, particularly if they found that the commitment was impacting negatively on their family or their well-being. I was also alert to this possibility and realised my responsibility to act in the interests of the family should I perceive that participation was having a negative impact.

The final consideration is the legal requirement concerning participants' privacy and the data management and protection of their data within the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). This includes the rights of the participants to be informed of why and how their data will be used, how it will be safely stored and disposed of, and who may have

access to it. The information sheet provided for participants (See Appendix 1b) includes details of how their data would be used and disposed of and information about confidentiality and anonymity (including the limits of this – as discussed). Participants were advised that they also had the right to withdraw their data, at any point before it was analysed and aggregated and a reasonable cut-off date was provided.

BERA (2018) considers ethics in research to be an iterative process, reminding researchers they should continue to be alert to ethical considerations throughout their research. During the execution of the research a number of ethical issues were reconsidered, including moving the research online and approaching possible participants who were known to me. Although adherence to the law and following professional guidance is important, through the process of this research I have learned the importance of being guided by the moral principles of honesty, fairness, and equality in representing the participants who have generously given their time and trusted me to do so.

3.11 Data Analysis Strategy

In devising a strategy for the analysis of the data generated during my project, it was important to revisit the original aim of the project: To explore what could be learned about adults' conversation with young children in their homes and communities through collaborative research with parents.

Inherent in my research approach was an intent to recognise and value the perceptions and insights of the parents themselves into the phenomenon within their own families. Therefore, the primary data collected were the semi-structured interviews in which the parents discussed and reflected upon their logs of conversation with their young children, both in general and through us reviewing together, specific episodes of conversation. However, the parents were also asked to submit, as data, their conversation logs which included, in some cases recorded conversations. The recordings, especially the video recordings, offered the opportunity for analysis in greater depth over time, rather than the 'in the moment' reflections taking place in the interviews. A table detailing the data shared by each collaborating parent is provided at the beginning of each case in Chapter 4. Analysis

of the recordings offered the opportunity to 'crystallise' (Richardson, 2000), to consider the data from different angles and perspectives, adding 'texture' to the findings (Wellington, 2015). In particular, analysing the recordings offered the opportunity to include my professional perspective:

> A thoughtful researcher must endeavour to accurately present the views or opinions of research participants, but also be willing to critically analyse these views and 'reinterpret them in a wider context'
> (Scott and Garner, 2013, p. 70 in Bergin, 2018 p. 130)

In choosing particular conversations to discuss in the interviews, the parents had already made decisions on which conversations they considered to be 'noteworthy'. Little and Little (2021) consider the judgement of noteworthiness to be aligned with the idea of critical incidents. Initially devised for developing learning in professions such as psychology, health, and education, critical incident analysis asks learners to choose particular experiences for in-depth reflection and critical analysis to develop their professional practice (Tripp, 2011). In my study, the parents made choices of particular conversations to focus reflection upon and I made additional choices of recordings for further analysis. These choices could be considered critical incidents as 'critical incidents are produced by the way we look at the situation: a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event.' (Tripp, 2011, p.8). Throughout my analysis, I needed to be aware that such choices profoundly influence the story to be told and to be reflexive and honest in my decisions. The primary consideration for further detailed analysis of the recordings would be their contribution to illuminating or clarifying (Richardson, 2000) themes raised in the collaborative interviews.

3.11.1 Thematic Analysis

My flexible research menu, which sought to share decisions over data collection with the parents, generated the corpus of data which included textual data such as transcriptions of verbal reflections in interviews, memos, written logs but also recordings of specific conversations, including audio and video recordings. Although Bryman (2014) suggests that thematic analysis (TA) is still largely poorly defined, Braun and Clarke (2012) contend that, having developed it in a systematic way as applied to psychology (Braun and Clarke, 2006), a strength of thematic analysis that it can be done in different ways. Thematic analysis

therefore offered the flexibility to support analysis across my range of data sources, providing:

> A method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set……which can then be linked to broader theoretical or conceptual issues. (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 57)

In this way, the meanings represented in diverse ways could be collected, organised systematically analysed, and presented as themes 'harvested' from the data. Importantly, thematic analysis offered the opportunity to work both deductively from my original research questions and inductively to unearth further meanings grounded in the data. Braun and Clarke (2012) argue that this balance determines a researcher's orientation to either participant-based meaning or theory-based meaning. As they suggest is often the case, my research project emerged from my professional interest i.e., in this study, the conditions which may support sustained conversations with very young children in the home. Therefore, my study is framed by a thorough literature review providing a theoretical basis for the enquiry, so my initial coding was inevitably influenced by my research questions. However, to align with my intentions towards collaboration, my study was predominantly exploratory and experiential, largely focussing on the perspectives of the parents - particular to each case, generating participant-based meaning. Therefore, my analysis also needed to be orientated to an inductive approach, as this would prioritise the voices, experiences, meanings, and, to some extent, interpretations of the parents themselves.

For each case, I applied the six-phase approach to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). My strategy began with listening, re-listening, and transcribing the interview data, as well as reviewing the written logs, audio and video recordings, reflecting, actively and critically on all of this throughout in memos (Wellington, 2015). These reflections and initial ideas, as well as terms represented in my research question and subsidiary questions, informed my thinking as I began open coding, initially by hand, the interview data provided by Ms K (case study 2pt 1). I decided to generate a basic schedule of codes, which I would use to begin the analysis of each case in order to look systematically across the cases. However, it was also important to consider unique conditions in each case as well, so in

each case, I continued to construct codes inductively, where it was clear that my interpretations of the meanings in the data could not be represented by existing codes. Codes were revisited and reviewed as I progressed through the data set, initially within cases, but also across the cases. To organise, manage and enable me to review, reconsider and critically interrogate the data, I used the basic functions of QSR NVivo 12.

Thematic analysis allows, recommends, and enables the researcher to think, interpret, and analyse the patterns and meanings in the data as the analysis proceeds (Miles and Huberman, 1994 in Punch, 2009; Bazeley, 2021), to search for, and construct themes. A theme 'captures something important in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within a data set' (Braun and Clarke, 2006 p.82). For each case in turn, I reviewed, collapsed, and clustered the codes to construct a series of themes to represent my interpretation of the distinctive, meaningful patterns in each case. In moving on, across the cases I repeated the process, beginning with the basic list of codes and the enhanced categories developed via NVivo. The first step was to search for and retrieve similar aspects of the data, carrying forward the codes and themes already identified, whilst adding new codes if necessary, to recognise the distinctiveness of each subsequent case. Analysis back and forth, within and across the cases, through constant comparison, both confirmed initial themes and added strength to further themes as they developed.

3.11.2 Analysis of Parents' Recordings of Specific Episodes of Conversation

As discussed, the primary data in my research were the joint reflections with the parents on conversations taking place with their children. However, recordings of some of the conversations which took place were also entered as data and, were recordings of sufficient quality to offer the opportunity for further analysis and interpretation. The chosen recordings, especially the video recordings, allowed further exploration of the following themes:

- The nature of the sustained conversations
- Relational aspects of the successful interactions
- Emotion in the Interactions

- Child's role and contributions
- Adult's role and contributions

To support this further exploration of the recorded conversations, I developed a framework for analysis (See Appendix 4a) and I will now outline the theoretical perspectives that underpinned its development.

3.11.3 Development of a Framework for Further Analysis of the Parent Researchers' Recorded Conversations

In their work with early childhood educators researching interactions with children in the classroom, Boyd (2015) and also Fisher and Wood (2012) explain their need to develop their own framework to analyse the particular style of conversations they were investigating i.e., less formal, conversational learning interactions. This was also my experience as I realised that further analysis of the video recordings shared by the parent researchers would require a framework for analysis based on four possible lines of provocation:

- the research question and the themes emerging
- my personal and professional experience, informed by training on strategies for promoting sustained interactions in the classroom (Dowling, 2005; Fisher, 2016)
- theoretical provocations provided by research providing evidence-informed communication-facilitating strategies (McDonald *et al*., 2015; Ang and Harmey, 2019) including some aspects of multimodal communication (Flewitt, 2005)
- child's involvement and well-being (Laevers, 2005)

Flewitt (2005) has demonstrated the importance of paying attention to the range of ways children, especially very young children, express themselves 'multimodally' 'through combinations of talk, body movement, facial expression, and gaze' (p.209). For preschool children especially, non-verbal signs are essential elements of communication which add to their ability to express themselves verbally whilst those skills are developing. The purpose of the research was to explore the nature of the conversations and the conditions in which sustained conversation may thrive rather than in-depth analysis of the children's meaning-making. Therefore, in-depth multimodal transcription and conversation analysis were

rejected. However, consideration of position, touch, and gesture as well as speech, including tone, were considered relevant and included in the framework. For any conversation to be sustained, the child would need to be engaged (Fisher, 2016), therefore I also included a consideration of the indicators of child engagement and well-being provided by the Leuven Scale (Laevers, 2005).

3.12 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have detailed and justified the decisions I made about the overall approach taken and the methods employed in this research. I have introduced the collaborating, parent participants and their children and detailed the methods of data collection and my strategy for data analysis. I have detailed the approach taken to ensure the research was undertaken ethically and can be considered trustworthy. I have also explained and justified the changes to the sampling strategy and methods of data collection necessitated by the COVID-19 restrictions in operation from March to July 2020, recognising the impact of the changes on the nature of the study, the representativeness of the participants, and the generalisability of the findings discussed later in the limitations section.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis, Findings, and Discussion: The Cases

4.1 Introduction to the Chapter

Wellington (2015) argues that the final step of the six-stage process of data analysis is creating a compelling narrative. To preserve the integrity of the cases and to avoid stripping the data from its context (Bazeley, 2021), I tell the story of each case by analysing each one individually with reference to the research question and key literature. To avoid repetition, themes will be thoroughly explored and explained as they arise and in subsequent cases, only data that develop or further illuminate, or demonstrate the cases' unique contribution, will be discussed. In Chapter 5, cross-case analysis is presented, discussing patterns which apply across the cases as:

> General patterns and processes can assist in describing experience or explaining behaviour across a wider population.' (Bazeley, 2021, p. 273)

In each separate case, thematic analysis of the interviews, and conversation logs is used, with further detailed analysis of chosen conversations to illustrate and crystallise the findings.

4.2 Case 1 Ms A and Caitlin

Caitlin had just turned five at the beginning of the research and was coming to the end of her reception year. She has a sister who is two years older than her. The family of her mother, Ms A, live 30 miles away and, although her in-laws live in the local area, they don't see them very often. Ms A is very involved in school life, helping out, reading in reception, and organising events for the Friends Association, etc. Ms A was the only participant to respond to the sixty letters sent out in the reception class book bags and was keen to support the research. During the time of the research, Caitlin was receiving speech therapy via school for a speech sound impairment which made it difficult for other people to understand her.

The following table details the data considered in relation to Ms A and Caitlin. Thematic analysis of the recordings is available in Appendix 3a, and detailed analysis of Beaver Camp, Walking Home, Toy Camera, Outings, and Karate conversations are available in Appendix 4b-4f).

Data Shared by Ms A	
	General Conversation Logs (2)
Research Meetings (5)	Recordings provided in Specific Conversation Log
Meeting 2	With Ms A – Beaver Camp and the Marvellous Robot. (Audio, 4:0) With Family Liaison Worker – Boardgame Club (Audio, 2:15) With Dad – Lego Pirate Video (brief) (Audio, 0:26)
Meeting 3	On the phone to Nanny 1 - All the News (Video, 4:08) With Ms A's Friend - Walking Home – New Class (Video, 1:48)
Meeting 4	With Nanny 1 Showing her camera (Video, 2:24) With Nanny 2 Outings (Video, 11:14) With Auntie – Playing a board game. (Video, 2:26)
Meeting 5	With Grandad – Karate and Swimming (Video, 4: 33)

Table 3 Data Analysed in Case 1: Ms A and Caitlin

4.2.1 Nature and characteristics of conversations taking place with Caitlin

Thematic analysis of the interviews, general logs, and recordings identified adults who converse with Caitlin, key contexts in which more sustained conversations tended to take place, and the topics of those conversations. The contexts identified are represented in a thematic map below:

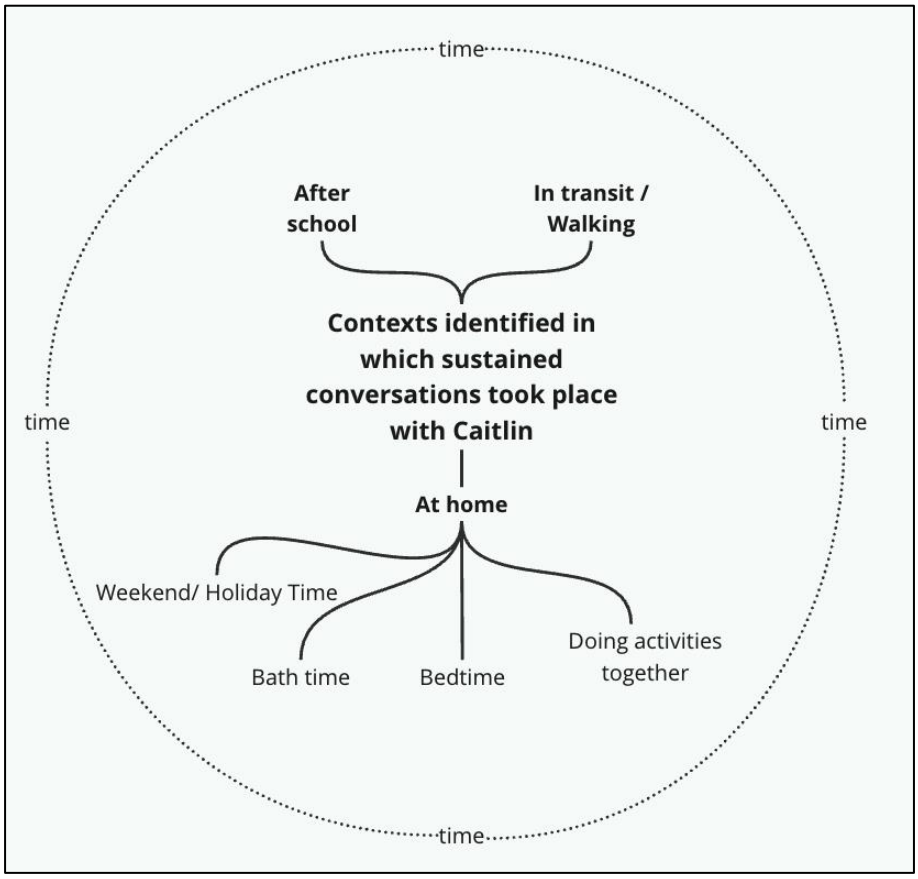

Fig.1 Contexts in which sustained conversation with Caitlin took place

Analysis clearly demonstrated that Ms A was the adult most likely to be involved in more sustained conversations with Caitlin and that most of those conversations tended to take place at home. It also demonstrated that, for Ms A and Caitlin, the time straight after school and bedtime were important contexts in which more sustained conversations were likely to take place. A further important context was when the two were in transit, on the way to and from school, clubs, etc. Weekends were also identified as particularly important in providing more time for conversation, as well as the opportunity for conversations with additional conversational partners in the wider family.

Stake (1995) defines analysis as 'a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations' (p. 71) and my very first impression of the nature of the conversations between Ms A and Caitlin, from the emotional warmth that emanated, suggested that emotion, and the relational purposes of the conversations, was an important theme for exploration. It was clear that for Ms A, listening to her daughters was important,

> *Just listening to them, making them feel valued, and their opinion matters. Don't just, you know, look at your phone, not interested kind of thing, that's hurtful.*
> (Ms A Initial Interview)

In contrast with classroom conversations, where the primary purpose is 'to bring about learning' (Fisher, 2016), the primary purpose for Ms A seemed to be to care for, and connect with her children; to know what was going on in their life, to check that they were OK and make things better if necessary:

> *Yeah, yeah, I think it's something, I think you should talk to 'em, find out how their day's been, if there's anything troubling them, or what their favourite part of the day was… I learn from them, so I know if they're upset or something, or something bothering them and work on that.* (Ms A Meeting 1)

Sometimes the purpose would be to gain information from Caitlin, as in the quote above, and sometimes as part of the general caring, such as 'chit chat' on the way home from school. However, there also seemed a further purpose - recognising and taking pleasure in Caitlin's speech and her development:

> *I just like hearing her talk to me because, where she's never talked, because obviously her speech problems, it's nice when she does (inaudible) to want to tell me something, even if it's something like when it's Christmas, what she wants for Christmas it's nice for her to tell me. Well, I do like listening to her talk.*
> (Ms A Meeting 2)

It was clear throughout interviews with Ms A that she took great pleasure in talking with Caitlin. My study explored pleasure in the parent-child interactions, aware of the findings of Preece and Levy (2020) that parents' behaviours around shared book reading with their children was influenced by their own feelings, influenced by the responses of their children.

Throughout the interviews and reflections on the more sustained conversations, there are multiple references to togetherness or connections. This included physical closeness and connection, e.g., holding hands, a cuddle preceding a conversation, climbing on Nanny's knee, snuggling up on the sofa, climbing on Step Grandad (two examples of closeness can be seen below in Figs. 2a and 2b, in stills obtained from the video recordings). This theme of togetherness was striking and can be found in all of the more sustained conversations with

Caitlin. Reflecting on the possible reasons why sustained conversations take place with Nanny 2, Ms A recalls:

> *Yes, they do talk all the time, always cuddling and tickling and kissing and singing together, yeah, she does like it.* (Ms A, Meeting 4)

Fig. 2a (left) w/Auntie, close, shoulder to shoulder & Fig.2b (right)w/ Family Friend, holding hands

Associated with this theme of togetherness and connection is the importance of the relationship between the conversational partners which is exemplified in a conversation Ms A chose to share between Caitlin and a family liaison worker (Sally) at school. Ms A chose this as an example of conversation with someone beyond family and close friends. In reflecting on why Sally was able to have more sustained conversations with Caitlin than other adults at school, Ms A suggested that the relationship Sally had built with Caitlin had an important part to play:

> *She's (Sally) very friendly. You know, everyone loves her when they're coming into school, she (Caitlin) always gives Sally a cuddle, so I know she likes Sally and I think that helps as well, so she's not shy…She likes talking to Sally, people that she knows.* (Ms. A, Meeting 2)

Contemporary literature considering influences on sustaining interactions with young children (Ang and Harmey, 2019) emphasises the importance of warmth and paying attention to the child's emotional well-being. Similarly, Fisher (2016) found children's interactions with the practitioners in her study were enhanced when a warm relationship

had been established, concluding that 'warm attentiveness' was a characteristic of interactions, associated with parents' interactions, that educators should strive for.

4.2.2 Conditions which may Support Sustained Conversations with Caitlin

The first, and arguably unsurprising factor in supporting more sustained conversation with Caitlin, was the contribution of an adult conversational partner. The interview data identified Ms A's perception that the adult's effort to converse with Caitlin, demonstrated by behaviours such as spending time together, initiating a conversation, and asking questions, were important. Ang and Harmey (2019) highlight the importance of the adult as an active conversational partner, both in their actions in the process, and also in creating the opportunities for them to take place. However, Ms A also identified the importance of how the adult responded when in conversation, particularly by listening to her, showing interest, and responding:

> *Ah, keep asking the questions, keeps it flowing, she's looking interested, she's not like sounding bored, going, 'yeah, yeah,' like some people do. She's actually listening and responding.* (Ms A, Interview 3)

Ms A was of the opinion that some adults such as the family liaison worker, and one of Caitlin's Nannies (Nanny 2), had particular skills in engaging Caitlin in conversation through their training. But interestingly, the adult making a special effort, or persisting in the conversation was also noted as supportive of sustained conversation. Ms A gives the example of Caitlin's Step Grandad, suggesting that the motivation to converse with her, for whatever reason, is also supportive of sustained conversation and is related to their relationship :

> *Because I like the bond they have…he's very close with 'em. He does put a lot of effort in, I quite like that, yeah.* (Ms A, Final Interview)

Reflection on conversations with other adults in Caitlin's life supports the conjecture that the adults' pleasure, or at least interest in the conversation, is important and is linked to the likelihood of more sustained conversations taking place. Ms A identified that generally (apart from Step Grandad) the males in the family were not so inclined to talk with Caitlin:

> *As I say I've noticed, it's more the male thing, that they, not that they don't want to talk to her, but they find it hard to talk to 'er, cos of her, like I say, her speech*

> *therapy and the stuff she wants to talk about (little laugh)…sort of kiddie stuff and, and they're sort of interested but they're not as interested as, me (emphasis), so….. (voice goes quiet and tails off*). (Ms A, Final Interview)

Interesting here is the suggestion that a lack of shared knowledge of the child's life and interests (which Ms A refers to as 'Kiddie Stuff') may be a hindrance or even a barrier to conversation for other adults around Caitlin. Tizard and Hughes (1984) demonstrated that the mothers' (they only studied mothers and daughters) understanding of the context of the conversation, i.e., having knowledge of the child's experiences and what they might be trying to talk about, enables conversation to flow. The parent being part of the context the child wished to explore was also suggested by Wells (1985) as enabling a shared focus of attention to develop, supporting the conversation. This can be seen in the case of Ms A and Caitlin, Ms A was very involved in the school and was therefore aware of Caitlin's experiences at that time, including transition day and the Pirate Parade. However, in the only conversation shared with her dad (a very short, recorded conversation about her day), Caitlin tries to tell him she watched a film (Lego Pirates) in the class of her new teacher. Although Mum tries to help out, without the shared understanding of the new teacher's name and knowledge of typical end-of-term activities, the pirate theme going on at school, Caitlin's dad is unable to get the 'gist.' The conversation flounders and he looks to Mum for help – even 'translation' of what Caitlin is trying to say.

The importance of the adult being able to 'tune in' to what Caitlin was saying was mentioned by Ms A multiple times including:

> *And just deciphering what she's saying as well, cos she does get frustrated if I get the wrong thing, she'll go, No, Mummy, No!* (Ms A Interview 2)

However, 'tuning in' is more than managing the technicalities of pronunciation. Flewitt (2005) demonstrated that the mothers in her study were able to sustain long exchanges with their children at home, with the mothers acting as communicative 'prompts and props' for their children (p. 212), and that many of these extended exchanges related to shared experiences. Reflection on the way the conversation with Caitlin's dad floundered resonates with that finding, suggesting that without the interest or involvement in the 'Kiddie Stuff' of Caitlin's life, her dad found deciphering what she was trying to say more

difficult. A further example suggests that, when a child is moving between settings, help with context supports understanding and helps the conversation to flow.

> *I ask what she's done, her day at school, and sometimes she can (emph.) tell me, but other times, she struggles to say certain words and I have to really ask her again and again, trying to tell me…yeah, but her teacher'll tell me, then I understand what she said.* (Ms A Interview 2)

Ms A was particularly skilled at understanding Caitlin's speech and frequently had the role of acting as 'translator' for other conversational partners. This suggests the possibility of a role for the insights that such skilled and knowledgeable conversational partners can offer in supporting children in making the transition from conversations at home to conversations at school, which could benefit continuity of learning (Tizard and Hughes, 1984, Fisher, 2016, Hadley *et al.,* 2022).

At the outset of the research, my primary focus was on the adult-related contributions to conversations with young children in their home and community. However, data from Ms A immediately demonstrated that the role of the child, their actions or agency, was an important consideration in whether a conversation would be sustained or not. For example, as already discussed, Ms A values bedtime as an important time to talk with Caitlin, and notes that conversation is enhanced at this time by Caitlin's willingness to engage with her, perhaps to prolong bedtime:

> *Rather than go to bed, it's like, let's talk to mummy!* (Ms A, Final Interview)

Frequently throughout the data, positive emotions are associated with the likelihood of Caitlin initiating or engaging in a conversation with an adult. Sustained conversation is more likely when Caitlin is enjoying the interaction, especially excitedly talking about things she is proud of, such as her creations, or her medals and badges for karate. In reflecting with Ms A about the circumstances under which Caitlin is most likely to be involved in more sustained conversations, the significance of Caitlin having something of importance to *her* to speak about was identified. In fact, in the final interview, when discussing what Ms A thought she had learned from the process of having observed, reviewed, and reflected on conversations with Caitlin over five cycles, she went so far as to suggest that it is *only* when

Caitlin has something that she wants to talk about that more sustained conversations tend to occur:

> *Like I say, it's only when she gets something like, she wants to talk about it tends to happen more.* (Ms A, Final Meeting)

Thematic analysis of the recordings, interviews, and general logs (Table 3) identified the things that Caitlin liked to talk about at the time of the research, her 'Kiddie Stuff'. This included: her toys, children's popular culture – TV, and videos such as Toy Story and Peppa Pig, but significantly, with the highest number of mentions – recent experiences, especially experiences at school. Hedges (2022) demonstrated that 'children's interests are sparked by community-based funds of knowledge, specifically cultural events and popular culture' (Chapter 5) emphasising the importance of such experiences in promoting informal learning, including, relevant here, provoking conversation.

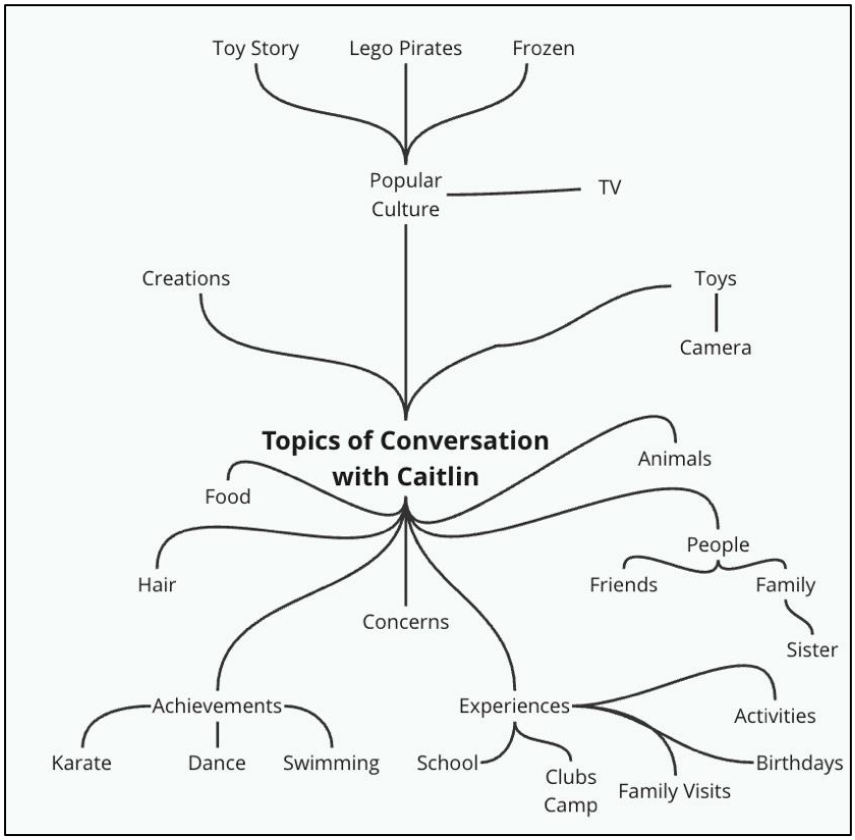

Fig.3 Thematic Map of topics of conversation with Caitlin

A theme beginning to develop is the importance of the agency of the child and their desire to communicate on matters important or meaningful to them as a powerful driver of

sustained conversation. As Hedges (2022) notes, 'Young children develop the verbal skills to engage in dialogue and debate, with peers and adults, on matters of deep interest…' (p.4), emphasising the motivating power of having something of importance, or meaningful to the child, to talk about.

However, the adult's response, notably their ability to tune into the child's focus also appeared to be important. Recent research has identified following the child's lead and sticking with the child's focus in the conversation as an effective strategy for sustaining conversation (Ang and Harmey, 2019). In drawing upon the influential work of Tizard and Hughes (1984) and Wells (1985) to consider what makes for effective interactions, Fisher (2016, p.5) suggests, 'Parents usually respond to their children by developing the child's own interests.' Ms A's naming of Caitlin's topics of conversation as 'Kiddie Stuff' and her perception that the adult (even if they are a parent) lacking that knowledge or interest in what was important to Caitlin, may hinder conversation is an interesting theme which will be pursued through the cases to follow.

So far, thematic analysis of the interviews, joint reflections, and conversation logs have highlighted a series of separate factors relating to conditions more likely to promote sustained conversations. Further detailed analysis (using the framework for analysis I developed and have discussed previously) of two recordings of conversations with Caitlin, 'Beaver Camp and the Marvellous Robot' and 'Walking Home – New Class' illustrate and crystallise the interplay between the factors.

4.2.3 Beaver Camp and the Marvellous Robot

The first conversation shared by Ms A, 'Beaver Camp and the Marvellous Robot', took place between Ms A and Caitlin the morning after Caitlin had had her first experience away from the family, a day camp at Beaver Camp. The subject of the conversation was Caitlin's experiences during the day when Caitlin had returned with an enormous robot, taller than her (see Figure 1) that she had made out of reclaimed materials (junk modelling) which created quite a stir! Mum explained how she deliberately decided to make time the

following morning, made a cup of tea, and sat down 'properly' with her to have a conversation about Beaver Camp and 'The Robot!'.

Ms A initiated the conversation with a very open question. Open questions are highly supportive of effective communication (McDonald, *et al.,* 2015; Fisher, 2016; Ang and Harmey, 2019). Her opening question was similar to her bedtime routine question, which she describes as almost a ritual:

Ms A: What happened when you went to Beavers?

Caitlin: Er after picnic, they wanted to…..(indistinguishable)…they wanted to lie teddies out and put all them down and laid on my belly.

A smile is distinguishable in Caitlin's voice and Ms A picks up on it. Later in our reflection, Ms A explained that Caitlin was being a bit cheeky about lying on her belly. She responded to Caitlin's provocation, answering with a surprised expression and showing genuine interest:

Ms A: Really?
Caitlin: Yeah
Ms A: You laid on your belly?
Caitlin: And maked a picture.
Ms A: Ooohh You done a big picture? What, for Lucy?
Caitlin: Er, No it's a new man.
Ms A: Oh a Man, oh, the Beaver Man?
Caitlin: Yeah.

Here Ms A is following Caitlin's lead and is showing that she is genuinely interested, she is also able to tune in with her knowledge of Beavers – Lucy is one of the leaders. But Caitlin has new information, the leader of the Beaver Camp was a man.

Ms A asks a further open question to continue the conversation
Ms A: Then what did you do?
Caitlin: Drawed. Then after pictures …(indistinguishable)…robot.

At this point, although I listened to the recording innumerable times, I was unable to determine what Caitlin says. However, Ms A clearly does understand, she can tune into Caitlin's speech sounds and gestures sufficiently to be able to offer a contingent response, expressing interest, warmth, and pride, but also enriched vocabulary.

Ms A: That's what this marvellous thing is – a robot?
Caitlin: Yes. Then after robot…(indistinguishable)…back inside

Ms A begins to speak – possibly to ask another question. However, Caitlin speaks at the same time and Ms A gives way to allow Caitlin time and space to speak - a further effective strategy (McDonald *et al.,* 2015; Ang and Harmey, 2019)

Caitlin: Cos, I find a spider in the toilet
Ms A: Ughoh, that's not good
Caitlin: In the toilet (with some emphasis)
Ms A: No, that's not good
Caitlin: It at Beavers

This section of the conversation, where Caitlin can be heard in the recording to be speaking confidently and in quite an animated fashion demonstrates the value of an authentic, meaningful purpose to communicate in supporting the child's involvement in the conversation. Here Caitlin has new information that she knows will interest her mum.

Caitlin: Cos…I…

Ms A begins to speak but again stops herself to enable Caitlin to continue.

Caitlin: …I really scared.

Here Caitlin is talking about her emotions and she knows from her bedtime ritual that her mum is keen to know how she feels about things. But she is also aware that her mum is 'petrified' of spiders, so they have this shared understanding. Ms A really doesn't want to talk about the spider, and she returns to one of her ritual questions to continue the conversation:

Ms A: So, What was your favourite (emph.) part of yesterday?
Caitlin: Erm (pause) really liked…indistinguishable…my robot.
Ms A: You liked building your robot?
Caitlin: Yeh, he really, really taller.
Ms A: It is, it's as tall as you!

Ms A laughs a little as Caitlin continues. Here Ms A is showing again to Caitlin that she is enjoying the conversation, but she has also relayed back the correct grammar in the sentence (and a bit of maths). At the same time, the response is really short which demonstrates how sensitive Ms A's response is, giving time and making space for Caitlin, enabling her to continue.

Caitlin: Yeah…(indistinguishable)…me too.

Ms A: And what was, was anything bad about it? Again, another of Ms A's routine open questions.
Caitlin: Er (pause)…(indistinguishable).
Ms A No, nothing bad about the picnic?
Caitlin: Er, oh, I…(indistinguishable)…sometimes it's cos, cos, give somebody don't want the boxes……

Caitlin has switched her attention to the robot and Ms A follows her lead.

Ms A: Oh are they his eyes?
Caitlin: Yeh, ah just, just, have two legs, two legs do make it fall.
Ms A: Oh
Caitlin: Cos he got one more at the back.
Ms A: Oh and that makes it stand up?

Sounds of the robot being moved

Caitlin: See…
Ms A: Oh Yeh, so now he's got three legs and now he can stand up.
Caitlin: No! (emph.) that one, it stands up.
Ms A: Oh, is that his tail?
Caitlin Cos – he needs to stand up…indistinguishable…eyes…indistinguishable…
Ms A: You didn't draw a mouth on him
Caitlin: Er, no, couldn't have pencils.
Ms A: Oh, OK
Caitlin: Cos
Ms A Do y'wanna put arms on him?
Caitlin: Look
Ms A: What's that bit?
Caitlin: That bit is …(indistinguishable)…da 'im….(indistinguishable).
Ms A: Oooh

Ms A sounds a little uncertain that she knows what Caitlin is saying at this point. In our later reflection on the conversation, she notes the strategies she was using to maintain the conversation including, making eye contact, showing that she's interested, listening to what Caitlin had to say, etc., all effective strategies to sustain interactions (McDonald *et al.,* 2015, Ang and Harmey, 2019). But she further explains that, although she was working hard to make sure that she captured what Caitlin was saying, she was aware that checking for meaning all the time was likely to hinder the conversation. Such sensitive, contingent responding, that recognises and builds on the child's linguistic competence, adjusting to the child is highly supportive of language growth (Rowe and Snow, 2020). Ms A made the decision that as long as she had the gist, she preferred the conversation to flow, enabling

the sustained interaction. At this point, Ms A and Caitlin are really attuned to each other and although this is a point where the conversation could have floundered, Caitlin continued:

Caitlin: (indistinguishable)…he really mall cos…be careful with it.
Ms A: D'ya wanna give him some arms, or not? You do? Oh, we'll have to get some big boxes won't we, then we can Sellotape the arms on yeh?
Caitlin: Yeh. I, I, I need to sort it like the…(indistinguishable)
Ms A: Where shall we stand this big robot?
Caitlin: I know. Come on (to robot) we need to carry you.
Ms A: Will it fit in that corner over there?

Ms A hoped the robot could be tucked away a little, but Caitlin has her own ideas:

Caitlin: Here!
Ms A: You wanna leave it there?
Caitlin: That betta.
Ms A: OK, right give us a kiss then. End 3:48 minutes long

Ms A's conversation with Caitlin about Beaver Camp and the marvellous robot bears many of the characteristics identified by the scientific literature (Ang and Harmey, 2019; Rowe and Snow, 2020) as quality features of language-building interactions. It was sustained (many more than 5 conversational turns), carried elements of narrative, and included explanation (Rowe, 2012), e.g., about the Teddy Bears Picnic. The conversation also offered the opportunity for Caitlin to use what would be considered more diverse vocabulary, e.g., using the word taller rather than just big, and Ms K introducing the word 'marvellous' within a meaningful context (Rowe, 2012; McKeown, 2019). The final section, where Caitlin and her mum work together to plan how to improve the robot, is an example of sustained shared thinking (Siraj *et al.,* 2015), a quality interaction highly valued in early childhood education for its learning power. Within that section, Caitlin gives precise explanations of improvements to be made, persisting in the conversation to share her ideas and intentions. In talking about their future plans – what they will need to obtain to make the improvements – they are demonstrating a highly valued strategy for developing complexity of language (Rowe and Snow, 2020) and cognition (Leech *et al.,* 2019). However, within this conversation at home, and our joint reflection on the recording, emotional connection is omni-present. As we listened to the recording together, Ms A can be heard quietly to say, unprompted, '*I liked it.*' And to share a picture on her phone: '*That was my oldest, see, she*

made a flag. She's (Caitlin) made a robot!' (Meeting 2). We both laugh as the robot is huge, as tall as Caitlin herself!

The Beaver Camp/Marvellous Robot conversation indicates an important role for the active involvement or agency of the child with an authentic purpose to communicate. Caitlin was relaying her own experiences from camp, with new information for her mum, giving her a genuine purpose for the conversation. She was also the only person with expertise in the construction of the robot and her confident and enthusiastic contribution can be heard clearly as she persists in the conversation to make her plan understood. In reflecting on a further sustained interaction with her auntie in meeting 4, (Playing a Board Game), Ms A reflected that Caitlin was particularly confident in her speech during that recording and confirmed that having a purpose to communicate (to teach Auntie how to play the game) but also Caitlin's expertise in knowing the rules of the game was really important:

> *Cos she gets more chatty cos she wants to tell you what's going on, and she knows the answers, so… (Ms A, Meeting 2)*

A second example (Walking Home – New Class) further exemplifies key conditions that appear to support sustained conversation, namely the motivation of the child to share authentic information, the adult tuning in, and the warmth of the connection between the conversational partners. The conversation took place between Ms A's friend and Caitlin, on their way home from school, on the day when the whole school had been to visit their new classes for the following year. The recording includes multiple turns by Caitlin and although it is difficult to discern in the recording, Ms A explains that Caitlin is reporting what they did in the new class (visiting Year 1 and watching a film). The neighbour's daughter (also holding her hand on the other side) is just about to go into the reception class that Caitlin is leaving, so Caitlin has 'insider' information to share on the teacher and life in the reception class, explaining, *'Her in my little class.'* It is interesting to note that the conversation takes place on the same day and on the same topic as the less successful one with her dad referred to earlier, which must have taken place later that evening. In contrast, the neighbour quickly tunes in and has a sustained interaction with Caitlin. Having a genuine interest and shared understanding of the children's experiences of transition day, provides her with authentic cues for comments and questions to support the conversation. In addition, Ms A explains

that her friend and Caitlin have a warm and friendly relationship as they often walk home together, the friend can understand Caitlin well and they often chat in this way.

Detailed thematic analysis of the data provided identified a range of conditions which may support more sustained conversations with Caitlin and are demonstrated in the thematic map in Figure 4, below. The diagram demonstrates factors relating to both the adult and the child contributions to sustaining conversation, but also conditions which seem to surround the conversations.

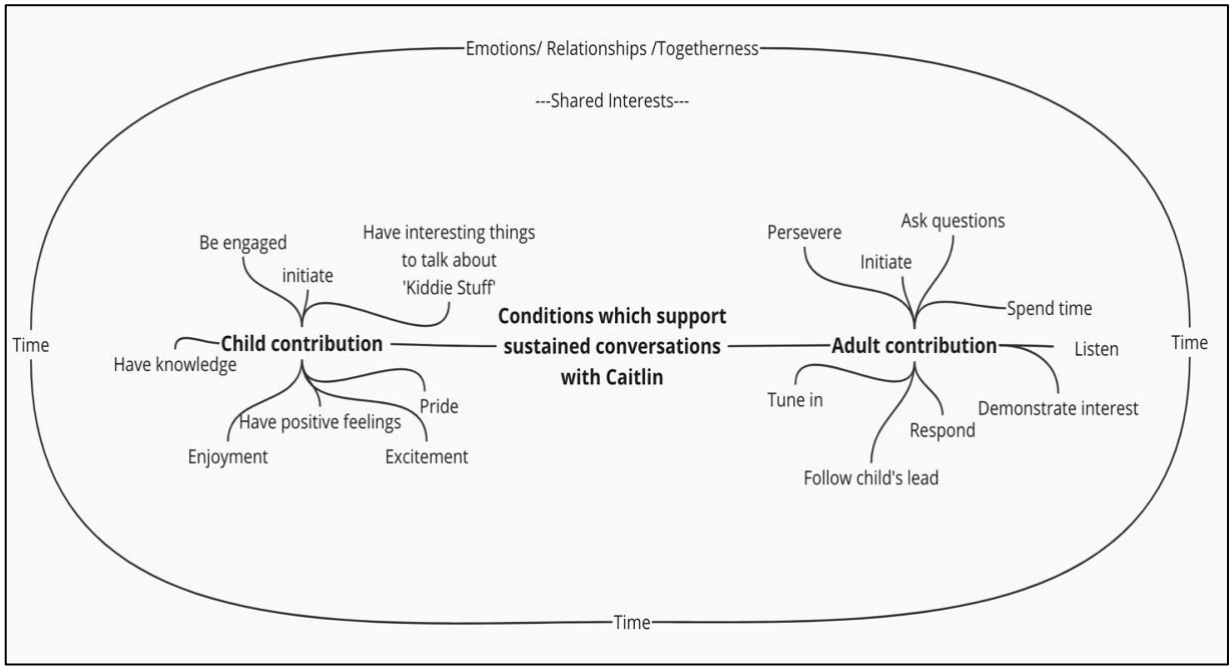

Fig. 4 Thematic Map of Conditions which may support sustained conversations with Caitlin

4.2.4 Hindrances to Sustained Conversation with Caitlin

Thematic analysis of interviews with Ms A identified her perceptions of potential hindrances to more sustained conversation with Caitlin and can be seen represented below in Figure 5.

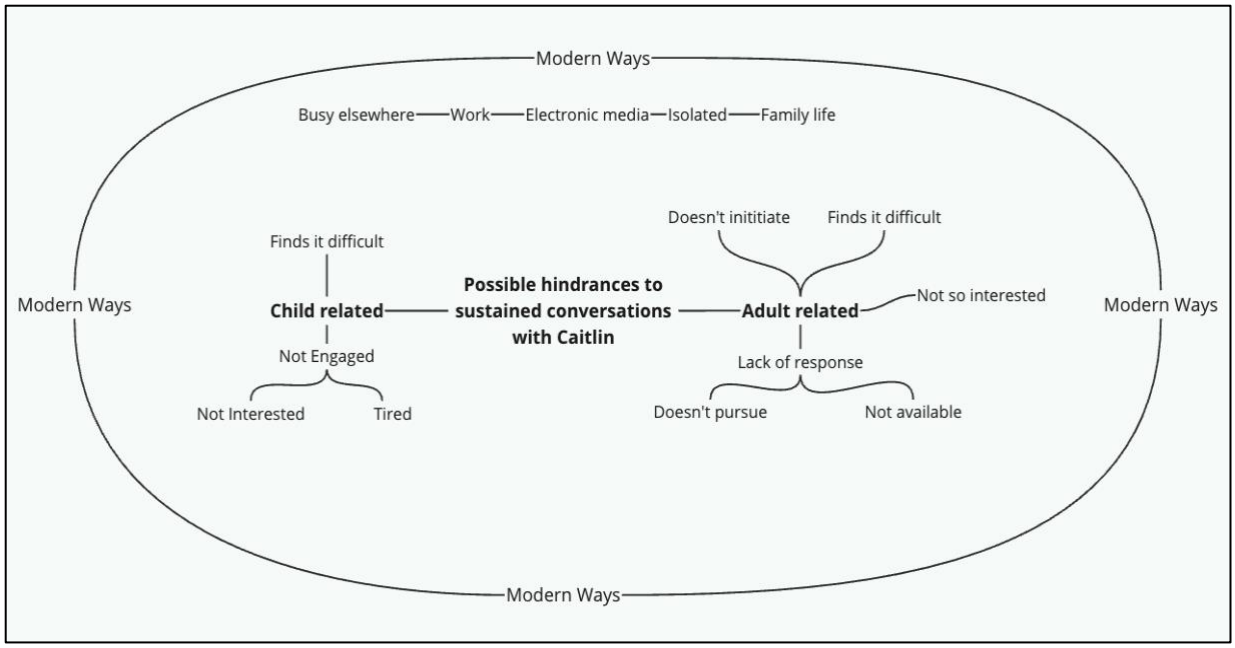

Fig.5 Thematic Map of Potential Hindrances to Conversation with Caitlin

Ms A was strongly of the opinion that 'Modern Ways' had a negative impact on conversation in the family:

> *In the past I think the conversation was better, but because modern ways and tablets and all (pause) TV (pause), we need to talk more.* (Ms A, Initial Interview)

Within this conception of the difficulties of 'modern ways' it was possible to discern, as well as distractions from electronic media, the contribution of 'busyness' or lack of time. Ms A described a tricky balancing act where the additional activities that the children took part in provided the interesting topics for conversation, but also created a rush where time to talk became more limited:

> *It's time. Because I'm, I do listen to her, but I'm cooking dinner at the same time and then needing to get changed for the activity. So, a lot of the time, sort of hurry her up a bit. That's when the conversations end quicker. Whereas at the weekend we don't do any clubs, so we have time to sit and chat with them. So, time yeh.*
> (Ms A, Interview 2)

Additionally, in reflecting upon the previously discussed unsustained interaction between Caitlin and her dad, Ms A suggests that Dad's work has an influence here as he is busy and tired due to working twelve-hour shifts.

Almost as a mirror image to the importance of having other people, especially family around to talk with in giving opportunities for sustained conversations, Ms A identified *not* seeing family (during term time) as a hindrance, not only in terms of having fewer people to talk to but also having less of an authentic purpose to talk (possibly because everything is known).

> *Well, a lot of my family, my family all live in G……. So we haven't seen them this past week, obviously we've been at school an' that so… Like during August there'll probably be more conversations with lots of different people. Round here it's just, tends to be me or Daddy or if we're going to school, a teacher.* (Ms A, Interview 2)

Analysing the qualitative data on hindrances to the more sustained conversation through the lens of critical reality suggests three structural influences, which it could logically be concluded could be a hindrance to conversation: electronic media, the pressure of time, and isolation from family. Similarly, given the demonstrable importance of the child having interesting experiences to talk about, limitations on such experiences would be likely to have an impact.

A further final two examples demonstrate that the conditions supporting or inhibiting sustained conversations with Caitlin represent a complex picture which the determination and perseverance of either the adult or the child has the potential to influence. In the first example, Caitlin's determination to connect and communicate overcame a range of potential hindrances to conversation, and in the second example, Step Grandad exhibited similar determination to engage Caitlin. In Meeting 4, Ms A shared a video recording of Caitlin with Nanny 1, where Caitlin is determined to share photos which she has taken on her toy camera (one of her favourite things to do) with her nanny. In this particular recording, there are multiple distractions which could have derailed the interaction including the television, other conversations going on around them and a toddler in constant motion needing to be watched. Despite the distractions, Caitlin's agency in the interaction, her determination and persistence to communicate about her camera and the photos contained in it, stand out and she uses a wide range of strategies to gain the attention of Nanny. In the final seconds of the video, a back-and-forth verbal exchange is sustained. Caitlin has found a photo of some family members and asks, *'Who are these?'* Nanny leans in, looking closely, *'Is that his mum*?' And they discuss. Although Ms A reports that generally Nanny 1 cannot understand Caitlin's speech so well, she is able to tune into

Caitlin's interests, presented in the photos, including her toys such as Peppa Pig, as well as photos of the family. The section of the conversation where the most sustained interaction occurred was where Caitlin captured her Nanny's interest and there was a shared interest and authentic purpose to work out, together, who was in the picture.

The final example, a recording of Step Grandad with Caitlin demonstrates his determination and perseverance to have a conversation with her, but also a further strategy – the use of humour. This recording is interesting because despite Step Grandad using all of his knowledge of Caitlin's interests: karate, swimming, things she is good at, and recent family events, at first the conversation would not flow. Caitlin was simply not engaged. However, it is Step Grandad's perseverance and use of humour to cajole that begins to draw Caitlin in. *'Swimmin' You good at swimmin'?* (Caitlin shakes her head), '*Whadya mean, no!'* (comic incredulity in his voice). The conversation finally turns when Step Grandad gets it wrong about the colour of the swimming hat that Caitlin has achieved (possibly on purpose). Again, the video recording shows the sudden engagement as Caitlin jumps up onto her knee to clarify the progression of the swimming hat colours - using her fingers to demonstrate further. This sudden engagement occurs when Caitlin knows something that Step Grandad doesn't and needs to explain, reinforcing the finding suggesting the importance of knowledge or expertise giving confidence and an authentic purpose to speak. The humour continues as they talk about karate, *'Woah!'* says Step Grandad, *'I'll have to be careful; you'll be beating me up!'* Caitlin is now clearly enjoying the interaction and the observation goes on to show again the value of shared understandings as they have a sustained exchange about Karate and other family members' involvement and achievements. However, this recording also reiterates that when this shared understanding is missing, conversation is more difficult. Towards the end of the interaction, Caitlin changes the subject to Halloween and Step Grandad, unaware of the planned Halloween event, falters as he is unable to tune in to what Caitlin is trying to say. Mum helps out with, 'She's gonna be a witch', reminding Caitlin and giving her extra vocabulary to continue, e.g., skeletons, turtles. Caitlin is now fully engaged in the conversation and as the recording ends is insisting, she has more to say, 'One more stuff!'

4.2.5 Insights gained through collaborative research into conversation with Caitlin and potential value of the process

As previously noted, Ms A was a highly motivated participant, largely by the wish to support my research and the university. However, she was also personally very interested in children and their development as well as having particular interest and concerns for Caitlin due to her speech sound impairment. Ms A's thoughtful contributions provided insight into the nature of conversation with Caitlin and the contexts, situations, and subjects where conversations were more likely to thrive. Significantly, Ms A's expert knowledge of her own child, gave insight into Caitlin's possible motivations to communicate, demonstrating the importance of the child's agency in driving more sustained conversations as well as the adults' contributions.

However, a further purpose of the research was to explore whether this process of reflection could have any additional value for the parents themselves. During the process, the videos seemed to highlight for Ms A some of the factors which may hinder conversation with Caitlin such as the distraction of the television, reminding her to try to remove distractions when talking with Caitlin, or her elder sister tending to take over and speak for her, reminding her to ensure Caitlin had opportunities to speak for herself. Ms A reported that she had enjoyed the process, especially finding out what Caitlin was saying to other people and which people were able to understand her, where she needed to help, or where she could stand back. Throughout the data are examples of Ms A acting as a go-between with other adults including Caitlin's dad, Nanny 1, and Step Grandad. Ms A was pleased to see how Caitlin's speech was developing and in thinking about the implications of what she had learned, the two key points, for her, were that all the family needed to be involved in talking with Caitlin, but this was only likely to happen when Caitlin had something that she wanted to talk about.

4.2.6 Summary of Findings Case Study 1

The evidence presented in Case 1 begins to suggest some possible themes for further investigation in the cases to follow:

- Emotion and relationships have a significant part to play in Caitlin's conversations in the home and community. Sustained conversations were characterised by connection and togetherness where the adults were 'tuned in' to the child and such attuned adults may act as a conduit to other potential conversational partners.

- Shared understandings and investment in the conversation by both conversational partners appear to sustain conversation.

- It appears to be important for the child to have opportunities and experiences that provide meaningful and authentic subjects for conversations. Motivating subjects can be particular ongoing interests of the child but may also be recent experiences, or where the child has knowledge or expertise.

- The conditions that support or hinder sustained conversation include the contribution of the adult, the child, and 'life' conditions around them at the time.

4.3 Case 2 Pt 1 Ms K and Frieda

The data for Case 2 was collected during May and the early part of June 2020 as England was beginning to emerge from the first lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic. Frieda is the youngest child in the study and had briefly started nursery part-time at her local primary school before its closure. Frieda is co-parented by her mum, Ms K, and dad, Mr P, who are no longer in a relationship, and she has no siblings. Ms K and Frieda had moved back into Ms K's family home with Frieda's maternal Grandparents, to live together through lockdown. After a brief period of uncertainty at the beginning of the lockdown restrictions, when it was unclear if Mr P (Frieda's dad) was allowed to see Frieda, the couple reinstated Frieda's weekend overnight stay at her dad's house, but not their normal pattern, which included a mid-week overnight stay as well.

Prior to lockdown, Frieda's paternal Grandparents were also very involved in her life. They had cared for her one day a week since she was a baby and had just begun picking her up from nursery one day, caring for her until her dad returned from work. Before lockdown, Frieda would have been taken to visit them most weekends. Lockdown meant that they had been unable to see Frieda for seven weeks and during the period the data relating to Mr P and Frieda was collected, groups of up to six people began to be allowed to meet outdoors and they were beginning to meet with Frieda, for picnics at their allotment. As Ms K worked part-time in essential retail and Mr P worked as a teaching assistant in a special needs school, both parents were key workers and had returned to their workplaces, working outside of the home throughout the period of data collection. Analysis of data relating to Frieda is considered in two parts because the phenomenon under study is adults' conversation with the child and, for Frieda, this is taking place in two different homes in different circumstances.

The following table details the data considered in relation to Ms K and Frieda. Thematic analysis of the recordings is available in Appendix 3c, and the detailed analysis of Elsa Built Two Castles is available in Appendix 4g.

Data Shared by Ms K	
	General Conversation Logs (3)
Research Meetings (5)	Recordings provided in Specific Conversation Log (Audio)
Meeting 2	Early Morning: Elsa made Two castles: Imagination and Dreams **(5:14)** Tiny Little Wolf: Playing phones with Nannan **(3.21)**
Meeting 3	Early Morning: Nice Dream **(6.31)** Breakfast time: Toast: Playing with words **(1.58)**
Meeting 4	Bedtime: Whispering with Tattoos **(10.35)** Bedtime: More Water **(4.46)**
Meeting 5	BabyBabs: Playful, F's alter ego **(4.20)** Early Morning: Mickey Mouse and Tinkerbell **(6.31)** Cleaning out the Hamster **(15.11)**

Table 4 Data analysed in Case 2 (Pt 1) MS K and Frieda

4.3.1 Nature and Characteristics of Conversations taking place with Frieda during her time with Ms K

Conversations with Frieda were delimited or enclosed by the COVID-19 restrictions in operation at the time of the data collection. The first influence was that Frieda's potential conversational partners were limited to Ms K and Frieda's nanna and grandad. The usual conversations with other extended family who would normally visit frequently through the week had ceased due to restrictions on household mixing, and although the family did sometimes have video conversations with them, it was not a regular occurrence for Frieda to be involved. Many of Frieda's normal experiences such as going to nursery, going to the playground, the shops, or visiting friends or family, that may have generated opportunities for conversation or become the subjects of conversation (as exemplified in Case 1), had ceased.

It is fascinating that despite the restrictions, Frieda found plenty to talk about, both real and via her imagination. Through the data, it is possible to see references to life during that first COVID-19 lockdown as subjects of Frieda's conversations. Examples included what she was seeing while she was out on local walks such as the rainbows chalked on the pavement or looking at the animals through the railings of the park that was closed. Ms K also reported that Frieda frequently returned to talking about her memories of life during the COVID-19 restrictions such as the Thursday clap for the NHS or when her great aunt had had to drop Grandad's birthday present on the step. Rather than create a specific theme or code for COVID-19, I see these as Frieda talking about her life and how life works, at that specific time, reflecting her own experience, what was happening within the family, and what was meaningful to her. These findings resonate with Tizard and Hughes (1984) who reported that the children and their mothers in their study would discuss, 'Everything…how life is organised (p.22) and Fisher (2016), who found children's conversations tended to focus on what was important to them in the moment. Hedges (2022) argues that such interactions and ongoing enquiries offer insight into children's 'important and deep interests' (p.iv) which tend to be 'almost everything in their life' (P. 4).

Figure 6 below shows the topics of Frieda's conversation during her time with her mum, Ms K, derived from detailed thematic analysis of the interviews with Ms K, her general logs, and her specific logs. Figure 7 shows the contexts in which sustained conversation was noted to occur.

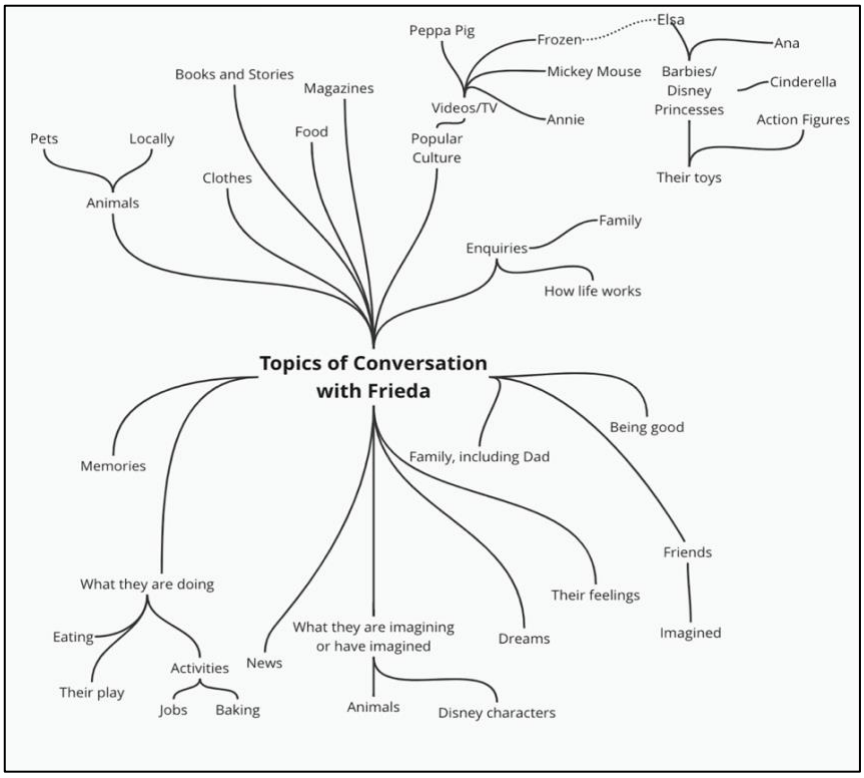

Fig. 6 Thematic Map of Frieda's Topics of Conversation and the Contexts in which Sustained Conversation tends to occur during her time with Ms K

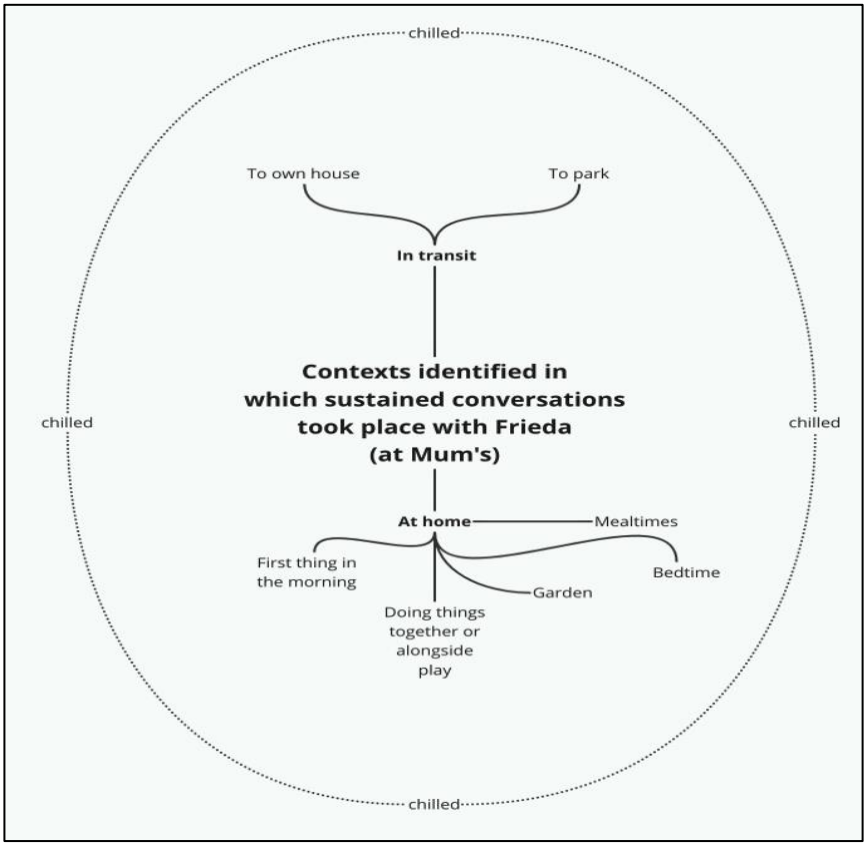

Fig. 7 Thematic Map of Contexts for Frieda's Sustained Conversations (at Mum's)

Unsurprisingly, the conversations largely took place at home (Ms K's childhood home). The only conversations noted outside of the home were in transit to either Frieda and Ms Ks' own house and to, or through, parks in their local area. Key times and contexts identified, where more sustained conversation took place, included first thing in the morning and last thing at night. Ms K identified that interactions tended to be particularly protracted at Frieda's bedtime. This echoes data from Case 1 and, similarly, Ms K also perceived that Frieda's purpose at that time was to engage her in conversation to avoid having to go to sleep. Throughout the rest of the day, there were opportunities for conversation where they would talk about what they were doing at the time. This may have occurred when the two were doing things together such as: eating, doing activities together (e.g., baking or cleaning out the hamster's cage), or other household chores. However, an interesting context identified is where the two were alongside each other, doing their own things, with Frieda engaged in her own play. Ms K reports that conversations with Frieda would frequently involve Frieda's play, especially her 'make-believe' play. This tended to involve Frieda telling Ms K about what she was doing in her play in the moment, rather than the two engaging in make-believe play together. Retelling a period of make-believe play or retelling an imagined event influenced by her play (as in the Elsa Built Two Castles conversation analysed in depth below) were also popular subjects. Ms K reflected that talking about her play was a very motivating topic of conversation for Frieda:

> *Usually around play, trying to involve you in play - that's always quite likely to get a conversation when you engage with her about that sort of stuff.* (Ms K, Meeting 3)

The COVID-19 lockdown April – June 2020 resulted in unprecedented changes to the daily routines of families, with considerable challenges for many and widespread concern for children's learning and development (Andrew *et al.*, 2020). However, there is considerable variation in individual experiences and the particular circumstances of how Ms K and Frieda were living at that time (having moved back to Ms K's family home) seem to have offered opportunities for sustained conversation. Ms K reported that her mum, Frieda's nanna, was very responsive to Frieda and would frequently engage with her as well as supporting Ms K in looking after Frieda (see Whispering with Tattoos section 4.3.4 as an example). Ms K specifically mentioned the circumstance of moving back to her parents' house, particularly

that she and Frieda were now sharing a bedroom and a 'very large bed' as influencing their conversations. Many of their conversations, including the very sustained conversations shared as data, took place there - first thing in the morning or last thing at night. Analysis of the conversations themselves, our joint reflections, and the interview data identified that conversations with Frieda generally were characterised by evidence of emotional warmth, playfulness, and connection. Throughout the data, there are lots of conversations, where the two are 'cosy', with lots of cuddles and 'I love yous' and this is particularly so in the early morning and bedtime conversations. Data from Ms K's interviews add strength to the finding identified in Case 1 of the relational purposes of the adults' conversations with their children. In reflecting upon Whispering with Tattoos, a particularly sustained conversation with Frieda at bedtime, and why she was prepared to continue talking with Frieda at that time, Ms K explained:

> *Erm (pause) definitely enjoyment. I think it's, it's like a bonding thing, bonding at that time of night yeh, definitely like a closeness thing.* (Ms K, Meeting 4)

This quote exemplifies a further theme in the data provided by Ms K and is informative to the research question in relation to pleasure in the conversation, suggesting that enjoyment was a key motivator for the conversation. Striking throughout the interviews with Ms K was her repeated use of words relating to engagement. Sometimes this related to her own intention to connect as above, but it was also used to express how much she enjoyed talking with Frieda, finding *her* engaging, talkative, and funny.

> *I love (emph.) talking to Frieda (laughs). It's really…yeh she can come out with some really funny stuff sometimes so erm and you just wonder where she's learned that stuff from, how does she know that word? Yeh she's a very talkative child, so I enjoy it. (Ms K, initial meeting)*

Just as with Ms A, part of the enjoyment Ms K takes from conversation with Frieda was an opportunity to gain insight into her child, particularly her language development, but also as a person:

> *It was enjoyable – definitely…Erm it was, erm, nice to see how she countered yeh, and like her, sort of, getting on her own two feet with her talking and stuff…Erm It*

didn't feel like I was talking to a toddler – it just felt like another person.' (Ms K, Meeting 3).

The following analysis illustrates two key characteristics of Frieda's conversations with Ms K: their playful nature and the presence of Frieda's imagination, bringing together influences from her own play, her experiences in real life, and her experience of characters from popular culture such as Disney princesses, in this case, Elsa and Anna from Frozen. However, it also demonstrates the language-building characteristics of the conversation.

4.3.2 Elsa Builds Two Castles

This conversation takes place first thing in the morning when Ms K and Frieda have just woken up. The recording begins with Frieda having initiated the conversation:

Frieda: Erm, Elsa build, er two castles for them
Ms K: She built two castles? One for the wolves and one for the foxes?

Tizard and Hughes (1984) refer to the mothers in their study as having 'a wealth of shared experience to draw on' (p. 61) and contend that the shared knowledge between conversational partners enables the conversation to flow as well as providing richness to the interaction. Here Ms K quickly tunes in to the subject of Frieda's conversation, drawing on their shared understanding of Frieda's current concerns and recent experiences. During our reflection on the conversation, it was clear that Ms K understood that Frieda likes to talk about events from her play and her imagination, that she loves animals (they both do), and importantly, she knows that Elsa is one of Frieda's favourite Disney characters and her Elsa doll is one of the toys she loves to play with. She is also aware that Frieda interacts with the princesses in her play and thinks of them as her friends. During our reflection, Ms K also explained that she had realised Frieda was drawing on a conversation they had had previously when Ms K had told Frieda about hearing a fox making a terrible, screeching noise in their road.

Frieda replies

Frieda: Yes.
Ms K: Wow! And what do they look like?

Ms K shows genuine interest through her voice, gives her full attention, and asks an open question to find out more, demonstrating a range of communication-facilitating strategies (McDonald *et al., 2015)*.

Frieda: They look like dirty ones and they climb up
Ms K: Ooh dear (a bit of laughter in Ms K's voice)
Frieda: Laughs and it turns into an extended false laugh
Ms K: You're funny.

Lots of affection and humour can be seen here in the interchange between the two, Frieda has been a little provocative making the foxes dirty and naughty. Ms K gives affirmation to Frieda that she is enjoying the conversation and her company and without prompting, Frieda continues with her story:

Frieda: Hmmmmm, when they climb on the (inaudible) it will be dirty and slippy! (emph)
Ms K: Right, well then that's, that's

Ms K sounds a little uncertain of what to say next, but Frieda is in full flow, talking with a loud, enthusiastic, confident voice. Ms K pauses to enable Frieda to continue and she gives her explanation:

Frieda: Coz they're muddy! (Shouts for emphasis and dramatic effect)
Ms K: Oh, because they're muddy.
Frieda: Yeh
Ms K: It does make everything dirty doesn't it? Mud.

Here Ms K demonstrates that she gets it now. She reciprocates and affirms what Frieda has been explaining and adds a little bit more explanation herself.

Frieda: Yeh. (pause) And sometimes you get mud on their feet, all over.

Frieda's voice is loud and demonstrative at this point and it does sound as though she is emphasising the mess the foxes and wolves make to draw Ms K in further and Ms K does respond:

Ms K: All over their feet?

Ms K's response affirms to Frieda that she understands what a predicament that would be, playing along with the dilemma. However, she has also reflected back to Frieda the correct syntax, demonstrating, within a very natural interaction, the parent modelling language (Hadley *et al.,* 2020) and operating as a language teacher (Kaiser and Roberts, 2013). She

then goes on to challenge Frieda's thinking (Early Education, 2005) by speculating on what may happen next, whilst also cueing Frieda for a further comment (McDonald *et al.,* 2015).

Ms K: Oh my goodness! so they have to have a bath?

Frieda gives a half laugh, which develops into a sound indicating she is thinking. There is a pause, but Ms K waits, a further communication facilitating strategy (McDonald, 2015)

Frieda: No, a, uh, I, (pause) a shower.
Ms K: A shower (amusement in voice) Oh, OK.
Frieda: They been outside with some sun cream on
Ms K: Oh, OK, so the foxes have all put some sun cream on outside
Frieda: That's why they need to have, have a shower, cos, cos they got sun cream on their (pause) and they got mud on them.
Ms K: Oooh OK. Yeah, they would definitely (emph) need a shower then wouldn't they?
Frieda: Huh huh Ms K: Huh huh
Frieda: And sometimes they likes to stand up
Ms K: They like to stand up? Like on their back legs?

A further example where Ms K has reflected back the correct syntax and also adds to the story by adding detail of the way that the animals may stand up.

Frieda: Uh, yeh
Ms K: What do they do when they stand up?
Frieda: They tiptoe around (Frieda uses a storytelling style voice here)
Ms K: Yeh
Frieda: The bath.
Ms K: They tiptoe around the bath (Incredulity in Ms K's voice)
Frieda: Yeh (laughs a little)
Ms K: Oh my goodness, bet that's a sight to see
Frieda: Um, sometimes, (pause) we had (pause) we just (pause) and we be naughty yesterday.
Ms K: Did they?
Frieda: Yeh
Ms K: What did they do?
Frieda: Well, not…(unfortunately indecipherable) *all dirty clothes*

The gist is that the foxes and the wolves got the clothes all dirty with their dirty feet and the information is delivered with recognition in Frieda's voice that this would be a terrible thing. It is interesting to note that the topic of 'understanding good and bad behaviour' occurs in other conversations, e.g. in 'Whispering with Tattoos' Frieda talks about not hitting. Hedges (2022) suggests adults may often overlook children's deeper concerns, but Ms K engages with the theme of doing the right thing in the conversation, indicating her approval of Anna,

who takes charge. Conversation within children's family settings is an important opportunity for emotional development and the development of self (Evangelou *et al., 2009)* and in telling her story, Frieda is playing with her developing awareness of self-regulating her own behaviour (Whitebread *et al.,* 2015) and she ends the conversation talking as if she took part in the incident herself:

> *Ms K: Oh my goodness, they didn't did they?*
> *Frieda: Yes!*
> *Ms K: (Shocked intake of breath) What did you do? Did you tell them off?*
> *Frieda: No. Elsa told them off.*
> *Ms K: Elsa told them off, of course (said as though that makes complete sense)*
> *Frieda: And Anna*
> *Ms K: And Anna too? I do like Anna.*
> *Frieda: I told the erm, the fox teh stop.*
> *Ms K: Oooh (But tired and half yawning)*
> *Frieda: And that, and that makes everybody happy again. (*A fairy tale ending)

Throughout this conversation it is possible to see many strategies supportive of language development, highlighting the vital role of parents as communicative partners (Kaiser and Roberts, 2013). The conversation is a sustained back-and-forth interaction, necessary to offer the linguistic and conceptual challenge to support language learning (Rowe and Snow, 2020), but also important in itself for the development of the architecture of the language processing centres of the brain (Romeo *et al.,* 2018). However, the conversation also tells a story, it has a narrative structure and concerns imagined, non-real happenings; characteristics associated with cognitive growth, and highly valued in education (Rowe, 2018). Throughout the conversation, Ms K responds warmly to Frieda's conversational overtures, following Frieda's agenda, showing genuine interest, and affirming that she understands and is enjoying what she is saying (McDonald *et al.,* 2015). Fisher (2016) contends such sensitive, contingent responses are essential for sustaining conversation with young children:

> Conversations flow because they are natural and genuine and because both parties are engaged in it and find pleasure in the exchange. (p.42).

However, Ms K is also, seemingly naturally, repeating back with the correct syntax providing the correct model for Frieda to hear and use in future conversations and enriching her vocabulary. Such strategies are vital for language development:

> Language grows through use. Students need to share conversations with a skilled language user, on topics they are interested in, to become proficient users of language themselves. (Hadley *et al.,* 2020, p. 39)

Throughout the conversation, the two partners cooperate to extend the narrative, making connections between real and imagined events. The challenge to thinking that has been provoked in this sustained, conversation represents the kind of interaction also highly valued in promoting cognitive development (Dowling, 2005; Siraj *et al.*, 2015). However, it is striking to note all of this taking place within a conversation about the child's own imaginary experience as well as the warmth, connectedness, and enjoyment of one another's company. One of the primary purposes of my research was to understand the conditions and contexts that enable such language and brain-building, sustained conversations to thrive and these will now be considered in relation to Frieda and Ms K.

4.3.3 Conditions which may Support Sustained Conversation with Frieda (during her time with Ms K)

In contrast to Case 1, there is little in Ms K's interview data relating to the effort or skill an adult may need to employ so that sustained conversation with Frieda may occur. Although, as demonstrated in the detailed analysis of the Elsa Built Two Castles conversation, Ms K employs many strategies known to support talk with young children, she perceives that the most important thing she did was to respond and engage with Frieda:

> *Erm, so I think because I didn't dismiss her…I think…cos she'd got validation I guess from me wanting to engage and that's what probably led on.* (Ms K Meeting 2)

This is a further suggestion that it is important that the child recognises that their conversational overtures will be welcome. This concurs with the findings of Fisher (2016) who found that even very small children realised when an adult was busy, influencing the interaction. Notable in each of the sustained conversations with Frieda is this engagement and the way that Ms K is able to very quickly respond and tune in to Frieda's overtures in a range of different ways. Just as with Ms A, Ms K is able to tune into Frieda's developing speech:

> *It makes sense is what I mean, like it's not all disjointed. You can have a proper conversation and most (emph) of the time you'll know what she's talking about – which is lovely.'* (Ms K Meeting 2)

However, Ms K also tunes into Frieda's playful mode of communication and the humour that she uses to entice adults into conversation with her. However, most notable is the way that Ms K has awareness and understanding of all of the influences on the conversation through their shared experiences, including in-depth knowledge of the Disney Princesses, which could be considered another example of 'Kiddie Stuff', the phrase coined by Ms A in Case 1.

However, the 'Elsa Builds Two Castles' conversation clearly demonstrates the significance of Frieda's active participation or agency in the conversations, with Frieda both initiating and driving the conversation, and this is supported by data from the interviews:

> *She just loves talking, so I think she finds anything to talk about…if it's something she likes and wants to do – you're gonna get conversation (laughs).*
> (Ms K, Meeting 5)

Throughout the data Frieda returns to repeated themes, perhaps suggesting that having something to talk about that she had particular knowledge or experience of would be a condition supportive of sustained conversation. In exploring this idea Ms K, considered it important for Frieda to feel comfortable with the content:

> *Erm, (very long pause) yeh I think, I think so. Like, she definitely seems to be more engaging when she's talking about something that she's comfortable with or that she knows quite a bit about. So massively like yer Disney characters and princesses and all that sort of stuff, you'll get a lot out of her from that. Or erm, something like that she knows quite a lot about and she's really comfortable with she'll talk to you about, a lot more – definitely.* (Ms K, Meeting 5)

In addition to the contributions from both Ms K and Frieda, there are also indications of the environment in which sustained conversation is more likely. This seems to be exemplified by a theme of togetherness throughout, where both parties are engaged and connected in the two-way process. In reflecting on what may have enabled the sustained conversations to occur, the most common response from Ms K was that the interaction had been relaxed or

chilled and with an absence of potential distractions. For example, in discussing the morning conversation, she noted:

> *Probably because I feel there was no other outside distractions because we'd just woken up – there was nothing else that was stimulating her I guess and giving her any sort of other influence…erm and I think it was because it was just a one-on-one conversation as well.* Ms K Meeting 2

Striking in the data shared by Ms K are the contexts in which the sustained conversations were taking place, which seemed to relate to the circumstances or conditions pertaining at that time and individual to the family, rather than a particular place, such as around the dinner table, as commonly advised to parents (Leech and Rowe, 2020). A further example of a language-building conversation, 'Whispering with Tattoos', will now be considered, highlighting an unexpected context for vocabulary building.

4.3.4 Whispering with Tattoos

This conversation takes place as both Ms K and her mother, Frieda's Nanna, are trying to put Frieda to bed. The full recording is over ten minutes long and here I consider a short section focussing on word learning. At the beginning of the recording, Frieda says that she can't hear the frog on the musical app they are using for bedtime music. This draws both Ms K and Nanna into a discussion about the app, whether Frieda heard the frog sound, and remembering the last time they heard it. Frieda talks in a loud confident voice, not a 'going to sleep voice' at all! The adults are trying not to respond and if they do, giving minimal responses in very quiet voices until:

> *Frieda: Mummy*
> *Ms K: Yeh*
> *Frieda: Talk properly*
> *Ms K: Sorry (laughing a little in her voice)*
> *Frieda: 'Don't, don't go whispering'*

Here is an example of the way Frieda draws her mum into a conversation, she persevered until Ms K, amused, gives in and asks an open question, giving Frieda the opportunity to continue.

Ms K: Why?
Frieda: Cos, cos yeh can't.
*Ms K: It's bedtime, (*trying not to laugh*) we whisper at bedtime.*
Frieda (very loudly)*: We don't! We whisper back properly*! (really loud). *Properly whispering like this*

Frieda starts to sing an invented tune in a whispery voice, which gradually gets louder and louder, incorporating playful voice sounds like:

Frieda: ta te tete te ta too tootoo tattoo, ta too, tattoo
Ms K: That's whispering is it?
Frieda: Yeh
Ms K: No

Frieda continues her song with more speech sounds and half words which sounds a bit like:

Frieda: ah make up, de mummy make up...
Ms K: Oh. It sounds more like singing than whispering

Frieda carries on with more singing her invented song with more sounds

Frieda (sounds like): *singing and whisper, pata, pate, dudu ……..choo, choo, choo choo.*

Frieda is being very playful with words, sounds, and music and seems to have hooked Ms K in, leading her to engage further with another open question

Ms K: What are you singing about?
F: I'm, I'm singing about tattoos.

Both Ms K and her mum really laugh.

Frieda: I'm whispering with tattoos.
Ms K: Whispering with tattoos?
Frieda (Singing): Whispering with tattooooos!

Frieda incorporates whispering with tattoos into the song. It has a lovely tune and a dramatic finish! Ms K responds with an amused tone:

Ms K: It's gonna be a hit single that innit?
Frieda sings more with the sounds: tattoos, tattoos, tattoos, tattoos, tattoos. Chuh.

This time Ms K continues the conversation, she has picked up the word tattoo, introduced by Frieda, and brings together her knowledge of the things that Frieda likes (glitter tattoos) and her interest in the little boy next door. She uses four words that would be considered

enriched or sophisticated (McKeown, 2019; Rowe and Snow, 2020) vocabulary, calf, permanent, and eventually.

> *Ms K: Harry's dad next door's got tattoos int' he? Have you seen the stars on the back of his leg?*
> *Frieda: Yeh*
> *Ms K: On his calf, that bit there. He's got stars on them, hasn't he?* (Nanny agrees). *They're permanent; which means that they'll never fade away.*

The phrase 'never fade away' is said in the style as if from a story, perhaps to help Frieda understand. There is a long pause, then they speak at the same time:

> *Frieda: Mummy (unclear)*
> *Ms K: The ones you have fade away don't they, the glitter ones – they come off eventually*
> *Frieda: But, but, but, Harry's dad's has not going run away.*
> *Ms K (slowly and carefully): No, those ones are permanent*
>
> *Frieda: And I (pause) and that's why (pause) erm, erm, Harry's (pause) Harry's dad can't, Harry's dad can't* (says the word slowly and then pauses) *Harr (pause) Harry's dad can't… Harry's dad can't.. te go off, ones can't te' go off*
> *Ms K: Yeh, they won't go off because they're permanent.*
> *Frieda: Yeh. Freya mumbles a word that sounds as though she tries to say the word*

At this point in the interview, when we were listening back together, I asked Ms K if Frieda had just tried to say permanent. She said she thought so, as did I. It is not really possible to tell, but even if Frieda is not trying out the word at that point, it is possible to discern in Frieda's more hesitating speech preceding it, that she is trying out the meaning of the new word. Ms K has tuned into this, given her time to try out the word, and then responded to what she perceives Frieda was trying to say. Just as identified in the research of Tizard and Hughes (1984), knowing the child so well enables careful and sensitive scaffolding to offer challenge that is just above her current level. Rowe and Snow (2020) also highlight that parents can be particularly well placed to offer linguistic and conceptual challenge, at just the right level, within meaningful contexts and the value of such interactions to language learning. The opportunity to hear, use, and understand words in a meaningful context is essential to vocabulary building (McKeown, 2014). Key to the language-building quality is the adaptation of the linguistic input to Frieda's current level of language acquisition, within their shared understanding of the context. When focussing on the word 'permanent', Ms K repeats the word and the explanation, slowly where necessary. She gives Frieda time to explore the new word and its meaning within the context of their shared knowledge that Frieda was able to wash off her transfers and she adds a storytelling style to one of the

phrases that she knows will be familiar to Frieda, 'they're permanent, which means that they'll never fade away.'

Although I suspected Ms K had allowed and enabled this conversation to be extended to get a recording for the research, this was not the case. She explained that the nature of their interactions and the things Frieda talks about pull her in, emphasising how her enjoyment of the conversation motivates her. However, it also highlights the agency of the child with both Ms K and her mum being drawn in by Frieda initially. In places, Ms K herself takes the lead, and together with Frieda's determination to remain involved, it becomes a conversation with the language-building power (Rowe and Snow, 2020) discussed. It is striking that such a powerful, language-building conversation occurred at that time when it could be assumed that parents would just want their children to go to sleep. In normal circumstances, with Nursery in the morning and Ms K being on her own at home with Frieda, such an extended bedtime may not be possible. The circumstances and the subject (the next-door neighbour's tattoos) demonstrate that the contexts and conditions in which sustained conversation may thrive are unique to the social, cultural, and familial context of the child pertaining at the time.

4.3.5 Hindrances to Sustained Conversation with Frieda

There were very few hindrances to conversation identified from the interview data in relation to Frieda and Ms K. As demonstrated, the two enjoy interacting with each other and the conditions pertaining at the time of the data collection seem to be supportive, but the most commonly mentioned hindrance would be distractions for either party which may detract from their engagement in the interaction.

Ms K was aware of the potential impact of being distracted by her mobile phone and social media and identified for herself:

> *But you know, even just being on your phone, just scrolling on Facebook for five minutes, that will take away from a possible conversation…And obviously, in this day and age, it's very hard to not have technology at your fingertips.* (Ms K, Meeting 3)

For Ms K also mentioned the importance of mood, e.g. if she is tired:

> *Erm a lot of the times I'm very, very (pause), if I'm very tired (laughs) it's a lot harder to engage with her then, like to find it within myself.* (Ms K, Meeting, 4)

In contrast to Case 1, time was not mentioned at all, but Ms K highlighted being busy with something else as a potential hindrance. This could be 'normal everyday stuff that needs to be done' such as household chores but could also be when she is trying to 'crack on with something of her own.' However, the distraction could also be on Frieda's side. Ms K expresses her experience where Frieda would almost 'blank' her if there was something she would rather be doing, such as playing with her toys, playing in the garden, with their pet rabbit, or with the little boy next door; emphasising again the powerful role of the child's agency in the process.

Interestingly, just as in Case 1, Ms K noticed that direct questioning was also a hindrance to a sustained conversation. In exploring the idea that the child having something genuine to tell may be a condition necessary for sustained conversation, I wondered if Frieda may share news when she returned from her dad's house. Ms K explained that although Frieda did like to tell them what she had done while she was away, it depended on the conditions and the circumstances. As Ms K explained:

> *If you ask you usually don't get much…she'll say 'I can't remember', or 'Nothing'…but if you just kinda let her talk…she'll want to tell you about it. (*Ms K, Meeting 4)

She also reflected on the need for a relaxed environment for this to occur too:

> *Erm, probably just like a relaxed thing, so usually it's like she runs back in and we have a hug and she goes 'Oh I've missed yeh' and just don't press her, so as long as it's a nice relaxed environment where you're chillin' that's usually where you will…(have a conversation).* (Ms K, Meeting 4)

4.3.6 Insights Gained through the Collaborative Research into Conversation with Frieda and Potential Value of the Process

From the beginning, Ms K could see the potential of the process to support Frieda in her talking. When asked what might be useful for Ms K to find out she replied:

> *Erm…. The method I suppose that will work best for her. Erm, just to try and work out what will help her engage more I suppose, just so's she can talk more, get her talking more.* (Ms K, Initial Meeting)

Over the course of the research, Ms K identified different aspects that tended to help their conversations, including that the more she engaged with Frieda, the more she would get back. She also noted the role Frieda herself was playing in the conversation; how she was very aware of different ways to communicate and how to draw others into a conversation, including her playfulness and her humour. Ms K also realised that Frieda's awareness extended to when she may not be welcomed into a conversation, recognising this as a potential hindrance and suggesting her own solution:

> *Yeh, so just like through normal everyday stuff that needs to be done you'll just wanna get it done, and a lot of the time she's trying to engage with yeh, and if you don't go to her straight away, she will sort of give up eventually because she knows that you're busy. So, I think it's like about keeping them sort of things to a minimum, so not doing stuff excessively that distracts you from her for a long period of time.* (Ms K, Meeting 4)

This included mobile technology:

> *You've got to be quite strict with it, which isn't always doable or easy.* (Ms K, Meeting 3)

When asked if the research process had helped her learn about the conditions that make it more likely that she and Freida would have sustained conversations, Ms K replied:

> *I think yeh, definitely sort of taking a step back from technology or TV and stuff like that and giving her a bit more time and, and attention definitely encourages it there. So, if you're just sat watching something you are less likely to be engaged with her so definitely makin' the time to just sort of actually sit back and go – OK, we're going to have a proper conversation or a play now and see where it goes.* (Ms K, Final Meeting)

4.3.7 Summary of Findings Case Study 2 pt. 1

- Sustained language-building conversations were taking place with Frieda and were characterised by connection and togetherness where the adult was 'tuned in' to the child, enabling sensitive scaffolding. 'Tuning in' included: understanding the child's

preoccupations within their shared context, her developing speech patterns and level of development, her behaviours, and modes of communication - including playfulness and imagination.

- The contexts in which sustained conversation may thrive can be unexpected and will be particular to the child and family.

- The agency of the child is an important condition in sustaining the conversation.

- Being involved in the research process may offer useful insights for the parent.

4.4 Case 2 Pt 2 Frieda and Mr P

At the time of the research, Mr P, Frieda's father, was the Student Engagement Coordinator in a Steiner special needs school for children with ASD. He is qualified to Level 3 in Childcare and Education, with additional professional development in speech, language, and communication. In our initial meeting, Mr P demonstrated a professional interest in conversation and the parent's role, seeing it as 'key' in a child's language development, and was keen to support Frieda in her development. However, Mr P was also concerned that, at the time of the data collection, the range of adults for Frieda to talk to was severely limited by COVID-19 19 and there was also some concern that perhaps his own efforts to have conversions with her were not always as successful as he may hope, noting '*Some conversations have fallen flat.*' When I suggested that it sounded as though he had been actively trying to get these conversations going, he agreed that was the case. The period of data collection was a busy, tiring, and stressful time for Mr P; he was working full time in the difficult conditions in school posed by COVID-19 restrictions and caring for Frieda each weekend. In addition, he had unexpectedly been given a month's notice to move out of the rented flat he shared with his new partner, Sophie, and had to find new accommodation. He found keeping the general log difficult and preferred, instead, to record particular conversations on his phone and reflect on them in the interviews.

The following table details the data considered in relation to Mr P and Frieda. Thematic analysis of the recordings is available in Appendix 3c, and the detailed analysis of Playing Shopping Game with Dad is available in Appendix 4h.

Data Shared by Mr P	
	General Conversation Log 1 (Reported Verbally)
Research Meetings (6)	Recordings provided in Specific Conversation Log (Audio and Video)
Meeting 2	When I was a baby – talking with Sophie (Audio) **2m:17s** Being Kind – not like Peppa Pig – talking with Sophie (Audio) **3m:48s**
Meeting 3	Allotment, socially distanced BBQ with Grandparents (Audio) **10m:11s**
Meeting 4	Jigsaw with Dad (Audio) **4m:46s** Playing shopping game with Dad (Audio) **2m:56s**
Meeting 5	Early morning: Painting blueberries yellow (Audio) **5m:4s**
Meeting 6	Allotment Series with Grandparents (Video) **13m:18s** In the grass with Grandma (Video) **11m:29s**

Table 5 Data analysed in Case 2 (Pt 2) Mr P and Frieda

4.4.1 Nature and characteristics of the more sustained conversations taking place with Frieda during her time with Mr P

Just as in Pt 1, conversations with Frieda during her time with her dad were delimited by the COVID-19 restrictions in operation. The data for part 2 were collected a little later than part 1 and by Mr P's second cycle of focus on the conversations, groups of six were allowed to meet outdoors, widening the pool of conversational partners for Frieda.

Figure 8, below, demonstrates the topics of Frieda's conversations determined from the interview data and the recordings provided. Figure 9, which follows, demonstrates the contexts in which conversations with Frieda were noted by Mr P to occur.

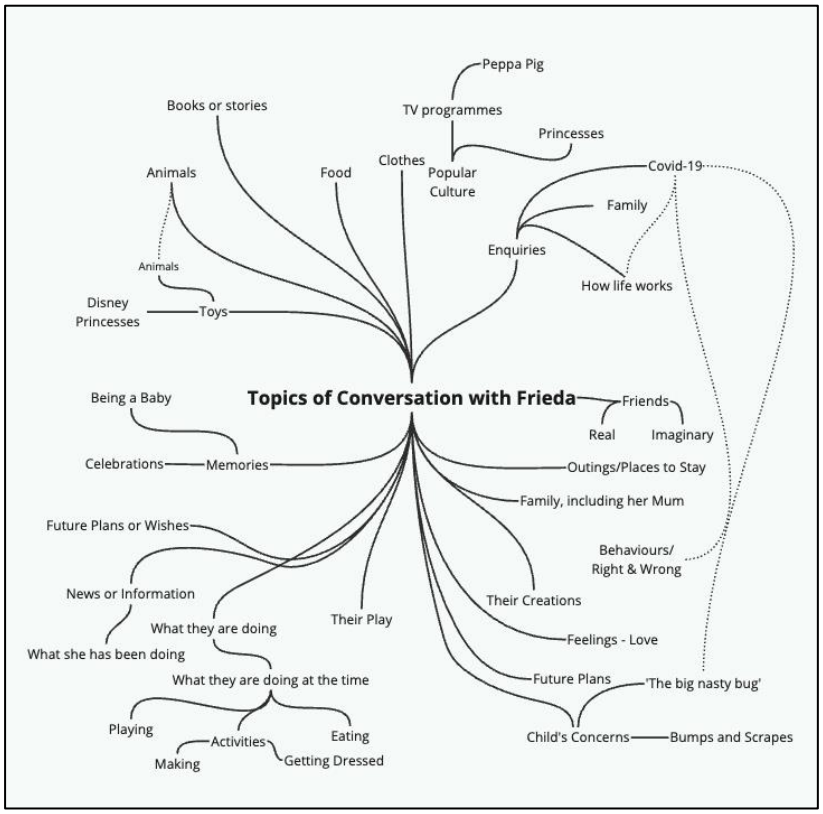

Fig. 8 Thematic Map of Frieda's Topics of Conversation during her time with Mr P

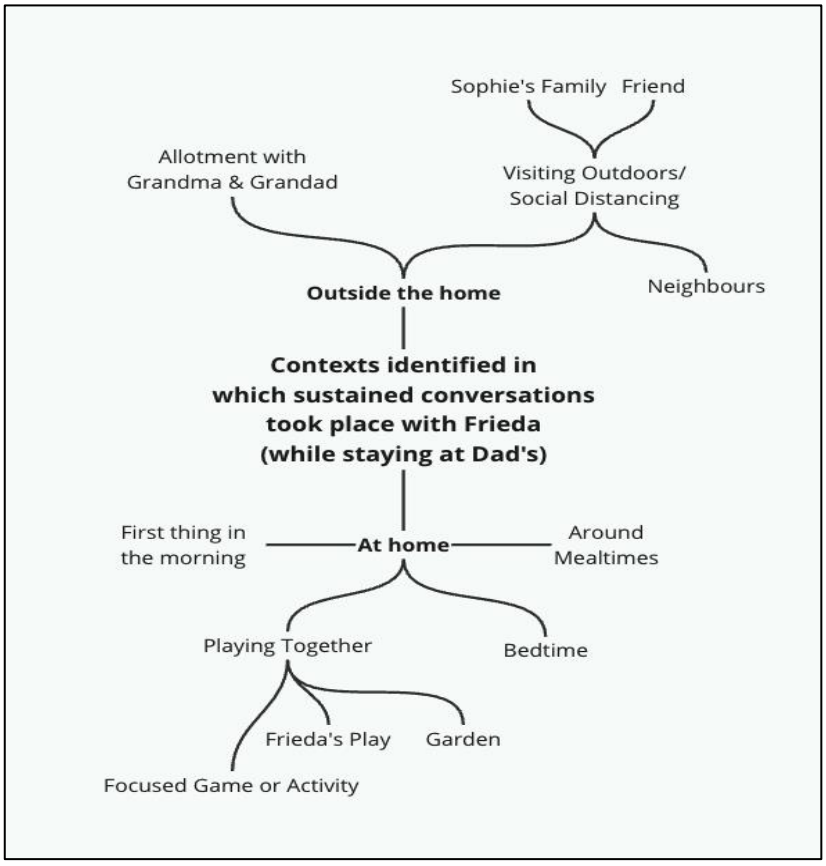

Fig. 9 Contexts in which Sustained Conversation occurred during Frieda's time with Mr P

As might be expected, there were some similarities between conversation when Frieda was with her dad to when she was with her mum. Many of her interests can be seen in both settings: animals, clothes, toys, books and stories, her creations and food, along with examples of Frieda's themes of 'I love you', wordplay and humour. Similar to Ms K, Mr P also highlights contexts such as early morning, bedtime, and around mealtimes as fertile opportunities for conversation. However, although Mr P does mention that one of Frieda's favourite things to talk about is princesses or things that she has watched, the data provided by Mr P does not contain any mention of Frieda reporting back to adults in conversation the things she has been imagining taking place in her imagination or her imaginary play.

A further difference was that a frequent subject of conversation with Frieda reported by Mr P was an enquiry of some sort relating to her life, for example, questioning what was going on around her and what was going to happen next. A common enquiry for Frieda related to the pandemic and the current rules that governed what they could and couldn't do:

> *Erm, (pause) she's curious about, especially with like some of the lockdown rules like edging down and us seeing er, Grandma and Grandad. I think she's curious about like why the rules are different now… and erm what it means and what, what the 'big nasty bug' means…Erm she'll ask why, like, it's OK now.* (Mr P, Meeting 5)

COVID-19 is referred to frequently throughout the data, both as a concern for Mr P in relation to Frieda's social, emotional, and language development due to being unable to attend Nursery and play with children her age, but also, as an important subject of Frieda's conversation. Hedges (2022) considers children's interests to be more than what children like, or do, extending her conceptualisation to include:

> 'Important and deep interests…evident in children's daily lives…and in their responses to the local and global events they encounter.' (p. iv)

As Figure 8 illustrates, conversations reported in Mr P's data relate to all aspects of Frieda's life, her own interests and experiences, be they narrations or queries about current activities, reports of recent experiences, reminiscence on shared experiences, enquiring about plans, or her wishes for the future. Indeed, reflecting back over the five cycles of the research, Mr P identified that topics of conversation for Frieda tended to be those things that were on her mind at the time:

'I guess it's where her head's at is the first, is the major point for the conversation.'
(Mr P, Final Meeting)

Mr P's reflection resonates with the findings of Fisher (2016), that conversations with young children tend to arise in the moment and relate to matters meaningful to them. One of the first recordings shared by Mr P: 'Being Kind, Not Like Peppa Pig' is now considered in detail. It demonstrates Mr P's point and was considered by Mr P very typical of their mornings during their weekends together at that time.

4.4.2 Being Kind, Not Like Peppa Pig

Mr P enters with a coffee for Sophie

Sophie: Oh, thank you. That was a proper Dad thing what you just did (said to Mr P)
Frieda: That's really kind that he brought you a coffee, my dad
Sophie: It is very kind
Frieda: Yeh
Sophie: That's right

Good behaviour and thinking about right and wrong is a theme that can also be seen in the data from Ms K, with examples including Frieda talking about the importance of sharing and not hitting.

Sophie: Have you had some breakfast?

Frieda doesn't respond to Sophie, she stays with the theme of good and bad behaviour and brings in one of her interests, programmes she watches on the television, and remembers that her mum has said she doesn't like Peppa Pig because she is rude. Throughout the next section, where Frieda explains the misdemeanour, her voice is strong and confident She has watched the programme many times and uses the expressions and intonation she has heard on the television; she seems to have expert knowledge to share.

Frieda: I'm not watching Peppa Pig anymore cos she's rude
Sophie: Ooh, is she?
Frieda: And, and she's, and she's very rude
Sophie: Why is she rude?
Frieda: Cos she didn't speak to people very nicely
Sophie: Oh no!
Frieda: And, and also Suzy (pause) does, doesn't be her friend anymore
Sophie: OK
Frieda: And that's not very kind either
Sophie: Nooh. Who's Suzy?

Here Sophie has responded contingently to Frieda's conversational overture (Rowe and Snow, 2020), and used a range of communication-facilitating strategies including, showing genuine interest through her tone and responsiveness, using verbal prompts, giving Frieda time, and using open questions to invite Frieda to explain more (McDonald *et al., 2015)*

> *Frieda: Em, Suzy's Peppa's best friend*
> *Sophie: Are they not friends anymore?*
> *Frieda: Weh, Cos, cos, cos they were cheating. They say erm, Peppa says, um 'You are cheating Suzy!'* (said with lots of expression)
> *Sophie: Cheating?*
> *Frieda: Yeh*
> *Sophie: Ahh*
> *Frieda: Then Suzy said, 'You are cheating'*
> *Sophie: Oh No!*
> *Frieda: And that wah, and that was, not very kind.*
> *Sophie: It's not very kind to cheat is it? That's right*
> *Frieda: Yeh*
> *Sophie: Bit cheeky*
> *Frieda: But (sigh and pause) I've got pockets all on my bum!* (Said loudly and dramatically. They both laugh).

Frieda appears to change the subject to something she notices in the here and now and something she can show her dresses (dresses are another of her favourite topics). But she knows it is funny to say bum (a bit cheeky like Peppa Pig) and seems to use another of her favourite strategies, humour, to continue the interaction. They chat a bit about her dress and the conversation may have faltered here but Frieda wants to continue talking and immediately, without any pause, comments on the drawing Sophie is doing, something she can see. Throughout, Sophie follows Frieda's lead (Landry, *et al.,* 2017), including when Frieda suddenly changes the topic again to COVID-19, a frequent topic for Frieda, which the family refers to as 'The Nasty Bug.' When asked why she might have brought it up just then, Mr P replied:

> *'Not sure…other than er it's just a topic point for her at the moment, it's a way to explain the situation, like why she can't go near other people and why she can't go in the playground so I'm guessing that's just a focus on her mind at the moment.'*
> (Mr P, Meeting 2)

In the following exchange with Sophie, Frieda talks about possible future events, drawing upon a happy memory of a past event to talk about what she would like to do when she gets the chance.

> *Frieda: But it's, but it's, can't wait till the nasty bug has gone in a few years*
> *Sophie: In a few years (laughs gently) That's right, it will be nice won't it? What are we gonna do when it goes away?*
> *Frieda: Erm, you can go near to people when the (inaudible) has gone*
> *Sophie: You can go near to people when it's gone, that's right.*
> *Frieda: Yeh*
> *Sophie: What places can we go when it's gone away?*
> *Frieda: Erm, we've been to the play centre, I think*
> *Sophie: Play centre? Nice.*
> *Frieda: Yeh, Goin', I like to my where I can play, but it's got a make-up spot, a make-up spot I can play, and, and also er play dresses*

Apart from the warmth of the exchange and the chance for Frieda to discuss her hopes, this exchange offers high-quality language input supportive of language growth and learning. Sophie is responsive to Frieda's current language level (Rowe and Snow, 2020) as she realises Frieda is trying to express that she would like to go back to the play centre she has visited before and then modelling and scaffolding (Ang and Harmey, 2019) the correct use of the future tense. Talking about future events supports the development of more linguistically sophisticated language, but it also supports planning skills, associated with school success (Leech *et al.,* 2019). The rest of the conversation is taken up with shared reminiscence of the play centre and includes discussing her friend Billy's birthday party and getting dressed up in a mermaid dress. Again, talking about the past event offers the opportunity of scaffolding to increase linguistic sophistication, but also offers conceptual challenge, building memory skills and taking others' perspectives (Fivush *et al., 2006),* in this case considering Billy's birthday cake. However, this is all enabled through a warm exchange, enjoyed by both parties, where Frieda's lead was followed throughout. The development potential was only possible because Frieda was fully engaged, with the adult responding to and taking her interests seriously. The conversation centred on recurrent themes for Frieda, indicating her deep interests (Hedges, 2022) especially the restrictions on her life caused by COVID-19, her tussle with good and bad behaviour, and her wish to see her friends again and to play with them.

Further data shared by Mr P identified a different context for conversation with Freida with a contrasting style of interaction. Important to Mr P was the time he and Frieda spend together involved in specific activities, particularly playing together. Whilst playing together this would often include Mr P taking part in role play as directed by Frieda. He indicated that he was keen to develop other ways to play and he chose to share two examples where the two of them were involved in a more focussed activity: doing a jigsaw puzzle and playing a board game. This is similar to the findings of Tizard and Hughes (1984) who found that, largely, the parents in their study did not tend to engage in imaginative play, preferring more structured 'games with rules'.

4.4.2 Playing the Shopping Game

Frieda spotted a new game and asked to play it. Mr P was aware that the game was intended for slightly older children and more structured than games they had played before, but he agreed to give it a go.

Frieda: Shake it (sounds of pieces being poured onto the table) Shake it out!
Mr P: Yeh
Frieda: Shake it out, shake it out (sing-song voice)
Frieda: Oooh! What's this?
Mr P: What do you think it is?
Frieda: These are only the rubbish.
Mr P: Rubbish!? (Amused tone) I think it's meant to be money!
Sounds of the coins being put out on the table
Mr P: 10p, 10p, 50p, 50p, 10p
Frieda: It is the pennies!

Frieda sounds delighted and really interested in finding out more about the game and Mr P continues demonstrating the coins, but Frieda has moved on to other parts of the game.

Mr P: 20p
Frieda: And only these ones too
Mr P: Hmmm
Frieda: Who's the children? (Frieda has seen the pictures of children who will be buying things at the shop)
Mr P: I don't know.

Mr P sounds as though he genuinely doesn't know (which may be the case as he has never played it before and is trying to work it out too). Either way, he is modelling to Frieda that they need to continue to think and explore together and that her ideas are welcomed,

effective strategies for both successful interactions (Fisher, 2016) and developing thinking (Dowling, 2005). Frieda does have an idea and therefore has genuine information to share. Her voice is loud and confident.

> Frieda: *They are the children,* (louder) *the children are at the shops, who's going to the shops.*
> *Mr P: Aaaah*

Throughout the interaction, Mr P makes encouraging sounds as responses, he affirms Frieda's ideas and Frieda's sing-song expression indicates she is enjoying finding out about the game. She pauses a little to think, before explaining that other pieces are the shopkeepers. But then suddenly she remembers about the 'nasty bug' and that comes into her conversation.

> *Frieda: She's going to the shops, she's going to the shops (sing-song voice) She's at the other, riiiiight, riiiight (pause) those children on here, these children on here. Any more things is shopkeepers.* (Frieda means here that she thinks the counters left over can be the shopkeepers).
> *Frieda continues: Some of these couldn't go to the shop, cos the nasty bug.*

This chat around the game demonstrates Frieda talking about what is on her mind at the moment (Fisher, 2016), making sense of her world (Tizard and Hughes, 1984), and that her interests include things that are happening in her life (Hedges, 2022).

> *Mr P: (Laughs a little.) But this is a game, so we can go to the shops in this game. Can you put that one in for me?*
> *Frieda: Why?*
> *Mr P: Why? Well, I think that you might know where it needs to go*
> *Frieda: There!*
> *Mr P: OK*
> *Frieda: Therererrrrmmmm*
> Long pause, where Frieda is exploring the pieces some more
> *Frieda: What are all these things in?*
> *Mr P: It is, they're called counters*
> *More sounds of the counters coming out on to the table*
> *Frieda: Singing her own song, Ickle wircle, ickle wircle, I, ah, I, make alled them out!* (Frieda has put all of the pieces out where she thinks they should go)
> *Mr P: Nice*
> *Frieda: What (inaudible) think this? what do you think at* (that) *might be?*

It sounds here as though Frieda has two attempts at the question as she tries out the expression, which would be considered challenging or sophisticated language (Rowe, 2018), drawing on the language model Mr P had provided at an appropriate level of challenge (Kaiser and Roberts, 2013) earlier doing the jigsaw.

Mr P: I think that's a dice, you roll it like that. (Sound of Mr P rolling the dice).
Frieda: There you are. (Little laugh.)
Mr P: That's number 1

In this example, Mr P takes a very active role in the conversation, this includes listening, modelling, scaffolding, and importantly creating an opportunity for joint engagement, important for language development (Ang and Harmey, 2019). Their talk around the game allowed multiple turns (Blinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek, 2019), the introduction of new vocabulary, and the opportunity for Frieda to try out phrases with an increased complexity of language structure (Rowe, 2018). In addition, the two were engaged in sustained shared thinking associated with cognitive growth. (Siraj *et al., 2015)*. However, just as in the previous cases, it was the 'togetherness' that seemed important to Mr P, and the word was repeated in his reflection:

> *Er, It was good, it was nice to have a look at it and like to be able to play games together… I think it's just that it's nice…and it's fun to do that together…so we have that concentrated time together, to talk together.* (Mr P, meeting 4)

4.4.3 Conditions which may support sustained conversations with Frieda when at Mr P's house

A key factor Mr P identified was the availability of one person to engage with Frieda, *'if she's got someone to chat to - just one person to bounce off of '* (Mr P, Meeting, 3). As can be seen from the analysis of the conversations so far, both Mr P and Sophie are motivated to take an active role in conversations with Frieda in the time that they have together and use a range of strategies supportive of sustaining conversation. During the interviews, he also considered the conditions that might enable conversations to happen and referred to the idea of 'space.' At first, it seemed that 'space' referred to the physical space, such as their positions at the table during the morning conversation. However, rather than being limited to a physical space, the space for sustained conversation seemed to be a communicative space, which was characterised by a 'coming together' or togetherness.

It was in reflecting on the success of the Playing the Shopping Game conversation, that Mr P struck upon the importance of having a focus of some sort to bring the two of them together:

> *I think having something to be able to focus on, and something to bring us both around.* (Mr P, Meeting, 4)

Here, exploring a new game together with Frieda provided that shared focus; a space for joint engagement (Ang and Harmey, 2019). However, he also seemed to suggest a role for ceding some control and receiving and responding to Frieda. In reflecting on what had contributed to the success of the 'Kind, not like Peppa Pig' conversation, Mr P noted:

> *I guess allowing it to flow in the way that it did. Erm, and the sort of questions we asked back to her.* (Mr P, Meeting 2)

Similarly, in their interaction around the shopping game:

> *I didn't know where it was gonna go next as well, like what she'd want to do with it and what she'd want to play and if she was interested so…*
> (Mr P, Meeting 4)

Quickly turning the interaction into a joint exploration of the game rather than trying to play the game 'properly' provided the opportunity to bring them both together, in a way that was clearly a pleasurable experience for both of them. It does seem here as though the conversation or talk between them, became sustained as this communicative, 'third space' was created between the two. The conception of a 'third space' as a comfortable space, where both parties can express themselves, be playful and equal (Oldenberg, 1989) is useful here. So to is Levy's (2008) interpretation of 'third space' as a space between two different conceptualisations to make something new. Mr P did not want their talk to be directed by Frieda in imaginative play, but he realised being overly directive himself would not be fruitful either. Instead, they explored the game together, creating a shared understanding of their own way to play it.

Mr P's recognition of the value of the adult receiving and responding to the conversation of their child was strengthened by reflecting on an early morning conversation with Frieda 'Painting Blueberries Yellow.' The conversation takes place in Frieda's room, early morning as Frieda is drawing at her easel and Mr P is trying to get her ready to go down for breakfast (detailed analysis provided in Appendix 4k). In reflecting on the conversation, Mr P noticed that despite being very tired and, in his opinion, not being fully 'with it', this was a sustained

conversation and we explored what part he may have played in making it so:

> *I think it was responding, as best as I could, like explain things and try to keep her (pause) follow **her** (emphasis) focus as well.* (Mr P, Meeting 5)

Probing on what had made him think to do that, it was clear that he wasn't deliberately or actively trying to prolong or extend the conversation, but it felt natural to him to respond to her as he was tidying the bedroom around her and he went on to reflect on his own predisposition to be 'clued-in' to Frieda's communicative efforts. Throughout the data are examples of him tuning in to the content of her conversations (her enquiries, toys, drawings, creations, etc.), her speech (both her enunciation and her meanings), her concerns (answering her COVID-19 questions), and her disposition (the awareness of when she is keen to chat or would like to express herself) as well as her manner of getting his attention (including her playfulness and her body language). Mr P suggests explicitly that as her parent, he has the closeness and the awareness to be able to tune into Frieda's conversation and that, for him, this is a natural thing. Fisher (2016) contends that parents 'instinctively tune in to their children and interactions are contingent upon the adult's adjustments' (p.6) considering such awareness crucial to sustained conversation.

In 'Painting with Blueberries', Frieda is clearly leading the conversation. However, across the recordings, it is noticeable that in the sustained conversations, it is not all one way and Mr P himself was pleased to note:

> *Hearing back the conversations, erm I can actually tell, feel the give and take of like how we talk to each other.* (Mr P, Meeting 5)

These comments are suggestive again of that coming together of a shared communicative space, characterised by a coming together, connectedness, and reciprocity, which Fisher contends is essential: 'Conversations flow because they are natural and genuine and because both parties are engaged in it and find pleasure in the exchange' (Fisher, 2016, p.42).

In addition to the contributions of the adult and the child, Mr P also identified certain times that were more conducive to the sustained conversations:

It's just because she's got a more clear, erm response or direct attention towards her and that conversation is unbroken by other jobs and stuff and no distractions. (Meeting 3)

Interestingly, there were also repeated references to time *around* activities and *around* mealtimes, almost perhaps a recognition by Frieda that they were all making the move from what they had been doing, to come together. Mr P's response suggested a subtle shift in the conditions may occur that opened up a communicative space:

Erm…I think it's when there's a lot of movement and a lot of like discussion can just naturally pop up…maybe when she's interested in getting the attention. Er when it's a bit busier, but it's not too busy, maybe it's a moment which erm maybe it's like more comfortable when it's just around a thing – like lunch.

4.4.4 Potential Hindrances to Conversation Identified in Case Study 2 Pt 2

Only one obvious hindrance was repeatedly mentioned throughout the data: the impact of the COVID-19 restrictions in cutting off access to conversation with important adults in Frieda's life, especially her paternal grandparents. Frieda's paternal Grandparents live close by and have been very involved in her care, looking after her one day a week since she was a baby. Normal (pre-lockdown) visits to their house would be characterised by lots of play and lots of chatting, with Frieda moving in and out of play and interactions with both grandparents with ease.

However, the following examples of Frieda meeting up with her grandparents at their allotment illustrate potential and perhaps unexpected hindrances to conversation with Frieda and how conditions, even in the same physical space, move and shift. The first recording (Socially Distanced BBQ) was made the first time in three months Frieda had been able to spend time with her paternal Grandparents, due to lockdown restrictions. The meeting had to take place in the open air because Frieda was not allowed to enter her grandparents' home at that time and, additionally, social distancing had to be maintained. The family were very much looking forward to seeing each other and Mr P and Sophie thought that this would also be an ideal opportunity to record Frieda chatting with her grandparents. Their surprise that this was not the case would be shared by many, as being

outdoors, in nature, is a context where sustained conversation may be expected to take place (Cameron-Faulkner *et al.,* 2018). However, analysis of excerpts of the recording and the reflections of Mr P, demonstrate how delicate the balance of conditions that influence conversation with small children can be.

4.4.5 Socially distanced BBQ

Throughout the recording, there are frequent attempts by the adults to direct conversation toward Frieda and bring her into whatever is happening using child-friendly language and topics she knows are familiar and attractive to Frieda, such as food and, in this case, her grandad.

> *Grandma: (To Frieda) Are you hungry for a hotdog?*

Grandad is talking at the same time about the BBQ. His comments are to the group in general rather than any one person.

> *Frieda: Yeh.*
> *Grandma: Shall we ask Grandad if he can start cooking a hot dog for us?*
> *Granddad: Five minutes yet.*
> *Frieda: Um*

It sounds here as if Frieda is trying to speak at the same time as Grandad who continues:

> *Grandad: It's got to be all white across the top*
> *Frieda: Uh*

It sounds here as though Frieda wants to say something but perhaps doesn't know what to say, she also may not be sure that Grandad is talking to her or that it is OK to talk to him as he is very busy with the barbeque. When we reflected on the conversation, Mr P explained that he had expected that because there were a lot of people around for conversation it would be a good time to capture one. However, this wasn't the case, giving us the opportunity to reflect on why that might be. The first hindrance he noticed was that perhaps it was too busy for her to be able to get into a conversation:

> *Erm I think when we started recording, I thought it was because there was a lot of people around for the conversation, erm and maybe we thought we'd be able to grab some little bits where she was having a conversation with someone, and wanted to lead with someone but maybe it was too busy for her to be able to get in.*
> (Mr P, Meeting 3)

The recording continues with Grandma talking to Frieda specifically, again about something she knows Frieda loves. She does elicit a response from Frieda, but the response also creates a talking point for the adults around her.

> *Grandma: Do you want another piece of cucumber sweetheart?*
> *Frieda: Yeah (pause) But I had one already.*

Grandma and Mr P speak at the same to let her know that that's ok, she can have another piece

> *Frieda: Can I have another puh*

Before she finishes, Grandma and Mr P speak at the same time to reassure her:

> *Grandma: Course you can.*
> *Mr P: Looks like you're gonna munch it all down before we (Sophie laughs) get to have it on our burger.*

Although the comment is directed at Frieda, it is a joke that also brings in the rest of the family. Grandma and Sophie then talk to each other, discussing the growing of the cucumber while Frieda munches her cucumber. In the background, there are sounds of the picnic being prepared.

As previously discussed, Mr P had already mentioned that although conversation with Frieda is likely to occur around mealtimes as they come together and sometimes in the preparation, during the actual mealtime she is more focussed on the food itself than talking, and that seems to be what is happening here. After a while though, with the adults still talking to each other, Frieda calls out to Mr P:

> *Frieda: Daddy! Watch this funny face.*
> *Mr P: Oh! That is a funny face*

Here, as heard in previous recordings, Frieda is using humour to initiate interaction with her dad. He also notes other occasions during the afternoon where she uses her intended conversational partner's name to get their attention and initiate a conversation but is then unsure of what she wants to say. As Mr P notes:

> *I spotted her doing a few times on that weekend… it was like erm, saying someone's name like she was going to ask them something and then not having anything to ask or like suddenly making it up in the moment. So, she's trying to open up a dialogue but I don't think she knows what she wants to chat about. (Mr P, Meeting 3)*

Grandma's attention comes back to Frieda, bringing her back into helping with the picnic.

> *Grandma calls out to Frieda: Could you pass me some of the lettuce*
> *Frieda sounds delighted: Oh!*

The adults then talk amongst themselves for a bit, referring to how well Frieda has helped, and how she has been very careful of the fire. When it goes quiet, Mr P tries to get Frieda to talk:

> *Mr P: Have you told Grandma and Grandad what you've done today Frieda?*
> *Grandma: Has it been an exciting day?*
> *Frieda: Um (pause) eh (sighs) I told Grandma I'm a (pause) tired. I'm eh tired a lickle bit…Yeh, I'm a bit tired.*

This seems to be a further example where a direct request from an adult falls flat and the conversation is further hindered when Frieda becomes distracted by the adults applying sun cream and negotiating to have more herself (which is not allowed). Sophie tries to bring Frieda back to talk with Grandma:

> *Sophie: I think Grandma was asking you a question then Frieda*
> *Frieda: Yeh*
> *Grandma: So, did you get up very, very early?*
> *Frieda: Yeh.*

Sophie laughs a little then because she can't believe the usually chatty Frieda is giving such minimal responses, and she tries to encourage her to contribute more, complimenting her on how well she has been sleeping. But Frieda's response, about her bed being bumpy, requires an explanation by Sophie, meaning that the conversation returns to the adults, and Frieda plays instead.

Mr P reflected on the potential hindrances to sustained conversation with Frieda, evident at that time:

> *Erm I think the factors were probably: erm the amount of people there, her being tired, and it also being like seeing Grandma and Grandad after such a long period of time as well. (Meeting 3)*

The final comment reflects Mr P's perception that the COVID-19-enforced estrangement of Frieda and her Grandparents may have had a part to play, but also the 'busyness' of the occasion, 'too many people' and 'distractions' for both Frieda and the adults. The

opportunity for one-to-one interaction between the adult and the child is considered a key aspect of the language learning environment provided by the home (Tizard and Hughes, 1984; Fisher, 2016; Roberts and Kaiser, 2013; Hindman *et al*., 2016; Rowe and Snow, 2020). Analysis of the recording and the following joint reflection adds to the developing theme in the data of the delicate balance of conditions that enables sustained interactions to occur. What is notable here is that although all of the adults were highly motivated to engage in conversation with Frieda, and as we have seen have the skills to do, it just didn't come together at that time. Of course, children should not be bombarded with 'language input' by adults (Rowe, 2020) and Frieda was quite happy to play for a while and come back to chat with the adults later.

In the final week, Mr P shared a suite of videos of the next occasion that the family met on the allotment, which offered the opportunity to consider how the conditions in the same environment can shift and a space for conversation with an adult can open up, but also how Frieda moves comfortably in and out. During the afternoon, Frieda watches what her Grandparents are doing and dips in and out of brief interactions with them as the adults explain different things they are doing. Frieda and her Grandma pick berries together; Grandma explains what she is doing, but Frieda is mostly watching, listening, and eating the berries. Fisher (2016) notes that when children are thinking intently, they often will not talk during that time. Otherwise, Freida is free to explore the allotment. She runs and skips between different beds, becoming fascinated by tiny fallen apples and her pink cardigan that she loses, and then is so delighted to find that she sings herself a song about it. A little later, Grandma decides to have a sit down in the grass. Frieda joins her, and a sustained interaction ensues.

4.4.6 Sitting in the Grass with Grandma

Grandma puts her arm around Frieda briefly and gives her a little rub on the shoulder (they are still not allowed to hug). They sit comfortably side by side with Frieda occasionally leaning towards her Grandma. As the conversation begins, Frieda is wrapping her cardi around her legs, and Grandma notices:

> *Frieda: I put my cardi in here*
> *Grandma: Is that comfy? Is the grass a bit scratchy? Is that the problem?*

Frieda: No, no. It's because they're nettles
Grandma: Where did it get you?
Frieda: Over here
Grandma: On your calf,

Grandma is responsive to Frieda's concerns (communicated nonverbally), she can tell her legs have been uncomfortable and knows how much Frieda loves her cardi.

Grandma: Awh, never mind. You know, sometimes, that's one of the reasons why I put my long trousers on, then they can't get me!

Frieda is looking and thinking, and Grandma gives her time to respond. She looks down at her own legs

Frieda: Oh. Well, I got my long dress
Grandma: Uh huh
Frieda: But they don't cover me all, (sigh).

Grandma calls out to Grandad about the next job to be done and Frieda pulls up clumps of grass and hands some towards Grandma then makes a sound to get her attention back

Frieda: Hmm
Grandma: Oh, thank you

Grandma takes the grass in Frieda's hand and pretends to eat the grass. Again, Grandma is going with the flow of Frieda's interest which is definitely the grass. She also uses humour, playing along and pretending to be a horse as she knows that Frieda loves animals.

Grandma: If I were a horse, I'd go yum, yum, yum, yum – thank you Frieda
Frieda: If you were a horse.
Grandma: You know I'd like to see Ben working with his sheep, looking after them.

Here Grandma is linking the horse joke to a new sheepdog (Ben), knowing that Frieda has been excited about a friend's new dog and knowing that Frieda loves animals. But Frieda is interested in the grass and Grandma mirrors her actions, pulling up grass too and tickling her with it, communicating in playful mode, just as Frieda is.

Frieda: Hey I haven't got some yet.
(Frieda plays with Grandma putting grass on her knee and making sing-song sounds)
Grandma: I like this one with the purple flowers, I'm going to have a look at these flowers, I think they're the ones that open up.

The two carry on sitting comfortably side by side chatting about different things that Frieda notices, then eat some more berries, chatting about finding the best ones and exploring the spider they find in the berry container. They discuss if it is indeed a spider or a fly, both of which are examples of sustained shared thinking (Siraj *et al., 2015).*

In reflecting on what had enabled this more sustained conversation to take place, Mr P notes his mum being sat down on Frieda's level, bringing them closer together. However, there is also an emotional closeness, with Mr P noting how Frieda was happy to be with her Grandma. He also notes Grandma 'taking on board where she (Frieda) is coming from.' Throughout, Grandma tunes in and responds to Frieda's concern, her nettle sting, and her interests in the moment: the grass, the berries, the spider, and her cardigan. Throughout their enforced time apart, Grandma has also kept up with what is happening in Frieda's life and is aware of Ben the sheepdog. In responding to Frieda's interest in the grass, she tunes in to Frieda's body language, where Frieda is showing rather than telling (Flewitt, 2005), and mirrors back Frieda's actions, tuning into the playfulness of the communication, as well as offering new language to explain. A space has been created, where both conversational partners have taken a little time out from their other activities to come together comfortably, each enjoying engaging with the other. However, it is a 'third space', where the child's world of her concerns, interests, and playful exploration, come together with Grandma's knowledge and experience of the natural world to connect and create a shared understanding.

4.4.7 Insights gained through this Collaborative Research into Conversation with Frieda and Potential Value of the Process

Mr P suggested that he had found the process of reflecting on particular recordings valuable, especially in developing understanding of the conditions that support conversation with Frieda:

> *Erm, yeh I've really, it's been really eye-opening I guess. I get to see it from the point of view of like being able to look, like reflect on the conversations and be able to, like think in those moments as well* (Mr P, Meeting 5)

*I am becoming aware of that was helping that conversation, why that conversation was as good as it was. (*Mr P, Meeting 2)

He further suggested that it had influenced the way he talked with her, particularly being able to tune in to both her desire to communicate and her manner of communication:

I think I've changed the way we chat as well… just that watching what she's trying to communicate…Erm, because I think that she uses words as an attention grabber but it's a lot with what's going on her head is displayed on her body and on her face most of the time. (Mr P, Final Meeting)

There was also evidence that the process had also supported Mr P to realise that his conversations with Frieda were actually more sustained than he had previously thought, reducing his concern, highlighting strengths, and increasing his confidence:

I think I don't think I'd thought about how much we do have…how well those chats do go and how much of a conversation we do have until listening back especially. (Mr P, Meeting 4)

I think I'm more confident, yeah. And I'm not, that's not as big a concern anymore. (Mr P, Final meeting)

4.4.8 Summary of Findings Case Study 2 Pt 2

- Sustained conversations require 'something' that brings both conversational partners around and creates togetherness in a communicative space.

- The agency of the child is an important condition in sustaining the conversation and what is 'in her head', her interest, query, or concern in the moment is a key focus for sustained conversation. However, Frieda was also amenable to being enticed into conversation with sensitive adults and the 'thing' that brings them together may be different with different adults on different occasions.

- The contexts in which sustained conversation may thrive are a complex interplay of factors in flux.

- The collaborative research process may enable the collaborating parents to gain insights into their strengths in communicating with their child.

4.5 Case 3 Ms N and Nathan

At the time of the data collection (July 2020), Nathan had been at home since school closed in March but had returned to his reception class for two days a week in the last three weeks of the Summer term. Nathan lives with his mum, Ms N, dad, and two siblings, a sister (aged 10) and an older brother (aged 18). Nathan's mum does not work outside the home at present but had previously worked as a legal secretary. Nathan has a large extended family on both sides who, in normal circumstances, he would see a lot of, especially Ms N's side of the family, whom they usually holiday with. Due to Lockdown and restrictions on social gatherings, all contact with the wider family was via audio or video calls. Ms N was highly motivated to take part in the research and shared a wealth of data covering conversations with a range of family members. The following table details the data considered in relation to Ms N and Nathan. Thematic analysis of the conversation logs is available in Appendix 3d, and the detailed analysis of 'Scary Cloak Dream' is available in Appendix 4j.

Data Shared by Ms N	
	General Conversation Logs **(0)**
Research Meetings (4)	Conversations recorded in Specific Conversation Log Conversations with Ms N, unless otherwise noted
Meeting 2	Scary Cloak Dream (Audio) **(6:09)** Family Exercise Session, Obstacle Course (Audio) **(4:53)** My tongue is painful (Audio) **(4:47)** Pandas do not kill you. (Audio) **(35s)** Red ants (Notes) Tooth Fairy (Notes) Being sad at school (Notes) Malls (Notes)
Meeting 3	With Ms N and Sister, Making an upcycled Elmer (Note) With Ms N and Sister, Dispute Beetle or Ladybird? (Notes) With Dad Bubbleman (Notes) With Dad – Insurance – it's complicated (Notes) With Dad – You OK? (Notes) Dad comes home (Notes) With Dad - Is Grandad Dead? (Notes) With Brother - TV (Notes)
Meeting 4	Phone call Auntie (Notes) Phone call Uncle (Notes) Phone call Nanny (Notes) With Dad Floor play (Notes) With Dad, Bathtime (Notes)

Table 6 Data sources shared by Ms N

4.5.1 Nature and characteristics of the more sustained conversations taking place with Nathan

Throughout Ms N's interviews, there is a predominance of references linking conversation to developing or maintaining relationships. Ms N considers conversation in the home to be:

> *Essential…it matters because we are getting to know each other…*I *think without having a good communication and, and talking to your child, you miss out on so much. They miss out on so much learning, you miss out on so much learning from them.* (Ms N Initial Interview)

This echoes the reflection by Ms K in Case 2, who refers to conversation with Frieda giving an insight into her child's development and the person she is becoming. Just as with Ms A in Case 1, an important purpose for Ms N in talking with her children related to the care of and concern for them:

> *If you, if you can't communicate with a child effectively, and erm, for them to talk to you, then a lot of their needs go unmet. And sometimes those needs are very basic needs. (Ms N Initial Interview)*

Ms N expresses how much she enjoys conversations with Nathan, not only as part of their relationship but also in their own right:

> *Cause, sometimes they're really fun, and, and you learn a lot. And, um, it's just good bonding.* (Ms N Meeting 2)

> *I have the best conversations with him, and he's only five, you know.*
> (Ms N Meeting 4)

Similarly, through the data provided by Ms N, there are repeated references to themes of connection and emotion. Interestingly, when asked what she would like to research about conversations with Nathan, Ms N quickly and strongly replied, 'Feelings,' further reinforcing the developing theme of the significance for her of emotion and the relational aspects of conversation within the home. Ang and Harmey (2019) emphasise the interrelationship of emotional development and well-being with language development; social interaction supports the development of relationships and secure relationships underpin language learning (Fisher, 2016).

Conversations with Ms N initiated by Nathan tended to be enquiries, sparked by his deep interest in aspects of the world around him, especially the natural world, such as bees, flying ants, plants, etc.

> *Erm, they usually centre around him wanting to know something, like how something works, or why something is, (little laugh). You know, why is there bees?*
> (Ms N, Initial Interview)

This resonates with the work of Tizard and Hughes (1984) who found that many of the sustained conversations in their study were prompted by the children's questions. Ms N reported that Nathan liked to hear and use new vocabulary and an example of this can be seen in the conversation recorded for Meeting 3 'Making an Upcycled Elmer', where he asked first where the materials came from and then, 'Is it recycling?'. He also liked challenging conversations, such as talking about 'Medieval Times'. Such interactions are highly supportive of language development. The explanations provided by adults offer the complex, decontextualised language supportive of child language growth, but they also tend to prompt further follow-up questions and therefore engage the child in sustained interaction (Rowe and Snow, 2020). Hedges (2020) considers such enquiries as indicating children's deep interests that motivate their participation in 'families, communities and cultures' (p.26) and motivating them to engage in dialogue which leads the development of the verbal skills they need to do so.

Nathan's conversations also featured worries, fears, and concerns: a scary dream, a sore tongue, fear the flying ants will bite, and having no one to play with at school. However, just as in the case of Frieda, it can also be seen that some of Nathan's subjects come straight out of his imagination ('Bubbleman Writes on the Wall'); dreams ('Scary Cloak Dream') or included elements of story, myth, and imagination ('Tooth Fairy'). Ms N considered some of the things that Nathan wished to talk about, to be '*weird*' (Ms N, Meeting 2), even '*bizarre*' (Ms N Meeting, 4). There is resonance here with the term introduced by Ms A in case 1 of 'Kiddie Stuff', which I interpret as the subjects children *may* talk about which could be quite different from those adults may choose.

Thematic analysis of the recorded and reported conversations and interviews with Ms N, identified the topics of Nathan's conversations (shown in Figure 10) and the contexts in which sustained conversations were identified as occurring (shown in Figure 11).

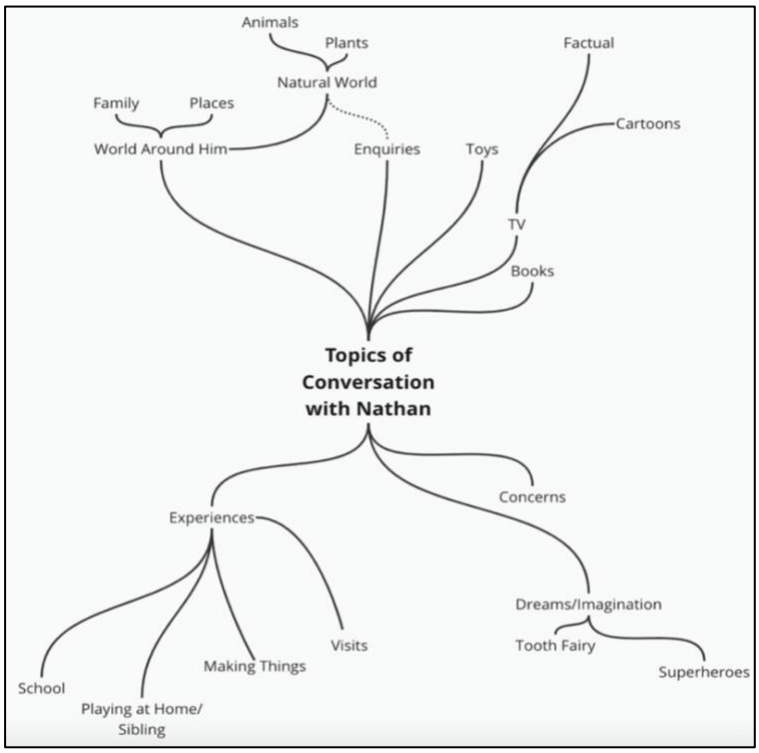

Fig.10 Thematic Map of Nathan's topics of conversations

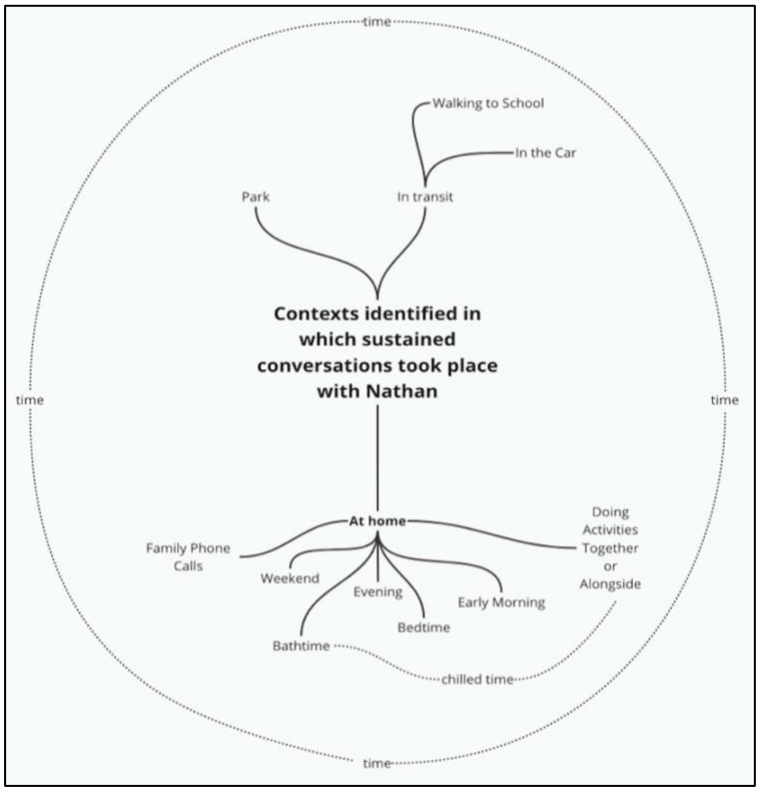

Figure 11 Contexts in which Sustained Conversations with Nathan were identified as occurring

As can be seen, the majority of the conversations are taking place within the home, and this reflects the conditions pertaining to COVID-19 at the time of the data collection. All contact with Nathan's extended family took place by phone, and the only experiences outside of the home were walking to school, visiting the supermarket and garden centre, and going to the park with his dad. Despite this, Nathan found plenty to talk about; his enquiries were sparked by all aspects of his life (Hedges, 2022) and the world around him, including the natural world, based on his experiences in the garden, as well as things he sees on the television and in books.

4.5.2 Hindrances to Sustained Conversation with Nathan

Just as in the previous cases, many of the hindrances to sustained conversation with Nathan were clustered under the theme of 'life.' Time or busyness was again noted frequently and included the adult being busy doing other things described as 'normal home things.' Ms N also realised that for Nathan (just as had been the case for Frieda at the allotment BBQ) too many other people being around, especially his sister, may impair conversation. As Ms N and explained:

> *So when, say, his sister, um, was in the same space or his dad was actually in, in, in the home, they weren't as, um, there wasn't that much back and forth. They were more sort of quick things, you know, little questions.* (Ms N, Meeting 2)

However, Ms N was very much of the opinion that it was the adult's response to Nathan that was a key hindrance to sustained conversation. She generously and honestly shared that for her, sometimes she was just not in the mood:

> *But, but because of me, that can quickly, you know (pause) because of the way I respond, that quickly can kill a conversation, I realised as well, you know? So, he* (Nathan) *might not explore it more. He just kinda leaves it at that, you know, oh, she's not interested, kind of thing, and, you know, I guess that's what he's doing.* (Ms N, Meeting 2 referring to Nathan's conversation with her)

However, when considering Nathan's conversations with his dad, she added the structural factor of long working hours creating tiredness and the impact of additional working at home:

> *Because obviously if he's on, if he's on his laptop, you know, within 10 minutes of getting home and Nathan goes to bed, you know, maybe an hour later, he's not opening up that space. Because children know once he's got the laptop on, he's working, and he's not, he's not available.*
> (Ms N, Meeting 3, referring to Nathan's conversations with his dad)

Muschamp *et al.* (2007) had already identified the trend of increasing pressure on family life influencing the potential home learning environment, including fathers in England working the longest hours in Europe. However, Andrew *et al. (2020)* demonstrated this trend intensifying during the COVID-19 lockdowns, including increased time working intruding into family life.

Both of these examples exemplify the importance of the opportunity to engage with an adult as an active partner in the conversation process (Ang and Harmey, 2019). They also support the concept, introduced in the case of Caitlin, and further seen with Frieda, that the child shows awareness of the signals that they are (or are not) being welcomed into the communicative space to enable joint engagement (Fisher, 2016).

However, in addition to the distraction of working at home, or being on his laptop, Ms N suggests that Nathan's dad may find talking with Nathan more difficult than she does:

> *Because, although he would say to Nathan, how is school? he's not, sort of, digging deep enough to really know what school means to Nathan, or what, what's happening at school. You know, so he's not (pause) I think he is interested, but I think he doesn't know how to [sighs], uh, I don't know what the word is, he just doesn't seem to know how to kind of, um, to explore in a conversation with a child of this age, you know.* (Ms, N Meeting 3)

As seen in the previous cases, this points to the effort the adult may need to put into the conversation, but also the importance of being able to make that connection with the child through tuning into them and their world. In considering hindrances to conversation with Nathan, Ms N suggests, '*the age difference, and, um, maybe kind of like, um, interests*' (Meeting 4) and gives the example of her younger brother, where conversation with Nathan seems to occur with ease. She notes how their conversations are fun and playful and explains her brother's ability to tune in and connect with Nathan:

> *Although my brother's a lot older, he's still like down with Nathan, you know. He's like, you know, yeah, I'll paint, let's paint, let's do this, you know. He's more, um, easy-going with it. (Ms N, Meeting 4)*

As well as tuning into Nathan's interests in the moment, this quote exemplifies the importance of connection, relationship, relaxation, and pleasure in sustaining the interaction (Fisher, 2016). However, it also highlights the agency of the child, which is further exemplified in the 'Phone Call Auntie J' conversation. In the phone conversation, reported by Ms N, Nathan's auntie (who now lives in Cornwall) actively uses a wide range of communication-facilitating strategies (McDonald *et al.,* 2015; Fisher, 2016, Ang and Harmey, 2019), requiring great persistence and perseverance to achieve a brief conversation with Nathan. As Ms N explained, Auntie B did her very best to 'work with him on the phone' (Meeting, 4), motivated by love and the desire to connect and maintain their relationship despite the geographical distance between them. However, their experience adds to the finding in Case 2, pt. 2 (Section 4.4) that being estranged and/or having to talk on the phone can create further hindrances to conversation:

> *I think over time, their conversations have become (pause) maybe he's getting older too, but they've become less and less like, um, Nathan engaged…Um, and I think because obviously the distance, and not seeing them as often, makes a big difference, um, to their relationship.* (Ms N, Meeting 4)

4.5.3 Conditions which may support sustained conversations with Nathan

Through her reflections, Ms N identified the ways in which she (and other skilled and motivated conversational partners) encouraged, supported, and enabled conversation with Nathan. These included asking questions (McDonald *et al.*, 2015), and working with the child's interests (Fisher, 2016; Ang and Harmey, 2019). However, Ms N was also strongly of the opinion that effort by the adult was needed to enable the conversation to progress, echoing the research emphasising the importance of the adult as an active conversational partner (Ang and Harmey, 2019). Fisher (2016), in highlighting features of conversation in the home supportive of sustained interaction, draws on the work of Tizard and Hughes (1984), which seems to give the impression that conversation in the home necessarily takes place with ease. However, more recent research (Hindman *et al.,* 2016; Rowe, 2018) recognises a wide range of factors influencing interactions both at home and in settings,

appreciating the important role of parents as 'highly invested'(Hindman *et al.,* 2016 p.137) in conversations with their children.

Although initially, Ms N considered that conversations with Nathan tended to begin with her and be led by her, she realised, through a deeper focus on the conversations taking place, that the more sustained conversations occurred where Nathan initiated the conversation, usually with an enquiry. Following and responding to the child's lead in the conversation is an important strategy for supporting sustained conversation (Fisher, 2016; Landry *et al.,* 2017; Hadley *et al.,* 2020). In the inverse to Ms N's realisation that her lack of response could 'kill a conversation,' analysis of the interviews, joint reflection on, and further analysis of the reported conversations, helped identify a range of ways in which the response of the adult is important in supporting and enabling the conversation to progress.

Just as in the previous cases, the data relating to Ms N and Nathan strongly reinforce the theme of the significance of the adult 'tuning into the child.' The following example demonstrates Ms N tuning into Nathan's particular 'Kiddie Stuff' emanating from his 'child's world,' including his imagination and the influence of books and cartoons.

4.5.4 No Superheroes in Real Life

The conversation took place at bedtime as Ms N was just about to begin the bedtime story,

> *Ms N: Let's read Mega Boy.*
> *Nathan: (lively sing-song voice) Mega Boy Man!*
> *Ms N: Oooh this looks like an interesting book.*

Nathan suddenly decides to begin a conversation, sharing with his mum his investigation into superheroes. Ms N pauses her book reading to let Nathan gather his thoughts and then state his case.

> *Nathan: Why's wwwrrr, wait, boys are, wait, wait (pause) There's no superheroes in real life! (Loud confident voice).*
> *Ms N: Wuh, huh, are you sure?*
> *Nathan: Yeahh. (High pitched, as if to suggest absolutely!)*
> *Ms N: How do you know? (a bit incredulous and her voice rising in pitch to match Nathan's).*

From the audio recording, it is possible to hear how Ms N uses her voice to portray genuine interest, her tone sounds amused as she invites Nathan to elaborate with an open question, all strategies supportive of facilitating communication (McDonald *et al.,* 2015)

Nathan: Coz I haven't seen an (a little hesitation) any around
Ms N: But (pauses to let Nathan continue)
Nathan: I've looked outside, every time - even outside the blinds. (emph).
Ms N: Yeh, but you, you, you (pause) okay, so (pause) youoo (emph) haven't seen the tooth fairy before but you, the tooth fairy, you think the …

Here Ms N can be heard to slow down her speaking and pause and begin to offer an alternative to challenge Nathan's thinking, but Nathan already has evidence and expresses his view with confidence.

Nathan: (speaks over loudly) Well, well I got money behind my (pause) Yeah, yeh
Ms N: So yeh but you haven't seen a tooth fairy, does that mean it does exist or it doesn't exist?
Nathan: It doesn't (a bit mumbled) exist.
Ms N: It doesn't (pause) or it does?
Nathan: It doesn't.
Ms N: What, the tooth fairy doesn't exist?
Nathan: No.
Ms N: So where did you get all that money from? (Laughing a little)
Nathan: I, got, it, from (speaking slowly and a bit hesitantly) the tooth fairy.
Ms N: Yeah, but you didn't see the Tooth Fairy. So how do you know the Tooth Fairy exists?
Long pause
Ms N: Uh?
Nathan: Oh noooo (giggling)
Ms N: What's the answer? (Laughing too)
Pause
Nathan: Uh (little laugh) Crazy tooth fairy stole my teeth (pause) and she gives me (pause) the devil cash!
Ms N: devil cash?
Nathan: Yeh, so I could be a devil.

To maintain the conversation when he doesn't have an answer, Nathan turns back to his imagination for an explanation, Ms N diverts the conversation away from the uncomfortable turn it has taken with a loving, affirming comment and then back to his original topic, superheroes, and clarifies Nathan's idea.

Ms N: Devil? you're far from a devil. You're too cute to be a devil. Okay, so you don't think a superhero exists then? Because you've never seen one.
Nathan: (Singing voice) Mega Boy!
Ms N: Have you seen Santa Claus?
Nathan: I have, I have seen him (pause) yeh the sneak peek in, in (Ms N laughs) I yeh, I saw, I know what he looks like (pause) I know what his reindeers look like.

Unfortunately, the recording ends there, but it sounds as though the conversation could have gone on for a very long time! This sustained interchange, clearly enjoyed by both, offers language-building linguistic and conceptual challenge (Rowe and Snow, 2020). It would also be considered by educators to be an 'effective' interaction (Fisher, 2016), demonstrating sustained shared thinking (Siraj *et al., 2015)* with Ms N using many of the strategies recommended to educators (Dowling, 2005; Ang and Harmey, 2019). Ms N has tuned into Nathan's current fascinations and his imagination to sustain the conversation and Nathan has enthusiastically and confidently shared with her knowledge of them that only he has. Ms N has ceded some control and the communicative space created enables them both to feel comfortable and welcome (Oldenburg, 1989, enabling exploration together of existence, what is real, what is imagined, and the nature of evidence. In this way, they have created a communicative space, or a third space (Bhabha, 1994) between their different conceptualisations (Levy, 2008) which seems to be in between the worlds of the adult and the child, a space for joint engagement (Ang and Harmey, 2019).

Analysis of a further example, Scary Cloak Dream demonstrates how sophisticated 'tuning in' can be. It also demonstrates the investment of the parent in engaging with their child, both verbally and emotionally, and identifies their purpose for such investment in the conversation. The conversation takes place mid-morning, in Ms N's bedroom as she is getting ready to go out to the shops. It begins as Nathan is trying to explain about a bad dream he has had about a man in a cloak:

It's his hoodie, coat thing, that, that, I, that hoodie coat thing. Y'know, one you put, like a dressing gown.

It sounds as though Nathan is referring to Ms N's dressing gown but hers doesn't have a hood, so she asks Nathan to explain better. He says he doesn't want to and she was going to leave it until he says, *'Because it makes me scared.'* Ms N suggests to Nathan that

sometimes it might be good to talk about scary things so that she can explain, and it might not be scary. She waits for his response but after a very long pause he says, 'I'm getting really good at my alphabet though, It's A, B, C…' (Nathan then sings the alphabet song all the way through). At the end, Ms N comments briefly, 'Oh, lovely singing.' Nathan changes tack, 'I found some cash on the floor, next to your bed.' Ms N does now respond and engages with Nathan to talk about the money and a sustained exchange of twenty-seven turns follows in which they discuss the money he has found, the concept of the value of the coin, what it might buy, and how many pennies he might need to buy sweets. Having explained the money, Ms N invites him to go with her to the shop. At first, he refuses, and she tries to encourage him, only stopping when, unprompted, he mentions again about the 'scary cloak thing':

Nathan: I'm never gonna talk about that ever again.
Ms N: About what?
Nathan: That, that, the thing that I just said to you - not the pennies.
Ms N: What? about the, the cloak thing? (pause) What? so come here and let's talk about this
Nathan: No! No! No! No! No!

Nathan is adamant and clearly upset, so Ms N carries on getting ready but explains again about scary things and explores a little further, which does then prompt Nathan to express his fear about his dream:

Ms N: Oh OK, but I don't think it's something you should be scared of and that's why I think we should talk about it, so we can, so I can show you that it's not anything to be scared about. Is it something you saw on a cartoon?
Nathan: N.n.no in my dream!
Ms N: Oh, in your dream (Ms N's voice sounds as though she now understands). Oh well, it, it's not real. A dream is just a dream, it doesn't mean it was real. Was that a dream, last night's dream? Or a long time ago?
Pause for a response
Noah: No, no it weren't, no. When I was sleeping, I saw it, and then I just opened my eyes

Ms N began to speak but stopped to let N continue.

N: Because I didn't want to be in my dream anymore.
Ms N: Oh, but when you opened your eyes, nothing was there was it? So, it's just a dream. So, it wasn't real. So, you shouldn't, you don't have anything to be scared of.
N: (quiet sing song-voice) I know, I know, I know, I know.

Ms N: Oh, come and have a hug, you look really upset, come here. (Quieter comforting voice) Oh, it was just a dream. It wasn't real, and you're OK. You're OK, aren't you?
N: Uh uh (agreeing)
Ms N: Yeah?
N: Eh, eh (agreeing)
Ms N: (Sigh) (Long pause – they are hugging) So should I finish getting ready so I can go to the shop?

In the scary cloak dream example, it is clear to see the place of emotion and the relational aspects of the conversation. It is also an example where Ms N has persisted within the conversation; as she said, '*I felt it was important to talk about it, um, so I kind of pushed*.' Interestingly, mid-way into the conversation, Nathan began singing the ABC song to his mum followed by a sustained interaction about pennies Nathan had noticed in the bedroom. On the surface, the time and effort Ms N was prepared to dedicate to this, suggested perhaps that the purpose of the conversation had shifted to being educative. However, Ms N explained her actual purpose at that time was one of care and concern for Nathan as he was so upset:

> *So, I kind of let him do whatever he was, that he was doing, the singing and, you know, all that kind of stuff. And, um, I was kind of intending to bring it back to it, but he did actually, did that himself, he came back to the, the, the cloak thing himself.*
> (Ms N Meeting 2).

As noted in earlier cases, the sustained section of the conversation, where the two discuss the coins, represents the kind of 'learning' conversation an educator may encourage parents to have with their children (Gunderson and Levine, 2011). However, Ms N explained that, at that point, Nathan's learning was not her primary purpose. Rather, she had used the familiarity and safety of the little teaching episode to calm his anxiety to '*bring him down a bit*.' She used her conversational skills to keep him engaged, letting him talk about familiar things, to maintain the connection, and help him manage his emotions. Recent evidence (Law *et al.,* 2017b) highlights the place of warm, contingent responses and interactions in emotional development and self-regulation, and this example highlights conversation as offering opportunities for emotional development and relationship building (Evangelou *et al.,* 2009).

Throughout the conversation, Ms N tuned in, not just to the subject and content of the conversation, but also to the emotion, the non-verbal cues, his behaviour, and also her knowledge of his capabilities to enable him to express himself. During Meeting 2 she explained how Nathan's body language and even his position on the bed (jumping off the bed when singing his ABC song but coming back onto the bed, closer to her and resuming his closed-off body language when he was talking about the scary things) were an expression of his feelings and emotions. Analysis of this conversation concurs with the findings of Flewitt (2005) that children express their meanings in diverse ways, including talk, but also body movement, and facial expression. Furthermore, that parents' knowledge of their children and their shared context (Tizard and Hughes, 1984) enables them to tune in and respond to their communicative practices, enabling the child to express themselves.

The following conversation (Bathtime) demonstrates an interplay of the conditions identified to be supportive of sustained conversation with Nathan. During the period of data collection, Nathan's dad took some holiday leave and the couple decided that he should take the opportunity to spend more time with Nathan. As previously discussed, they had already identified working long hours, tiredness, and 'busyness' were issues that were having an impact on the quality of conversation between Nathan and his dad. Therefore, they decided that during the period when Nathan's dad spent more time at home, he should also get more involved in the basics of caring for Nathan, bathing him, getting him dressed, getting his cereal, etc. so that those little portions of extra time would increase the likelihood of conversation taking place. In translating the messages from the science of language development into practicable actions, Rowe (2020) recommends exactly the strategy Nathan's mum and dad adopted, encouraging parents to have conversations with their children as part of normal, day-to-day activities, emphasising how they will both build connection and support the child's development.

The conversation (Bathtime) took place while Dad was bathing Nathan before bed.

> *Nathan: Oh, Look Daddy – I have another water gun.*
> *Dad: Oh, that's big. Where did you get it from?*
> *Nathan: Mummy got it from the plant shop. We went there and it's a long way.*

Nathan has introduced his toy and Dad has followed his interest. Nathan's response is much more fulsome than in the example with his Auntie and suggests that Nathan is engaged and keen to speak with his dad.

Dad: It's not that far.

In other circumstances, this response may have closed down the conversation and as it was reported in writing it is not possible to tell Dad's expression, perhaps he was challenging Nathan, or perhaps it was jokey - either way, Nathan was keen to expand and prove his point.

Nathan: It is. We walked there, actually, I went on my bike, Mummy was walking. J (sister) didn't come. Just me.
Dad: Did Mummy buy more plants?

Now Nathan's dad has genuine interest, and Nathan has information he knows his dad wants to hear about. As Ms N explained:

I realised that the way he (Nathan's dad) was asking Nathan questions was to find out what I'd bought because I could tell by his tone of voice…he was using Nathan as a means to kind of get information on what I'd done…Nathan spilled the beans! (Ms N, Meeting 4)

The baththime conversation continues:

Nathan: No, she bought seeds and God. (It was a Buddha)
Dad: God? What?
Nathan: That God thing in the garden. Is it God, or Jesus?
Dad: Erm, kind of.
Nathan: It's ugly.
Dad: (Laughing) Is it? You're funny.

In our joint reflection on the conversations, Ms N had noticed during the week that where Nathan and his dad had spent more time together, a more relaxed connection between the two had developed:

Um, I thought it was really relaxed. I think because baththime is a relaxing time, um, it was nice…Um, although they were having a lot of fun, he was still really chilled out…Um, so, I think that made the conversation… You know, it was just relaxed…just fun. (Ms N, Meeting 4 reflecting on the baththime conversation)

Indeed, Ms N noticed that over the week, the more Dad talked with Nathan, the more Nathan wanted to be with him and talk with him. Ms N suggested that perhaps Nathan had been used to his dad being less available, and as they spent more time together the dynamics changed and Nathan became more comfortable, 'freeing up more,' making requests of and having more regular conversations with his dad. Ms N also asked Dad about his experience of talking more with Nathan and reported his response:

> *Oh, actually, he's quite a funny kid, isn't he?... He's really funny, you know...he makes me laugh*. (Meeting, 4)

Ms N expressed her perception that, through the process, Nathan's dad was learning more about Nathan and was enjoying his company suggesting that, taking pleasure in the conversation was also an important condition supporting sustained conversation.

Overall, analysis of this conversation between Nathan and his dad demonstrates the complex interplay of the conditions that support sustained conversation coming together, including the importance of the environment and the interaction being relaxed, chilled, and enjoyable for each. The self-motivated intervention by Nathan's parents focussing on Nathan's dad spending more time with Nathan supports data from the other cases that time is important but also the adult being available and signalling to the child that they are available. As Ms N noted:

> *I think time is important because it makes a difference to the quality of conversation. And also, because he wasn't so tired, so he had more energy to play with them, you know, to actually be around. Because he can be around, but not be around.*
> (Ms N Meeting 4)

Furthermore, within the communicative space that was created, they were able to connect and found a shared interest and enjoyment in the conversation. Their conversation flowed and engaged them both, with Nathan having an authentic purpose for the conversation and information to share that genuinely interested, as well as amused, his dad.

4.5.5 Insights gained through this collaborative research into conversation with Nathan and potential value of the process

The first insight for Ms N was noticing the environment in which sustained conversation was more likely to occur, and it was not what she expected. Just as in the previous two cases, early morning, evening, and bedtimes were identified as important times, but significantly for Ms N, these times were the more relaxed times. Ms N also came to realise that sustained conversations with Nathan often involved them being *'together but separate.'* Examples given included: walking side by side to school, driving in the car, and Nathan '*mooching around in the bedroom'* whilst she was putting clothes away, noting that they happened where she wasn't '*necessarily even having, like, direct eye contact.'*

Ms N's insights also suggested that the process of reflecting on conversations with Nathan had value in that it had empowered her:

> *I've learned that talking to Nathan has given me, um, the power to change how we interact and speak because I think I've learned to listen to him a bit more. And just not, you know… Like he usually does all the listening. (Ms N, Meeting 4)*

Data from Ms N in case 3, also strongly supports the concept developing across the cases that these highly attuned parents can and do act as a conduit for their children to more sustained conversation with other adults. In the data collected during this short time, it was possible to see Ms N prompting both her sister and her husband in ways to communicate and to enjoy communicating with Nathan. However, as we came to the end of our cycle of reflecting on conversations with Nathan, Ms N identified that she could see that what she had been learning could also support her in advocating for Nathan at school. At the end of our final interview, as I reflected back to Ms N that one of the things I had learned from our reflections on conversation with Nathan, related to the poor response we (as teachers) often get from those direct questions where children are put on the spot and which may influence our judgements of children. Ms N responded emphatically, *'That's for sure! I'm having that with the school now with Nathan, so Yeah.'* Nathan missed a lot of his reception year due to the COVID-19 lockdown and Ms N felt very strongly that the report she had received did not reflect Nathan's true attainment in language and communication - that

they had '*got him wrong'* and were '*not seeing him properly*.' Ms N expressed that she intended to continue to observe and even video Nathan through the summer to be able to show his teachers what he was truly capable of and that the research process we had been through together had given her the encouragement to do so.

4.5.6 Summary of Findings Case Study 3

The evidence presented for Case 3 develops the themes introduced in Case 1 and developed through Case 2. It further suggests:

- Emotion, the development of their relationship, and the desire to connect can motivate adults to take part in and persevere in conversations with their children. Pleasure in the conversation also motivates and conversation tends to be more sustained where they can come together and connect over shared interests and understandings.

- Some parents may be highly attuned to their child, taking cues from their interests, concerns, body language, and behaviours. They can and do 'translate' or smooth the way for others within the family.

- The process of being involved in reflecting on conversations at home can enable deeper understanding of the processes at play and conversation with the child can be enhanced by deliberate action, e.g., increasing responsiveness, listening more, spending time together, and finding out about the child's life and interests.

Chapter 5 Cross Case Analysis, Findings and Discussion

Having analysed each of the individual cases in depth and intact, this chapter offers discussion of a series of findings identified through analysis of the data across the cases. The findings are drawn from patterns which 'hold true' (Bazeley, 2021, p. 273), supported by evidence, across the cases. The analysis draws upon the thematic maps and summaries for each case, confirmed through comparison, back and forth, across the cases in relation to my research question, academic literature, and the theoretical perspectives introduced in Section 1.3. Evidence to support the findings is drawn from thematic analysis of the interviews and conversation logs for each case, further informed by the detailed analysis of chosen conversations presented in depth within individual cases.

5.1 Finding 1: Quality

Sustained conversations were taking place between the collaborating parent participants and their children in their homes and communities in each case studied, demonstrating key aspects of 'quality' associated with language building.

It is widely accepted (Hoff, 2006; Roulstone *et al*., 2011; Hoff, 2013; Weisleder and Fernald, 2013; Law *et al*., 2017; Ang and Harmey, 2019; Rowe and Snow, 2020) that the quality of the child's home communication environment influences language development. Across each of the cases, conversations demonstrating key features of language-building quality (Rowe and Snow, 2020), appropriate to the ages and development of the children were discerned, particularly with the collaborating parent participants. The sustained nature of the interactions provided opportunities for the children to be involved in back-and-forth conversation associated with both the development of language-building capacity (Dickinson and Porche, 2011; Romeo, 2018) and providing a vehicle for particular dimensions of quality, within the child's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978, Rowe and Snow, 2020) such as rich or new vocabulary, explanations or detailed responses and the use of decontextualised, beyond the here and now, language (Rowe, 2012). Current scientific understanding of language acquisition (Ang and Harmey, 2019; Rowe and Snow,

2020) reinforces social-interactionist and socio-cultural theoretical perspectives (Vygotsky, 1978), and emphasises the value of adult input, which is challenging but accessible, engaging, and responsive to the child.

Offering a holistic model of human development, Bronfenbrenner's 'bioecological model' (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998, 2006) emphasises the primacy of the 'proximal processes' the relationships and interactions with those closest to the child in influences on development. The evidence provided across the case studies emphasises the responsive and connected nature of the sustained conversations at home, and across each of the cases, the willingness of the collaborating parent participants, along with other family members, friends, and neighbours, to engage with the children in sustained one to one conversation offered opportunities for the advantageous linguistic and conceptual features of quality language input, in contexts meaningful to the individual children.

5.2 Finding 2: Togetherness

The sustained conversations were characterised by connection and togetherness. Emotion and affect were notable features, including the adults' enjoyment of the interactions. The adults' purposes were concerned with connection and relationship and the wish to connect appeared to motivate adults to take part in, to enable, and to persevere in, conversations with the children.

Across each of the cases, the relational nature of the sustained conversations, characterised by emotion, connection, and togetherness, could be seen. Intimacy, 'cosiness', and being relaxed or 'chilled' (see Finding 7) were also characteristics of the more sustained conversations across the cases. Throughout the data, are examples of the conversational partners coming together on the sofa, around a table, side by side, holding hands, or in the case of Frieda and Ms K, sharing a big double bed. Bedtime conversations were identified as of particular importance across each of the cases, both in terms of their sustained nature, but also their content and role in the relationship between parent and child. For example, in the case of Ms N and Nathan:

> *I think I've found that, um, the evening conversations, where he's probably had time to reflect as well, um, can be quite, um, you know, more serious, in a way. It's almost like he's offloading before he goes [laughing] to bed.* (Ms N, Meeting 3)

And Ms A and Caitlin:

> *That's when she likes to **really** (parent's emphasis) talk to me and it's like an essay on what happened in the day (laughs)…rather than go to bed, it's like, let's talk to mummy!* (Ms A, meeting 1)

A strong cross-case theme identified was that the collaborating parent participants' purposes for engaging in conversation with their child were consistently associated with aspects of their relationship rather than for educative purposes. Purposes identified included: to engage and to connect with their child; to understand their child more and gain insight into the child's world; care and concern for the child's well-being and development; and, importantly, to build or sustain their relationship.

At first, Mr P (an educator) appeared to be an exception as he seemed to see conversation as a means of teaching Frieda. However, reflecting on his purpose in the 'Jigsaw with Dad', although he initially referred to it as a 'nice, focussed bit of play and learning' when asked if that was his main purpose he further reflected:

> *I don't think that was the main target really, I think it was more the (pause) being able to be together and er play, together. (Mr P, Meeting 4)*

And he went further, realising that he particularly appreciated opportunities for himself and Frieda to explore games such as the Shopping Game (Appendix 4h) as opportunities for togetherness noting:

> *'It was nice to have a look at it and like to be able to play games together …and it's fun to do that together…so we have that concentrated time together and to talk together.'* (Mr P, Meeting 4)

Here his repeated use of the word 'together' emphasises the importance he places on the relational aspects of their conversations, but it also highlights his intention to ensure that their interaction was enjoyable for both of them. However, across the cases, a range of

feelings and emotions were identified including feeling comfortable, enjoyment, fun, playfulness, humour, and pride. However, some of the sustained conversations were also associated with concern, e.g., checking that the child was OK. In other conversations, such as in the case of Auntie J and Nathan, the conversation was not particularly comfortable in the moment, but Ms N (her sister), was strongly of the opinion that Auntie J's desire to maintain her relationship with Nathan motivated her to persevere:

> *So, she really, like, loved, especially Nathan. She had a really good bond with him… So, when they do speak, um, I can always see that she's working really hard, because she desperately wants to have, like, the connection and the conversation with him.* (Ms N, Meeting 4)

Specific within my research question, was the intention to explore whether the conversations taking place were pleasurable to the adults and whether that mattered. Across the cases, each of the collaborating parent participants expressed pleasure in their conversations with their children, especially the more sustained conversations, with Ms K going so far as to describe her conversations with Frieda as 'joyful'. Parents' pleasure in the conversations could be attributed to enjoying the engagement and connection with their child as discussed, enjoying the conversation itself*:*

I just like talking to 'em, I like finding out what they did and what makes their favourite day and what's their worst part of the day. I'm interested. (Ms A Meeting 2)

…or enjoying the recognition of their child's development:

It's so lovely to hear her speaking and see how grown up she is already.' (Ms K. Meeting 3).

Evidence, that the adult enjoying, or at least feeling comfortable in the conversation supports sustained interaction, is strengthened by Nathan's dad's experience when he made a deliberate effort to spend more time with him. Ms N expressed the view that, as a result, Nathan's dad came to realise how enjoyable conversations with Nathan could be, which then supported their interactions. Fisher (2016) contends that:

> Conversations flow because they are natural and genuine and because both parties are engaged in it and find pleasure in the exchange. (p. 42)

Bronfenbrenner's 'bioecological model' (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998, 2006) emphasised the importance of relationships and nurture to a child's development, stressing the role of parents and the family. He argued that children needed adults (at least one) who were 'crazy' about them, which he explained as the adult finding the child special or wonderful (Grimmer, 2022) and Piasta *et al. (2012)* demonstrate how interactions are enhanced when educators are warm and receptive to children. Across the cases, the evidence demonstrates the sustained conversations occurring where both parties are engaged, but it further highlights the emotional connection and togetherness involved in the sustained conversations at home. The adults' wish to connect was also shown to prompt and enable conversation and may motivate adults to persevere even if the conversation was not flowing with ease.

5.3 Finding 3: Coming Together

The sustained conversations occurred where there was a 'coming together' of the two parties.

There was evidence, across all of the cases, of sustained interactions occurring when the two conversational partners found a way to come together, with investment in the conversation by both parties. The most significant way in which this coming together occurred, was around the things that interested, or were meaningful or important to the child in that moment, which Ms A referred to as 'Kiddie Stuff'. On first hearing the expression, it may sound dismissive, as Hedges (2022) suggests, adults often lack interest or dismiss children's interests. However, Ms A's use of the word conveyed a nuanced representation of the things that interested the child, coming from the child's world, which the 'tuned in' or responsive adult has access to, that some adults may not appreciate as interesting or significant.

In each of the cases, reflection on both the conversations that engaged the children and the topics they introduced into conversation identified each child's concerns, enquiries, and

fascinations at the time. In agreement with Hedges (2022) the children in my study demonstrated interest in a diverse range of social and cultural events, 'almost everything in their life' (p.4), and each child's own 'Kiddie Stuff' is presented in the individual cases. The children talked about their toys and objects they like to play with, as well as TV, films, and videos. They reported on their experiences, including those they were beginning to have beyond the family e.g., school, Beaver Camp, clubs, etc. Each child enquired or commented on aspects of the world around them, both the social world and the natural world. However, the topics of their conversations could also be more ephemeral, including dreams and imagination. For Frieda, whose experiences beyond the home were limited by the first full COVID-19 lockdown of 2020, this included reporting on her experiences within her play as she interacted with her Disney Princesses. Within each child's conversations could be seen themes of emotions, family and friends, and relationships, as well as 'big' issues including fear, death, responsibility, and morality. This evidence concurs with Hedges (2022) who argues that:

> *Important and deep interests are evident in children's daily lives in their play, in participation in family, community and cultural activities and practices, in ongoing enquiries and questions, in respectful and responsive relationships with peers and adults and in their responses to the local and global events they encounter.* (p.iv)

In other words, children's motivation to pursue their interests drives their participation in experiences, including conversations, and, across all the cases, the conversations shared gave indications of subjects the children were motivated to talk about. They could be particular ongoing interests of the child but may also be recent experiences to report or concerns they may have. Examples included: Frieda's concerns and enquiries about COVID-19 (both the 'The Nasty Bug' and the changing rules); Caitlin sharing news of her experiences (supported by her camera); and Nathan's reflections on characters and happenings from his imagination, stories, and TV. As Mr P put it:

> *I guess it's where her head's at is the first, is the major point for the conversation. (Mr P, Final Meeting).*

Mr P's reflection illustrates the sociocultural perspective, that children develop language as a means to engage with others to understand and participate in their world and culture, so the drive to explore and learn about the things that interest them in their world drives the development of language:

> 'Young children develop the verbal skills to engage in dialogue and debate, with peers and adults on matters of deep interest and enquiry: fairness, friendship and families are frequent themes.' (Hedges, 2022, p. 4)

This sociocultural perspective concurs with recent scientific research in language development (Pace, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff, 2016; Landry *et al.,* 2017; Rowe and Snow, 2020) emphasising the importance of the child's engagement in the conversation as essential for any language building qualities of the interaction to be manifested.

Tizard and Hughes (1984) argued that, as the parents and children shared the contexts for interactions at home, their shared understandings supported and enabled rich conversations to occur naturally and with ease, calling for greater recognition in school of children's experiences at home. Similarly, the FofK approach (Moll *et al*., 1992) recognises that children have knowledge and skills derived from their participation in life in their homes and communities and learning would be enhanced by educators recognising and building upon them. The children's conversations considered in each of my cases gave indications of the individual child's funds of knowledge based interests (Hedges *et al.,* 2011; Chesworth, 2016; Hedges, 2022). However, my research demonstrated that the children's foci of interest do not necessarily align with the funds of knowledge of the family, the things that were meaningful to the children included their own personal concerns, toys, characters from popular culture, animals, dreams and imagination. Drawing on the work of Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014), who have evolved the FofK approach to recognise learners' individual life experiences as their individual 'funds of identity', Hedges (2021) emphasises the need for adults (early childhood educators in her study) to both recognise and respond to children's own individual interests and experiences, including interests beyond the real world.

As well as conversations where the adult engaged with the child's current focus of interest, ease was also seen in conversations where the two parties were able to find a shared interest or common ground. Similar to the findings of Tizard and Hughes (1984) the adults were frequently part of the context themselves, for instance when talking about family or friends, or shared experiences such as visits, celebrations etc. There was also evidence of adults actively maintaining interest in, or knowledge of, the contexts that were meaningful to the children in order to engage (See Auntie J, Case 3, Step Grandad, Case 1). Sometimes the 'coming together' in the conversation occurred when the two partners found that shared focus of interest, e.g., Nanny 1 and Caitlin's shared interest in family members, and Nathan's Dad's interest in Ms N's plant buying. Moreover, Mr P explained how he deliberately used his knowledge of things that interested Frieda (games, shopping, food), to create an opportunity for shared focus 'something to bring us both around' (Meeting 4). This evidence suggests that as well as shared understandings and contexts supporting sustained conversation, there was also an interplay of emotional and relational considerations which prompted, enabled, and sustained the coming together of conversational partners.

5.4 Finding 4: Supportive Conditions

The conditions that support sustained conversation include the contribution and influences upon the adult, the child, and the environment or 'life' conditions pertaining at the time.

Thematic analysis of the interview data, within and across the cases, identified a range of perceived influences on sustained conversation with the children. The first categories to be identified were contributions related to the adult, the child, or the environment. However, as the codes were reviewed and revisited in the light of the insights provided by further analysis of the recorded conversations, a conceptual model began to be developed (Figure 12 below) demonstrating an interplay of the potential influences identified, fluctuating in different ways, to create the conditions where the 'coming together' of the conversational partners could occur. Cross-case analysis of the evidence provided by the case studies with reference to each of the three foci of influence (adult, child, environment) will now be

discussed. A detailed composite model, including the influences identified across the cases, is presented in the conclusion (Figure 13).

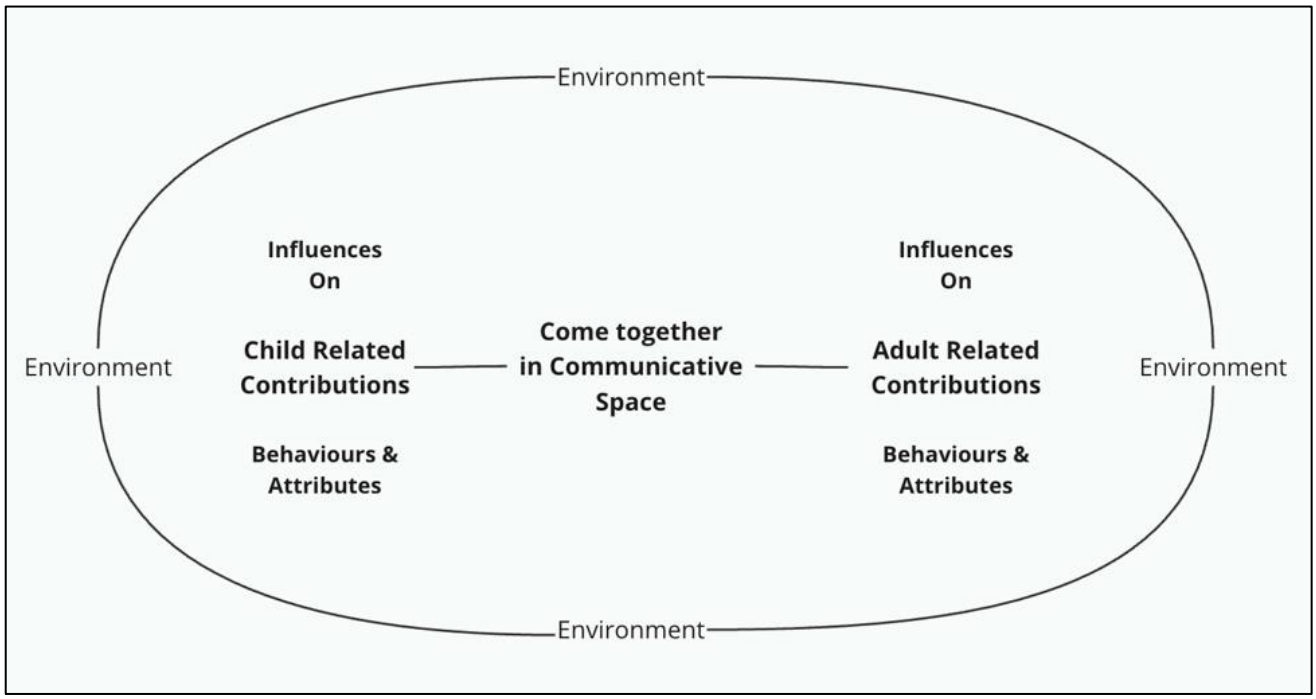

Fig. 12 Emergent Conceptual Model of Influences on Sustained Conversation

5.4.1 Adult Related Contributions

In each of the cases studied, the parent participants themselves and *some* family members and friends were both highly motivated and skilled in enabling sustained conversations with the children. It was clear that fundamentally, sustained conversation required the adult to actively engage with the child in some way, and Ang and Harmey (2019) emphasise the importance of adults being active partners in the conversation process. Taken across the cases, the behaviours and attributes perceived by the parent collaborators as supportive of sustained conversation or demonstrated in the recordings they shared, can be seen in the conceptual model (Figure 13). Behaviours identified that could be considered deliberate on the part of the adult included: making time or creating opportunities, asking questions, initiating or leading the conversation, and within that, actively using their knowledge of the child and their interests (as discussed above) to sustain the conversation.

However, listening and responding to children are also integral to being an active conversational partner (Ang and Harmey, 2019). Responsive behaviours, noted by the collaborating parents as they reflected on their recordings, included: being available to the child, listening, showing interest, or simply just responding (in any way) to the child's conversational overtures. As well as being responsive to the child, a characteristic of quality interactions is that the adult extends and enhances the interaction (Hoff, 2006; Rowe, 2012; Hoff, 2013; Weisleder and Fernald, 2013; Law *et al*., 2017; Ang and Harmey, 2019; Rowe and Snow, 2020). Throughout the analysis and discussion of the cases, particularly of the recordings considered in depth, there was evidence of the collaborating adults actively modulating their inputs and responses in ways specific to their child to enable the conversations to be sustained. For example, when reflecting on the sustained conversation between Frieda and Sophie (Be Kind, Not like Peppa Pig, Section 4.2.2) during our joint reflection, we noted that the whole conversation seemed to have come out of nowhere. Whilst Frieda initiated and led the conversation, both Mr P and Sophie were listening and responding, following her changes of subject, going with her interest in clothes, friends, birthdays, being good, and the rules relating to COVID-19. However, they were also asking and answering questions as well as providing little prompts to memory from their shared experiences. When asked what he thought had enabled the depth and the sustained nature of the conversation, Mr P replied:

> *I guess allowing it to flow in the way that it did, erm, and the sort of questions we asked back to her.* (Mr P Meeting 2)

Similarly, Ms A reflecting upon the Marvellous Robot conversation (Section 4.2.3):

> *I think I started off leading it and then, I let her lead it through the conversation. So, we talked about what she wanted to I led the first bit, getting her to talk about the Beaver trip, so yeah.* (Ms A, Meeting 2)

My professional understanding, suggested that sustained conversations would tend to be associated with the responsiveness of the adult to the child's agenda (Fisher, 2016), leading me to include, in the research question and the research tools, reflection on who had led the interactions studied. Contemporary research focussing on caregiver behaviours to support children's language development (Cabell, 2015; Landry *et al*., 2017; Ang and

Harmey, 2019;) emphasises the importance of the adult responding to the child's lead and staying with their focus of interest. The interviews demonstrated the parents' realisations, in different ways, that their responsiveness to their children was important in sustaining their conversations. For Ms A, it was the realisation that conversation was only likely when Caitlin had something she wanted to talk about; for Ms K, realising that giving Frieda more time and attention enhanced their interactions; for Mr P, noting better conversations with Frieda when she came in and 'splurted' everything out and Ms N realising how listening more to Nathan enhanced how they interacted. Reflection on key conversations with each of the parents demonstrates their responsive behaviours throughout the cases and the composite conceptual model (Figure 13) demonstrates the parents' perceptions of their role in sustaining conversation with their children.

5.4.2 Child Related Contributions

The intended focus of my research was the nature of, and influences on, adults' conversations with young children in their home and community, placing the attention largely on the adult. However, as became apparent from the beginning of the data collection and was reinforced through the analysis of each case, a consistent theme that developed was the contribution of the child in the conversation; their desire to communicate and influences on their attempts to communicate. Across the cases, data from the joint reflections and further analysis of the recordings of the more sustained conversations demonstrated greater ease in the coming together of the two conversational parties around the things that were interesting, important, or meaningful, in the moment, to the child. Each of the collaborating parents expressed the realisation that their more sustained conversations came about when they were able to respond to what the child wanted to talk about. For Mr P and Ms N, recognising the difference that responding to their child in that way made, prompted them to adapt the way they interacted. As Mr P noted:

> *Especially with so much breadth we get in the chats we have when she comes in the morning, and that's when she'll like splurt all everything out, she'll wanna know, she'll wanna chat and chat then.* (Mr P, Final Meeting)

Further evidence was provided by each of the collaborating parents who expressed having experienced the frustration of getting very little back from direct questions such as asking

the children what they had been doing in school or during that day. For example, although Frieda would want to tell her mum all about her time spent at her dad's house, she did not tend to respond to direct questioning. As Ms K explained:

> *But if you just kinda just let her talk you'll get more out of her that way than if you try and prompt her and yeh, she'll want to tell you about it.* (Ms K, Meeting 2)

Each parent also expressed, in different ways, that the engagement and involvement of the child was *essential* to sustained conversation. As Ms A noted:

> *Like I say, it's only when she gets something like, she wants to talk about it tends to happen more.* (Ms A, Final Meeting)

The evidence considered here highlights the agency of the child as an important condition in sustaining conversation. The idea of children's agency sees children as active participants in their interactions and relationships with others, where their actions have some influence or effect (James, 2009). Bronfenbrenner evolved his 'bioecological model' (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998, 2006) to emphasise the child as an active agent in influencing the interactions and relationships integral to their development, seeing the process as dynamic, reciprocal, and bidirectional (Hayes *et al.,* 2017). The child, therefore, must be recognised as playing a role in their own development and dwelling in a self-directed world, not merely emerging into the adult culture around them (James, 2009). In terms of language development, the linguistic dimensions of quality input are not possible without the involvement of the child enabling the back-and-forth of conversation (Rowe and Snow, 2020). However, having discussed the contributions of the adult and the child separately, it is the 'coming together' of the two, in a 'conversational duet' (Hirsh-Pasek *et al.,* 2018, p.339) that sustains the interaction.

5.4.3 The Contribution of the Environment

The final contribution to the conditions in which sustained conversation may thrive was the contribution of the environment at the time of the interaction. Consistently across the cases, a key element of the environment enabling the 'coming together' of conversational partners was the adult and child having time together that was relaxed and comfortable,

without distractions. For Ms A, this was 'more weekend…when we've got more time.' (Meeting, 2), with Ms K explaining that she would usually get a conversation with Frieda 'so long as it's a nice relaxed environment where you're chillin' (Meeting 4). Similarly for Mr P, 'It's a moment which, erm, maybe is like, more comfortable (Meeting 4), and, as Ms N explained, when Nathan and his dad did get to have a sustained conversation, the emotional environment had a part to play:

> *'He's (Nathan) just, you know, enjoying himself …so, I think that made the conversation. You know, it was just relaxed.' (Ms N, Meeting 4).*

5.5 Finding 5: Hindrances

Hindrances to sustained conversation also relate to influences of, and on the adult, child, and the environment and include factors which include structural aspects of 'modern life.'

The hindrances to sustained conversation identified across the cases were essentially mirror images of the conditions that tended to sustain conversation and represented anything that acted to prevent the coming together of the conversational partners, demonstrating the susceptibility of the communicative space to disruption.

As discussed in the methodology, my research intended to identify influences on the adults' conversations with young children that were beyond the adults' individual behaviours and understandings. Alderson (2013) explains that this is possible in qualitative research by analysis through the lens of critical realism. Although I was analysing the words of the parent collaborators, Braun and Clark (2021) advise that a reflexive review of the themes can identify actual possible structures that influence a phenomenon. In other words, the qualitative researcher can make a reasonable judgement on factors, beyond the actions of the humans in the study, identified as influencing the phenomenon. Analysis across the cases identified behaviours, actions, and dispositions of the adults and children that may hinder conversation, but also factors across the cases that could be considered structural, and beyond conscious action or behaviour. Unsurprisingly, given the importance to sustained conversation of the adult and child having focused, yet relaxed, time together, the

theme of 'life' or 'modern life' was consistent across the cases. It incorporated the subthemes of busyness/lack of time, distractions (for either adult or child), and lack of other adults to talk with due to isolation or separation.

The adult being 'busy else-wise' was identified as a potential hindrance in each case, with each collaborating parent identifying chores and jobs to be done around the house as potentially hindering conversation. Aligned with the theme of being 'busy else-wise' was also the influence of the adult being tired due to work whether it be within the home or work outside of the home, identified in each case. Examples have been identified in each of the cases and include the busy, term-time, after-school experiences of Ms A and Caitlin; Caitlin and Nathan's dads' long working hours; household chores and admin; and Mr P's tiredness due to challenging work during the week and caring for Frieda at the weekend. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing pressures on family life had been identified (Muschamp *et al.,* 2007), including parents having the longest working hours in Europe. Andrew *et al*. (2020) demonstrated this trend intensifying during the COVID-19 lockdowns, with work intruding into family life as in the case of Nathan's dad, where remote working blurred the boundary between work and home.

A further consistent theme across the cases was the hindrance of distractions. Potential distractions were different in each case but included television, the child being more interested in their toys or their play, adults being distracted by their computer or mobile phone, and the presence of other people including siblings making it more difficult for the child to enter into conversation. Each of these factors can be considered structural features that influence behaviours and interaction in the home. It is interesting to note that in the work of Tizard and Hughes (1984) their recordings were made deliberately at times when sustained interactions were determined to be most likely to occur. They note in their methodology that they identified times when both parties would be at home, just after lunch, with older siblings at school, and other adults out of the house. Furthermore, the research, carried out in the 1980s, took place in a very different landscape with regard to technology and social media (Olusoga, 2019), but importantly, the four-year-olds studied by Tizard and Hughes (1984) would now be in full-time reception class during those most fruitful of times for chat.

Whatever was preventing the adult from being able to engage with the children, there was also evidence from each of the cases that the adult being or appearing busy sent a message to the child that the adult was unavailable. As Ms N noted, referring to Nathan's dad, he can '*be around, but not be around.'* Each collaborating parent also indicated that the child could sense even subtle shifts that may indicate that they were, or were not, welcome in a communicative space. E.g., Mr P suggested that Frieda could sense a shift that opened up a communicative space:

> *When it's a bit busier, but not too busy, maybe it's a moment which, erm, it's like more comfortable, when it's just around a thing – like lunch.* (Mr P, Meeting 4)

Whereas being aware of the adults' lack of availability deterred the child from initiating, or not persevering in the conversation:

E.g., Ms K noted:

> *Just like through normal everyday stuff that needs to be done, you'll just wanna get it done, and a lot of the time she's trying to engage with yeh, and if you don't go to her straight away, she will sort of give up eventually because she knows that you're busy.* (Ms K, Meeting 3)

The strongest evidence for the impact of the adult being available and the child being aware they were available, came from data shared by Ms N and her husband demonstrating that as a result of dedicated time together their conversation was more sustained:

> *So, maybe having more time around him, and being more available, gave Nathan the indication that, oh, okay, you know, we can talk and play a little bit more… I noticed that the more his dad sort of conversated with him over the week, the more Nathan wanted to be with him and speak with him more*. (Ms N, Meeting 4)

The final consistent hindrance identified across the cases was that of a lack of a range of conversational partners for the child caused by isolation or separation from family due to a lack of family living nearby in the case of Ms A and Caitlin or the COVID-19 restrictions in the other two cases. Aligned with separation from family was the effect of estrangement on conversation as discussed in the example of Nathan and his Auntie J, and Frieda and her paternal grandparents.

Whereas I have previously discussed the influences on sustained conversation concerning the proximal processes in the microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998, 2006), the data related to conditions that support or hinder sustained conversation, highlighted factors, distal to the child, having an indirect influence on interaction and relationships. Such factors included parents' workplace and conditions of work, including long working hours, meaning that parents had less time or were too tired to engage in sustained conversation. Distal processes also include the influences of mass media, which it is argued, should now be extended to include mobile technology and social media, distractions identified in my data. Government policy is also identified as a distal influence, and notable in my research was the influence of the social distancing requirements of COVID-19. Nathan and Frieda's opportunities for interactions with a range of conversational partners, as well as experiences that may spark conversations, were severely restricted in comparison to Caitlin's in the first case study. Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasises the bidirectional influences of the person, systems, relationships, and contexts (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) to create a complex web of influence (Hayes, *et al.,* 2017. It emphasises the proximal processes, the dynamic, bidirectional influences of relationships and interactions as fuelling development. Although the children and the families' worlds and experiences changed dramatically during that time, in the cases I studied, there were still opportunities where the conditions that prevailed, enabled the 'coming together' of the adults and children in sustained conversation. This will not have been the case for all families, many of whom experienced further lack of time with both parents working, juggling working from home, lack of space, lack of resources, and increased stress (Andrew *et al.,* 2021). Families' experiences during COVID-19 varied greatly, but for many, it created additional hardships which can influence mental health and reduce parents' capacity to interact and support their children's learning. (National Literacy Trust, 2021). Bronfenbrenner's model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) theorises that development is influenced by a dynamic interplay of process, person, context, and time so that influences on the psychology and well-being of the family will influence the child's development (Hayes *et al.,* 2017). To ensure optimal development of the child, community, society, and government have a role to optimise the conditions in which such nurturing relationships and interactions may thrive.

5.6 Finding 6: Tuning In

The collaborating parents were able to 'tune in' to their children, enabling the conversation to be sustained. 'Tuning in' may include understanding and engaging with the individual child's interests or concerns in the moment, their developing speech patterns, modes of communication, body language, emotions, and behaviours. The attuned parents may act as conduits to other potential conversational partners.

Across each case, the collaborating parents recognised and demonstrated that they were particularly able to 'tune in' (Flewitt, 2005; Fisher, 2016) to their children. 'Tuning in' could be through recognising and understanding their child's unique 'Kiddie Stuff' (as discussed in Finding 3). However, there was also evidence of the collaborating parents being 'tuned in' to the idiosyncrasies of their child's speech (as in the case of Ms A and Caitlin), their emotions, body language, and behaviours (as detailed in the analysis of Nathan's Scary Cloak Dream conversation) or their style of communication. Ms N emphasised the importance of her understanding Nathan's style of communication, and knowing when to push a little, to them being able to have sustained conversation:

> *It seems to me, in a lot of conversations, so he does give back and forth really well. And he does ask a lot of questions, but I think, without me perhaps leading to the level that I do, then we probably wouldn't have those conversations.*
> (Ms N, Meeting 3)

There was also evidence of the collaborating parents recognising their child's attempts to initiate conversation or 'translating' their communicative attempts if necessary. In reflecting on observing Frieda struggling a little to get into a conversation, Mr P noted:

> *Erm, I think I've (pause), it's more to do with being clued in to what she's saying and asking. And I think, like, I take for granted that I am already in tune with her desire for conversation. And erm when she's asking questions…it's not necessarily that she's not saying stuff clearly, I just don't (long pause) er, I don't know how to describe it, but I think I'm more in tune with her. (Mr P, Final Meeting)*

Here Mr P suggests explicitly, that as the parent, he has the closeness and the awareness to be able to tune into Frieda's communicative attempts and this resonates with the work of Flewitt (2005) who demonstrated the parents in her studies were attuned to their child's

different communicative strategies including their expressions, movements and gaze as well as verbal utterances, supporting communication between them.

The work of Tizard and Hughes (1984) is frequently referred to as evidence that responsiveness would necessarily be evident in parents' conversations with their children (Fisher, 2016, Levy, 2008) with parents motivated to respond to their child's interests (Hedges, 2022). Evidence from my study suggests this would not necessarily be so for all parents and that conditions that influence the time the adult and child spend together, or their relationship and connectedness would affect their 'tuning in.' Mr P was strongly of the opinion that the time he and Frieda spend together is important in developing that awareness:

> *Yeh, I think that that's, that's massively it. It's just that I, I am naturally the person who's … gonna have like one of the most (pause) have that developed the most with me and her. Coz my ability to have that perception of her and be able to receive what she's trying to communicate because it happens so often. (Mr P, Final Meeting)*

Sensitive, attuned responses are the basis of home communication practices that are supportive of early language development (Gross, 2013), aligning with Bronfenbrenner's emphasis on the importance of relationships and interactions in the microsystem.

Each of the cases provided evidence of the collaborating parent participants supporting their child in conversation with other adults, acting as go-betweens or conduits (Flewitt, 2005). For example, Ms N sharing with her husband her reflections on the importance of being responsive to Nathan and the resultant improvements in their communication. Furthermore, the evidence provided by Ms N suggests that such a mediating role could be extended to school. She spontaneously proposed that she could share her knowledge of Nathan's interests and the things he would feel confident or might be motivated to talk about, but also the way that he communicates, especially that he tends to be reticent in talking. Ms N expressed the view that sharing with school her research and reflections on conversation with Nathan would enable school to see him 'properly'.

> *I think. I think for anybody, it will take a while to get to know him. Um, you know just some children, they just give off quickly, and they're quick to tell you about themselves and what they liked doing, he's not really that kind of child. (Ms N, Meeting Final Meeting)*

5.7 Finding 7: Contexts

The contexts in which sustained conversation may thrive are a complex interplay of factors in flux particular to the individual child, family, and circumstances which enable a 'coming together' of the two conversational partners in a shared communicative or 'third' space.

One of the aspects of my research question related to identifying the contexts that influence sustained conversation as it may be predicted that particular contexts such as mealtimes (Leech and Rowe, 2020), may be associated with opportunities for sustained conversation. The contexts relating to the individual children were identified and presented, diagrammatically, in each case. However, cross-case analysis suggested a more complex picture than any particular individual contexts being consistently associated with sustained conversations. Rather, analysis of the data across the cases demonstrated the same context operating differently for different families, as well as shifts and changes to the context within the same family or situation. The following two examples of transit to and from school exemplify this point. One of the most sustained conversations reported was Caitlin talking with her neighbour on the way home from school and Ms A confirmed that after school was, indeed, one of Caitlin's preferred times to chat:

> *She'll be eager to tell me what she got in her school bag, like oh I got this picture for you mum, or we watched a film at school.* (Ms A, Final Meeting)

However, she went on to explain that sometimes the conditions pertaining at the time, make this difficult for her:

> *I do try and talk to 'er but obviously it's quite hustle and bustle of all the mums coming out of school. So, I'm trying to listen… but there's so many parents, so obviously holding her hand and you're sort of going 'yeah, yeah', yeah, and look for the traffic and listen but, it's quite difficult, the way she, she obviously struggles with her speech, and you have to really listen. So, I'd rather wait till we get home and it's quiet, but by then the excitement's gone.* (Ms A, Final Meeting)

Conversely, Ms N explained that walking to school was not usually a time when she would have a conversation with Nathan, but COVID-19 restrictions resulted in a shift in conditions

that enabled quite a significant conversation for them.

> *Coz we don't generally have conversations when we walk to school as such because I'm generally walking and talking with, say, another parent or whoever I know. He would be either riding his bicycle, running ahead with other children, or walking ahead with Jade (his sister). But because, um, Jade's not at school because of this lockdown, and I'm socially distancing from other people, I'm walking on my own and we're walking together. So, um… But I might not have had that conversation.* (Ms N, Meeting 2)

This suggests that it is not the simple context (walking home, after school, bedtime, etc.) that would ensure a sustained conversation; more that the sustained conversations tended to occur in contexts in which the relaxed, comfortable conditions as discussed in Finding 4 arose. They could be surprising to the parents themselves:

> *Um, so I think I've learned that we don't necessarily be having to sit at a table, having a conference to have, um, a serious conversation. And that, actually, some of the best conversations, the most revealing conversations, we're actually together but separate, you know? I might not even be facing him, and it still works…and he's more comfortable to, to talk.* (Ms N, Meeting 2)

Concerning mealtimes, Mr P explained that Frieda tended to be more into her food, rather than chat at mealtimes. But it was evidence from Ms A that confirmed that contexts in which conversation would thrive, would be very individual to the family, and to different circumstances within the family. In discussing mealtimes, Ms A explained:

> *No, we never seem to talk much at mealtimes…he (Daddy) likes us just to eat our dinner. It's different like when we've got nannies and that round, then we do have a little chitchat at the table. But when it's just us four, it tends to be just, eat your dinner.* (Ms A, Final Interview).

Overall, the evidence across the cases suggests that the contexts in which sustained conversation may occur, are those in which a complex interplay of conditions at the time, influences the creation or emergence of a shared communicative space and that the conditions are shifting rather than static. Furthermore, consideration of the hindrances to conversation demonstrates how fleeting those windows of opportunity may be.

In considering the communicative space created as a 'third space' I draw upon Bhabha's (1994) conceptualisation of third space as a space 'in between'. The space may be created, enabled or it may emerge, but it is characterised by the coming together of the two parties collectively in genuine dialogic interaction (Bakhtin, 1986) where each party is influenced by and responds to the other, even though their world views, knowledge or experience differ (Kuhlthau *et al*., 2015, cited in Hansen *et al*., 2021). Although it may be assumed that the home environment would mean that the parents and children would have a shared context or worldview, (Tizard and Hughes, 1984; Fisher, 2016), reflection on the conversations in my research also shows the children as separate, agentive social actors in their own child's world (James, 2009). For the conversations to be sustained, the two worlds needed to come together. The communicative or third space was enabled and influenced by a complex interplay of emotions, dispositions, and behaviours from both parties as well as environmental considerations in operation at the time. Consistently across the cases, the conditions in which the communicative third spaces opened up were perceived to include the contribution of a relaxed, 'chilled' environment, resonating with Oldenburg's (1989) conceptualisation of a third space as a space to feel comfortable and welcomed, a space to belong. Analysis across the cases demonstrated a complex interplay of a range of potential influences on the behaviours and attributes of the adult, the child, and the environment around them at the time, creating a dynamic ecosystem, in which communicative spaces arose or were enabled.

5.8 Finding 8: Valuable Insights

The collaborative research process enabled further understanding of the processes at play in sustaining conversation with young children and offered useful insights for the parent participants themselves.

Across each of the cases, the collaborating parents were active partners in the research process, co-creating empirical research about the nature of, and influences on, adults' conversation with young children at home. The parents made decisions on the most suitable methods for data collection for their situation, aspects of family life they thought it important to focus their attention upon, and the recordings they would share and reflect

upon. This echoes the findings of Marsh (2015), where parents' reflections on their own recordings yielded understanding beyond surveys or interviews. Although, as Marsh (2015) suggests, empirical knowledge may be enhanced by more traditional ethnographic methods, including direct observation (Flewitt, 2011; Scott, 2018), the insights yielded by the parents' reflections on their self-chosen episodes yielded important new knowledge, especially relating to interactions taking place at times which may not be accessible to an ethnographer in situ. Further implications of foregrounding the adults' perspectives in this way are considered in my limitations.

The collaborative research process also provided the parents with insights and practical knowledge which seemed to be of value to them. The process enabled the collaborating parents to learn more about the conditions, pertinent to their own situation, in which more sustained conversation with their child may occur and what may hinder. Although the collaborating parents in the study were already highly motivated to engage in conversation with their children, they each found (to differing degrees) that through the research process they each learned something new about conversation with their own child, which in some cases was surprising, even 'eye opening':

> *Erm, yeh I've really, it's been really eye-opening, I guess. I get to see it from the point of view of like being able to look, like reflect on the conversations, and be able to like think in those moments as well…I think I've changed the way we chat as well. (Mr P Final Interview)*

Mr P's recognition that the process had influenced how he interacted with his daughter was reflected across each of the cases, providing evidence that the research process was empowering for the collaborating parents, enabling each to identify changes they wished to make within their families. For Mr P, the process helped him to feel more confident in his interactions with his daughter, realising that they do have good chats, but furthermore, that he was able to influence their interactions by relaxing, following her lead, and letting the conversation '*flow where she's flowing'*. Similarly, for Ms N, it was realising that it was in the quieter, more relaxed times with Nathan (rather than as she had thought, occasions where she was actively driving conversation), that their conversation flourished. For both Ms A and Ms K it was the recognition of distractions that may hinder conversation; TV for

Ms A, and mobile phone usage for Ms K. Significant here, was the self-identification of practical actions, each of the collaborating parents expressed their intention to implement, within their individual situations.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter concludes the thesis with a summary of the findings and discussion of the contributions they make to understanding adults' conversations with young children in their homes and communities. It first discusses how the research addresses each aspect of the research questions including implications for the families themselves and for partnerships between home and school to support young children's language development. The chapter then considers the contribution to knowledge made by the research, including its contribution to extending the theoretical perspective of children's individual funds of knowledge. The limitations of the research are discussed and I offer suggestions for professional practice and future research. The chapter finishes with a final reflection on personal lessons learned through the collaborative research process in this study.

6.2 Summary of Findings

Firstly, drawing on the discussion and analysis of the key findings across the three cases, I will respond to the research question under three broad themes, corresponding to the three main components of the research question:

- What is the nature of the conversations taking place in the home and community?
- What conditions and contexts promote sustained conversations with young children? What hinders?
- What may be the value of insights gained through the process?

6.2.1 What is the nature of the conversations taking place in the home and community?

Sustained conversations were taking place between the collaborating parent participants and their children in each case studied, demonstrating key aspects of 'quality' associated with language building. Relationships were key; the sustained conversations were characterised by togetherness and connection and permeated with emotion. Although, by their nature as sustained conversations, the interactions would be supportive of language

development, the purposes of the collaborating parents, across the cases related to connection or togetherness, rather than any particular educative purpose. The sustained conversations occurred where there was a 'coming together' of the two parties in a shared communicative space, characterised as a 'third space.'

Contemporary reframing of the scientific evidence (Rowe and Snow, 2020) concerning caregiver input quality is important when considering conversation in the home. It confirms the responsive, back-and-forth interaction of 'everyday conversation' as offering a quality feature in relation to language development in its own right. However, it also highlights conversation as foundational in offering the opportunity for the linguistic and conceptual 'quality' features from the educator's perspective. Therefore, caregiver language input continues to be highly influential (Ford *et al.,* 2020) and the contributions of conversation in the home can be seen as complementary to the more learning focussed (Fisher, 2016) academic register (Theakston, 2015; Hadley et al, 2022) of interactions in the later stages of the EYFS, especially reception classes. Thinking about complementary contributions to language development from both home and school aligns with Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) which emphasises the primacy of the contributions of the proximal processes in the microsystem, which would include both home and school. In applying this theory to language, children's development will be enhanced by sustained interactions in both settings, as well as by experiences in the local community. Furthermore, the relational and emotional nature and purposes of the conversations in the homes studied in this research align with Bronfenbrenner's emphasis on relationships and nurturance as crucial to development and wellbeing, as well as contemporary research into language development highlighting the interconnection of emotional development and language development (Ang and Harmey, 2019).

A further aspect of Bronfenbrenner's theory is the emphasis on relationships and continuity, between those who are in closest proximity to the child. Bronfenbrenner designated these linkages, or nurturing bridges, as a system of its own, the mesosystem, stressing its potential to further enhance development. Therefore, authentic parent partnerships in early childhood between the educator and the parent, both with the child's best interests at heart, have the potential to support the development of early educational experiences

foundational to optimal development (Hayes *et al.,* 2017). Bronfenbrenner called for educators to appreciate parents and, in applying this perspective to a consideration of language development, the research presented in this thesis highlights the potential of their ongoing contribution via warm, responsive, connected conversations that are meaningful to the child. The research further highlights the difference between conversations at home and the language practices children will encounter in school, such as large group interactions, more formal language (Theakston, 2015), or interactions with educators in a more academic register (Hadley *et al.,* 2022). For children to benefit from the conceptual talk provided by the classroom, for example, talk relating to abstract ideas, or talk about new vocabulary words or narratives, educators need to be attuned to children's language abilities to fine-tune their language responses and offer careful scaffolding (Fisher, 2016: Hadley *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, children need opportunities to use this new language themselves in contexts that are meaningful to them and which they find engaging (Hadley *et al.*, 2022). Applying Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model to language development here calls for high-quality interactions both at home and at school but further suggests that greater continuity between the two, supported by two-way communication and respectful relationship between educator and parent offers additional potential benefits.

6.2.2.What conditions and contexts promote sustained conversations with young children? What hinders?

Key to the overall purpose of my study was the development of a greater understanding of the contexts and conditions in which conversations with young children may thrive. It was envisaged that such understanding would highlight existing 'strengths' within families as well as potentially fruitful contexts to be built upon. Similarly, appreciation of hindrances to sustained conversation would contribute to a greater understanding of structural influences, beyond parents' specific intent.

Although the original focus of the research was on the adults, and what may influence their actions, my research demonstrates the agency of the child, and influences upon them as important considerations in relation to conditions supportive of sustained conversations. Therefore, my emergent conceptual model (Fig.12, p.173) exemplifies the concept identified

in the research that the sustained conversations occurred where there was a 'coming together' of the two parties. It demonstrates the necessary contributions of both the adult and the child, as well as the environment around them. Within and across the cases, my research further identified factors in relation to each of the three spheres that influenced the 'coming together' of the conversational partners and are presented in the composite conceptual model (Figure 13) below.

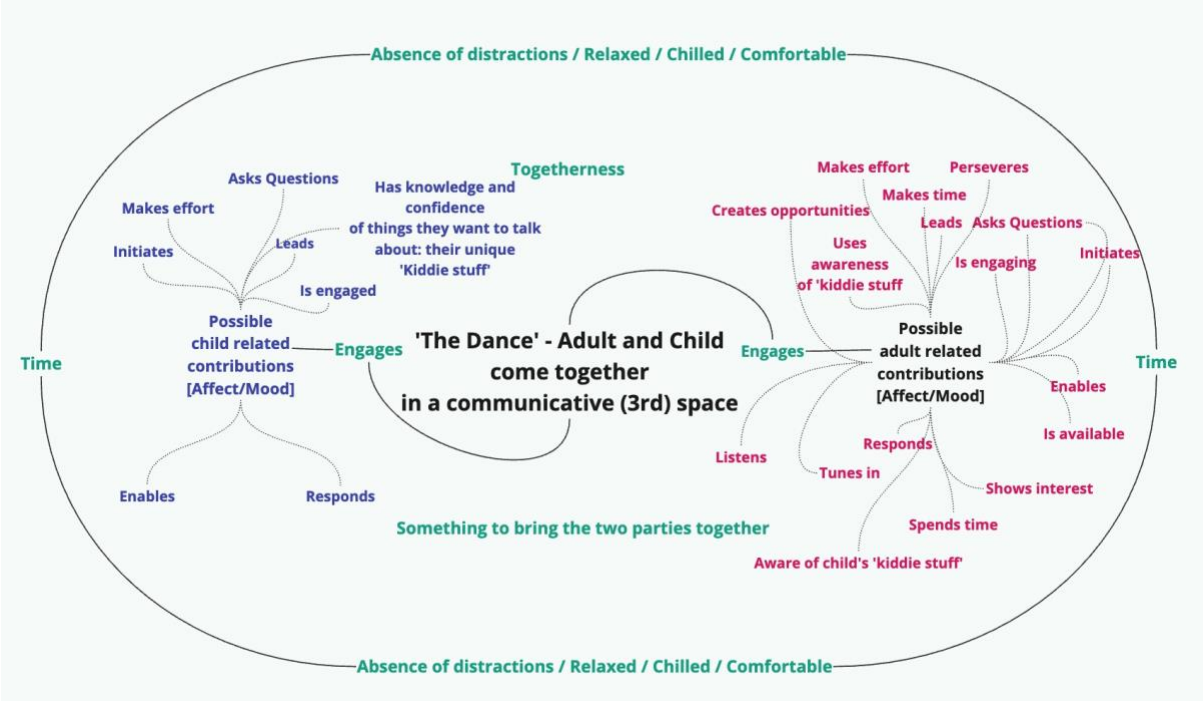

Fig. 13 Composite conceptual model of influences on sustained conversation

One of the key influences in supporting or promoting sustained conversation identified in my research was the responsiveness of the adult (Fisher, 2016; Ang and Harmey, 2019), including their capacity, availability, and willingness to 'tune in' to what the child was saying. The impact of the adults' responsiveness was recognised by each of the collaborating parents and exemplified in the sustained conversations, chosen as critical incidents. Being aware of, and responding to the things that interested, were meaningful, or important to the child was also demonstrated to be supportive of sustaining conversation. However, my research further demonstrated that for each of the children, the things that they were interested in, they may like to talk about, or were able to talk about, could be revealed through the collaborating parents' reflections on conversations with their children. The collaborative research with parents enabled the creation of individual thematic maps of the

topics of conversation for each of the children and were presented in each case (Figures 3, 6, 8, 10). Whilst some of the topics could be seen to be rooted in shared contexts and family funds of knowledge, such as family, and experiences and activities at home and in the local environment, as in the research of Tizard and Hughes (1984), others were rooted in the individual child's own 'world'. Indeed, Ms A used the term 'Kiddie Stuff' (discussed in detail in Section 5.3 and Section 5.6) to refer to topics of conversation that children may talk about. The research identified for each of the children, individual topics around their toys, popular culture, and enquiries about the social and natural world, as well as more ephemeral topics such as their individual concerns, fears, dreams, and imagination. Analysis of the topics of conversation with Frieda shared by both her mum and her dad (who are separated) further emphasises the agency of the child in the conversation, as the thematic maps in the two settings differ. Therefore, my research demonstrated that, although there were some commonalities, each individual child had their own unique 'Kiddie Stuff', representing each child's individual fascinations, enquiries, or concerns, at that particular time, in those particular circumstances.

My research demonstrated sustained conversation occurring when the conversational partners come together around a shared focus of interest, referred to in the conceptual model as 'something' to bring the two parties together. This may be, as previously discussed, the adult 'tuning in' and responding to the child's focus of interest in the moment, or a shared focus. However, the research also demonstrated how adults, seeking to connect, were able to create opportunities to bring both parties together. In doing so, the adults utilised their awareness of the child's interests, both those which were ongoing and those which were 'in the moment'. My research also shows the adults in the sustained conversations actively modulating their responses to the child, as well as the children both initiating conversations and responding to the adults. Therefore, my research demonstrated that the behaviours of both the adult and the child, when actively involved in the conversation, act and influence each other bidirectionally to support sustained interaction. The reciprocal, back-and-forth nature of sustained interactions is often considered a 'dance' (Pace, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff, 2016), and my research offers further illustration of that analogy. It shows that either partner could offer the invitation and either could lead, doing so at different times and in different ways, it also shows that

either party could be 'enticed'. It emphasises the necessary responsiveness between the two partners, where they are in step with one another, attending to each other, and sharing in the experience. My research further demonstrates that the dance is enhanced by the relationship between the dancers, their knowledge and understanding of one another, and the emotional connection between them. Just as Fisher (2016) concluded, the partners are not performing a prescribed dance such as a waltz or a tango, it is an improvised dance, where they create new understandings. Therefore, it is not always known which direction may be taken next in the creation of authentic dialogue (Strickland and Marinak, 2016), whereby the adult's and the child's worlds meet in a communicative 'third space'.

However, my research also demonstrated that the conditions influencing sustained conversation, and the contexts in which 'the dance' may occur were not simple or straightforward. As well as the contributions of the two conversational partners, my research highlights the contribution of the environment to sustaining conversation. In particular, my research highlights the need for the adult and child to have time together that is relaxed and comfortable. At the outset of the research, it was envisaged that the research may identify particular contexts, for example, mealtimes in which sustained conversations would tend to occur. Although the research did highlight bedtime as a time when each of the children was keen to enter into sustained conversations with their parents, rather than identifying any other particular contexts in which conversation may consistently occur, the research demonstrated a more complex picture. It showed the same context operating differently for different families and shifts and changes in the context in the same family but on different occasions. This suggests that it is not the context itself that ensures a sustained conversation will take place, but rather that sustained conversation would tend to occur, or be enabled when the necessary conditions were in place. Careful analysis of the data provided by the research led me to conceptualise the conditions, in which the sustained conversations between adults and children may take place, as a complex, interplay of a range of potential influences on the behaviours and attributes of the adult, the child, and the environment around them at the time, in flux within the milieux of family life. Therefore, the conditions in which sustained conversations may thrive are represented in the composite conceptual model (figure 13) as a unique, delicate, shifting

ecosystem, in which the conversational partners come together in a communicative space so that 'the dance' of sustained conversation can occur.

A second composite conceptual model (Figure 14) demonstrates the potential hindrances to sustained conversation identified across the cases. The model demonstrates influences acting upon both the adult and the child, as well as the conditions surrounding them at the time that may prevent the coming together of the adult and child in a communicative space.

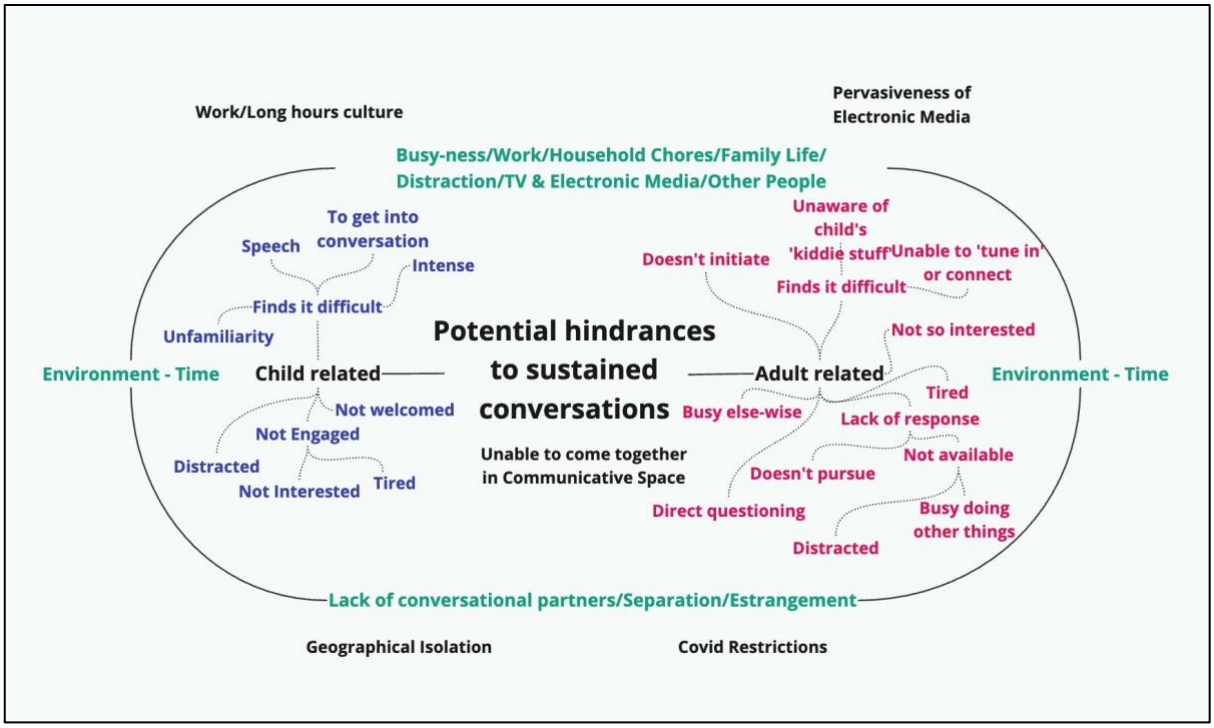

Fig.14 Composite conceptual model of potential hindrances to sustained conversation.

Similar to the supportive conditions, the influences hindering sustained conversations were shown, across the cases, to operate in flux, and my research demonstrates how the delicate balance of conditions in which the conversations were sustained could easily be disrupted. Through applying a lens of critical analysis to the data, my research also identified influences, prevalent in 'modern life', beyond the intentions, actions, and dispositions of the adults and children themselves. These influences included the 'busyness' of modern life and the existence of multiple sources of distractions for both the adult and the child. Just as the agency of the child was demonstrated to be integral to sustaining the conversation, my research also demonstrated influences on the child that may also hinder conversation such as, the child being more interested in their own play, play with friends or siblings, or

watching their own programmes. The consideration of influences on the child reiterates the idea of the child having their own child's world, even within the life of the family, and highlights a potential for distance between the two worlds that would have been less pronounced when the work of Tizard and Hughes (1984) was carried out.

The final influence identified in the cases studied was the lack of a range of adult conversational partners for the child. In the first case, this was through geographical isolation from extended family, whereas in the latter two cases, the isolation was brought about through social distancing restrictions in place at the time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the research found that sustained conversations were taking place within the families and demonstrated extended family members making concerted efforts to maintain connection with the children, it demonstrated the influences of lack of access to experiences to talk about, lack of access to potential conversational partners, and even how a period of estrangement could hinder conversation.

6.2.3 What may be the value of insights gained through the research process?

The final part of the research question, 'What may be the value of insights gained through the research process?' was included to address the 'participatory turn' of my research design. It represents an aspiration that, in addition to developing empirical knowledge, exploring conversation with their young children may offer parents insights into the conditions that support or hinder conversations in their own context and may empower them to make changes should they wish. A second aspiration was that the research may contribute to the further understanding of approaches to parent partnership.

As demonstrated in Section 5.8, the collaborative research process did indeed support each of the collaborating parents to gain insights into conversations with their own children. Furthermore, in each case, the process enabled parents to identify actionable strategies which were individual to their own families. This was most notable in the cases of Mr P and Frieda and Ms N (and her husband) and Nathan. Mr P described the process as 'eye opening'; reflecting on the sustained conversations that he and Frieda had made it possible for Mr P to see beyond his own attempts to initiate conversation (such as asking Frieda

direct questions) to the influences of the environment around them and the contributions of, and influences upon, Frieda herself. Mr P's evolving understanding of, and his confidence in sustaining conversation with Frieda indicates the potential of the collaborative process undertaken for this research to enable practical, situated learning for both parents and educators. Even as an educator himself, having training and experience in communicating with young children, the process provided opportunities for valuable insights; most notably his expressed surprise at the effect of *merely* responding to Frieda.

However, my research also indicates the potential of the collaborative process to offer insights which may be empowering to parents. This was demonstrated most notably in the case of Ms N, who stated explicitly that she found the process had given her the power to change how she and Nathan interacted, even leading her to encourage her husband to pursue more sustained interactions with Nathan. Moreover, Ms N found the process potentially empowering in relation to advocating for Nathan at school. The insights she gained led her to consider that sharing her understanding of communicating with Nathan with his educators could help them to 'see' Nathan more and support their communication with him. It is here that my research can be seen to contribute to an understanding of approaches to parent partnership. It demonstrated that the collaborating parents, as active partners in the research process, enabled invaluable insight into the lived experience of their own family with a specific focus on the influences on sustained adult-child conversations. In recognising and valuing the contribution of the parents' expert knowledge of their own child and family in the collaborative research process, understanding was co-created between an educator/researcher and the collaborating parents - with learning occurring on both sides. The joint reflections on episodes of conversation, brought together insights from their two different perspectives, with an acute focus on the child.
Athey (2007) contends that joint focus on observations of children is motivating to both parents and educators, supporting the development of the relationship as well as shared understanding of the child's development. As contemporary research into strategies to enhance early language development calls for educators to enhance their skills in sustaining interactions with young children (EEF, 2018b; Ang and Harmey, 2019; Siraj and Mathers 2021), my research emphasises language-building quality features of parents' conversations, complementary to those of their educators. In particular, it reiterates the

importance of adults' responsiveness to both the child's focus of interest (Fisher, 2016; Ang and Harmey, 2019) and the child's communicative practices (Flewitt, 2005) as well as the place of emotion and relationships (Ang and Harmey, 2019). The sustained conversations presented in this research represents the 'warm attentiveness' Fisher (2016) contends educators should aspire to. However, the research also demonstrates the potential of harnessing the insights parents may offer to enhance adult-child interactions in school by highlighting those topics, interests, contexts, or approaches which may enhance conversation with their child in school and foster continuity between home and school.

Finally, in highlighting conditions which may hinder conversation beyond the explicit intent of the parents, my research challenges the simple, deficit perception that parents don't talk to their children. In particular, it has highlighted the prevalence of distractions, prevalent in modern life, that influence both adults and children. Moreover, in highlighting the agency of the child in sustaining conversation, my research indicates that expectations that parents 'talk to' or even 'talk with' their child would not necessarily achieve the intended outcome. Similarly, parents may be advised to 'make time', but my research indicates that time chosen by the parent may not necessarily be as fruitful as they may hope. My research suggests that the 'right time', where the balance of conditions supportive of sustained conversation come together is easily disrupted and may be quite fleeting. Therefore, my research suggests greater compassion and the development of shared understanding of individual circumstances are indicated in approaches to working with parents.

6.3 Contributions to Knowledge

In this thesis, I have explored the process of researching collaboratively with parents to co-construct understanding of conversation with their young children. Traditional scientific, correlational research emphasises the association between caregiver behaviour, beliefs, and knowledge and the quality of the home communication environment (Rowe, 2008). The collaborative qualitative research presented here explored parents' own experiences of, feelings about, and purposes for engaging in sustained conversations with their children. Therefore, the research contributes to understanding the nature of, and influences on, their home communication environment 'in situ'. Its rich description (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016)

of the phenomenon through a series of cases (Yazan, 2015), highlights the emotional and relational nature of the conversations, with the parents' contributions influenced by the wish to engage and connect with their child, by their enjoyment in interacting with their child or through interest in what the child had to say.

The sociocultural research of Tizard and Hughes (1984) was influential on my own research. It highlighted rich conversations taking place between parents and children in each of the homes they studied in the early eighties and theorised that children's conversations in school were hindered by dissonance between the home and school communication environment. Whilst affirming strongly that sustained conversations were taking place in each of the homes I studied and further demonstrating shared contexts to be supportive of conversation, my research extends understanding to include hindrances, beyond the specific intent of the parents, associated with contemporary life. Tizard and Hughes (1984) sought to challenge deficit discourses of parents, but their research may be extrapolated to imply that rich interactions, occurring 'naturally' at home, were to be expected and were simple and straightforward to achieve. In contrast, by adopting a bioecological approach (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), my research identified wider influences, beyond the specific intent of the adults, supporting or hindering sustained conversation and portrays sustained adult-child conversations as occurring within a delicate balance of conditions vulnerable to disruption. Prominent in the data, a key influence identified was the agency of the child in the conversations. Therefore, concurrent with Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), my research highlights the bidirectional influences between the adult and the child, but also wider influences on both parties as shown in my composite conceptual model, figure 13. Conducted during the summers of 2019 and 2020, the research gave indications of environmental components prevalent in 'modern life', including a culture of long working hours for parents, busyness, and distractions acting on both the adult and child, as well as an absence or disconnection from potential conversational partners, as negatively influencing opportunities for sustained conversation. It also makes a particular, original contribution to knowledge in identifying influences on adult-child conversation in two of the families, as a result of the conditions created by the restrictions on social interaction within the wider community, by the COVID-19 regulations in the summer of 2020. Analysis of the influences on sustained adult-child

conversation during that period, added to the conceptualisation of the conditions, influencing conversation as a delicate complex ecosystem, unique to the child and family at any particular time.

Finally, my research contributes to developing the understanding of approaches to early childhood education that recognise and appreciate families' funds of knowledge (Moll *et al.,* 1992; González *et al*., 2005) as it affirms aspects of language building 'quality' in the collaborating parents' conversations with their children which are complementary to those of educators. Furthermore, it suggests that insights provided by collaborating with parents, as skilled and knowledgeable conversational partners, could support educators in their conversations with their children at school. My research provides evidence that the collaborative process itself, of joint reflection upon episodes of conversation in the home and community, offered the opportunity to co-create shared understandings of the child's communicative practices, e.g., the way the children may try to initiate or engage in a conversation as well as the topics they may choose or are confident to talk about. Therefore, my research also adds to understanding of the theoretical perspective of Funds of Identity (Esteban-Guitart and Moll, 2014) which argues that whilst learners have knowledge and skills derived from their participation in their homes and communities and learning would be enhanced by educators recognising and building upon them, they have their own individual life experiences, separate to their family. Researching adult-child conversations demonstrated that, even aged three to five, the children's focus of interest did not always align with that of the family and, with some adults, this created a hindrance to their conversations. In addition to topics adults may find accessible such as shared experiences, toys, books, and animals, my research demonstrated children wishing to talk about characters from children's popular culture, their enquiries and concerns about the world around them, dreams, and imagination. It gave indications of the children as separate, agentive social actors in a child's world (James, 2009) and, to sustain conversation, the necessity of the adult being able to tune in and respond in a communicative 'third space.

Interactions in school are enhanced when the educator builds a relationship with the child and their family and knows the child and their interests and fascinations well enough to

fine-tune their responses, 'the more that is known about the child, the easier it is to find a conversational hook on which to hang an interaction that has meaning and relevance' (Fisher, p. 51). Furthermore, tuning in to the linguistic competence of the child enables careful scaffolding to provide appropriate cognitive and conceptual challenge (Hadley *et al.,* 2022). Therefore, a greater understanding of a child's communicative practices and the topics of conversation that may engage them has the potential to support them in making the transition from conversations at home to conversations at school, with benefits for their language development and continuity of learning. Through collaborating with parents and engaging with children's funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart and Moll, 2014) or funds of knowledge-based interests (Hedges, 2021), my research indicates possibilities for educators wishing to optimise what may be fleeting opportunities for conversations with children.

6.4 Implications for Professional Practice for Early Childhood Education Provision in Communication and Language in the Later Stages of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

Developing children's oral language skills is a key priority and one of the drivers for the recent revisions to the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (DfE, 2021) and is therefore a focus for many schools. Educators in the EYFS also have a statutory requirement 'working in parentship with parents…to promote learning and development' (p.7). In addition to educators' own efforts to ensure natural, back-and-forth conversations (Fisher, 2016; DfE, 2021; Siraj and Mathers, 2021) in a language-rich environment with opportunities for shared reading and role play (Mathers, 2023), my research highlights the contribution of adult-child conversations at home to children's language development, which educators may seek to influence (Mathers, 2023). There is an argument that the home should not be 'schoolified, and it is not the job of parents to attend to school or governmental priorities (Jarvis and Georgeson, 2017) and that the expectation of parents' involvement in their child's learning adds to distress and may alienate families (Lareau, 1994). Furthermore, undue focus on the behaviours of parents absolves society and the state (Goodall, 2021) of the conditions that may make it more difficult for parents to provide the nurturing interactions explored in my research. However, to avoid engaging with parents, or some parents – either through fear of overburdening them or through deficit perceptions (Ellis, 2020), risks disadvantaging those families further. Processes of engagement, founded in

respectful relationships (Goodall, 2018) which empower both parents and educators (Wolfendale, 1992) and offer opportunities for each to learn from one other (Goodall, 2018), although challenging, offer possibilities.

My research indicates that initiatives to influence parents to provide a supportive home communication environment, should avoid deficit conceptions and emphasise the important contribution parents can make in their own way, through nurturing and responsive interactions, whilst also recognising material and structural challenges parents face. It demonstrates that parents and educators may have different purposes for engaging in conversation with children and that the emotional and relational features of the parents' conversations need to be preserved and supported. However, my research also highlights the funds of knowledge of the child's interests and communicative practices held by parents, indicating possibilities for educators to also learn about the child and family.

Developing knowledge and understanding of the child and their communicative practices offers educators the potential to support their own interactions with the child (Fisher, 2016) and the planning of engaging educational experiences (Chesworth, 2023). For educators seeking to improve interactions with young children, my research indicates there is much to be learned from parents about the emotional and relational influences on sustaining conversation. Fisher (2016) contends that in creating an educational setting, conducive to interactions, attention must be paid to creating an emotional space for parents, echoing the call for the trusting relationships in Brooker's 'Triangle of Care' (Brooker, 2010) or the creation of a 'Triangle of Trust' (Early Years Coalition, 2021), where both adults and children feel valued and listened to. Enhanced continuity between home and school offers the potential to support children in transitioning between the language practices of home and school. The following diagram (fig. 15) demonstrates the potential for a two-way flow of knowledge between home and school in relation to communication and language, demonstrating how collaboration between educators and parents offers potential to support children traversing between the interactions with adults at home and the interactions with adults at school.

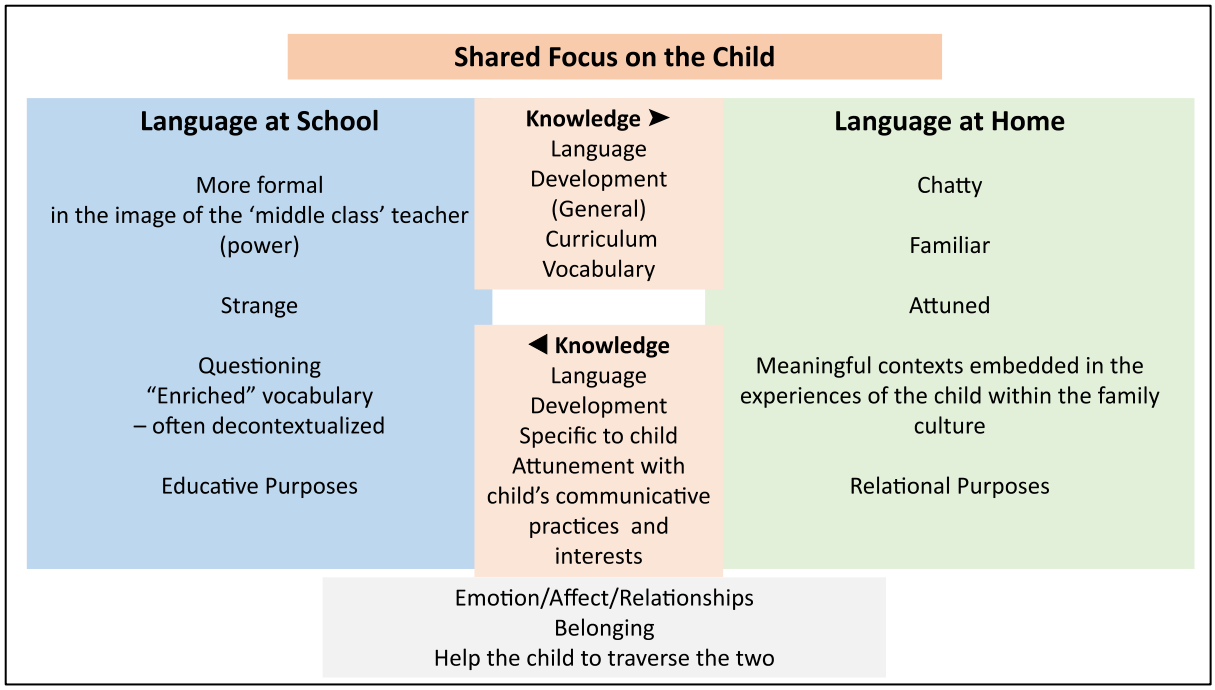

Fig.15 Potential two-way flow of knowledge between home and school in relation to communication and language development

However, community resources that enable adults and children to interact together in enjoyable experiences that increase social and cultural capital and provide interesting things to talk about, supportive interactions in the wider local community, and respectful, non-judgemental support for the family will also enhance children's opportunities for language development (Greenwood, 2017, Layzell, 2019; NCB, 2021). My research supports the recommendation of a holistic and coordinated approach to supporting communication and language development through a home, school, community partnership (Epstein 2016), with a two-way flow of knowledge and understanding between school and family, focussed on the child, at its heart.

6.5 Limitations of the Study

This research has generated deep, rich data on the experiences of four parents exploring conversations with their children in their homes and communities, however, it is indicative of possibilities rather than generalisable to the wider experiences of parents. This collective qualitative case study was always intended to explore 'particularities' (Stake, 1995, p.8), intense examination of the 'everyday, commonplace' (Bryman, 2016, p.62) 'natural' experiences of conversation in particular families, enabling the findings to be relatable or

transferable to others in similar circumstances. However, only one parent participant volunteered out of sixty families invited to take part at the original research site and, due to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, the further three parents were then approached through personal connections, resulting in a convenience sample. Due to the level of commitment required by the collaborating parent participants, and their conscientious involvement in the data collection, it must be considered that they could not be considered 'typical' or 'representative'(Bryman, 2016, p. 62) of the wider parent community, especially a community facing high levels of disadvantage. Similarly, data collection during the COVID-19 restrictions could not be considered representative of 'normal life' and the findings have been interpreted as particular to that time.

Whilst, throughout this thesis, the collaboration of the parents has been highlighted as both a guiding principle and a strength of the research, the necessary reliance on the self-chosen recordings and self-reporting of the experiences, requires the recognition and acceptance of the possibility for social desirability bias (Bryman, 2016), where the parents may have tended to share data that represents themselves in the best light. Such bias is recognised and accepted in the epistemology of the study, which through explicitly seeking the parents' insights and perceptions, recognises and acknowledges that the knowledge will be largely situated, experiential, practical knowing (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017).

From its conception, the focus of this research was firmly on exploring with parents, influences of, and influences on, adults in conversations with their children. This originated with my professional interest in parental engagement and working in partnership with parents, seeking to address the deficit conception of 'parents don't talk to their children' and not a conception of the child as a passive recipient. Nevertheless, foregrounding the parents as collaborative partners has obscured the perspectives of the children themselves. In the joint reflections and my further interpretations, the knowledge generated lacks the full picture which may be achieved by including the children as collaborative partners (Chesworth, 2018; Tatham-Fashanu, 2021). In future studies, including the children as active, collaborating participants, via three-way discussion about the conversations and the circumstances around the conversations, has the potential to add further depth of understanding. This would recognise and value the children's contribution to the

epistemological quality of the research as well as respecting the right of the child to participate fully in the research process (Chesworth, 2018; Flewitt and Ang, 2020).

6.6 Suggestions for further research

Carrying out the study I originally intended has the potential to add to knowledge of conversation with young children in more disadvantaged circumstances than the families presented in my thesis and challenge deficit views of such families. However, in the current circumstances, with the cost-of-living crisis impacting disproportionately on lower-income families, the ethics of undertaking such research must be carefully considered; research should not add to family pressures and should employ a participatory approach.

A further possibility for future research would be collaborative action research (Sigurdardottir and Puroila, 2018) focussing on the model represented in Figure 15 in Section 6.4. The purpose would be to research the process of bringing families and teachers together in a 'third space' to co-construct shared understandings of children's communicative practices and the conditions and topics that motivate sustained interactions at home, to support interactions in school. Qualitative research could focus on investigating the families' (including the children) and teachers' experiences of reflecting together on episodes of sustained conversations at home and exploring the possibilities for learning experiences and interactions in school.

6.7 Final Thoughts

Little and Little (2022) refer to the 'third space' they created as collaborators in research as being a strange place. Throughout this research, I too, found myself in a strange place; experiencing shifts in researcher, educator, and learner roles that Sigurdardottir and Puroila (2018) suggest 'dwelling' in the third space in collaborative research will bring. At the commencement of this research, the intended space of co-production was between me, as a developing academic researcher, and the collaborating parent participants. However, in retrospect, from the dawning of the initial idea and the development of the research question, a third collaborator, my previous self as a teacher in the early years, was also present. At the end of my thesis, it is possible to see within the research I was, by proxy,

exploring a model for educators engaging with parents around talking with their children. Employing methods influenced by the Pen Green PICL approach (Whalley, 2017), meant that the participatory turn (Ospina *et al.,* 2008) drove the collaboration. However, it was in the role of researcher, that the educator as expert, could be set to one side to enable, with humility, my own professional learning about talking with children. However, I also gained practical, experiential learning of the model itself. Hawley and Potter (2022) contend shifts in the researcher role should be welcomed along with emotional responses which may open the research and the researcher up to 'possibilities' (p.19), as I experienced. Through the research I began to see the recordings as a vehicle for an intense shared focus on the child, experiencing an emotional connection with the parents as we learned together. Collaborating in this way seemed to offer the possibility for a deep 'knowing' of the child and I could not help but reflect during the very last interview:

> *I've never even met Nathan and I feel like I know him, you know…and understanding Nathan, actually, as a teacher now, if I was teaching now, I would want to do something like this. If I was particularly talking about language, so maybe a child who I thought, as a teacher, 'ooh I'm not too sure about the language here', I think, I think it would be really good to have that two-way conversation with you, with the mum, with the parents. What's going on? What interests him? What can you talk about? Yeah, absolutely! (Researcher (Me), Final Interview with Ms N)*

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Ethics

1a Ethics Approval University of Sheffield

The University Of Sheffield.

Downloaded: 08/04/2023
Approved: 23/04/2019

Janet Morris
Registration number: 150242279
School of Education
Programme: Doctorate in Education EdD

Dear Janet

PROJECT TITLE: Join the Conversation: Learning with Parents about Talking with Young Children: An exploration of conversation with young children in their home and community.
APPLICATION: Reference Number 022789

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 23/04/2019 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 022789 (form submission date: 01/04/2019); (expected project end date: 31/07/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1054628 version 3 (01/04/2019).
- Participant information sheet 1054630 version 3 (01/04/2019).
- Participant consent form 1054634 version 3 (01/04/2019).
- Participant consent form 1054633 version 3 (01/04/2019).

The following optional amendments were suggested:

See above.

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.

1b Information for Participants (In person)

Join the Conversation: Learning with Parents about Talking with Young Children

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

What is the project's purpose?

I am a senior lecturer at the University of Greenwich and usually work with your child's school to train trainee teachers. However, this research is being carried out as part of my own studies for a doctorate in education at the University of Sheffield; this research will be the basis of my thesis.

The project aims to explore what can be learned about conversation with young children in their homes and communities through researching with their parents. It further aims to explore the value of this approach for the parents themselves and as an approach to engaging with parents. It also aims to explore the conditions which support conversation with young children as well as what some of the barriers to this may be.

Why has my family been approached?

Your child's school has been chosen as the research base because it recognises and values the important role of parents in supporting children's learning and is also keen to find ways to support the language development of children in the early years. It also has a very valuable partnership with the University of Greenwich through having trainee teachers at school and is happy for this research to take place. I am inviting all parents of children in the early years to take part. It is completely up to you to decide whether or not to take part and there is no pressure whatsoever from school. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form). You can withdraw at any time without any negative consequences and you do not have to give a reason. If you do decide to withdraw I will remove and destroy any information that you have shared with me.

What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

There are three parts to this research. The first is a focus group in which you will be asked to discuss with other parents your current thoughts on conversation with your young children, at home and in your community. This discussion will be audio recorded and should last no more than an hour. If you want to add anything further you can write your comments on a form which will be provided.

The second part of the research is a more in-depth consideration of conversation in your family. I would like you to observe episodes of conversation with your child and collect information on them in a conversation diary. This could be in the form of written notes, or commenting on a photo, a video or some audio on your phone. We would then meet on two occasions (more if you would like) to talk about what you have found out. These meetings will be audio recorded for the research and copies of your conversation diary will also enter into the research. Each of these meetings should last no longer than half an hour. The meetings will usually take place on school premises at a time that is convenient to you – this could be at school drop off or pick up time. If this is not possible the meetings could take place at a mutually convenient location, which may include your home if that is acceptable.

The final stage will be a focus group with other parents who have taken part in the research in which we discuss the things that we have found out together during the project. During this focus group I

will have some questions to ask you but you will also have the opportunity to express your opinions and add any further details you think are important. If you would prefer this can be done individually.

All of this information is crucial to the project as it aims to capture parents' own insights.
You can take part in all parts of the research or just the initial focus group; you will be asked to sign separate consent forms for each part.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I appreciate that both aspects of this research will take up some of your time – especially the research in your home. It is possible that this could add to the pressures of family life and I am aware of this. If you are concerned about the time commitment then the research could be adapted or stopped altogether.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The research offers opportunities for you to gain insights into the most fruitful opportunities for your own child to experience sustained conversation and how this could be supported.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential in all instances except where there is a legal obligation to report disclosures, for example where issues of child protection arise.

What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.'

What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

I will store everything safely on a password protected computer which can only be accessed by me. If I share this information with anyone I employ to type up any of the recorded discussions, they will not know who is speaking. Once all the information has been collected, the research will be written up and published in my doctoral thesis and possible research papers; the findings may also be presented at conferences. In all of these outputs your names and the name of the school will be removed as well as any distinguishing features which may identify you. However, school is very keen that this research be useful to local parents so I will also produce more informal reports to be shared locally. In these cases the name of the school will be known but I will remove any details that may identify you as an individual. I will not use your real name in anything I write and I will also share with you what will be written, should you wish. Once the project is complete I will destroy all records containing personal details, the original audio recordings and ensure that any examples from the diaries used cannot be linked to individuals. The project should be completed and the thesis published by July 2021 but you can ask to see drafts of anything written about you throughout the project.

How will the recorded media be used?
The audio and/or video recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

Who is organising and funding the research?

No organisation or company is funding this research; it is purely for the purposes of academic study.

Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the university is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This research follows ethical guidance produced by the British Education Research Association (BERA) and has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by their Research Ethics Committee.

What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research?

If you are not happy with any aspect of the way that this research is being carried out please let me know straight away so that I can try to resolve the problem. If you are not happy with how I handle your complaint please contact my supervisor or the chair of ethics at The University of Sheffield (please see details below). If your complaint relates to the way that your personal details have been handled information on how to complain can be found in the University's Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.

Contact for further information

Janet Morris Senior Lecturer Primary Education (Early Years)
Department of Education and Heath
University of Greenwich, Avery Hill Campus, Bexley Road, London SE9 2PQ
Tel. 020 8331 8613 j.morris@gre.ac.uk

Thank you
Thank you for reading this information sheet and your interest in the project. If you decide to take part please keep it for your information.

1c Amendment to Research in the Home Section April 2020

The second part of the research is a more in-depth consideration of conversation in your family called collaborative research in the home. I would like you to observe episodes of conversation with your child and collect information on them and your thoughts about this in a conversation diary. This could be in the form of written notes, or commenting on a photo, a video or some audio on your phone. We would meet online initially for me to outline the methods further and conduct a brief interview and then we would meet online on two further occasions (more if you would like) to talk about what you have found out. These meetings will be conducted by video conferencing and recorded (audio and video) for the research and copies of your conversation diary, either emailed or completed on an online form will also enter into the research. Each of these meetings should last no longer than half an hour. The online meetings will take place at a time that is convenient to you and I can be very flexible in this.

1d Consent form Participants (In Person)

Join the Conversation: Learning with Parents about Talking with Young Children

Collaborative Research in the Home

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in participatory research in the home. I understand that this will include: observing episodes of conversation in my home and community, keeping a record of this in a diary which may include notes, photos, audio or video recordings, discussing these with the researcher on two occasions and taking part in a final group or individual interview.	☐	☐
I agree to share my diaries with the researcher including video data /not including video data (please choose one option)	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time, when the research will be compiled. I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words and notes may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my photos and videos (if agreed above) may be shown to the researcher's supervisor and examiners and for educational purposes at conferences etc. I understand and agree that they may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that these will be annonymised.	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of participant [printed] Signature Date

Name of Researcher [printed] Signature Date

Project contact details for further information:
Researcher:
Janet Morris Senior Lecturer Primary Education (Early Years) Tel. 020 8331 8613 j.morris@gre.ac.uk
Department of Education and Heath University of Greenwich, Avery Hill Campus, Bexley Road, London SE9 2PQ
Supervisor: Dr S. Little School of Education University of Sheffield 241, Glossop Road, Sheffield S10 2GW
In case of a complaint about the conduct of this research:
Dr D Hyatt Chair of Ethics Committee School of Education University of Sheffield 241, Glossop Road, Sheffield S10 2GW

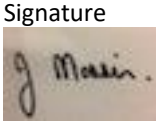
1e Consent Form Participants (online)

Join the Conversation: Learning with Parents about Talking with Young Children: Collaborative Research in the Home

Please put a Y in the boxes as appropriate to indicate your consent	**Yes**	**No**
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)		
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.		
I agree to take part in collaborative research in the home. I understand that this will include: observing episodes of conversation in my home and community, keeping a record of this in a diary which may include notes, photos, audio or video recordings, discussing these with the researcher on two (more if you would like) occasions and taking part in a final interview.		
I understand that these discussions will take place by video conferencing and that they will be recorded as data (video and audio)		
I agree to share my diaries with the researcher including video data /not including video data (please choose one option)		
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time until 1st August when the data will be collated). I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.		
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.		
I understand and agree that my words and notes may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request.		
I understand and agree that my photos and videos (if agreed above) may be shown to the researcher's supervisor and examiners and for educational purposes at conferences etc. I understand and agree that they may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that these will be annonymised.		
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.		

Name of participant [printed] Signature Date

Name of Researcher [printed] Janet Morris Signature Date 4.7.20.



If an electronic signature is not possible, return of this form completed will be taken as consent.

Project contact details for further information:

Researcher: Janet Morris Senior Lecturer Primary Education (Early Years) Tel. 020 8331 8613 j.morris@gre.ac.uk
Department of Education and Heath University of Greenwich, Avery Hill Campus, Bexley Road, London SE9 2PQ
Supervisor: Dr S. Little School of Education University of Sheffield 241, Glossop Road, Sheffield S10 2GW
In case of a complaint about the conduct of this research: Dr D Hyatt Chair of Ethics Committee School of Education University of Sheffield 241, Glossop Road, Sheffield S10 2GW

Appendix 2 Research Tools

Appendix 2a Conversation Log

Join the Conversation:
Learning with Parents about Talking with Young Children
Your Conversation Log

Please use these materials to help you to observe, record and reflect upon episodes of sustained conversation (both in general and in particular) that take place with your child in your home and community and to build a **conversation log.**

This log can be very flexible. It could include: written notes, photos, video or some audio on your phone.

Part 1 **General**: Over the week keep a note of episodes of conversation that take place with your child.

Part 2 **Specific:** Choose one or two (more if you wish) key episodes of sustained conversation that you would like to think about more carefully. Capture the episode (if possible) and then record your thoughts on the episode (either in writing or in some other way)

These could be episodes of sustained conversation (5 or more turns) or less successful interactions. Again this is flexible but please reflect/report on them as soon as possible after the conversation (without disrupting the conversation)

Research Menu: Capture the episode

- Observe and make notes or
- Audio record the episode or
- Take a photo and make notes later or
- Video the episode

You can email this to me jmorris5@sheffield.ac.uk or WhatsApp ***** ****50

Reflect on/think about:

- When did the conversation take place? What happened? Who was involved?
- What was the conversation about? How did it develop?
- Who led? What was the purpose of the conversation?
- Was this conversation usual or unusual – in what way? What did you notice about the interaction? Why did you focus on this episode?
- **Was it sustained? Yes/ No?** If yes, why do you think it was successful? If no, why do you think it was less than successful?
- **Anything else you would like to note**

Research Menu: Reflect on/think about the episode

- Make notes or
- Audio or video record yourself You can e mail this to me jmorris5@sheffield.ac.uk or WhatsApp ***** ****50 or
- Leave me a message on my phone ***** ****50

Janet Morris Tel: ***** ****50 Email: jmorris5@sheffield.ac.uk

Join the Conversation:
Learning with Parents about Talking with Young Children
General Conversation Log

Please make a note of conversations with your child that you notice taking place. Please note the date, time, where the conversation took place, who it was with and what they were talking about.

Janet Morris University of Sheffield Tel: 07507 596250 Email jmorris5@sheffield.ac.uk

Use this space to make notes on your chosen conversation (or record it in some other way e.g. audio, photo, video)
Use this space to think about your chosen conversation: (or record yourself talking about it and send to Janet)

Join the Conversation:
Learning with Parents about Talking with Young Children
Specific Conversation Log

Please use this sheet for a conversation you choose to study in greater depth.

Use this space to make notes on your chosen conversation (or record it in some other way e.g. audio, photo, video)
Use this space to think about your chosen conversation: (or record yourself talking about it and send to Janet)

Janet Morris Tel: **** ****50 Email: jmorris5@sheffield.sc.uk

Appendix 2b Schedule for Research Conversations

Ask parent to talk me through the material they have gathered in the general conversation log
Discuss the general log:
What have you noticed?

What are the contexts/ occasions/ in which conversations are most likely to develop?
Who with? Where?
What conditions make them more likely? What hinders?
What kind of conversations take place? What about?
When more sustained conversations take place -what are they like?
What have you noticed about them in general?

Ask the participant to choose one or two of the videos/ audios/reflections to watch to discuss.
Review the parent's reflections on the episode together (if available)

Ask the parent:
Why did you choose that episode to record/focus on? What do you think was interesting or significant about it?
When? What happened? What was it about? Who led?

Who was involved?
How did it develop? Was it successful do you think?
In what way? Sustained? Why?

Watch the recording together (If available)

What do we notice about the Interaction? Discuss together

How did you feel through that interaction (with the child?) Pleasurable?

What have we noticed? Learned? Anything else you would like to add?

What would you like to explore next week?
Anything in particular you would like to try to find out?

How have you found the research process, is there a need to adapt?

Appendix 3 Thematic Analysis of Conversation Logs

Appendix 3a Thematic analysis of Conversation Logs shared by Ms A

Time/Context	Who with?	What about?	Reflection/thematic analysis
Meeting 2			
General Log 1			
Way home from school	Ms A	School, handwriting good.	Topic: Child's life, school, achievement
At home – evening	Ms A	School, fell over	Topic: Child's life, school, concern
Bedtime	Ms A	Her day	Topic: Child's life Friend , Sibling
Bedtime	Ms A	School	Topic: Child's life friend, school, friend, sweets
Morning/Garden	Ms A	Snails	Topic: Animals.
Way to school	Mum's friend	Going to Beavers	Topic: Child's life Activities
Way home from school	Ms A	School	Topic: Child's life, school, concern
Before bed	Ms A	Her day	Topic: Child's life
Weekend morning	Ms A	Beaver Trip	Topic: Child's life Activities
Weekend morning	Ms A	Her toy	Topic: Child's life, toy.
Way home from school	Ms A	Made a dinosaur	Topic: Child's life, creations
Board Game Club	Family liaison	Chit Chat	Topic: Child's life, activities.
Way home from Beavers	Ms A	Pirate Day	Topic: Child's life, school, Pirate Day
Home after school	Dad	Pirate Day	Topic: Child's life, school, Pirate Day
Home evening	Ms A	Her hair	Topic: Child's life, her hair
Home after school	Ms A	Transition Day	Topic: Child's life, school
Home phone call	Nanny 1	News	Topic: Child's life, school, show, popular culture, Toy Story.
Audio			
Beaver Camp and the Marvellous Robot (4 minutes) Morning after Beaver Camp	Ms A	Experiences at Beaver Camp, the story of the day Picnic, having a photo taken with teddy bear – lying on her belly 'It's a new man', Made a Robot, went back inside. I found a spider in the toilet. Scared Size of robot, didn't have pencils.	Topic: Child's life, creations, activities, concerns. Adult Contribution: Makes effort, enables, interested, listens, responds, makes time, tunes in, follows child's interests Child Contribution: Knowledgeable, interesting things to talk about, Positive affect: proud
Board Game Club (2mins 15 secs) Didn't flow easily Caitlin was colouring in pirates, adults initiated and led the conversation.	Family liaison worker based at school.	Mum introduces the topic of beaver Camp. Sally asks about it, Caitlin talks about the robot, and picnic. Mum changes the subject, ballet, pirate dressing up.	Adult Contribution: Makes effort, appears interested, asks questions, responds. Child Contribution: Responds. Hindrance: Child, Distracted/Busy Hindrance: Adult, finds it difficult Parent as Conduit.
Lego Pirate Video (26 seconds) Very short, didn't flow	Dad	Telling Dad about transition day, watching Lego Pirate Film in new class.	Adult Contribution: Listens Child Contribution: Child Knowledgeable Parent as Conduit. Hindrance: Adult, finds it difficult.
Meeting 3			

General Log 2			
Home, summer holiday Home, summer holiday Home, summer holiday	Nanny 1 Nanny 2 Auntie	Caitlin's toy camera School , holidays, friends, puppy, farm trip How to play game	Topic: Child's life, toy. Topic: Child's life, school, friends, animals, activities. Child Contribution: Knowledgeable, explains.
Video			
All the News **(4 mins 8 seconds)** On the phone to Nanny 1. Caitlin does most of the talking, recording only captures Caitlin's contribution.	Nanny 1	What happens in Toy Story, Birthday party	Child Contribution: Knowledgeable, engaged, explains, responds to questions, listens, perseveres, Topic: Child's life, popular culture, Toy Story, birthdays. Emotion and Affect: Happy, connected Child Agency
Walking Home **(1min 48 secs)**	Neighbour	Current class and her teacher New Class, new teacher, Caitlin's sister, dinner.	Adult Contribution: Tunes in to child's focus of interest, genuine interest, asks questions, responds, gives time, enables. Emotion: warmth, connection. Child Contribution: Child Knowledgeable, engaged, responds. Topic: Child's life, school, friends, family, food. Togetherness
Meeting 4			
Video			
Caitlin showing her camera **(2mins, 24secs)** Caitlin determined to share her photos with Nanny 1	Nanny 1	The subjects of the photos, different family and friends. If they are good photos or not and if they should be deleted.	Child Contribution: Child Knowledgeable, initiates, leads, perseveres, asks questions, humour, uses shared interests, Child Agency Adult Contribution: Comments, humour, uses child's interests, interested, Togetherness. Emotion and Affect: Warmth. Hindrances: distractions, other people.
Outings **(11mins, 14 secs)** Little participation from Caitlin, despite adult's best efforts. Mostly big sister talking.	Nanny 2	Nanny asking about school, favourite teacher, favourite lesson, friends, favourite story, new teacher. Yesterday's outing to soft play area. Friends, friend's puppy. Colours Animals, favourite animals. What will we see at the farm tomorrow? what sounds animals make, what colours they are.	Complexity Togetherness Hindrance: Distractions TV, sibling. Child Agency Adult Contribution: Uses child's interests, humour, Authentic purpose.
Playing a Board Game **(2mins 26 secs)** Both parties engaged in the game. Caitlin teaching Auntie.	Auntie	Numbers on the cards Where the cards go	Togetherness Child Contribution: knowledgeable, responds, engaged Adult Contribution: listens, responds, engaged
Meeting 5			

Video			
Karate and Swimming (4mins, 33 secs) Step Grandad perseveres in the conversation.	Step Grandad	Step Grandad asks about: karate – her achievements, colour of her belt, swimming – her achievements, colours of her hat, other family members. Halloween, dressing up as a witch	Togetherness Child Contribution: knowledgeable, responds, engaged Adult Contribution: uses child's interests, listens, responds – follows her lead, asks questions, uses humour, perseveres. Child Agency Authentic purpose Parent Conduit. Topics: Child's life, activities, achievements, family.

Appendix 3b Thematic Analysis of Conversation Logs Shared by Ms K.

Time/Context	Who with?	What about? Topic	Reflection/thematic analysis
Meeting 2			
Data General Log 1			
First thing in the morning	Ms K	'make-believe' and play	Parent: Pleasure in interaction/pride in language development. Topic: Imagination, their play.
Late afternoon/teatime:	Ms K	Food	Nature of conversation: Child Enquiry Topic: Food.
Evening/ family watching television.	Nanna	Wolf from dream/imagination	Topic: Imagination Overall. Nature of conversations – affectionate, lots of enquiries.
Audio Data			
Elsa Built Two Castles (5:14) First thing in the morning Sustained conversation in bed.	Ms K	Elsa built two castles, one for the wolves and one for the foxes. Wolves are muddy, they put sun cream on outside, Frieda explains they need a shower because they've got mud on them and sun cream on them, they tiptoe along the bath, they 'be naughty yesterday,' made dirty clothes. Elsa told them off, and Ana, they told the fox to stop and made everyone happy again. Ends with word play around I love you, and you're gorgeous and physical play fist bumps and climbing on mum.	Child Initiates Adult responds: tunes in to child's interest, asks open questions, shows interest, listens carefully, gives time, pauses for child to speak, clarifies, reciprocates. Emotion: pleasure, amusement, love. Togetherness Narrative elements to Frieda's conversation, bringing together a memory of a conversation with her mum, her dream and characters from her favourite film.
Tiny Little Wolf (3.21) Early evening/family watching telly. Sustained conversation. Frieda uses an old mobile phone as a prop.	Nanna Ms K present	Tiny, little wolf from Frieda's dream or imagination. What she will say to the wolf, his dad, he was a nice wolf, and a bunny rabbit (friends), what Frieda will say to them. Advises Nanna to pretend to be poorly so she'll have a nice dream too. I love you.	Child Initiates Adult responds: tunes in to child's interest, asks open questions, shows interest, listens carefully, gives time, clarifies, offers own experience. Emotion: Pleasure, enjoyment, amusement, love. Parent helps the conversation along a little as she knows about the subject of the dream (conduit)
Meeting 3			

Audio Data			
Getting Dressed/Cinderella says it's time to get up (6:54) First thing in the morning. Frieda wide awake, mum coming round. Sustained conversation	Ms K	Morning time, sky outside, waking up, Cinderella says it's time. Cinderella is Frieda's friend, she says it's daytime, we can wake. Getting dressed. Negotiating who should decide which dress. Dress might not be warm. Who's choice? Frieda wants to choose. Tidying the dresses. Growing up. Unicorn and jelly fish dress.	Child Initiates Adult responds/ tunes in – listens carefully/shows genuine interest. Asks questions/clarifies/offers own-alternative opinion/ Topics: Imagination/Popular culture/the world/clothes/child's life. *F: 'It's really cool if I choose another one'*
Nice Dreams First thing in the morning. Frieda playing in the bedroom, jumping around. Playful interaction, but Frieda busy and not wishing to talk.	Ms K	Nice dream - nothing happened, naughty dreams. Being happy, Frieda's dress – is it comfortable? What to wear. Energy in the morning. Playing. Standing on Ms K's toes. Saying sorry. Saying I love you, falling over, watching the film Annie, wearing a mask.	Adult Initiates: Asks questions, invites, persists, Hindrance: Child: Not engaged, distracted – playing. Adult: Wearing a mask. Agency of the child. Topic: Dreams, Child's life, clothes, popular culture, COVID-19. *Ms N: Come and talk to me* *F: No, I'm playing. I'll talk to yeh afterwards when I've finished playing.*
Toast (1:58) Morning -breakfast Playful interaction rather than sustained conversation.	Ms K	Toast, what Frieda wants on her toast, what shape, big or small. Please – playing with the word. Please and thank you. Being polite. F: repeating and playing with the words Ms K uses.	Hindrance: Child distracted/ busy elsewise. Emotion: Pleasure and humour
Meeting 4			
Data General Log 2			
Breakfast time Playful interaction. Morning Sustained interaction Morning Lunchtime Conversation not sustained as Frieda excited and running around. Garden Dinnertime Sustained Night time Sustained	Ms K Ms K Ms K Ms K Other family Ms K Ms K Ms K	What to eat, playing with repeated words, 'please' and 'thank you' Household jobs, washing and drying clothes Baking, ingredients, mixing, folding, stirring, colours. Picnic, being outside, what Frieda would like to eat. Clapping for the NHS Eating	Subject: Childs life/what they are doing, food, playing with words. Child enquires. Subject: Child's life/ what they are doing Subject: Child's life/ what they are doing/food/activities. Child enquires Condition: Doing activity/ being involved Hindrances: Distractions – busy elsewise, other people, toys. Subject: Child's life/COVID-19. Child Initiates/tactics. Subject: Child's life/food. Child's possible purpose: Have their needs met
Audio Data			
More Water (4:46) Night time/ bedtime Multiple conversational turns by Frieda attempting to engage Ms K.	Ms K	Starts with pretend snoring. Not Frieda's turn to go to sleep. Pretending to sleep, real sleep. Water, gurgling. Going to sleep, playing with Ana (toy), Ana wants to go to sleep. Being tired. Going to bed.	Child Initiates/tactics to extend interaction Subject: Child's life/ what they are doing/their play/toys. Nature: Togetherness. *F: 'Mummy you 'atend to sleep.'* *F: 'I want some actual more water'*

Whispering with Tattoos (10.35) Night time/ bedtime Sustained in parts, despite the adults trying not to engage!	Ms K and Nanna	Frog in the music, frog sounds, the music, I love you, talk properly, don't whisper, playing with sounds and words. Whispering with tattoos, child next door's dad's tattoo, permanent, sharing her tattoos. Not hitting. Enquiry re Ms K's watch can't sleep in that, disagreement about the watch. Disagreement about not going to sleep and not snoring. An earlier joke. Sleeping. I love you.	Child Initiates/ tactics to extend interaction Child enquires Adult responds. Adult engages tunes in to child's interest, listens carefully, explains, offers own experience. Subject: Child's life/ what they are doing/music/word play/ Subject: Child's life/experiences/actions. Nature: Togetherness. Emotion: Amusement, Love *F: Don't go whispering.* *F: You can borrow my tattoos* *F: She'd run away and choose a different house.* *F: I'm not tired and that's not funny – it's a little bit funny.*
Meeting 5			
Data General Log 3			
Breakfast time Through the day Lunchtime Playful interaction ? Walking to own house. Sustained conversation	Ms K	Food, her magazine. 'make-believe' characters being her friend. Baby Babs (Frieda's alter ego), numbers. Family and relatives. Going home, houses, rainbows for the NHS.	Subject: Child's life/food/her things. Subject: Child's life/imagination Subject: Child's life/imagination. Child initiates, Child's purpose: to enquire/to reminisce. Subject: Child's life/ what they are doing/COVID-19.
Audio Data			
Baby Babs (4:20) Playful interaction	Ms K	How old Baby Babs is. How old Frieda is. Sequence of numbers, number names, before and after. Baby Babs doing ballet.	Adult initiates. Adult ask questions Child responds Hindrances: Distraction
Hamster (15:11) (Lots of silence where both parties are concentrating on what they are doing).	Ms K	Hamster, caring for hamster, Frieda being a naughty hamster, cleaning out, using spray, vacuum cleaning up the mess, present for the hamster. Peppa Pig likes muddy puddles, sings a rain song. When asked a direct question about the colour of the bedding, ignored Ms K twice and began to sing about the rain instead. Returned to her song.	Adult initiates. Adult leads, asks questions, Child responds, narrates, asks questions, Subject: Child's life/ what they are doing/interests – animals-pets.
Mickey Mouse & Tinker Bell First thing in the morning **(6:31)** (Sustained back and forth, Frieda driving the initial interaction, Ms K very tired) Frieda's speech is markedly more confident and fluent where she is talking about the things that she wants to and has knowledge of – including from her dreams or imagination.	Ms K	Frieda's dream, Mickey Mouse talking to Tinker Bell, Mickey Mouse didn't know Tinker Bell, Frieda told Mickey Mouse Tinker Bell's name, and told Tinker Bell about her name. Tinker bell in the Sky, Tinker bell is Frieda's friend. Ms K changes subject: Frieda going to the park yesterday, animals, Frieda looked at the farm, looked by the gate, so can't go near them. Returns to Tinker bell is Frieda's friend. Ms K asks about the thunder – little response. Frieda changes subject – talking to Daddy on the phone, Frieda read a story to Daddy and Daddy read one to Frieda, Frieda tells the story of the Naughty Troll.	Child Initiates Adult responds – tunes in to interest, asks open questions, adds own experience. Subject: Imagination/Popular Culture *F: I can just see it, Tinker Bell floating up in the sky.'* Adult Initiates: Adult asks questions. Child responds, child tells Subject: Child's life: Visit, animals, COVID-19. Child Initiates Adult responds – tunes in to child's interest, shows interest, asks open questions, clarifies. Subject: Child's life: relatives, child's things – books.

Appendix 3c Thematic Analysis of Conversation Logs Shared by Mr P

Time/Context	Who with?	What about? Topic	Reflection/thematic analysis
Meeting 2			
Audio Data			
When I was a baby Morning time **2:17** Initiated spontaneously by Frieda In living room with Sophie, Mr P making breakfast.	Sophie, Mr P's partner	A memory/recollection based on a photo from Nanna's house. When she was a baby, used to sit next to the dog. Daddy told her Sophie held her when she was a baby. Growing so fast now. Her toy, Candyfloss. Getting a bruise when she fell over and not crying.	Reminiscence Conditions that support sustained conversation: Child Initiates, Child leads, Adult available, Adult Enables – asks questions Child has knowledge, child initiates, shared interest, togetherness, relaxed. Context: At Home, morning time, Subjects: Her life, being a baby, bruise, growing up, a memory, animal/pet, animal toy.
Being Kind – not like Peppa Pig **3:48** Initiated spontaneously by Frieda Spontaneously brings up 'The Nasty Bug' Uses memories to talk about things she will do. Morning, before lunch, sitting with Sophie, at the table colouring.	Sophie, Mr P's partner Analysed in detail in the text	Begins playing with coasters, Mr P brings Sophie a coffee, Daddy very kind to bring Sophie a coffee. Not watching Peppa Pig anymore, she's very rude. She didn't speak to people very nicely, Suzy's not her friend anymore, that's not very kind either. Suzy was cheating, Suzy said Peppa Pig was cheating, that's not very kind. Pockets on her bum (laughs) her dress has a love heart. Can't wait till the 'nasty bug' has gone in a few years, what we will be able to do: go near people with no mask on, go to playcentre, I can play, a makeup stand, and also play dresses, the dress she wore to a friend's birthday, his birthday cake, look at the photo.	Reminiscence Conditions that support sustained conversation: Child has knowledge, Child initiates, Adult available, Adult enables – asks questions, shared interest, togetherness, relaxed. Subjects: Child's interests: popular culture - Peppa Pig, clothes, Child's Life: 'The Nasty Bug', play, friends, outings, friends, birthdays, birthday cake, morals, concerns. Bringing into the conversation, things she remembers.
Meeting 3			
General Log - Reported Verbally			
Friday Evening Just arrived 'Very much in conversation mode when she walked in, she wanted to talk straight away.	Mr P	What Frieda was going to eat. The food, what they were going to do at weekend, the toys that she had brought – a llama toy.	Reporting news/enquiring Conditions: Child Knowledgeable Subjects: Child's interests/food, what they will do, toys, animals. Subjects: Information: news
First thing the following morning – Saturday morning (Also a video discussed in Meeting 5)	Mr P	Breakfast, Wanting to do drawing/painting, pens. getting dressed, talking about her drawing, opening the curtains.	Subjects: what she is doing/ her creations.
Before breakfast	Sophie	Chat/Catch up	Child telling Condition: Child has knowledge
Morning and Afternoon 'Playing and chatty moments'	Mr P /Sophie	Giving instructions about the play.	Child telling/ engaging adult in play. Conditions: Child has knowledge Subjects: Her play, Information, imagination. Hindrance: Child finds it difficult.

Before and After Tea During tea 'she's usually into the food!'	Mr P	What they will eat	Subject: Food.
Bedtime	Mr P	Bedtime routine, what's happening, what books to read. What she will read, 'reading' a story	Child enquiry. Subjects: Child's interests, what they are doing, books/stories.
Through the day/over the weekend. More apparent.	Mr P	The Nasty Bug	Subject: The Nasty Bug
Audio Data			
Allotment: Socially distanced BBQ **10:11** Multiple short interactions with Frieda.	Grandma and Grandad, Sophie and Mr P Analysed in detail in the text	Food, being tired, sun cream, getting up early, a bumpy bed, the bbq, I love you Grandad, The Nasty Bug will go, being younger, drink.	Subjects: food, child's life, love. Hindrances: Many people, distractions, busyness.
Morning			
Meeting 4			
Audio Data			
Doing a jigsaw **4.46** About an hour after she arrived. Sustained	Mr P Analysed in detail in the text	Pieces, colours of and objects e.g. popcorn. Where the pieces go. 'Good job – doop de doo!' 'I love you' repeated to each other. Other jigsaws to do next.	Conditions: togetherness, adult available, adult enables, child engaged, child knowledgeable, enjoyment, Nature: Focussed, Context: Playing together Subjects: Child's interests – toys, Child's life- future plans.
Playing the shopping game **2:56** Later on in the morning, a new game. Sustained	Mr P Analysed in detail in the text	Shake it out! Pieces of the game, money, going to the shops, children, The Nasty Bug, questions about the game, what things are and how to play.	Conditions: togetherness, adult available, adult enables, adult responds, child engaged. Nature: Focussed Context: Playing together Subjects: Child's interests – toys, Child's life – what she is doing Child's enquiries, The Nasty Bug.
Meeting 5			
Audio Data			
Painting blueberries yellow. **5:4** Early morning Sustained	Mr P Analysed in detail in the text	Drawing a picture, painting blueberries, her pens, testing them all, do they work? colours. Oh Dear! new pens, go to the shops, The Nasty Bug, breakfast, getting dressed, dress, buttons, opening the curtains.	Conditions: Child engaged, child knowledgeable, child leads, adult responds. Nature: Around activities, playful. Context: Early morning, Child playing, Subjects: Child's interests – toys, creations, Child's life – what she is doing, Child's enquiries, The Nasty Bug.
Meeting 6			
Video Data			
The allotment series: Weeding the Strawberries and picking black currants (some are sour) 10:28 My Cardi Song 45 seconds Picking Redcurrants with Grandma, noticing small apples 2:50 Showing Grandma Green Apples 48 seconds Follows Frieda on the allotment as she follows Grandma and helps to harvest berries, eating lots of them along the way. Frieda stays close by the adults, mostly Grandma. She watches what they are doing, joining in with the berry picking but also moving in and out of the activities to attend to her own fascinations: the sunglasses in her pocket, some discomfort on her leg caused by a nettle sting, the			

sizes of the fallen apples she plays with – throwing them up in the air, her containers of berries she worries she has lost, and her pink cardigan that she is pleased she has found. She sings a song to herself about her found cardigan. She has a series of interactions with the adults, some very brief and some more extended. The adults are busy doing allotment jobs but that also share with her what they are doing: how to find hidden redcurrants, weeding strawberries, noting that they may need slug pellets, the one strawberry that is found - but it is outside the netting, why she can play with the small apples and what will happen to the apples remaining on the tree. Frieda is also busy exploring the allotment, especially the feeling of the long grass on her legs and finding fallen apples of different sizes. Frieda occasionally initiates an interaction, often with the adults name: 'Daddy, have you got my blackcurrants?' Or exclamations, 'Hey! look, look! A apple - it's very big.' Sometimes the adult responses are brief as the adult focus is different to the child's and the most extended interaction occurs when Frieda and Grandma come together to pick (and Frieda to eat) the blackcurrants. Frieda can be heard trying out and repeating expressions 'It gets ever so heavy' (the blackcurrant container), 'They're sour' 'I like sour.' When Grandma says she thinks she will have a sit down, Frieda joins her, and an extended conversation ensues – see Sitting in the Grass with Grandma below.			
Sitting in the Grass with Grandma **11:29** Late afternoon on the allotment Sustained	Grandma Analysed in detail in the text	In between jobs and activities on the allotment. Frieda joins Grandma having a rest on the grass. Frieda has a nettle sting and is dealing with it with her cardi.	Conditions: Child engaged, child knowledgeable, child leads, adult tunes in, aware of child's interests, adult responds, adult enables. Nature: Playful, togetherness Context: Between activities, allotment, outdoors, Subjects: Child's concern, Child's interests – their experience, food, clothes, animals.

Appendix 3dThematic Analysis of Conversation Logs shared by Ms N

Time/Context	Who with?	What about? Subject	Reflection/thematic analysis
Meeting 2			
Audio Data			
Scary Cloak Dream (6:07) 1st thing in the morning – Mum getting ready to go out to the shops.	Ms N (Mum)	Nathan's Scary Dream Money (cash) Nathan found – Mum explaining about buying with pennies Nathan returns to the scary dream. Ms N seeking to understand, distract, explain and reassure.	Child initiates Emotion: Child disturbed, Adult follows child's lead Subject: Child's life/Concern
Family Exercise Session (4:52) Evening time Playful family interaction rather than sustained verbal communication.	Ms N and Sister	Exercise, Exercise equipment Household responsibilities Mum giving instructions for setting up the obstacle course.	Emotion: Pleasure/playful Child comments Subject: Child's life/family/activity.
My tongue is painful (4:46) Bedtime while brushing his teeth	Ms N	Nathan has a sore tongue How he got his sore tongue Losing teeth and new teeth Ms N clarifies /explains/ reassures/advises.	Adult initiates, asks question. Adult responds, explains. Emotion: Child upset, Adult Concern, Child explains/ persists to explain. Subject: Child's life/concern Subject: Natural World
Pandas do not Kill 35s Evening time – watching telly Very short conversation, not sustained.	Ms N (Mum)	Pandas	Child Initiates, asks a question Adult responds but does not develop. Subject: Child's enquiry: TV programme/Natural World
No Superheroes in Real Life 1:59	Ms N (Mum)	Superheroes Nathan explains: Evidence that there are no Superheroes	Child initiates, tells, knowledgeable. Mum responds – asks questions Subject: Child's Life/Imagination

Bed time, bedtime story		Evidence about the Tooth Fairy Evidence about Santa Claus	
Written notes by Ms N			
Flying Ants Sunday morning Nathan has just seen flying ants	Ms N (Mum) and Sister	Ants/flying ants Nathan scared they will bite Sister (initially) and Ms N trying to explain and reassure Nathan asking questions about ants. Mum and sister replying and giving info	Child Initiates, asks questions. Emotion: Child anxious/Mum care and concern. Topic: Natural World/Child's concerns Child Asks questions Adult responds – explains Subject: Child's life/Concern Subject: Child's enquiry/natural World
Tooth Fairy Saturday Night 9pm Bedtime	Ms N (Mum)	Tooth Fairy – what she is like and how she operates: : wand, fly – she teleports in. Tooth Fairy Kingdom Money, teeth	Child initiates, asks questions. Adult responds, answers Child explains/knowledgeable. Subject: Childs life/Imagination
Malls Thursday evening 7pm Watching TV	Ms N (Mum)	Questions and opinions about malls Characteristics of malls and markets Not liking malls	Child initiates and leads. Child asks question, child tells. Adult responds/ explains/asks questions. Subject: Child's enquiry/the world
Being sad at school Morning on way to school	Ms N (Mum)	I don't want to go to school anymore. Hate school Friend, no one played Don't know how to play, played alone, had food, wasn't OK Ms N: Advises, plans to make it better.	Child initiates Child tells Emotion: Child sad/crying. Adult concern. Adult listens, responds. Subject: Child's life/concern.
Meeting 3			
Written notes by Ms N			
Making an upcycled Elmer Afternoon Nathan is doing a craft activity Very short conversation, not sustained with Nathan	Ms N and Sister J	Play on the trampoline Dead bee Making Elmo (Elmer the patchwork elephant) N: 'Is it recycling?'	Sister comments on child's creation Child asks questions Adult replies/explains Hindrance: busy elsewise Subject: Child's interest/their creations
Dispute with sister - Lady bug or ladybird? Afternoon in the kitchen	Ms N and Sister, J	Is a ladybird a bug? Characteristics of bugs	Sister initiates Child comments, Adult responds, explains. Subject: Child's Interests/ Natural World
Bubbleman writes on the wall Quite short but 11 conversational turns. In living room, Dad on laptop	Dad	Bubbleman Writing on the wall	Child initiates/ possibly provokes Child telling Dad responds – questions, explains Subject: Child's life/Imagination
Dad Comes Home Friday evening 7pm Ms N and Nathan in the garden Quite short – 10 conversational turns.	Dad Ms N (Mum) also present	How Noah is - Bad day Dispute with sister – not friends.	Adult Initiates Child responds Adult doesn't persist Subject: Child's life/family
Insurance – It's complicated Sunday afternoon 1pm Quite short -7 conversational turns.	Dad	Insurance claim Flood in the house Money It's complicated.	Child initiates - Child asks questions Adult responds – explains (a little) Adult doesn't persist. Subject: Child's Life/Enquiry.

You OK? Quite short- 5 conversational turns.	Dad	How Noah is Noah sick through the night.	Adult initiates – asks questions Nathan responds Adult doesn't persist. Subject: Child's life
Is Grandad Dead? Saturday 6pm. Dad rushing to get ready to go out 12 conversational turns.	Dad Ms N (Mum) also present	Grandad Not seen Grandad for a long time Calling Grandad Nathan's imagination Telephone calls	Nathan initiates – asks a question Dad responds Subject: Child's life, family, enquiry.
Getting the TV turned on Saturday evening 7.30 Quite short – 10 conversational turns.	Elder brother, Z	TV Is TV allowed? TV channel Crying Wolf	Child initiates – asks question Brother responds Subject: Child's life/TV.
Meeting 4			
Written notes by Ms N			
Phone call Auntie J in Cornwall	Auntie J	How Nathan is. What Nathan's been doing Nathan's crafts – papier mache hot air balloon The boat – getting it ready for Nathan Catching crabs, Nathan's swimming badges	Adult initiates Adult asks open questions Adult perseveres Adult tunes in – child's interests/life. Adult makes effort. Subject: Child's life/Child's interests/crafts/activities.
Phone call with Young Uncle L	Uncle L	How Nathan is Family trip to Kew Gardens What Nathan is doing: going outside, trampoline, hurt foot, painting stones. Adult asks first question, but child initiates a different conversation which takes off. Adult Jokes – calls Nathan Smarty Pants and Spud.	Child initiates Adult responds Adult tunes in Adult asks open questions/shows interest Emotion: Pleasure – fun Subjects: Child's life/Child's interests/crafts/activities/family.
Phone call with Nanny	Nanny	How Nathan is What Nathan is doing: Building Thomas the Tank Engine track What his dad is doing. Is Nathan sad? Looking forward to seeing him. Fun things – paddling pool Love and kisses. Uses pet name – Ninky Nonks	Adult asks questions – some open Adult shows interest Emotion: Adult warm and loving/ concern. Child concern. Adult tunes in – child's interests incl. concern. Subjects: Child's life/Child's interests/crafts/activities/family.
Dad playing on the Floor Very brief 12 conversational turns	Dad	What Nathan is doing His toys – a big furry thing Recording A bit of a disagreement.	Adult initiates Asks questions – some open Adult comments Subjects: Child's life/toys.
Dad at Bathtime Longer interaction, playful and fun. Multiple conversational turns	Dad	New water gun bought in the plant shop Riding bike to plant shop, Sister God (Buddha statue), plants and seeds. Hair washing negotiation Dad's genuine interest in visit to the plant shop and finds Nathan's comments funny.	Child initiates Adult asks questions. Adult comments and responds to child's questions. Subjects: Child's life/Child's interests/activities/family/concern.

Appendix 4 Analysis of Conversations

Appendix 4a Framework for Analysis of Video/Audio **Recording**

Signs of connectedness, closeness	
Strategies from professional practice	
Following Child's interests Child taking the lead	
Signs of Involvement and Wellbeing	
Strategies from theory: Communication – facilitating Strategies	
Looks expectantly at child and is warm and receptive to encourage interaction	
Uses slow/adequate pace to allow children to participate	
Uses comments to cue another turn	
Uses sincere/open questions	
Additional Actions taken by Adult	
Further Evidence provided by Multimodal Communication	
Body Movement Facial Expression Objects	

Appendix 4b

Case 1: Ms A and Caitlin

Analysis of Audio Observation: Beaver Camp and the Marvellous Robot.

Signs of connectedness, closeness	See Interview.
Strategies from professional practice	
Following Child's interests Child taking the lead	Mum is aware of Caitlin's interests and her activities and introduces the conversation by asking about Beaver Camp. Once Caitlin gets on to talking about the robot, mum follows Caitlin's lead and follows that interest, being involved together in discussing how to complete the robot.
Signs of Involvement and Wellbeing	**Involvement 5** Caitlin is fully involved in the conversation and talks for the vast majority of the time. The greatest involvement is when she is talking about her robot (her favourite thing about the trip). She concentrates fully and perseveres to explain herself and how she will develop the robot, giving detailed explanations. She is thinking carefully and using her imagination to imagine how the robot will turn out. **Wellbeing** Caitlin's voice is loud and confident, she expresses herself, answering questions but also making points spontaneously. She sounds very relaxed but is also full of life. We can see in the photo, Caitlin's happiness and pride in her robot.
Strategies from theory: Communication – facilitating Strategies	
Looks expectantly at child and is warm and receptive to encourage interaction	The interaction is very warm and cosy (See interview)
Uses slow/adequate pace to allow children to participate	Yes
Uses comments to cue another turn	Yes
Uses sincere/open questions	What happened yesterday at Beaver Camp? What did you do? Then what did you do? What was your favourite part? Mum genuinely interested in Caitlin's experiences. Anything bad about it?
Additional Actions taken by Adult	
Tuned in to what Caitlin was talking about. Clarified what she thought Caitlin was saying. E.g., about the picture (photo). Clarified and encouraged: 'That's what this marvellous thing is? A robot. Mum responds, showing she is listening. E.g. spider in the toilet – 'Eughw, that's not good. Repeating back what Caitlin said, E.g. You really liked building your robot? Responds and affirms what Caitlin says in response to her saying the robot is really, really tall - but also humour 'He's as tall as you!' laughs. Mum also clarifies what Caitlin is trying to explain about the third leg. 'That makes it stand up.' Thinks alongside Caitlin about adapting her robot, respects Caitlin's ideas.	
Further Evidence provided by Multimodal Communication	

Body Movement	Can hear sounds of her footsteps - her skipping about as she talks.
Facial Expression	N/A - except smiling and proud in phot with her robot.
Objects	The Robot

Appendix 4c

Case 1 Analysis of Video Observation: Neighbour and Caitlin Walking Home

Themes from Initial thematic analysis	
Signs of connectedness, closeness	Throughout the recording, Kay and Caitlin walk side by side , holding hands. (Opening scene of (Screenshot 1 Walking Home)
Strategies from professional practice	
Following Child's interests Child taking the lead	Kay has knowledge of Caitlin's interests; her show and moving to year 1. She keeps the conversation going around those areas. She follows Caitlin's interest in talking about her sister and being 'big'
Signs of Involvement and Wellbeing	**Involvement 5** During the conversation Caitlin is continuously engaged and absorbed, she focusses, concentrates and is not distracted during the observation. She appears highly motivated to communicate, persevering where necessary to explain her point. **Wellbeing 5** During the conversation Caitlin appears happy and relaxed, swinging her other hand which flaps her dress she walks and talks. Her energy seems high and she speaks confidently and appears self-assured. Although she is filmed from behind, we see her relaxed expression occasionally as she turns to Kay
Strategies from theory: Communication – facilitating Strategies	
Looks expectantly at child and is warm and receptive to encourage interaction	Although walking side by side, periodically through the recording, Kay and Caitlin turn and incline their heads to each other. Kay is warm and receptive to Caitlin. They are holding hands.
Uses slow/adequate pace to allow children to participate	Kay gives Caitlin time to talk. Where there is a pause, she waits 5 seconds before asking a question or making a comment. Of the first minute Caitlin talks for 25 seconds, and five second pause so their contributions to the conversation are pretty equal.
Uses comments to cue another turn	Kay uses relevant and genuine comments to follow up Caitlin's utterances and prompt further the discussion. E.g. in response to Caitlin explaining that she went to visit Yr 1. Kay says, 'Two more days with Ms B and then you go to your new class in September' Her voice goes up at the end and she sounds genuinely excited for Caitlin, adding 'Awh' indicating it is something to be pleased about. Throughout, Katy cues Caitlin with 'Yeah' or 'Yeah?' indicating she is listening, and she is interested.
Uses sincere/open questions	Questions are sincere but all questions are closed. Kay has genuine interest in Caitlin's 'insider information' but also indicates genuine interest in Caitlin's new class, her moving on.

Further Evidence provided by Multimodal Communication	
Body Movement Facial Expression Objects	The conversational partners walk in step (even though Caitlin is much smaller). Caitlin's sister is not in the conversation and is out of step behind. Facial expressions cannot be seen, but the conversational partners turn to face each other at times and are absorbed focussed in the conversation.

Appendix 4d

Case 1: Ms A and Caitlin

Analysis of Video Observation: Nanny 1 Toy Camera

Themes from Initial thematic analysis	
Signs of connectedness, closeness	Caitlin sits on Nanny's Knee for the whole time and is in constant physical contact throughout.
Strategies from professional practice	
Following Child's interests Child taking the lead	* Looking at the child's photos and commenting. * Caitlin takes the lead throughout. Nanny responds to the photos Caitlin shows and points to, her bodily prompts to bring her attention back, her expressions through her body such as indications that the photo is funny, her utterances and her verbal questions, e.g. 'Who are these?
Signs of Involvement and Wellbeing	**Involvement 5** Caitlin is deeply involved; at times her tongue is out in concentration. She has a clear idea that she wants to show her camera and her photos to Nanny. It is her choice, and she shows determination to see it through, despite the distractions all around. **Wellbeing 5** In her element at home, totally relaxed and able to communicate with her body her wish to share her photos with Nanny.
Strategies from theory: Communication – facilitating Strategies	
Looks expectantly at child and is warm and receptive to encourage interaction	Although not looking directly at the child and constantly getting distracted elsewhere, the interaction remains warm throughout through the bodily connection. Nanny returns attention to Caitlin each time when Caitlin prompts her. She uses humour and knowledge of the family to interact.
Uses slow/adequate pace to allow children to participate	Caitlin has the majority of the time within the interaction.
Uses comments to cue another turn	Nanny tends to use comments that are also questions *You're not binning them, are you? You're sticking them in the bin?* (Voice goes up at the end in disbelief/humour) *You're not sticking Jordan in the bin are you?* *She's sticking her tongue out* (both laugh)

	Yeah, that's a good one, she's smiling in that on, blowing kisses. *'Who's that? Peppa Pig?* (Both laugh)
Uses sincere/open questions	'How did you do that? 3 faces' Gets a verbal response from Caitlin a clear, confident '1,2,3,4' (Example of child as expert). Genuine interest from Nanny and authentic purpose for child to talk. 'Who's that? That's a funny one.
Further Evidence provided by Multimodal Communication	
Body Movement Facial Expression Objects	Caitlin uses her body to get Nanny's full attention. When Nanny looks away, Caitlin first pats Nanny's chest, 'Mummy' then puts her hand up to her face, 'Erm, Nanny' and brings her back to looking at the camera. Does this twice and also holds the camera up to Nanny's face. Nanny gets distracted and Caitlin nudges Nanny's chest with her elbow and follows up with pressing in her whole body. 'Erm Nanny, what about that one?' Caitlin uses the object – the camera to show Nanny rather than telling her. She points. Nanny labels 'Ruby' Caitlin 'Yeah.' Caitlin inclines her head to see if Nanny has noticed the picture of Ruby. Then inclines her head again to get Nanny's joint attention, 'Is that a nice one?' Caitlin finds a funny one, she laughs a little and looks at Nanny, Nanny laughs too and responds Caitlin points, 'Peter' 'that's a funny one'

Appendix 4e

Case 1: Analysis of Video Observation: Nanny 2 and Caitlin Outings

Themes from Initial thematic analysis	
Signs of connectedness, closeness	Throughout the interaction, Nanny 2 and Caitlin are physically close. Nanny 2 is one the settee and Caitlin is in her lap. Nanny 2 has her arm around her.
Strategies from professional practice	
Following Child's interests Child taking the lead	Nanny 2 has instigated and is trying to lead the conversation. Although Nanny 2 introduces topics likely to be of interest to Caitlin, e.g., new class, things she likes. Caitlin is not bringing anything to the interaction for Nanny to follow apart from one incidence where Caitlin shows Nanny 2 her cuddly toy. This could be followed up but wasn't.
Signs of Involvement and Wellbeing	**Involvement 2** Caitlin shows some degree of activity but easily distracted. She shows limited concentration, looks away and fiddles with her cuddly toy. **Wellbeing 4** Overall, Caitlin looks happy and cheerful, she smiles and laughs in fun at times and joins in with sound play with her Nanny 2 and her sister. But there is very little spontaneous expressing of herself and she does not appear fully relaxed, she twists her cuddly toy in her hands repeatedly. There are indications that she does not feel at ease when answering questions and her voice is very quiet.
Strategies from theory: Communication – facilitating Strategies	
Looks expectantly at child and is warm and receptive to encourage interaction	Very much so. Nanny 2 looks at Caitlin with expectance, interest and warmth. She has her arm around Caitlin and is warm and receptive to Caitlin's utterances. She also uses additional strategies e.g. humour, and forced choices to make it easier for Caitlin to answer.
Uses slow/adequate pace to allow children to participate	Yes. Nanny 2 gives Caitlin time. But Caitlin participates for a very small amount of the time.
Uses comments to cue another turn	Not really. Only questions were used.
Uses sincere/open questions	The majority of questions are closed requiring Yes/No or one-word answers. The questions are related to their day out the previous day and so Caitlin knows that Nanny knows the answers. There is more response from Caitlin when the question relates to going to the farm the following day.
Further Evidence provided by Multimodal Communication	
Body Movement Facial Expression Objects	Caitlin constantly holds her cuddly toy and at times twizzles the animals hair. Points to the telly to try to get it turned back on. Signs to mum to put it back on again.

	Sits right up and gets more involved in the conversation when her sister Ruby joins in, but particularly when the conversation turns to the outing tomorrow and she signs and says 'riding horses' At one point Caitlin puts the cuddly toy right in Nanny D's face

Appendix 4f

Case 1: Analysis of Video Observation: Step Grandad and Caitlin Karate and Swimming

Signs of connectedness, closeness	Caitlin and her granddad are in physical contact throughout the conversation. Grandad has his arm around Caitlin
Strategies from professional practice	
Following Child's interests Child taking the lead	Asks about things that he knows are Caitlin's interests; karate, swimming, going to the farm for Halloween. Follows her thread when she talks about the swimming hat colours and the karate belt colours. Follows up with other family members who do karate. Doesn't quite catch when she wants to talk about the witch Not really. Grandad is leading, asking questions, encouraging. But does let Caitlin take lead on the details of the hats and belts. Unfortunately, misses that Caitlin wants to talk about the witch that she saw at the Halloween event. Moves the conversation onto talking about the farm – Caitlin still wants to persevere talking about wanting to be a witch and returns to it on three occasions.
Signs of Involvement and Wellbeing	**Involvement** Once Caitlin decides to talk, she enjoys being totally involved in the conversation. She is fully focussed and concentrates on trying to explain herself, giving details of how the swimming hats are awarded. She perseveres in talking about talking about Halloween, 'One more stuff' (Three times). **Wellbeing** Caitlin appears uncomfortable at first. But at the point where she decides to talk, she suddenly comes alive, looks happy and comfortable and expresses herself. She perseveres in her explanation and wanting to talk about being a witch. Even when she is being tickled, continues, 'One more stuff' Demonstrates self-confidence and self-assurance.
Strategies from theory: Communication – facilitating Strategies	
Looks expectantly at child and is warm and receptive to encourage interaction	This is the behaviour observed the most.

	Warm welcoming voice. 'C'mon, talk to Grandad'. Keeps his arm around Caitlin at all times. Is warm and funny and uses humour throughout.
Uses slow/adequate pace to allow children to participate	Gives Caitlin time, but also tends to rush in with closed questions.
Uses comments to cue another turn	Eh? Red? Orange? Karate?
Uses sincere/open questions	Tends to use closed questions, e.g. 'What colour hat are you? D'you like orange? But he genuinely wants to know the details.
Additional Actions taken by Adult	
	At first Caitlin is shy and grandad has to work hard to encourage Catherine to engage. Persists , encourages, e.g., 'Talk to Grandad – he even gives her the words to say, 'Karate, trophy' Uses his knowledge of Caitlin's interests such as swimming, but also things she is good at, 'Swimmin' You good at swimmin'?' but also humour to cajole, 'Whadya mean, no!' humour in his voice. Caitlin laughs and begins to use her voice, but conversation turns when Grandad gets it wrong about the colour of her swimming hat that she has achieved (possibly deliberately?) and Caitlin needs to explain. Grandad listens. Humour continues, he makes Caitlin laugh, 'Cwah! I'll have to be careful; you'll be beating me up!' Mum needs to translate, 'She's gonna be a witch' and mum needs to remind her and give her the vocabulary: skeletons.
Further Evidence provided by Multimodal Communication	
Body Movement Facial Expression Objects	**At first** Caitlin is turned away, hiding her face and chewing her sleeve.
	Once the conversation turns Caitlin jumps up onto her knees, turns to face Grandad. Uses her fingers to indicate the three levels of progression in swimming. Points to Rosie. Points her finger, 'One more stuff' coming back to her point. Uses arm motions to try to illustrate the Halloween event, the turtles and the witches. Looks to mum for help with the details. Starts to bounce on Grandad's arm and looks uncomfortable again as she struggles to explain re the Halloween event and Grandad has gone onto talking about the farm. Climbs on his shoulder and the interaction becomes physical play.

Appendix 4g

Case 2 pt 1 Analysis of Audio Recording, Ms K and Frieda: Elsa Built Two Castles

Signs of connectedness, closeness	The conversation takes place first thing in the morning when they have just woken up. Ms K and Frieda are lying together in the bed they are sharing because of moving back into Ms K's parents' home due to COVID-19. In the recording it sounds as though Frieda is cuddling Ms K in places and in the final section has climbed on her.
Strategies from professional practice	
Following Child's interests Child taking the lead	Ms K shows genuine interest through her voice and attention and quickly picking up on the topic of the wolves and the foxes. In meeting 2, Ms K explained she realised Frieda was drawing on a conversation they had had previously when Ms K had told Frieda about hearing a fox screeching in their road. Frieda initiated the conversation when she woke up and throughout, she leads on the topic, but Ms K enables the conversation to develop through open questions and her responses.
Signs of Involvement and Wellbeing	Frieda is communicating enthusiastically and laughs throughout. The conversation ends with 2 minutes of word play with the words I love you and You're gorgeous being repeated between the two with Frieda concluding 'What about we're all gorgeouses and physical play with Frieda Climbing on Ms K.
Strategies from theory: Communication – facilitating Strategies	
Looks expectantly at child and is warm and receptive to encourage interaction	Not possible to tell how Ms K looks at Frieda, but her voice sounds warm and receptive.
Uses slow/adequate pace to allow children to participate	Ms K pauses and allows time for Frieda to speak and also time where she may be thinking about what to say.
Uses comments to cue another turn	Yes. E.g. *F: They (the foxes) tiptoe along the bath.* *Ms K: They tiptoe along the bath? Oh my goodness, I bet that's a sight to see….*
Uses sincere/open questions	Yes. E.g. Ms K What did they look like? (The castles). Open questions throughout the conversation enable it to develop.
Additional Actions taken by Adult	
Listens carefully to what is said and responds authentically. She shows genuine interest and laughs, finding the conversation funny. Affirms what the child said, e.g, 'Oh, they would *definitely* need a shower then wouldn't they?' following the child's explanation. Demonstrates that she is enjoying the conversation by laughing, demonstrating incredulity with her voice and verbally expressing 'You're funny'	
Further Evidence provided by Multimodal Communication	
Body Movement Facial Expression Objects	At the end of the conversation, Frieda is climbing on Ms K

Appendix 4h

Case 2 pt. 2 Mr P and Freida. Analysis of Audio Observation: Playing Shopping Game

Signs of connectedness, closeness	(From Interview) Throughout the recording Frieda and her dad are physically close around a table, working together on sorting out the pieces of a game.
Strategies from Professional Practice	
Following Child's interests Child taking the lead	Frieda chose the game, and although Mr P thought perhaps it may be too difficult for her age, he went along with it. Throughout the recording Mr P follows Frieda's lead as she explores the pieces of the game and responding to her questions as they arise, E.g., Frieda: Oooh! What's this? Mr P: What do you think it is? Frieda: These are only the rubbish. Mr P: Rubbish!? I think it's meant to be money! Sounds of the coins being put out on the table Mr P: 10p, 10p, 50p, 50p, 10p Frieda: It is the pennies!
Signs of Involvement and Wellbeing	Frieda is involved throughout. Sounds of enjoyment, exclamations and gasps indicate pleasure Voice is enthusiastic and full of life, she laughs at times. Frieda sings little songs she makes up words and sounds.
Strategies from theory: Communication – facilitating Strategies	
Adult warm and receptive to encourage interaction	Mr P's voice sounds warm and encouraging throughout
Uses slow/adequate pace to allow children to participate	Mr P leaves plenty of time for Frieda's comments and response
Uses comments to cue another turn	Mr P makes encouraging sounds as responses, he affirms Frieda's ideas. E.g. Frieda: They are the children, (louder) the children are at the shops, who's going to the shops. Mr P: Aaaaah Frieda: She's going to the shops, she's going to the shops (sing song voice)
Uses sincere/open questions	Opportunity does not arise, although Mr P is keen to encourage Frieda to share her ideas. E.g., Frieda: Oooh! What's this? Mr P: What do you think it is?
Additional Actions taken by Adult	
Responding to questions and giving explanations where needed to keep the game on track but also trying to encourage Frieda to share her ideas: *'Erm, to be able to have (pause) like I think, erm being able to bounce back I think bouncing back her why questions which I noticed I did a bit, I think a little bit in that one where its… instead of me answering directly why – it's trying to find out what she thinks first I think before saying what I think. That feels like a better conversation.*	
Further Evidence provided by Multimodal Communication	
Body Movement Facial Expression Objects	Mr P is sat at the table with the pieces, Frieda is standing by the table, but they are both focussing on the board game and the small pieces within.

Appendix 4i

Analysis of Audio: Painting Blueberries Yellow

Signs of connectedness, closeness	Not physically close, but together in the bedroom, Mr P. decided to tidy alongside Frieda while she was finishing her drawing.
Strategies from professional practice	
Following Child's interests Child taking the lead	Mr P was drawn into the conversation by being interested in what Frieda was drawing. Stayed with the focus of the conversation, even though he really wanted to get her to go downstairs for breakfast. Very much so
Signs of Involvement and Wellbeing	Engaged in her drawing and explaining about her drawing and pens to Dad. Expressive and confident when she talks, singing and making funny sounds,
Strategies from theory: Communication – facilitating Strategies	
Looks expectantly at child and is warm and receptive to encourage interaction	Unable to tell as audio. But Mr P would prefer Frieda to go downstairs so is not actively encouraging interaction about the painting.
Uses slow/adequate pace to allow children to participate	Yes. Frieda is taking the lead
Uses comments to cue another turn	Yes. Even though he would prefer the conversation to end and they get to go downstairs.
Uses sincere/open questions	Yes. The questions seem very genuine. Frieda has hooked Mr P into what she is doing and he asks questions to clarify and find our what she is
Additional Actions taken by Adult	
N/A	
Further Evidence provided by Multimodal Communication	
Body Movement Facial Expression Objects	N/A

Painting Blueberries Yellow

The conversation begins in Frieda's room, early morning. Frieda is drawing at her easel and Mr P is trying to get her ready to go down for breakfast.

Mr P: Put the lid back on
Frieda: I am trying (emphasised – quite loud) to do some drawing
Mr P: Yeh, but we're getting ready to go downstairs aren't we.
Frieda: But I want to do some drawing a bit.

Reflecting on the conversation later, Mr P explained he had decided it would be unproductive to rush Frieda, so was tidying the bedroom around her.

Mr P: What are you drawing?

Frieda: I am drawing a picture of a plate of blueberries
Mr P: Of blueberries?

Mr P does sound genuinely interested, and it sounds as though Frieda has drawn him in, perhaps she has surprised him with what she is drawing, but her expression to accompany 'a plate of blueberries' is very dramatic as well. Frieda carries on with her drawing for briefly and Mr P gives her time so that she then continues, narrating what she is doing.

Frieda: Like this blueberry, this yellow blueberry
Mr P: A yellow blueberry?
Frieda: And that's my (difficult to discern)
Mr P: Your what?
Frieda: My (pause) my (Frieda repeats her word, this time more clearly and a little more slowly –but it is still difficult to discern)

However, Mr P has been able to tune in to Frieda's speech and his response would indicate that he realises that she is saying it is her pointer. Again, when he replies, he does sound genuinely interested which would signal to Frieda that he understands her and has listened carefully to what she is trying to say, giving her affirmation in her ability to make herself understood. However, he is also showing interest in what she is trying to say, and what her pointer may be. Therefore, his brief response acts as a cue for her to carry on and explain what her pointer is and does.

Mr P: Your pointer?
Frieda: Yeh
Mr P: Ah - a little gasp
Frieda: Pointer how to make berries
Mr P: Oooooh,

This time, the expression accompanying Mr P's response shows he gets it and also suggests thinks a pointer is an intriguing thing to have and Frieda continues

Frieda: And it's telling me how to do berries

This might be a little of Frieda's imagination showing up, it sounds like her pointer may be a magical wand, but Mr P doesn't pursue, he doesn't want to prolong the conversation, he wants Frieda to get dressed so they can go down stairs.

Mr P: Shall we go downstairs and get some breakfast?
Frieda: No. No cos

Mr P: Nooo?
Frieda: Cos I can't, cos I've got to do some more drawing for a bit, cos this is boring.

It really sounds as though Frieda says boring, but she may have meant drawing, either way she has hooked her dad back in

Mr P: What's boring?
Frieda: Boring, writing berries!
Mr P: That you're writing berries?

Frieda carries on drawing, but one of her pens has run out and an extended discussion continues as she tests each colour and then negotiates for new pens, but notes:

Frieda: Cos the shops (pause) are not open from the nasty bug

Mr P is tired and would prefer Frieda to get dressed and go downstairs but takes the time to respond to her about the shops beginning to open again. The rest of the recording are the sounds of Frieda moving about the room getting dressed, a little more discussion about them both getting dressed, a bit of singing Frieda making funny sounds and word play back and forth e.g., when Mr P asks if she wants Coco Pops for breakfast, Frieda replies:

Frieda: Yeh, Sure man

This makes her dad laugh and she giggles, they repeat it back and forth, playing with the words and then Frieda adds in an expression Frieda's nanna uses results in more giggling.

Frieda: Oh, deary me,
Mr P: Oh, deary me

Appendix 4j

Case 3 Analysis of Audio Observation: Ms N and Nathan - Scary Cloak Dream

Conversation took place early morning as Ms N was getting ready to go out to the shops.

Signs of connectedness, closeness	Noah stays close by to Ms N (his mum. They come together to look at the penny Noah finds, and they end the conversation with a big cuddle.
Strategies from professional practice	
Following Child's interests Child taking the lead	Ms N follows and explores the subjects Noah introduces: The black cloak, the money he finds, returns to the black cloak when Noah reintroduces the subject, even though he says he never wants to speck of it again. Nathan initiated the conversation and leads the subjects, but Ms N explores and develops the explanations.
Signs of Involvement and Wellbeing	Nathan is involved in the conversation throughout, he perseveres to make his meaning understood. Although he is expressing anxiety about the dream, he is comfortable in the interaction with his mother and is expressing his feelings about his dream, as well as how he wants the conversation to go. By the end of the conversation, he is relaxed and comfortable.
Strategies from theory: Communication – facilitating Strategies	
Looks expectantly at child and is warm and receptive to encourage interaction	It is not possible to tell how Ms N is looking at Nathan, but warmth can be heard in her voice and she is receptive and welcoming of the interaction.
Uses slow/adequate pace to allow children to participate	Ms N pauses throughout the conversation to make space for Noah to contribute. Where she and Nathan speak together, she gives way to allow him to speak.
Uses comments to cue another turn	E.g. 'I didn't understand what you mean by the black thing.' 'When I wear a dressing gown?' 'Maybe it's something that I can explain to you…'
Uses genuine/open questions	'What was it?' 'What happened?
Additional Actions taken by Adult	
Encourages Nathan to talk about what is worrying him, letting him know that her intention is to help.	
Further Evidence provided by Multimodal Communication	
Body Movement Facial Expression Objects	Not possible to tell from the recording. In the interview Ms N noted: Nathan was sitting on the bed, while Ms N was getting ready. 'I realised, uh, just looking at his face when he mentioned that, that he was really scared, but then he didn't wanna speak about it.' (when talking about the cloak).

Appendix 5 Thematic Analysis of Interviews Code Book Sample

JMEdDataChildFMum

Codes

Name	Description	Files	References
Child's Possible Purpose	Examples which may suggest or infer the child's purpose in the conversation.	1	1
To connect	Includes to engage with.	5	6
to enquire		2	2
To have their needs met		4	17
To reminisce		2	3
To tell		3	9
Conditions that support sustained converstaion		0	0
Adult Contribution		0	0
Adult asks questions		1	1
Adult enables		2	2
Adult engages		2	7
Adult Enjoys		5	18
Adult Initiates or leads		1	1
Adult responds		1	1
Adult tuned in		2	2
Adult uses child's interests		1	1
Ease		2	2
Parent mediates		1	1
Positive affect		1	1
Child Contribution		0	0
Agency	Demonstrates the importance of the agency of the child. This code is more than engagement or even child initiates the conversation. It is the actions that the child takes to pull their conversational partner in or drive the conversation along.	4	12
Child asks questions		1	2
Child Aware		2	2
Child Engaged		4	4

Name	Description	Files	References
Child Initiates		3	14
Child Knowledgeable		2	5
Child leads		1	2
Child's response	The way that the child responds encourages the adult to continue.	1	1
Positive affect		4	8
Environment		0	0
No distractions		3	3
one to one		1	1
Relaxed		3	4
Contexts		0	0
Activities	Adult and child doing specific activities together.	2	2
Bedtime		4	5
In transit		1	2
Meal times		2	2
Morning time		3	3
First thing in the morning		4	10
Play	Play being a context for a conversation with an adult.	2	3
Hindrances		0	0
Adult related		0	0
Direct Questions		1	2
Doesn't initiate		1	1
Doesn't respond		1	1
Mood		1	1
Tired		1	1
Child Related		0	0
Child finds it difficult		1	1
Unfamiliarity		1	1
Not engaged		1	1
Distracted		1	1
LIfe		0	0
Busy Elsewise		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Household jobs		3	3
Seperation		1	1
Technology		2	2
Nature		2	7
Covid	Examples where the conversation has been influenced by the conditions imposed due to the COVID-19 lockdown	4	8
Emotion		0	0
Amusement		3	7
Enjoyment		5	13
joy		1	2
Love	Includes closeness and cosiness	3	5
Pleasure		3	5
Pride		2	8
Playful		3	6
Relational		1	1
Togetherness		3	6
Parent Learning		0	0
Parent notices		2	14
Child's Development		2	11
Parent wants to learn		4	4
Specific Learning		4	11
Parent values talking with children		1	3
Parent's purpose		0	0
Child's learning		1	1
Insight into child		2	4
Relationship		2	2
To develop their language		1	1
To Engage	To engage or connect	3	3
To have fun		4	5
Topic		0	0
Child's enquiries		1	3
Child's Interests		0	0
Animals		2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
Clothes		1	3
Food		2	2
Popular Culture		2	2
Their toys		3	6
Child's life	What's going on for them at the moment	0	0
Child's feelings		3	3
Child's imagination		4	14
Dreams		1	1
Family		1	1
Friends		2	4
Memories		2	4
Morals	Talking about what is right, wrong or moral. Trying to understand behaviour, her own or others - real of characters.	2	2
News		1	2
What they are doing	The child is remarking on the thing they are doing at this moment.	4	9
Their play		3	4
Uniqueness or Complexity		4	9
Value of the process		2	5

Appendix 6 Transcript Samples

Appendix 6a Conversations with Children

Case 2 pt. 1 Elsa Built Two Castles

Frieda: Erm, Elsa build, er two castles for them

Ms K: She built two castles? One for the wolves and one for the foxes?

Frieda: Yes

Ms K: Wow! And what do they look like?

Frieda: They look like dirty ones and they climb up

Ms K: Ooh dear (a bit of laughter in Ms K's voice)

Frieda: Laughs and it turns into an extended false laugh

Ms K: You're funny.

Frieda: Hmmmmm, when they climb on the (inaudible) it will be dirty and slippy! (emph)

Ms K: Right, well then that's, tha (Frieda carries on and Ms K pauses for her to continue)

Frieda: Coz they're muddy! (Shouts for emphasis)

Ms K: Oh, because they're muddy (Ms K also emphasises this word and her voice suggests she gets it now)

Frieda: Yeh

Ms K: It does make everything dirty doesn't it? Mud.
Frieda: Yeh

Frieda: And sometimes you get mud on their feet all over.

All over their feet? Oh my goodness, so they have to have a bath?

Frieda: Heheherrrrm

Frieda: No, a, uh, I, (pause) a shower.

Ms K: A shower (amusement in voice) Oh, OK.

Frieda: They been outside with some sun cream on

Ms K: Oh, Ok, so the foxes have all put some sun cream on outside

Frieda: That's why they need to have, have a shower, cos, cos they got suncream on there and they got mud on them.

Ms K: Oooh OK. Yeah, they would definitely (emph) need a shower then wouldn't they?

Frieda: huh huh

Ms K: huh huh

Frieda: And sometimes they likes to stand up

Ms K: They like to stand up? Like on their back legs?

Frieda: Uh, yeh

Ms K: What do they do when they stand up?

Frieda: They tiptoe around (Frieda uses a story telling style voice here)

Ms K: Yeh

Frieda: The bath.

Ms K: They tiptoe around the bath (Incredulity in Ms K's voice)

Frieda: Yeh

Ms K: Oh my goodness, bet that's a sight to see

Frieda: Um, sometimes, (pause) we had (pause) we just (pause) and we be naughty yesterday.

Ms K: Did they?

Frieda: Yeh

Ms K: What did they do?

Frieda: Well, not…(unfortunately undecipherable) all dirty clothes

Ms K: Oh my goodness, they didn't did they?

Frieda: Yes

Ms K: (Shocked intake of breath) What did you do? Did you tell them off?

Frieda: No. Elsa told them off.

Ms K: Elsa told them off, of course

Frieda: And Anna

Ms K: And Anna too? I do like Anna.

Frieda: I told the erm, the fox teh stop.

Ms K: Ohhh (But tired and half yawning)

Frieda: And that, and that makes everybody happy again.

Ms K: Oh good, that's really lovely. You've got a vivid imagination you, don't yeh

Frieda: Yeah

Ms K: laughs

Ms K: I love you.

The rest of the recording is Frieda and Ms K, playing with the phrases I love you and you're gorgeous, they mirror and repeat back what each other say and Frieda comes to a conclusion and an invented construction of a word

Frieda: What about, we all gorgeouses?

Ms K: Oh, we're all gorgeouses are we? I think that's a good compromise.

They continue with the word play, introduce fist bumps and sound effects and as the recording ends Frieda is sitting on Ms K.

Appendix 6b Sample Interview Transcript

Ms N Meeting 3 pt1 TS

Speaker Key:

JM Janet Morris
MN Ms N

Time code	Speaker	Text
00:00:00	*JM*	*Okay, so, um…*
	MN	*It's recording, yeah.*
	JM	*So you, um… Do you want to start off by just telling me a little bit, a kind of an overview of what you noted through the week?*
	MN	*Erm, so kind of tried to concentrate on conversations that Nathan was obviously having with others.*
	JM	*Yeah.*
	MN	*Erm, particularly I was trying to get those with his dad, which… Found them really not great, because he's at work a lot of the time, so a lot of their conversations, erm, happen quite late, erm, or on a weekend. So… He's always quite busy on a weekend. But anyway, what I did notice was that Nathan has a different tactic to having a conversation with his dad. Nathan, turn that down, please. Erm, in that he uses almost like, erm… He draws him into… I noticed Nathan seems to draw him into conversations using, like, not necessarily a negative, erm… Well, in a way, I think some of it is a little bit negative, but he will… He will kind of try and get D into a conversation by showing him something that's not good. Or talking about something that's… Or making it seem like he's not very happy or quite upset. Maybe he is, 'cause maybe he's not getting the conversation he needs from his dad, maybe, I'm not sure about that. But yeah, I noticed that there's a different sort of style to the conversations he starts with his dad.*

Time code	Speaker	Text
	MN	*Erm, and again, even with, erm, his sister, I noticed that there's a different sort of conversation that… It's almost more competitive, erm, like, erm… He almost needs to feel, erm, not more important, but that he's on her level and he knows as much and, you know, like, you know, that they're sort of equal. Like, I guess, almost, that I notice with him. And with his brother, they don't have much conversation, it's very limited. It's usually Nathan wants something from him, or for him to do something for him. So they're not… They don't generally have very deep conversations, but I suspect also that, with my oldest son being on the spectrum, he's not a very, erm… He doesn't have a lot of communication with others in the household anyway. So I think… And I think Nathan knows that instinctively, so usually Nathan's telling him to do something, rather than having a conversation. You know, he just wants him to do or get something out of him, rather than sitting there, sort of having a back-and-forth conversation, like a big back-and-forth conversation. So yeah, I noticed that there is different styles of conversating.*
	JM	*Yeah, and that's really interesting. Um, you know, that's just fascinating, really, and fascinating that you, through this close looking at it, you kind of notice that. Or do you think you knew that anyway? Or is it something…?*
00:02:59	*MN*	*Not really. I mean, you notice little things in conversation, but never to the depth that I've analysed it, because I've never… I've never sat down and sort of really listened to… Well, what are they saying? What is he doing? What's the context? You know, how is he responding? I've never… 'Cause, you know, you just get on with daily life, and, you know, things get said, things don't get said, things happen, so you just kind of keep moving on. But to actually sit back and really listen, erm, and analyse everything has been quite eye-opening. I'm like, oh actually, like, actually, he's quite… They're quite smart, even as a small child, to realise how to manipulate a conversation or to draw you in or to push you away from a*

Time code	Speaker	Text
		conversation. Like, there's a whole lot more going on than I think I've actually realised, you know, a lot more. So yeah, that's been really cool to watch and, like, learn from, I think. Yeah.
00:03:55	*JM*	*Yeah. I mean, what… Do you think there would be any sort of implications in terms of Nathan and his dad's, you know… Have you kind of mentioned it to D? Or…*
	MN	*I have, actually, erm, after… I mean, 'cause sometimes I do say to him, erm, anyway, that D, err, you need to… Usually, though, I say, you need to play with them more, but actually, erm, in order to do that, he needs to speak to them more. Because what happens is, he wants to, say, sit down and suddenly play a game with them.*
00:04:27		*And they're not interested because, I think, he's not building up that conversation, erm, level with them to even engage with them, to even get them to play the game.*
	JM	*Yeah.*
	MN	*And I do often say to him, you know, you need to spend more time talking to them, because you just give yes-and-no answers. Or, when you do have something to say, it's negative, because they've done something, you're responding to something that they've done, rather than sort of just sitting down and having a conversation, just about anything. (Yeah)*
	MN	*You know, and it's usually because, erm, they've started the conversation. And I think Nathan's still young enough for him to undo that damage. But I can see that, with the eldest, and even now it's starting with Jade, erm, that they are almost like, erm, pulling away from, like, a lot of time with him and talking with him. Because he hasn't built up that relationship, erm, to have conversations with them, from an early age. So they will come to me and have conversations, and then I will relay it onto D, so he's getting everything second-hand.*

Time code	Speaker	Text
	MN	*Whereas it would be nice that they felt able to go to him and have true conversations. And I think he's… I'm not saying it's impossible, 'cause nothing's impossible, but he has kind of lost that, erm, window of opportunity, because of their age groups, with Jade and, erm, I . I think Jade, you can still recapture that, but I's now 18, he's almost off to university, back, he's kind of lost that boat.*
00:05:58		*But Jade's still in the household, and I think she's still young enough that he can kind of undo some of that if he wants.*
	JM	*Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.*
	MN	*You know, if he's able to and if he wants, so that's, you know, that's… I can only advise, I can't force that.*
	JM	*No. But I mean, I think you seem to be suggesting that it's about, as well, responding to them. Is that what you were saying? So that they sort of, erm, initiate… They bring something to him.*
	MN	*Exactly.*
00:06:29	*JM*	*In their own style, yeah? So could you tell me a little bit more about that, what you mean there?*
	MN	*Sorry, say that again, Janet.*
	JM	*Just tell, just… If you could just explain to me a little bit more what you meant by that, 'cause you… I think you were saying that they have different styles of bringing things to him.*
	MN	*Right.*
	JM	*Is that right? And then, then, then, what would, you know, what would, what should he or would he do with that, do you think?*
00:06:55	*MN*	*So, yeah, so I think, say with Nathan, his style of bringing stuff to him usually comes almost kind of negatively, because I think he's realised that that's the way to draw him in.*

Time code	Speaker	Text
		Erm, but D doesn't necessarily have to continue that negative conversation and then end it because it's not really something he wants to discuss or he's not finding it interesting, so, erm… Because I find that, with Nathan, he often draws D in with, like, things that he's done that are probably not very good. But I think that's Nathan's need to have a conversation, or to engage with him… But I don't think D's picking up on that, that it's actually more than just that situation.
	JM	*Yeah. Yeah. No, that's… That's really interesting. Yeah, yeah. So, erm… So if we think, if we just think about those kind of… Like, the kind of conversations in a way that I think you would like to see Nathan having with his dad, and I think I'd add to the feel that I'm getting from you, would that be fair to say? Oh, you've had some… (Call broke down because of poor internet)*