

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN SERVICES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Accepting, resisting and proposing alternatives to
mainstream views

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August 2006

Abstract

This research investigates the questions why do practitioners, volunteers and community members get involved in programmes for socially excluded children, families and communities and how and under what circumstances can this participation become a meaningful experience? The aim of the research was to explore the ways in which one non-governmental organisation and a group of service users accept, resist and propose alternatives to programme definition and implementation. Two ethnographic case studies were carried out at sites involved in the Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes. These studies used interviews and informal conversations with service users and service providers, along with observations and documentary analysis.

The site of the first case study had been in development as a community-based scheme for over 25 years as a co-operative employing a community-led development strategy. From the study, the scheme can be shown to be a grassroots social movement, which has developed a number of innovations based on values and beliefs and on an attempt to embrace social inclusion. The case examines how an identity was developed and how innovation was achieved when community members' values and beliefs was at the basis of the development of new services and practice and the community grew up through a network of relationships offering reciprocity and support. The case also details the difficulties this site has faced with the implementation of current policy.

The second case study examined a provision established by a Local Authority as part of the development of national policies. The findings identify

an improvement in the self-confidence and the conditions of depression and isolation in the mothers who attended, but little impact on them gaining qualifications or obtaining jobs. The findings also illustrate how certain features of government-led development can become an obstacle to the involvement of participants in the establishment of a programme's aims, implementation and volunteer work.

The national rollout of Children's Centres, developing from the two programmes considered here, seems to suggest that the government will give less importance to community involvement. This will detract from one of the main characteristics of the holistic and integrated view of provision for children, families and communities.

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Acknowledgements

This research was possible thanks to the grants and
support provided by the
Mexican Council for Science and Technology
(CONACyT)

Thanks to my supervisor Dr. Pat Broadhead
for her support and patience

Introduction

The author's involvement in a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and research experience in the area of services for young children, families and communities put him in touch with some cases where community involvement sometimes resulted in achievements far beyond those expected. In these schemes – some of which are presented as part of the theoretical background to the study – ordinary people were ready to develop innovative services and practices that were meaningful for them and their communities in spite of the difficult conditions they were dealing with. These experiences were the basis for the questions addressed by this research:

- why do practitioners, volunteers and community members get involved in programmes for socially excluded children, families and communities and
- how and under what circumstances can this participation become a meaningful experience? By 'meaningful experience' this research refers to the holistic notion of knowledge linked to its ethical and political implications, as well as its potential to improve the lives of participants of community education programmes.

During the last three decades or so, in many countries around the world the idea that such programmes should deal with children's and families' needs in an integrated way has become widespread. This has required providers to deal not only with childcare, health and educational issues, but also with families and communities. In many Majority Countries¹ this has also meant that programmes were dealing with poverty and social exclusion. To

some extent, the origins of such holistic visions can be traced not only to developments in social science and social policy, but also to the involvement of social movements attempting – and eventually managing – to change mainstream visions. Some of the strategies adopted by social movements have been public demonstrations, the establishing of non-governmental organisations experimenting with community-based services and research, and the organisation of networks supporting representatives from local or national governments. Some of these social movements defended a series of values and beliefs that included the promotion of human rights, particularly those of women and children, and the belief that the world could be improved (Haddad, 2002).

To explore this theme, two case studies have been carried out with the aim of examining how one NGO and a group of service users accept, resist and potentially propose alternatives to government initiatives during the creation of a programme, the formulation of its aims and its implementation. The two case studies were carried out in England. The fieldwork for the **Castle Children's Centre**, a co-operative, identified as an Early Excellence Centre in government designations, took place between November 2002 and June 2004, a period of 19 months. For the second case study, a government-led initiative, **Stanford Family Service Network**, the fieldwork was conducted between June 2003 and March 2005, a period of 21 months. During twelve months the case studies were carried out simultaneously. An ethnographic approach was used to explore service users' and service providers' reasons for participating and the ways in which their involvement took place. These

issues were investigated through interviews, informal conversations, observations of activities and documentary analysis.

This study is presented in six chapters. Chapter One discusses a theoretical framework for understanding the holistic nature of services for young children, families and communities. The framework deals with the social interactions and cultural changes that such programmes need to consider within different social spaces in order to achieve meaningful changes for children: from the macro-social political and economical contexts, local government and the community's formal and informal structures, to families and individuals. It also deals with issues of social exclusion (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cochran, 1993; Myers, 1992). Crucially, it introduces the need to consider community participation in the formulation of aims, implementation and evaluation of such programmes. In order to understand these complex processes, the chapter also discusses a psychosocial theory of social change that can help to consider the way groups and individuals in each of the social spaces described by the framework attempt to influence one another while defining their identities. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which socially excluded communities can manage to participate in the processes of social influence and social change. The theory we refer to is Critical Education, where the ultimate aim is to support and encourage socially excluded groups to participate in social change by exercising their citizenship (Freire, 1972; Giroux, 1999; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Dahlberg *et al*, 1999, 2005). The chapter also presents two cases from Mexico, in which the author was involved, which illustrate the two main approaches by which social change is attempted through such means as services, labelled community-led

development and government-led development. The two cases are new in the English-speaking literature.

Chapter Two focuses on recent policy developments in England, one of the few Minority countries where social movements were not strong enough to prompt the government to set up national services in the 1970s or 1980s. It was not until 1997, with the return of the Labour Party to power, that considerable changes have taken place. From a position that considered services for children and families to be a private matter, the government developed new policies promoting a more central role in establishing a holistic approach that considers families and communities. The chapter discusses the 'Third Way' behind these policies and the government's claims of reconciling the values of socialism with the efficiency of capitalism. Particular attention is paid to the role given to civil society in the form of NGOs through partnerships and service users.

Chapter Three presents the methodology used to carry out the two case studies that form the core of this research. This was an ethnographic approach undertaken through interviews, observations, informal conversations and documentary analysis. Continuing the discussions of Chapter One, this chapter emphasises the emergence of post-modern views and the implications of this for ethnographic developments. Likewise, it discusses complementary points of view that avoid post-modern excesses that could lead to nihilism. In this way, the chapter develops an argument on how current ethnographic emphasis on social justice and researchers' political

participation broadly coincide with the principles of Critical Education, part of the theoretical background presented in the first chapter.

Chapters Four and Five present the findings of the case studies. The first of these refers to the 'Castle Children's Centre'. This Centre was chosen on the basis of its outstanding characteristics, certainly not as an attempt to generalise findings. The scheme was created in 1979 as a community-based organisation employing a bottom-up, capacity-building strategy, almost 20 years before the Labour Party's reforms of the late 1990s, a period in which it was awarded Early Excellence Centre status. The case examines the ways in which community members organised themselves in order to set up, maintain and develop the service. While identifying values and beliefs as part of that process, the analysis of the case found that ideas about the past and hopes for a different future were strong enough to forge an identity based on the desire to achieve social change. For these reasons, the Centre could be seen as social movement, emerging from exclusion and attempting to change its community members' life experience. By introducing the concept of social movement, the case goes on to examine themes new in the early years literature, particularly themes related to the 'Network Society' theory (Castells, 2000, 2001, 2004).

The case study details the Centre's shift in aims and practice, from a '*resistance identity*' in which community members set up the service to oppose their exclusion to a '*project identity*' in which a strengthened community was able to plan and implement alternatives to mainstream services. Such alternatives included a holistic vision in the form of the work

with children, families and the community, the layout of its premises, a curriculum based on the cultural diversity of its members, and the inclusion of male staff. These and a large list of other innovative services attempt to fulfil the values, beliefs and hopes of social inclusion that participants share as their identity. Alongside services, the community's members have increased in number and geographical location, notably to ten countries in North Africa and the Middle East, where the Centre works as a network. The Centre also established links in other countries in Europe and in the US. Having emerged as an opposition to exclusion, the Centre developed in a way which reflects a process that has involved resistance and conflict.

Within the context of the Labour Party's reforms, the Centre has gone through a difficult and ambiguous period, in which policies seem not only to support but also to value the Centre's development. However, the Centre faces the threat of closure as a result, in our interpretation, of the rigid and restrictive way in which community participation has been defined by national policies and implemented by the Local Authority, which may see the Centre as a threat to its legitimation and means of control.

Chapter Five presents findings from the second case study, the 'Stanford Family Services Network'. This is not a centre but rather a small team supporting established services and providing home visits and courses on parenting issues, something no other service in the area was offering. The Network was set up by the Local Authority through the Early Excellence Centres programme in 2001, and later it would also receive support from the Sure Start Local Programme. The case study reconstructs the way community

needs were identified and activities developed. The chapter also presents four case studies of service users in which participants told the researcher how they had been attracted to the services, the benefits they have gained and the plans they have for the future. Findings coincide broadly with similar studies in identifying positive changes in participants' self-confidence and overcoming depression and isolation (see, for example, Tunstall *et al*, 2005; Carlson & West, 2005; Attree, 2004). However, observations also provide evidence of some limitations of the service, particularly on how institutional practice can become an obstacle for long-term and sustained community involvement.

The Stanford Family Services Network closely follows strategies determined centrally for community participation and seeks to fulfil performance targets, also centrally determined. The establishment of aims, for example, takes place largely through assessments carried out on home visits. As a result, courses tend to adjust to that data and the study suggests that particular circumstances of group participants and issues not directly related to practitioners' expertise might have been overlooked. In this sense, it is important to mention that one of the distinguishing features of this case study is the reduced size of its staff: one family support development worker during the first year, accompanied by one community teacher from the second year. Early in the third year, just a few months before the beginning of the fieldwork for this research, two members of support staff also began to work for the Network. All the staff worked part-time and the Network operated for three days a week during school term times only. The data showed that the eight-week summer break provoked dissatisfaction. This was also a factor in participants' decision to leave the group.

Following national policies, the targeted community was defined on a geographical basis and in terms of children's age. The case study presents some evidence of how definitions of entitlement hampered volunteers' involvement. Regarding the holistic approach, the data suggests that changes were limited to the individual level and by and large had no effect in community development as defined either by the government or the theoretical framework presented in Chapter One.

The chapter goes on to analyse the way in which the case coincides with literature criticising the prescriptive government-led strategies (Gustafsson & Driver, 2005; Cohen, Moss *et al*, 2004) which, particularly in the case of Sure Start Local Programmes, have been described as authoritarian. In spite of claiming that community participation was an important component of the Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start programmes, the case study seems to confirm that such participation is limited to certain aspects of implementation, but is certainly not influencing the revision, adaptation or flexibility of national policies. The case appears to support the argument that non-formal educational programmes, within a market-like system, tend to see community involvement as a means of saving money rather than strengthening its members (Myers, 2000b; Rosemberg, 2003; Osgood, 2005)

Finally, Chapter Six presents the conclusions to the study. Findings from both case studies are summarised with particular attention to four main issues: 1) *community-led initiatives opposing social exclusion*, analysing the reasons and circumstances that encouraged some of the research

participants to set up and develop an independent service and eventually a social movement. Emphasis is placed on the role values, beliefs, notions about the origin of social exclusion and hopes for a different future in prompting people to act. 2) *The basic process of forging communities and extending social influence*, discussing the theoretical implications of introducing the concept of 'social movement' and how this study enriches the discussion on the ways in which communities develop through informal relationships of reciprocal support. 3) *Can government-led initiatives achieve sustained long-term community involvement?* discusses how institutional practices found in the study could potentially encourage or inhibit community involvement in the services in question and 4) *Community development for what?* reflects on the sense of the term 'community development' and its implications for community involvement.

From 2006, Children's Centres will begin to replace Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes. Early indications suggest that community participation will feature only in a reduced way (Glass, 2005; Moss 2004). If this is the case, it could be argued that the holistic vision of services for young children, families and communities would be undermined. Civil society's participation would also reflect these changes, accentuating NGOs' entrepreneurial role over their criticism and construction of alternatives to government's vision (Williams & Roseneil, 2005). This action also seems to reinforce a governmental vision of social exclusion as the consequence of the failure of individuals rather than as a result of the evolving global structure ruled by market forces (Byrne, 2005, McLaren, 1999).

¹ Following Dahlberg *et al* (1999, 2005), this study avoids the use of notions such as ‘developed countries’ *versus* ‘developing countries’ or ‘first world’ *versus* ‘third world’, as these terms suggest a preconceived way of thinking about the development of countries. The term ‘Majority Countries’ refers to the poor countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia, while ‘Minority Countries’ refers to the privileged countries of Europe and North America, as well as other privileged countries such as Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

Chapter One. Services for Young Children, Families and Communities: Ecological Perspectives, Cultural Change and Critical Education

This study investigates community involvement in holistic services for young children, parents and their communities living in social exclusion. Over recent decades, these programmes have broadened considerably the theoretical background supporting their work as well as the technical and managerial resources needed to implement them. The 1990 UNESCO Jomtien convention on *Education for All* (UNESCO, 1990) declared that *learning begins at birth*, encouraging the design and implementation of these services, particularly in Majority Countries, from prenatal age to children in the primary school years. Theoretical developments signalled that work with parents and communities could potentially make these programmes more complete and effective, implying that services should extend their work to adults and organisations. The concept of development evolved and new evidence suggested that the different areas of academia and administration dealing with such services were failing to acknowledge the influence that health, social and cognitive development had on one another, suggesting that better results could be achieved by coordinating services (Myers, 1992). This was partly the result of a broad theoretical framework, known as the ecological model. In this model, children's development was studied in relation to events happening in various social spaces ranging from those in the family and preschool to culture and the economy (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Cochran, 1993).

The present work deals with civil society's participation in this complex framework. It attempts to shed light on the process that takes place on and

between the different levels described by the ecological approach, particularly the involvement of social movements and the initiatives of the 'community'. Civil society has influenced the establishment of services and the way they are implemented, bringing along ideas about their past, hopes for the future and ideas about the reasons for social exclusion.

In order to present the theoretical framework, this chapter is divided into five sections. Section one discusses the ecological model of services for young children and holistic planning for intervention. Given the importance of cultural change as one of the desired results of intervention. Section two presents a psychosocial framework in which the relationship between social influence and social change can be understood. Section three deals with critical education and the different ways in which participation and change can be conceived. Sections four and five present two cases from Mexico, which illustrate two approaches for implementing programmes for young children, families and communities: community-led and government-led development.

1. An ecological approach to services for young children, families and communities

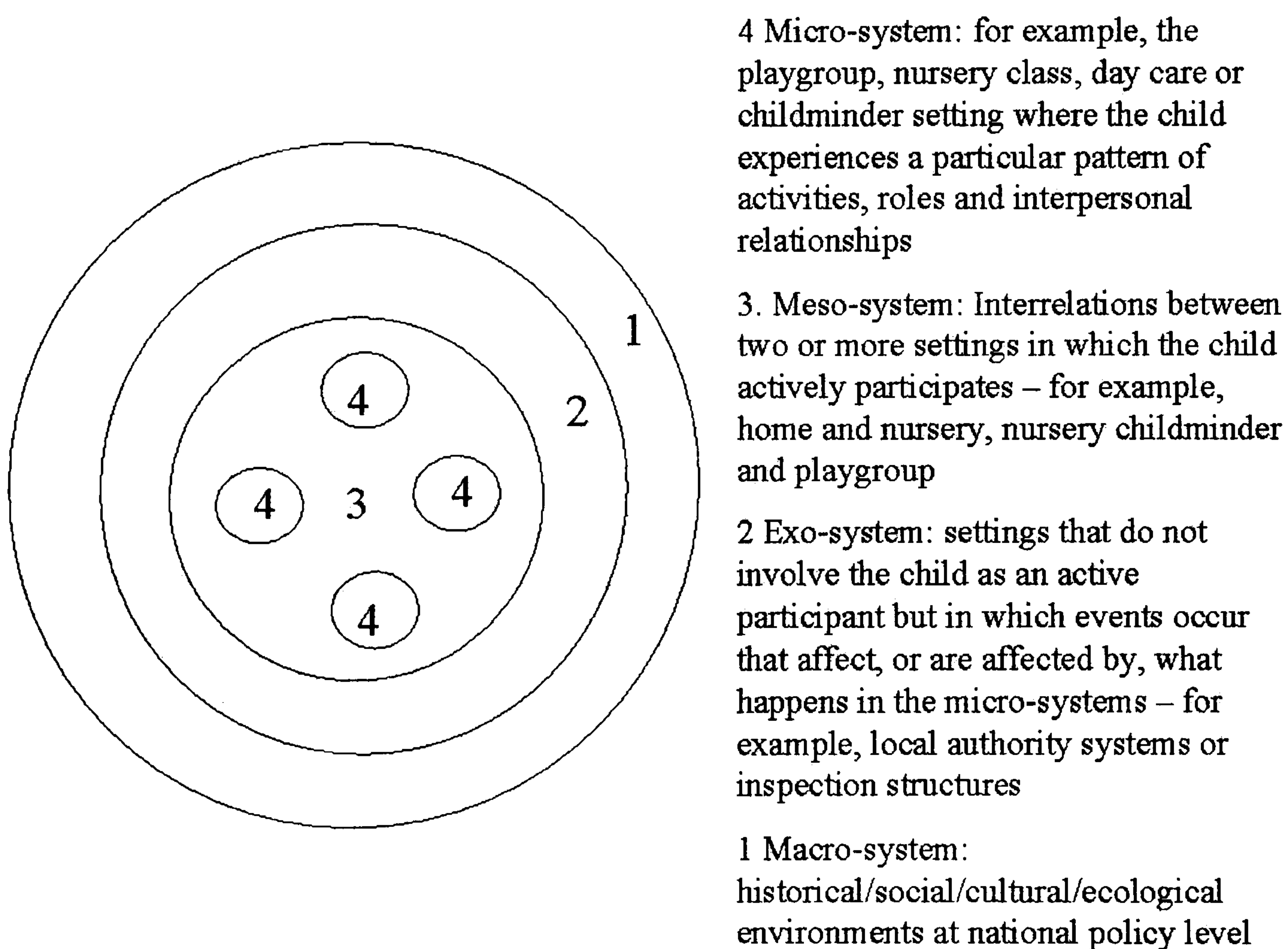
Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) emerged as a critical response to social psychology and developmental psychology. Most studies in these fields during the 1970s studied interactions between couples or small groups in laboratories, reducing the concept of *context*, from his standpoint, to an immediate and limited notion. Such experiments had failed to study the context in which human development takes place in everyday life. Bronfenbrenner's model has evolved and it was the first of many models. Myers (1992) analyses seven of them at length. The original model is

considered here because it is still a good introduction to the complexities involved in services for young children, parents and communities. The model also helps to highlight a missing presence in that original model: the participation of civil society in the form of *community, voluntary sector or social movements*. This section reviews the key ideas underpinning the model, and two important developments relating to the participation of civil society within such services.

1.1 A complex situation demanding a complex theory: the ecological model

Bronfenbrenner's model aims to study the relationship between the individual and his/her environment and their *simultaneous accommodation*. Figure 1 shows Anning & Edwards's (1997:17) interpretation of Bronfenbrenner's original model.

Figure 1 Historical/cultural influences on services for the developing child



The ecological model incorporates four contexts. The *micro-system*, number 4 in the diagram is

“... a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics...” (Ibid: 22).

This level represents the preschool or day care service settings.

The meso-system, number 3 in Figure 1, is defined as a system of micro-systems, that is, the relationship between two or more micro-systems, such as preschool and family. The Exo-system, number 2, is similarly a system of meso-systems; but here the individual has no direct participation. Even so, what happens in the exo-system can affect families and services. Anning & Edwards (1999) exemplify this level with local authorities in relation to children and carers. Finally, the macro-system, number 1 in the diagram, is the cultural system, in which the formation of beliefs, ideologies and policy-making takes place.

The actions within each system have different meaning within the other systems. It is possible to begin to understand how individuals and groups from different parts of the system influence what happens in the micro-system. But theoretically, the micro-system is also able to influence the broader systems.

More recently, the model has been developed to include two more concentric circles: an outer circle, *global context*, and an intermediate one, *community* (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Huitt, 2003; see Gustafsson & Driver, 2005 for a related idea in the study of power relations).

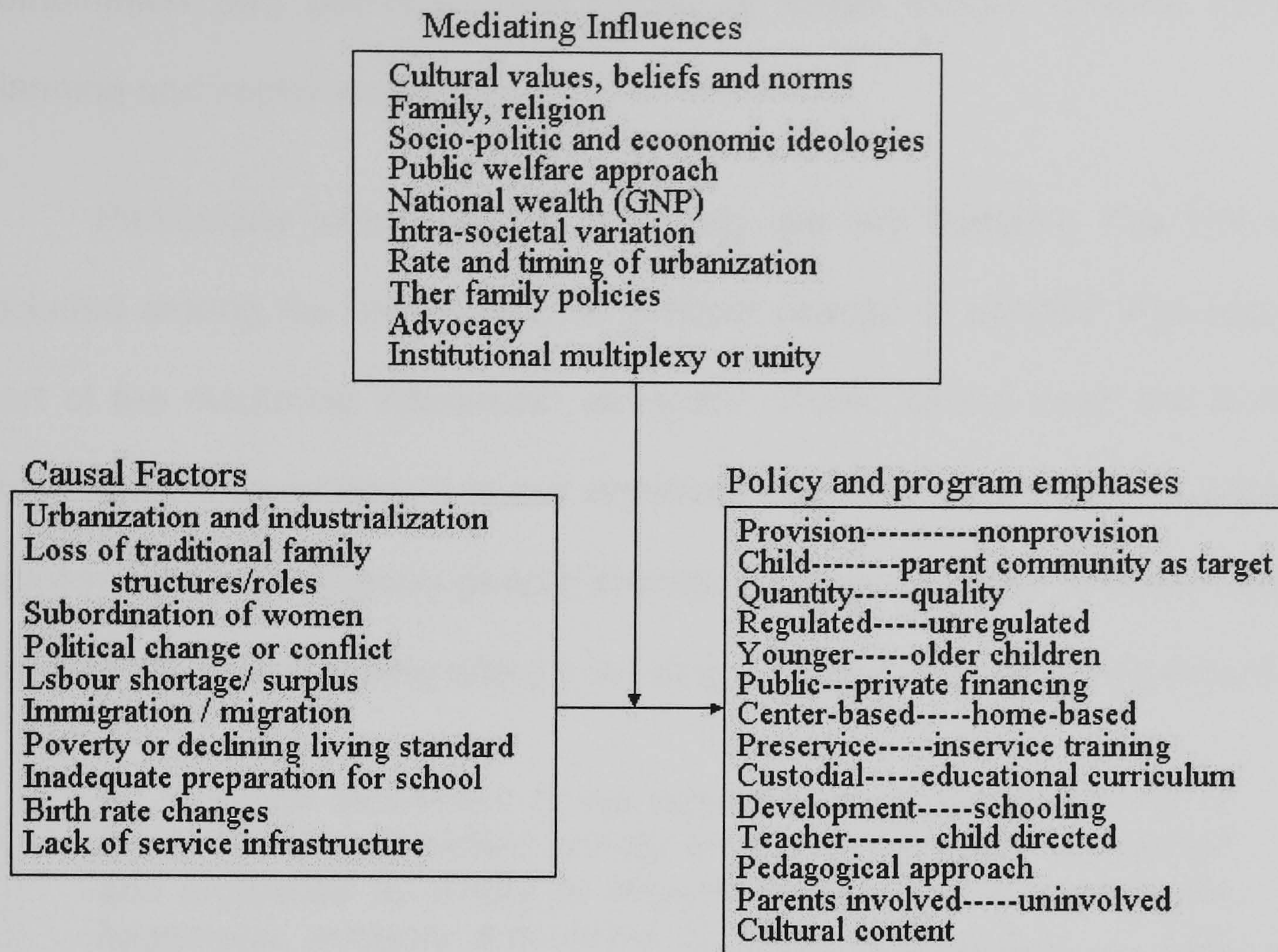
Myers (1992) criticised Bronfenbrenner's original model for not including the community. In spite of the inclusion of the two new levels in recent years, Myers' other criticisms are still important: it requires further complexity and consideration of the community's means of participation. In practice, reality can be more complex than the model as is the case for those living in multicultural settings, where participants may, for example, have to adapt to a different set of values, language and a broader culture. More importantly for this study is the second criticism; the model is homeostatic, with little room for community agency and change. Groups within society may not only need to adapt to the environment, sometimes they seek to change any imbalance.

The following sections discuss two developments from this model, one emphasising the role of social conflict at the macro-system level and the second promoting participation, agency and change.

1.2 The participation of civil society in the macro-system: social conflict and change

Cochran (1993) studied detailed social relationships and circumstances within the macro-system in an attempt to understand the processes that led different countries with similar needs to develop different services for young children and their families². Figure 2 shows three dimensions involved in the creation, planning and implementation of services. The model was drawn up through an analysis of the experiences of 29 countries.

Figure 2. A framework linking macro-level causes and mediating influences to policy and programme outcomes



Source: Cochran, 1993: 628

Cochran identified three interacting dimensions that help give an understanding of the defining features of the resulting services in these countries. These three dimensions are causal factors, mediating influences and policy and programme emphases.

Among the causal factors that triggered the need for services for young children were global and local conditions. Among the global conditions, we find urbanisation resulting from industrialisation and the related loss of traditional family structures, although these have taken place at different times and with differing intensity among the countries studied. Between the more local conditions, Cochran identified the lack of infrastructure or inadequate preparation for school. Mediating influences were the available resources,

established institutions and socio-political ideologies, among others. The combination and particular interactions of these factors underlie service planning and implementation.

Particularly interesting for this study are two features. The first was included among the causal factors: *political change or conflict*. The second, part of the mediating influences: *advocacy*. These factors open the door to civil society intervention. It is our argument that both form part of a broader process, in which ordinary people attempt to influence those in power: social movements. The following offers a working definition of a social movement:

“... A social movement is the organisation of multiple forms of locally generated skilled activity around a rationality expressed and organised by would-be hegemonic actors, and against the hegemonic projects articulated by other such actors ...” Cox (1998: online edition).

Social movements are organised citizens acting together and attempting to influence social change from a non-formal social space.

The involvement of social movements in the creation of services for children, families and communities has been so decisive in some countries at particular times that the following section makes reference to them.

Historical phases of social movements influencing services for young children, families and communities

From a global perspective, Haddad (2002) studied and classified social movements influencing the creation and development of services into four historical periods: Appearance, Cold War, Cultural Revolution and Globalisation, and these periods will now be presented in turn.

Appearance. In the late 19th century, two types of institution emerged in industrialised countries. One type, charity, was directed towards poor children; the other, preschool institutions, to the wealthy. In both cases, provision started as non-governmental initiatives. The developments of Oberlin in France, Froebel in Germany, and Montessori in Italy inspired the implementation of services between 1860 and 1900 to various Majority and Minority countries. Owen began to work with families and communities in England (Kamerman, 2000). Haddad also mentions early schemes in Brazil, China and Kenya, where services were established for upper class children, sometimes still within a context of colonisation.

After the First World War came initiatives such as the MacMillan sisters' extension of childcare services to poor families in Bradford and London. The first schemes in the Minority Countries, in spite of the initial split, tended to become inclusive, to open for long periods of time and to work with parents.

The split between care and education was related to happenings during the Cold War. During this period, socialist countries saw institutions for children as an important way of creating a new culture, in which children were a public responsibility and socialisation was not limited to the family domain, facilitating the transmission of state values. Equally importantly, inclusion of women in the labour force would be facilitated and guides were published for factories, mines and agricultural cooperatives to establish such services. Provision for young children in China, for example, grew exponentially from 1.1 to 29.5 million children between 1957 and 1958 (Zhengao, 1993).

On the other hand, Western countries, particularly the US and the UK, saw childcare as the private responsibility of families; those wishing for or needing services would have to make arrangements privately. States would act only in the case of children 'in need', through welfare services. Clear differences were established between educational and care services, providing for children of differing natures and with minimum state involvement. Particularly in the UK, this situation resulted in an unequal access to services in different areas, uneven quality of services and mainly expensive provision.

After the Second World War, services for young children would undergo another transformation. This period, considered as the Cultural Revolution, extended to the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. During this time, the Frankfurt School and its Critical Theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005) influenced and theorised on various social movements around the world. Some of these social movements demanded and influenced the creation and implementation of services for young children, their families and communities.

This is the moment at which these services expanded considerably in the Majority World and in Western Europe, in many cases with the decided intervention of social movements. Castells (2000, 2004) also studied the intense and powerful social movements of the period. He notes that although many of them adopted Marxist ideological expressions:

"... they had little to do with Marxism or, for that matter, with the working class. They were essentially cultural movements, wanting to change life rather than seizing power. They intuitively knew that access to the institutions of state co-opts the movement, while the construction of a new, revolutionary state perverts the movement. Their ambitions encompassed a multidimensional reaction to arbitrary authority, a revolt against

injustice, and a search for personal experimentation ... their values reverberated in all spheres of life. Of course, they were politically defeated because, as most utopian movements in history, they never pretended to political victory. But they faded away with high historical productivity, with many of their ideas, and some of their dreams germinating in societies and blossoming as cultural innovations, to which politicians and ideologues will have to relate for generations to come ..."
(Castells, 2001: 370)

In the Minority Countries, childcare was important for various feminist movements, as it was the key for women to engage in full-time jobs or studies. Some of these movements used mass movements and networks supporting women in parliaments, among them Sweden (Bergman, 2004; Naumann 2005; Hiilamo, 2004), whose model is still considered to be one of the most progressive (Dahlberg *et al*, 1999, 2005; Moss, 2004).

But this also happened in other Minority countries, with social movements and large demonstrations mostly related to feminism, such as in the case of Canada, (Dobrowolsky & Jenson 2004); Germany, where mass movements influenced only school practices (Naumann 2005); and France, as part of the student movements in Paris where new gender roles were put to the test (Mozère, 1992; Eme, Gardin *et al*, 2001). In Italy, these movements were part of more comprehensive actions against fascism in favour of local autonomy, where community-based schemes for young children and families were dubbed cooperatives and influenced one of the first legislations on social enterprise (Fitch, 1996; New, 1993; Clément & Gardin 2000). In Spain, services were part of the demands of broader urban social movements (Castells, 1983). Social movements favouring workers' rights also achieved provision for working mothers elsewhere (Foley, 2003; Marx-Ferree & Roth, 1998).

New revolutions and major social changes were also behind important developments in the provision of services for young children, parents and communities, for example: the *Sandinista* Revolution in Nicaragua (Torres, 1993); the end of apartheid in South Africa (Mkhulisi & Cochran 1993); Vietnam's independence from France (Thi Trong *et al*, 1993) and the extreme conditions of Afghan refugees in Iran (Piran, 2004).

In the Majority Countries, social movements were influenced by feminism, but also by anti-poverty mass and social movements as in the case of Brazil (Rosemberg, 1993, 2003), with grassroots initiatives in Mexico (Pérez *et al*, 1991; Tolbert, Shrader *et al*, 1993), and Nepal (CWIN, 2005). Also civil society participated in creating services within the context of dictatorship in Chile (Richards, 1985) and through networks supporting women in political posts in India (Barry *et al*, 2004). In this context of poverty, we also find the emergence of one of the most striking cases, a social movement in Peru set up by child workers (it is legal in Peru for children to work from the age of 12) demanding childcare and social services for themselves, for younger children and for other Latin American children (Cisneros, 1999; Save the Children, undated)

Haddad (2002) distinguishes between services created within educational settings and those created within welfare services. She notes that in many countries the inclusion of services in the area of welfare led to innovation in providing services in non-school settings, developing educational environments different from preschools. During the Cultural Revolution phase, the emergence of alternative family arrangements is more

clearly established and over the years this would expand, starting in the major urban areas of Minority and Majority Countries. There is a shift in interest towards children and their rights rather than solely the rights of women.

At this time, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) was drawn up and all countries, except the US and Somalia, subscribed to it. Institutions for young children became an alternative to care for children, an aspiration for working families and those seeking gender equality. In Europe, the European Commission Network on Childcare was set up in 1986. What particularly marked this period was the aim of extending services on the basis of universal rights emphasising both those of children and those of women.

The United Kingdom, the site for our case studies, is perhaps the last Minority Country to develop policies for the provision of services for young children and their families. In spite of the historic developments of Owen and the MacMillan sisters, after the Second World War public provision remained patchy. During the *Cultural Revolution* phase, an extensive but informal provision of playgroups was organised by mothers. This grew and to some extent it empowered participating women (PLA, undated; Kellmer & Naidoo, 1975; Tizard *et al*, 1976) but it had no impact on the further establishment of public provision. Nash, (2002) even wondered whether there was a British feminist movement at all while Barry *et al* (2004) argued that there has been a submerged network of NGOs supporting various women in Parliament to achieve these developments. It was not until the Labour Party's return to government in 1997 that a national policy began to emerge.

The current stage is the Globalisation period. With the disintegration of the socialist bloc, a new period ruled by free-market policies has had considerable effect on programmes for young children and their families. For Haddad, this era has been characterised by a return to fragmented services subject to market forces, cuts in social expenditure and an overturning of various rights, among them those of women's access to childcare services and children's holistic services. However, forces that work for and against the integration of care and education can and do coexist:

"... Countries strongly influenced by social-democratic ideologies, such as the Nordic countries, led the move towards convergence, while those with dominant liberal or market-economy ideologies have shown resistance to viewing childhood-related matters as a public social issue in which the state has an important role to play. Developing countries, striving to comply with the constrain of structural adjustment programmes and reeling under the burden of poverty, have tended to abdicate control over ECEC [Early Childhood Education and Care] policies and follow guidelines imposed by international organisations ..." (Haddad, 2002:23)

International organisations such as the OECD, UNESCO and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) have established holistic approaches to children's services, which still strive for universal access. For Haddad, services should focus on the shift from deficit models to the Human Rights model, from a family's exclusive responsibility to a shared responsibility on the part of the state. These circumstances have led her to add further complexity to the ecological model in the form of international influence. Rosemberg (2003) argues that the characteristics observed during the Globalisation phase were experienced in the Majority Countries over national governments from the early 1980s, where international organisations had already taken the lead in defining economic and social policies.

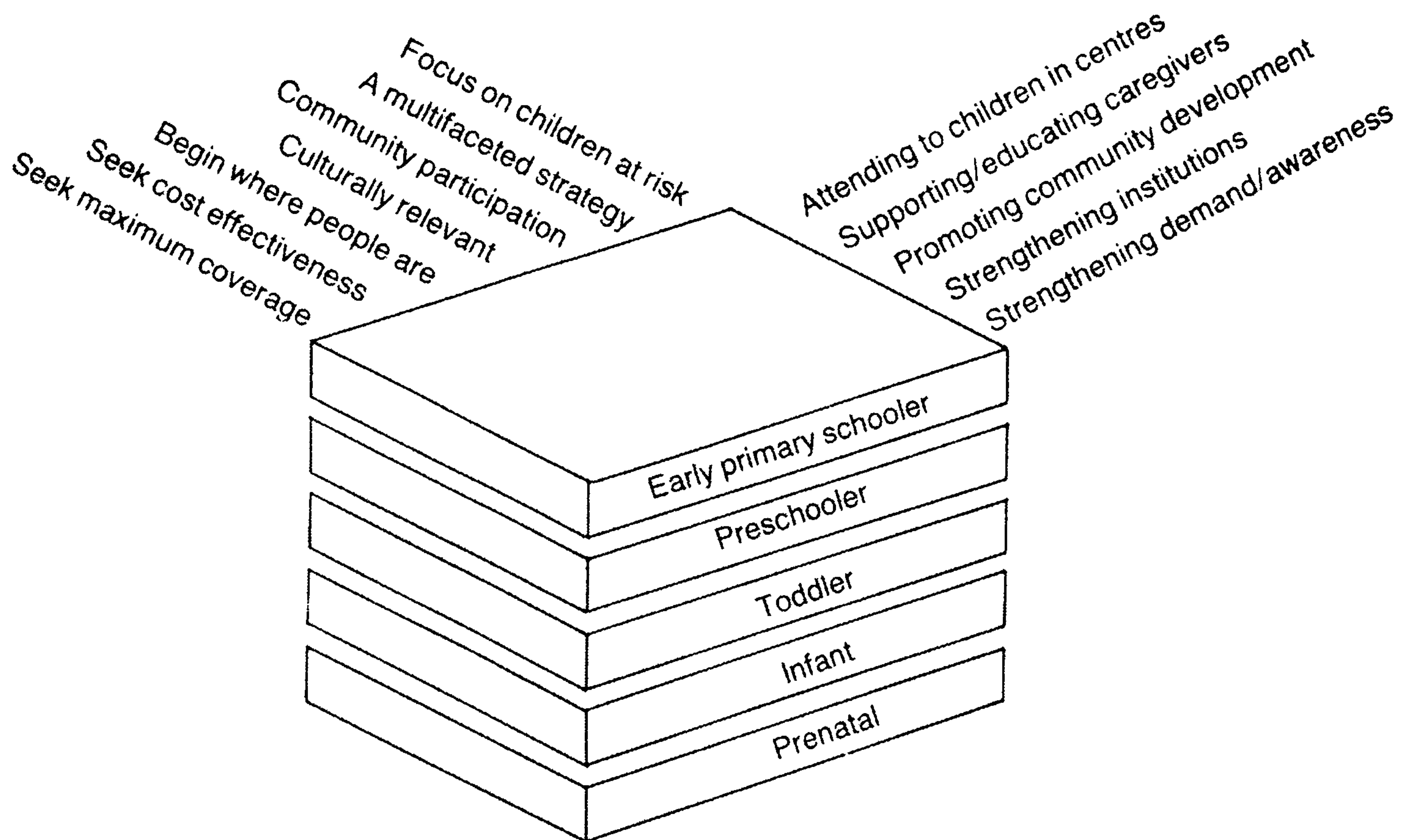
The chapter will continue to talk about the influence of social movements, but before we do that, let us examine one more development in the ecological model, one which refers to other ways in which civil society can influence the creation and implementation of services for children and families.

1.3 A holistic framework to understand and guide the planning of Early Years Development Programmes

Myers (1992) developed a framework for assessing and planning services for the development of young children, families and communities (see also Evans Myers & Illfeld, 2000). As with other ecological models, the emphasis on *development* attempts to overcome the fragmented vision of separate *educational, care, health and social* services. From this perspective, children's development is a complex process in which psychosocial, cognitive and biological dimensions come together to form a developmental unit. Furthermore, the model is seen as a part of implementing universal-access services, although it makes a clear commitment to start providing for vulnerable members of the population, as it was primarily designed to enrich programmes targeting Majority Countries' poorest communities.

The term '*universal access*' makes reference to *universal rights* and not to *universal technical solutions*. The model makes a strong case for implementing participatory strategies in which improvements to parents' and communities' conditions are part of the process of improving children's conditions. Figure 3 shows the comprehensive framework as developed by Myers:

Figure 3 A comprehensive framework for planning early childhood development services



Source: Myers, 1992: 84

This model also has three dimensions to it. The lower part indicates the child's development. As Bronfenbrenner before him, Myers is critical of developmental psychology's universal claims based only on the experiences of Minority Countries. He acknowledges that culture and environment demand the use of diverse approaches. He presents evidence of growth, survival and development being simultaneous, not sequential processes. The phases of development are marked by general achievements and not necessarily by strict standards developed in laboratories. The holistic framework starts with pregnant women and infancy (up to about 18 months), in which children are weaned, learn to walk and show early language development. It also includes a toddler and post-toddler period (about 18 to 48 months), in which children's coordination, cognitive and social skills develop unevenly. It continues with a preschool period (approximately four to five years old) and an early primary school period.

In the upper right of Figure 3, we find the complementary approaches to children's development. Due to the complexity of the developmental processes and the difficulties that various children face in their early years, programmes paying attention to the complementary environments related to children have more chance of having long-lasting effects. It is in this dimension that Bronfenbrenner's original model has more clearly influenced the framework. It can deal with children in centres, but also with parents, communities and institutions dealing with children and within a broader context. However, one of the complementary approaches is clearly devoted to participation and change. This is the *strengthening demand and awareness* as it:

"... concentrates on the production and distribution of knowledge in order to create awareness and demand. It may function at the level of policymakers and planners, or be directed broadly towards changing the cultural ethos that affects the child development ..."
Myers (1992).

Civil society can establish relationships with governments, the media, organisations, communities and families, and seek to influence ideas and decisions. This approach is directed towards the wider public, but also towards policymakers and professionals. It is civil society organised into NGOs and boards of community-based programmes that can actually participate at this level. Myers wrote his book from his experience as part of *the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development*, which aims to influence national governments from international agencies, while Haddad (2002) and Rosemberg (2003) would probably seek to influence international agencies from their local networks, although with international links.

In any case, programmes attempt to influence social change either in carers' child-rearing practices, in the way community members support each other, the way organisations coordinate efforts, or the way NGOs can influence politicians and programme makers. Social change in this sense means changes in social and political relationships. This is what Richards (1985), based on the Critical Education background, calls *cultural action*.

Finally, in the upper left of Figure 3 are the planning guidelines, in what could be called the values and beliefs of the model. This framework was fundamentally developed to deal with Majority Countries, so it is not surprising that vulnerable communities are given priority. Among these guidelines, two are particularly interesting for this study. These are *community participation* and *beginning where people are*, both seeking cultural action through a meaningful and participatory experience. In a way, these are the dimensions that we are dealing with throughout the research. This section presents Myers' views, but the discussion will be resumed in various contexts throughout the rest of the study. There are various ways in which the 'community' has been referred to in programmes for young children, parents and communities: as donors, users, key informants and others. Two visions are summarised as:

"... Community participation is sometimes encouraged for its own sake, as a basis for developing solidarity and greater control over one's life. More often, however, participation is viewed instrumentally – as a means to make programmes more effectively by engaging potential recipients actively so that usage will increase and so that the programme will respond appropriately to local needs ..." (Myers, 1992: 91).

The difference is between working *for* the community and working *with* the community. This does not imply that there is a best way to do things. Some programmes, for example, deal with infrastructure for a short period. The benefits for the community, says Myers, will be meaningful even if little participation has taken place. On the contrary, if the attempted changes were cultural, it could be argued that more profound and long-term involvement of communities, professionals and institutions would be required. The latter are the types of scheme this study refers to.

In our vision, Critical Education could be an important component of the process, as it strives to develop communities through a process in which participants develop knowledge, skills and a collective vision of the ways they would like to change their conditions. In a sense, Critical Education aims to provide civil society with skills to influence social change in every space of the framework and for that reason a later section is dedicated to a discussion of it.

Myers' book title *The Twelve Who Survive* (1992) alluded to statistics showing that in the Majority World twelve out of thirteen children would survive at least until their first year of life. His point was to criticise programmes concerned only with the survival of children, as survival, growth and development are simultaneous processes and provision for *survivors* was needed too. '*Survival for what?*' was the question posed in order to encourage the design and implementation of holistic services. The point was to provide a fairer start for *the twelve who survived*; to promote more meaningful ways of planning services for them. Following on from this idea, the present research questions the objectives that programmes have for communities' participation

and organisation. It also questions the way such communities may agree with, resist or propose alternatives to those programmes' assumptions.

The section has presented the literature studying the ways in which civil society can influence the creation of services for young children and their families in the form of social movements. In seeking for other ways and spaces in which this participation can take place, we have also seen that programmes dealing with excluded children and families seek community participation, either as a way to give them more control over their lives or to implement programmes more efficiently. Much of what is expected from these programmes relates to cultural change, either as a change in child-rearing practices, institutional organisation or the influence of civil society on politicians and planners. This study attempts to shed light on how civil society, in its forms of social movements, NGO's and 'community' members, participates in these programmes and seeks to influence cultural changes in the process.

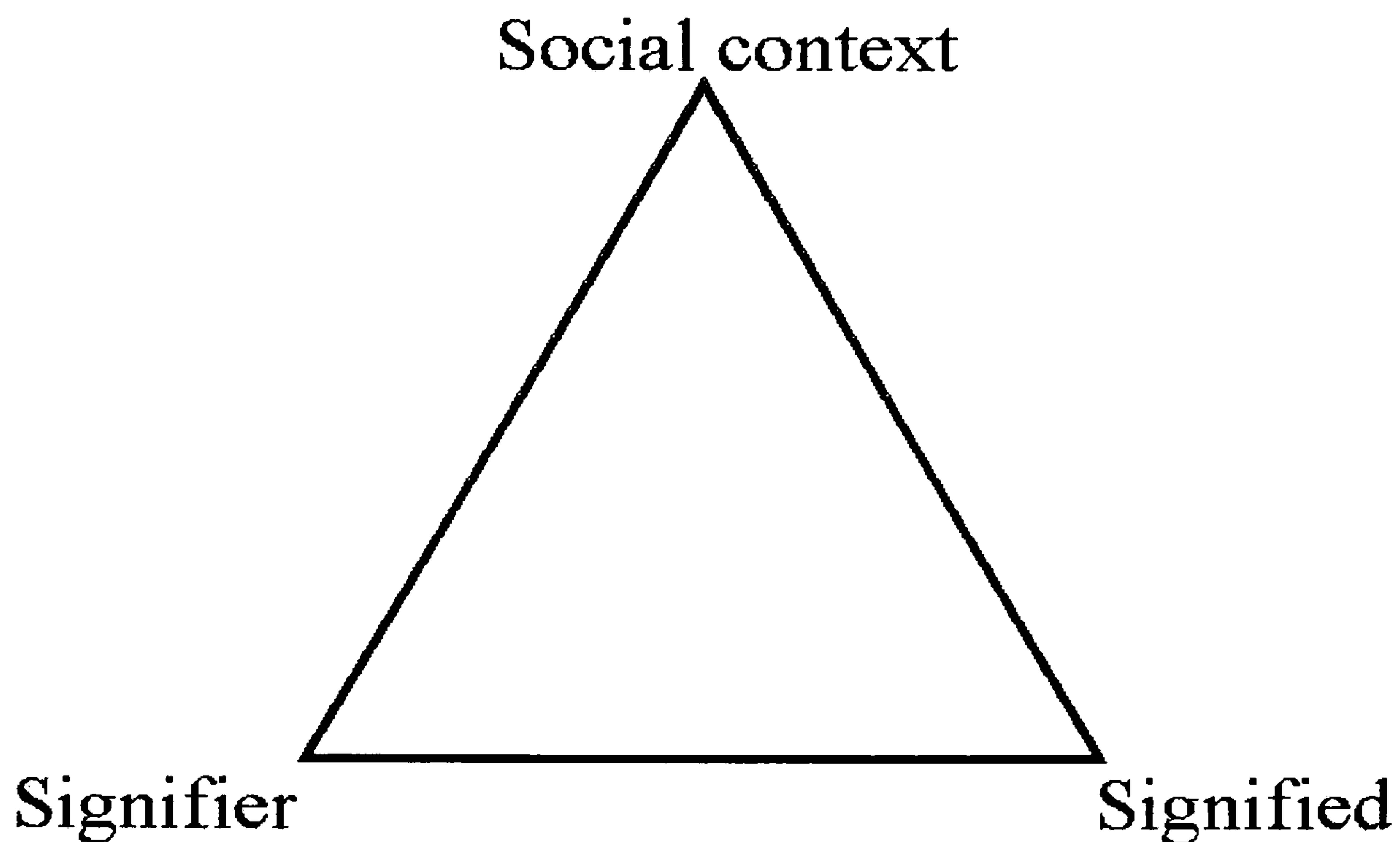
The following section presents a theoretical framework that will help in understanding the processes of cultural change. It is a framework that pays particular attention to the active role of ordinary people, a key feature of this study.

2 Cultural psychology and historical context: cultural change in a complex structure

Processes of social influence and social change have been studied by one psychological theory known as psychosociology. One of the principal notions of this theory is intersubjectivity (Jodelet, 1993; Alba, 2004; Moscovici, 1993, 2000). This refers to a space that for a long time was not considered by either sociology or psychology, namely that space mediating between society and individuals. Intersubjectivity consists of symbolic representations of reality. Symbolic representations are processes, in constant flux. This notion is based on a criticism of Structuralist theories, which stated that the relationship between reality and the language representing it was direct: signifier (the word or image) and signified (the concepts). Being a psychological theory, its interest is in the social use of symbols: group interaction, identities and the collective unconscious. Like other post-structuralist theories, psychosociology introduced a third feature to mediate this relationship: the social context or the social use of those symbols. This relationship can be represented in a triangle, as Figure 4 shows (overleaf).

The element of social context makes reference to cultural life and the necessary assumptions behind social relationships, such as the myths about the society's past and hopes for the collective future. In this way, symbolic systems are not studied in a vacuum; they are dynamic because every interaction requires elaboration by linking the three elements.

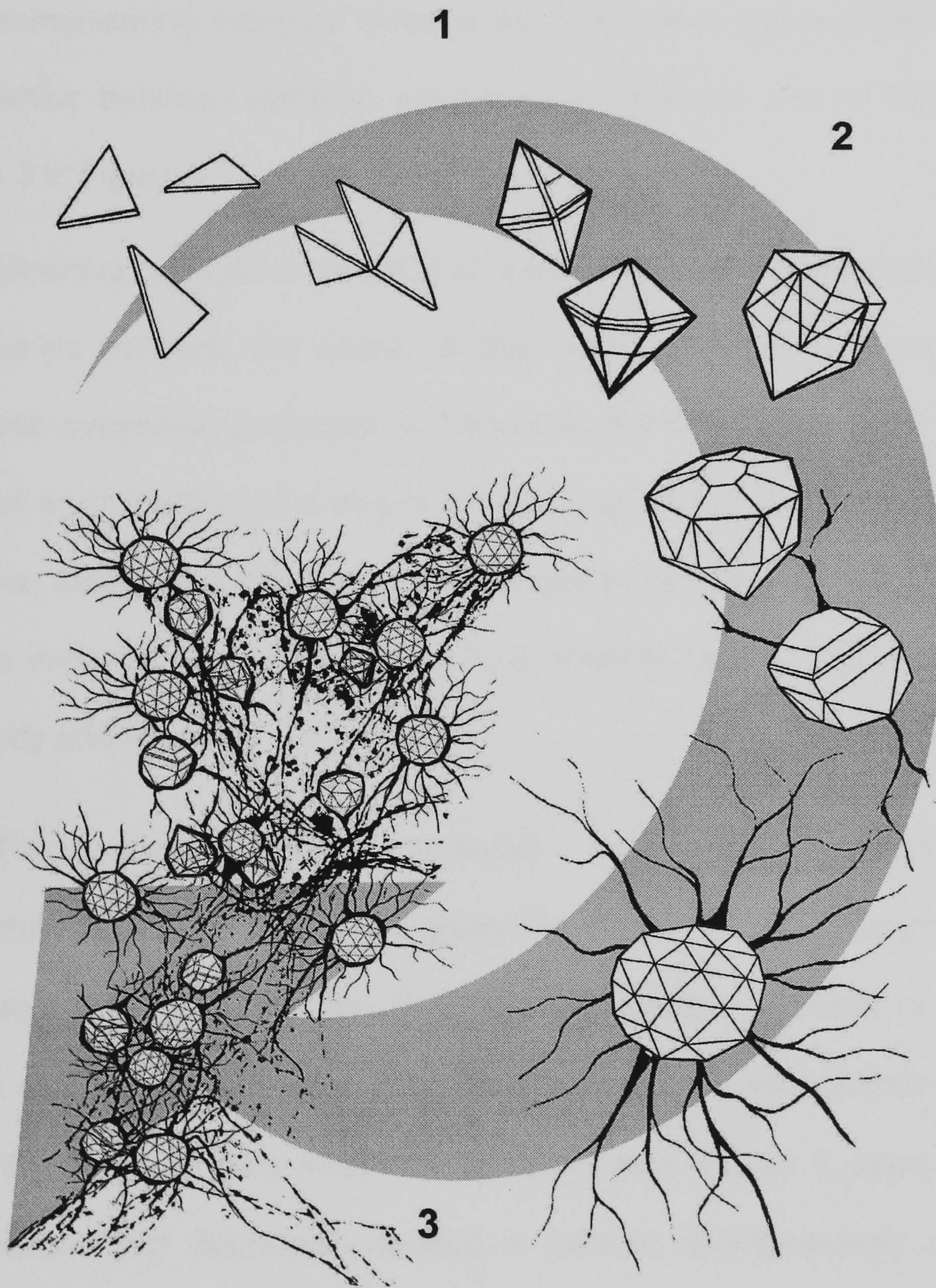
Figure 4 The triadic relationship of the communicative act



Symbols can be of two types: linguistic and non-linguistic. Reason, made out of linguistic symbols, does not participate alone in the social construction of reality. Iconic or non-linguistic symbols can be diverse in nature. They can be sensory, such as visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, etc.; or emotive, such as empathy or feelings (note the relation with the concept developed in the Italian experience of preschools in Reggio Emilia of the *100 languages of the child*, Edwards *et al*, 1993). Both types participate in the social construction of relationships, spaces, knowledge or social movements. Considering the context of the interaction implies a principle of alterity, the other who may think differently. Not every iconic symbol is susceptible to being converted into linguistic terms, thus not everything is susceptible to being known and understood; likewise we can know and understand without language. Here lies the non logo-centric vision of this theory (Delgado, 1992b, Fernández-Christlieb, 1999; Taylor, 1998).

This flexibility and dynamism leads us to discuss another characteristic of psychosociology: transience. Symbols can have different meanings and their social use offers insights into which meaning or, more usually, meanings are involved in particular communicative acts. Rather than there being a direct correspondence between symbols and meanings, symbols make reference to fields of meanings. Figure 5 is an interpretation of this dynamism.

Figure 5 An interpretation of the dynamic process of communication



The number 1 represents the triangle represented earlier in Figure 4, now isolated. The number 2 represents fields of related meanings. The symbolic relationships represented are intended to depict movement. Linguistic symbols can become non-linguistic and concepts and the words representing them can transmute. Symbols can themselves refer to old social contexts or particular people. This means that symbols, subjects and social contexts can change places in the relationship. A network of interchanging and communicating triangles gives a more dynamic representation of the relationships between symbols, subjects and contexts, this is depicted by number 3 in Figure 5.

Meaning could be understood as a transient event, a series of potential relationships between the nodes of this network. Notice the similarity to *rhizomatic structures*, proposed by Deleuze & Guattari (1984, 1988) and the notion of *crystallisation* as a way to validate qualitative research (Richardson & Adams, 2005). The structure is also related to two other concepts that will become important later in this study: the Network Society and networks of reciprocity and support.

This communicative dynamism could be contrasted to Bronfenbrenner's model (Figure 1, page 21). Rather than thinking of a linear interchange of ideas between the nested systems, influence is exerted through discourses that move in a disorganised and unpredictable manner across the systems, more even than in Myers' view (Figure 3, page 33). It is also possible that discourses develop in parallel, simultaneously and in a contradictory manner. Culture changes through the negotiation of dynamic discourses. Thinking about society in terms of communication involves

networks of meanings shifting, extending and retracting throughout social spaces.

The dynamic process of communication gives the notion of subject and context a particular vision, not only because the binary opposition between them is broken by the inclusion of symbols mediating them, but also because it requires an active role on the part of individuals. Although contextual limitations remain, subjects are not entirely predetermined by history, unconsciousness, language or social spaces. Although language and the means of communication precede individuals, these have access to the production of meanings. It is like having a computer keyboard; individuals may not be able to modify the structure of the language on their own, but have nevertheless the opportunity to write their own individual and collective lives. Intersubjectivity structures the Self but, by the same process, the Self is able to change intersubjectivity, albeit within certain limits. Civil society has then the opportunity to influence social change at every level described in the ecological approaches.

In the communicative act and the resulting 'texts' – in the broad sense of cultural production – individuals or groups are able to accept established notions, to oppose them and even to propose alternatives based on arguments and feelings. Hence the assumptions of this study, in which participants of developmental programmes are able to accept, resist or propose alternatives to the way these are conceived and implemented. As will be discussed later, this is the process by which *services* for children and communities can turn into *spaces* for them (Moss & Petrie, 2002).

Cultural constructs do not change at the same pace nor does the system change suddenly. Neither do changes take place simultaneously among all members (Parekh, 2000). The intertwined processes of change and its distinctive pace are partly responsible for the diversity of social representations within society. The dynamic structure makes it difficult to grasp all possible changes, some of them may happen spontaneously and remain open to different interpretations. In spite of this, some ways in which social change can take place have been studied. Here, we shall focus on two processes relevant to discussion: *active social minorities* and *mass movements*. To understand these, however, it is necessary to talk first about the meaning of social change in a dynamic model.

2.1 Time, space and identities: the intersubjectivity of social change

From this perspective, society is diverse and different groups interact and influence each other. Change could be thought of as a phase of the process of the social construction of reality. Society is as much preservation as change (Taylor, 1998).

Society is founded on social agreements about the world and about society itself, but also on the relationships that share those agreements. Symbolic representations can also be attached to objective components (Moscovici, 1993). This is a crucial difference from other social constructivist theories as it sees reality and representations as having different substance, but coexisting.

The process that allows symbols and reality to relate to one another is known as *anchoring* (Moscovici, 1976, 1984). Social constructs are symbolic, but can be constructed with substance. Objects and spaces are transformed by society; they have meaning but also substance. This concept also allows us to link culture with more material terrains and has led Willis (1999) and Ball (1990), for example, to study education as a commodity.

The concepts of time and space are also social constructs; these have been made to *preserve* social constructions, to anchor symbolic meanings in the reality and make some of them *irreversible*. Dates are an invention that contains memories (Fernández-Christlieb, 1991, 1999; Schwarts, 1991) and particular cycles allow memories to become present. They also form a sort of conceptual map in which meanings can be brought to the present. Theories, myths, dreams and hopes about society's past and future are socially constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed (Gil-Juarez, 1992; Mead, 1934; Gongaware, 2003). It is in the present that past and future are interpreted and dreamt about. The study of the symbolic world can become a study of utopias. But utopias are not only rational. Delgado (1992) suggests that the study of everyday life may be a good ground to study the ways in which the community enjoys, entertains and strengthens relationships: the collective emotional life. Boltvinik (2005) also locates in everyday life and leisure times the elements that permit a search for utopia (for emotions and utopia in social movements, see also Charles, 2004). Social movements demanding services for young children and their families or changes in the way these are implemented may well have had notions of the past and hopes of the future that are interconnected with broader social movements.

The notion of time is full of meaning; individuals and groups structure their experiences within a temporal framework. The same can be said about space. Monuments and historical sites are obvious examples (Eliade, 1954; Olick, 1999), but also the design of private and public spaces, sacred and profane behaviours, the use of our bodies, all have meaning and to some extent control interactions (Fernández-Christlieb, 1989). This allows us to study the spatial dimension of social exclusion (Byrne, 2005, Castells, 2004) and the construction of democracy in preschools (Pérez *et al*, 1991; Dahlberg *et al*, 1999, 2005).

The social use of space is not limited to the solid representations of symbols. For this theory, social construction is carried out in different social spaces. These are not so much defined by the systems of the Ecological Model but rather by the type of social construction that takes place within them.

Everyday life is the quintessential public space – or social arena. It is a space to which every member of a society has access and it is here that most discourses originate and to which they return. There are, however, other spaces less public to which only certain members have access and which share a defining code of linguistic and non-linguistic symbols. One such space is science. Scientific theories are made up of an excluding scientific language which has certain characteristics and vocabulary. Scientific theories can later filter through to everyday life, enriching it, but the process runs in both directions (Moscovici, 1986; Greenwood & Levin 2005; House, 2005; Rist, 2000). Chapter Three deals with the implications of these ideas on

methodological issues. Theoretically, in a society based on communication, conversations move along physical and virtual spaces, but all start in everyday life and must return to it to maintain a collective life. The *privatisation* of symbolic space inevitably means the *exclusion* from participation (Bettencurt, 1996). If the exclusion ends enriching society's cultural everyday life, temporal exclusion causes minimal or no conflict; if exclusion from communication prevents contact with everyday life and attempts to impose meaning, then conflict may emerge.

Time and space acquire more sense within the concept of identity (Nash, 2002). Groups produce and preserve meanings that form their identities. Like the broad process of social construction, identities are a series of ideas, emotions and discourses that structure beliefs and practices (Parekh, 2000). With the idea of anchoring, we could say that the group is its identity, united by symbols, but also by flesh and bones. Identities are anchored in living people, but a collectivity is also made up of symbols that can no longer be anchored or were never able to be. The memory of those who have died, the hope for future generations, the myths that have been invented: all these images and discourses participate in the construction of identities (Melucci, 1995, 1996; Snow & McAdan, 2000). Identities change over time because of interactions but also because people, symbols themselves, die. Ethnic cleansing, for example, is as much symbolic as biological violence.

Within groups, there is also diversity; individual experiences and contact with other groups, or participation in other social spaces may change

people and their discourses. But there is a sense of a shared past and an expected future – even if it is just an image of continuity. Members of groups may also differ with respect to their tolerance of others. Ideas about the ‘purity’ of notions such as ‘them’ and ‘us’ vary. Groups contain a collective memory, or maybe, as Fernández-Christlieb (1990) puts it, collective memory creates groups. But there is no theoretical reason to rule out the possibility that the ‘other’ may become ‘us’, that people participating in a social movement may develop new identities.

2.2 Influencing social change: active social minorities

Within society, there are groups that not only create and conserve discourses but also push for social change in more direct ways than everyday communication could. Mainstream psychology tended to use a biomedical model to characterise those that did not fit the model and had been qualified as *anomic*. In accordance with Foucault’s ideas about institutionalisation and control through scientificist narratives (1979, 1989, 1994), Moscovici & Doise (1994) and Mugny & Pérez (1987) studied minorities from a perspective in which their opposition to established norms turned them into innovating agents, not as an exception but as a necessary part of social life.

Active minorities, from this point of view, are characterised by their lack of formal power; they get involved in asymmetrical relationships with authority creating a *conflict* (Hinkle *et al*, 1996; Pilisuk *et al*, 1996). The *conflict* is characterised by a dialogue – or struggles to initiate one – in which the minority exposes its reasons for disagreement. If the minority is able to deal

with the pressure and is consistent – and skilful in negotiating – it is possible that it can achieve influence over the majority.

Simply by emerging, active minorities change the balance of power and undermine the status of established norms. Their presence forces an acknowledgment of their *right to dissent*, or as Satterfield (1996) puts it, their right for recognition. Authority and establishment can be questioned and influenced. In terms of the idea of social spaces, social minorities emerge because *they have been excluded* from a social space in which a conversation that affects them is taking place without them – regarding values, beliefs, practices or material resources – (Friedman, 1996). They emerge into a social space that has been *privatised* and bring dialogue back to everyday life: the private is made public again. Because of the process of anchoring, this exclusion can become more than symbolic.

There are two important things about the way minorities organise themselves. If minorities decide to work jointly in a sustained process – that is, more than just a single event – they may become a social movement. They may reach a way to organise themselves that does not reproduce those characteristics of the wider society that they want to change. Creating a collective leadership is one way to maintain a broad perspective on their condition and potential influence (Adams, 2003; Pratkanis & Turner, 1996). If the group tends to be homogeneous, it is likely that some norms in its organisation become taken for granted. If the group is diverse and has the desire to stay together as a group, new norms, which include all this diversity, can be created. Intragroup differences are accepted as part of the group, not

because they have been imposed but rather because the norms have been broadened (Moscovici, 1976).

This is the clue to innovation: diversity and a commitment to stay together promote the discussion of a new set of norms for the group. These new norms help to establish innovative ways to relate and communicate. Group members may even establish their identity on the particularities of such innovation (Mugny & Pérez 1987).

The potential influence that minorities can exert over the majority can be of two forms, each closely related to linguistic or non-linguistic representations. The former relates to argumentation. If a minority group is consistent and coherent, it may influence the majority on the particular issue that prompted it to emerge. In other words, if the members of such a group can demonstrate that they have been unfairly excluded, the minority can win the argument. This is a rational influence.

The second type of influence is unconscious and uses non-linguistic symbols. This is also known as “covert influence” (Adams, 2003; Borshuk, 2004; Mann, 2002). This influence is neither immediate nor made public at first: influence can emerge in unsuspected places and long after the event has taken place. It has to do with styles, with forms more recognisable to everyday life, showing how the particular language of the establishment has lost its sensible relevance to everyday life. Politicians, for example, frequently seem rehearsed when compared with the spontaneity and emotivity of a committed minority. Some of the social movements we referred to in Section One did in fact exert influence on the creation of services for young children, families and

communities. However, we do not know what their covert influence might have been.

When minorities emerge, the majority will try to dismiss them in two ways: psychologisation and *dénégation* (denial).

Psychologisation (Papastamou, 1991; Satterfield, 1996) is the process already mentioned in which the mainstream considers opposition as *anomic*, attributing insanity, or lack of reason, to minorities who refuse to adopt the norm. In this way, majorities attempt to hide the relational – social, historical or economical – nature of the claim and replace it with a discussion of the *anomic* reasons behind the refusal to accept authority. With this action, authority closes off any possibility of dialogue. Scientificism becomes the main argument for maintaining the establishment and privatising social construction.

Dénégation, the second strategy used by majorities to deal with minorities (Moscovici, 1976, 1994), involves dealing with the minority's linguistic message. Here, authorities try to make the message, not the person, appear unreasonable or utopic. When forced into dialogue, majorities cannot finish the conflict; the process of influence has already started. In some cases, minorities do not talk to the authority; they use the dialogue to talk instead to the audience, to encourage them to share the new norms (Woliver, 1996). Although legislation and formal norms are important, cultural change, like most discourses, takes place firstly in everyday life, with people accepting or living by them.

A second strategy for social change is the mass movement. Mass movements are events in which part of a society breaks the flow of everyday life. They are impressive and difficult to linguistically comprehend because their main characteristic is that they are non-linguistic events. (Le Bon, 2004; Pratkanis & Turner, 1996; Freud, 1984; Moscovici, 1985)

Being mainly non-linguistic, masses are subversive and feared by the establishment (Graumann & Krause, 1984, Dudet, 1989; Goodwin *et al*, 2000). Their emergence seems to originate in the intersection of non-linguistic social representations, such as those described in our dynamic diagram of communication (Figure 5). Notions of the past and hopes for the future are among the meanings that give them sense (Fernández-Christlieb, 1989; Delgado, 1992).

Masses not only create new meanings but also propagate them and encourage the formation of new groups; they create and change identities. Masses have lain behind revolutions, political parties, non-governmental organisations, cultural movements, and smaller groups, yet with the same symbolic nature such as friendships and love affairs (Fernández-Christlieb, 1999, Alberoni, 1983).

This section has attempted to foster an understanding of social change as part of a cultural process, which also includes a complementary action, conservatism. Through the process of communication, the Self constructs itself within the limits of the structure, but this theory also sees the Self as able to change the structure, though within limits. In many cases, the emergence of

social movements has influenced the design and implementation of services for young children; we can only speculate that their influence was more extensive, not only on other members of the broader society, but also in time through their covert influence. We also do not know what representations of past and future were implied, although we hypothesise that in some cases these representations were related to those expressed by feminist movements. In other cases they might have related to poverty and exclusion.

We shall continue to talk about social movements and services for young children and their families, together with some other means of participation. But before that, the possible directions of these changes and the ways in which many have attempted to make those changes possible will be discussed. The following section discusses Critical Education and the way it has attempted social change through educational processes.

3. Critical Education, directions for social change and types of participation

The *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1972) has been particularly influential. It was strongly influenced by the social theory of the *Frankfurt School*, which was developed from a criticism of the orthodoxies of Historical Materialism, Psychoanalysis and Structuralist theories and is the basis of a theory and practice known as Critical Education (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Section One identified how Critical Theory inspired some social movements during the *Cultural Revolution* phase (Haddad, 2002). This theory aims to influence social change and establishes a relationship between theory and social movements (Martin, 2004; Mulderrig, 2005; Pinkney *et al*, 2004).

Critical Education has produced a considerable amount of practice at responding to socially excluded communities – or oppressed communities as in the original term – and provides a useful framework for understanding civil society's involvement in the current conditions of globalisation. This section discusses the origins of the theory and presents two recent developments: the post-modern view on services for young children and families, and the Network Society theory, which analyses current global social structures.

3.1 Origins and developments: the struggle for inclusive societies

Freire (1970, 1972, 1973, 1987) developed his theory and praxis in his native Brazil with illiterate adult workers. They had been excluded from basic infrastructural services and education. Freire's work led him to develop an alternative to the lack of mainstream services. Education in this context had to be meaningful and help to meet participants' everyday needs. Through this process, strongly based on participative practice, the construction of knowledge through communication would lead organised workers to understand, question and propose alternatives to their oppressive circumstances. Understanding social structures, how exclusion takes place, and the possibilities for change were at the heart of the educational aims for those living in exclusion. More recently, McLaren (1999) and Flecha (1999) have argued for the need to understand global processes and the development of pedagogies of dissent and possibility.

Freire believed that a better world was possible, but like the Frankfurt School, he was critical of orthodox Marxist ideas of a predetermined future and totalitarian parties dictating the way that transformation would take place.

His theory and praxis were coherent with his beliefs about grassroots intervention, the construction of knowledge based on local conditions, and the possibility of non-violent structural changes:

“... Because it is a distortion of being more fully human, sooner or later being less human leads to the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so. In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both ...”
(Freire 1972: 20).

After years of exile during the Brazilian dictatorship, Freire returned to his country and became Minister of Education. His theory extended to include some ways in which government initiatives could consider the hopes of those living in exclusion, opening spaces for their involvement in establishing more meaningful educational services (Freire, 1999). Although independent participation remained important, he was convinced that the state should be the major provider of meaningful education; opposition could become the mainstream.

This theory developed crucial ways to understand and implement services. Firstly, it analysed how the lack of educational services and the establishment of these in *oppressed* communities responded to the need of the ruling elite to adapt the *oppressed* to the established norms (Willis, 1999). From this point of view, authoritarian states tend to prescribe what they consider necessary to access a low-waged labour market. Secondly, in the Critical Education process participants would develop or strengthen the caring relationships and solidarity in their immediate context. Later, they would engage in political action through a process that we could now call citizenship

(Maitles, 2000; Maitles & Gilchrist 2005; Talbot, 2000). Giroux (1999, 2003) has widened the study on structuring knowledge and identities in contexts beyond schools, and has criticised the narrow view of education solely as a school activity. The relationship between the resulting knowledge and power is mediated by participants' emotions and their faith in a better world: hope. Critical education is also a pedagogy of hope (Byrne, 2005; Holst, 2002; Hooks, 2003).

The following section deals with how, in the field of services for young children, parents and communities, this process concentrates on the relationship between childcare, welfare cuts and parents' participation in low-waged and unstable jobs.

3.2 The post-modern vision of early years services

Post-modern thinking and Critical Theory are closely related, as both are a response to the orthodoxies of Marxism, psychoanalysis and structuralism (McLaren, 1999; Giroux, 1999). Chapter Three discusses more broadly the similarities and differences between them, but for the time being, let us say that post-modern theories focus on the symbolic nature of society and power. This emphasis has led to some extreme visions to assume that the reality does not exist except in its symbolic representation. Critical Theory's departing point, on the other hand, is material inequality and links cultural and symbolic developments to material conditions. The theory presented in this section focuses on the symbolic use of scientific discourses to exert control over activities in services for young children and families. However, it does so with the finality of enriching the understanding of a process of control and

encourages the development of alternatives that could, potentially, lead to more democratic and participative societies. It therefore shares the main objectives of Critical Education while using the analytic methods of the post-modern view.

The post-modern vision on early years services in Europe (Dalhberg *et al*, 1999, 2005, Moss, 2004) has analysed how developmental psychology and notions of quality are being used to standardise services for young children globally and provide *one-size-fits-all* solutions to services.

Maintaining that the world is socially constructed, Dalhberg, Moss & Pence (1999) deconstructed the *grand narrative* behind the emergence and implementation of preschools. Following Foucault's ideas, they analysed the current trend to *institutionalise* childhood. Without ruling out the economic conditions that favour women's entry into the labour market, and consequently the need for caring for and/or educating young children, the authors emphasised the control exerted over the construction of social behaviour and minds through a scientific narrative. They summarised their vision in this way:

"... Just as the concept of 'development' in relation to Majority World countries is being questioned for its attempt to prescribe a universal model for progress, so too is the concept of development in relation to children ... The tension again is between the concept of development as a universal phenomenon, a predetermined linear sequence that all must follow to achieve full realization, or as a construction specific to and contingent on particular times, places and cultures – between a modernist search for foundations and universals and a postmodern recognition of diversity and contextualization. Issues of universality in child development 'and' in global development come together in international activities to promote 'early childhood care and development' ... While modernist perspectives, foregrounding the general applicability of 'best practices' largely taken from Minority World experiences

and claims to universal knowledge legitimated as the product of scientific enquiry, have dominated much of the discussion, there is a growing swell of support recognizing and valuing diversity, which might be seen as reflecting a more postmodern perspective ...” (Dalhberg et al, 1999: 161, emphasis in the original)

Previous discussion on social movements has conceptualised the present as the *Globalisation phase*, but the post-modern view explores further how the legitimating science-based discourse has emerged within developmental psychology and how the discourse is ruled by the notion of *quality*. This notion implies the idea of quality achieved through a process that admits no questioning. Preschools are required to follow the prescription of those who disseminate *the* valid knowledge. Power and knowledge intertwine in a scientificism that can guide participants towards the achievement of quality services and, in so doing, control them. In this way, detailed specifications about curriculum, practices, spatial arrangement, staff/pupil ratios and extensive inventories of appropriate and inappropriate behaviours are prescribed by Minority Countries to preschools around the world. A system of evaluation is developed in parallel, a *normalisation* that allows experts to detect *failures* within individuals and their practices and creates the need for experts, capable of developing remedial measures for institutions deemed to be failing. *Quality* becomes a product – a commodity. The scientific narrative exerts control without the need of coercion. Other common features of this dominant vision are ‘early intervention’, ‘investment in the future’, ‘outcomes’, ‘cost benefit’ and ‘best practice’. Past social movements and their hopes are ‘erased’ from the official history, and parents and communities are included in the model as part of the prescription, rather than part of the solution.

Deconstructing the notion of the child expected from this perspective, Moss & Petrie (2002) conclude:

“... we saw three ideas lying at the heart of this dominant discourse: that children are the ‘private’ responsibility of parents; that children are ‘passive’ dependants; and that parents are ‘consumers’ of marketised services for children. These ideas ‘construct children as poor and weak’ ...(:5)

Once deconstructed and inspired by Foucault’s previous works, the authors are ready to identify the silenced and marginalised alternatives to the mainstream. Deconstruction would lead people to revalue their own importance and acknowledge their right to become an alternative, their own right to dissent and to recognition. Post-modernism values diversity, something denied by the current emphasis on standardisation. The mainstream vision can find a place within the diversity. However, the place of an expert is not one of domination through prescription, but one among many visions.

Dahlberg *et al* (1999, 2005) present a series of international schemes that differ from the mainstream and emphasise the way notions of an active child, capable of constructing knowledge and of taking ethical decisions, are indeed taking place. These schemes, however, must actively resist the pressure of normalisation. However, the authors regret not including Majority World experiences. This Chapter presents two examples from Mexico, one of them an alternative scheme.

From being services for children created from economic needs, these international examples might have become something more: spaces in which children, families and practitioners can create new ways of life, alternatives to

the everyday life in which participants' lives could be 'less governed', less structured by grand narratives. Preschools have the potential to become public spaces in which participants, including children, discuss and construct new ways to live their lives and could eventually lead to new ways in which institutions could relate to local governments and community members (Moss & Petrie, 2002; Moss, 2003). The development of these ideas takes the authors a step further towards possibilities for the future: a utopia for constructing these spaces that might also inspire others to challenge and change the current mainstream (Moss & Dahlberg, 2005).

Giroux (2001) also deals with utopia in the context of the privatisation of public life. He sees the utopian praxis of thinking and acting as a means of bringing back to public life the hope for the future that has been privatised by global capitalism (see also Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005 for this point). In this context, public schooling, welfare and democracy have been undermined (Rosemberg, 2003, Haddad, 2002). In the view of Giroux, utopia needs to be based on participation and popular decision-making, and would be necessarily embedded in notions of political agency, pedagogy and social change. As Freire before him, he sees pockets of resistance outside mainstream schools. The aim is to make the state the principal provider of meaningful education, in order not only to gain a place in the labour market but also to transform the excluding social reality and allow the construction of a new meaning for democracy. The aim of Critical Pedagogy is to reach a *militant optimism* and an *educated hope*. Culture and everyday life are the arena in which this construction can take place, suggesting that grassroots social movements can be some of the social actors involved in such efforts.

Levitas (1990, 2004) relates the possibilities of utopia to those of change and criticism; therefore, critical education has an important role in developing that criticism. She goes beyond *hope* as the emotional force behind transformation; she argues that it is *desire* that triggers action to reach a *perceived possibility*. Rather than Giroux's educated hope, she argues for an *education of desire*, although equally linked to the *issue of agency*.

3.3 The Network Society and Critical Education: exclusion and agency in a global structure

One of the more recent developments emerging from the critical tradition is that of the *Network Society* (Castells, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004). It is a broad and comprehensive work analysing current, global, social structures, and the transformations in the relationships of production, power and experience lived by individuals throughout the world. It is impossible here to summarise all the insights that it provides. But some key aspects particularly underpin this study.

Past sections have already suggested that an understanding of the current global social structure is important to consider when studying international trends in policy development in services for young children, families and communities. Such a structure was important also to the study of the social movements that demanded their creation and certain ways of implementing them and even the way in which the production of theories on Minority Countries influence services in Majority Countries. For Critical Theory and Critical Education, an understanding of the social structure is paramount as they attempt to influence individuals, institutions and governments within the structure in order to change the conditions of exclusion resulting from

social order. These elements are important when considering the objectives, strategies and extent of potential outcomes.

The Network Society theory engages with the complex ways in which relationships, in the means of production, have experienced a revolution through the creation and use of information technology which, it claims, has reinvented capitalism. If mass production marked 19th century capitalism, the production of knowledge and technology mark present-day capitalism. With the use of the new technologies, global industry is capable of moving throughout the world in search of conditions that offer the best profit-making opportunities. This results in nations losing control of establishing economic and social policies and new social inequalities, no longer based on the means of production but rather on the possession of proprietary rights, a place in the managerial class, and global financial markets, which work through networks using the new technologies.

Social mobility is possible only through higher education in exclusive educational systems. For the rest, a series of vocational courses tailored to the needs of the market are the only option for low-paid and unstable jobs. These conditions are accompanied by a reduction of welfare benefits (where they exist), public investment in development, and the disempowerment of traditional forms of opposition, such as unions or political parties. In this context, millions of people and entire continents become irrelevant as producers and consumers, and with a simple decision, they can be excluded from the Network Society. Many of the achievements which have been made for Human Rights are being eroded. The Network Society has silently taken

over old forms of power, with different and moving centres and not easily accountable: it is a global empire in which ordinary people have no means of participation or representation.

So far, we have talked about social exclusion in terms of communication, although we have also suggested that this has repercussions on material conditions through the process of anchoring. Let us see a more comprehensive definition, within the context of the Network Society Theory, of where social exclusion is:

“... the process by which certain individuals and groups are systematically barred from access to positions that would enable them to an autonomous livelihood within the social standards framed by institutions and values in a given context ...” (Castells, 2001: 71)

Castells explains that this autonomy is limited to contextual conditions. He also makes the distinction between this and other related terms such as *inequality*, which refers to the difference of wealth between individuals and social groups; *polarisation*, which is the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest; *poverty*, which is an institutionally-fixed norm under which it is not possible to reach certain living standards; and *misery* – a term he proposes – which is extreme deprivation. Social exclusion is now a relationship in which the excluders use technology to exclude. Hereafter we shall refer to this definition of social exclusion.

In terms of Figure 5 (page 40) the process of communication, which takes place in a dynamic and unpredictable way, has also shifted with the use of information technology. The network represented in that figure expands throughout the world and the notions of time and space shift from symbolic to

virtual. The difference between those with access to the new technology and those who do not have access to it is creating a world more polarised than ever before. But in a context where new ways of domination are being created, new ways of opposition also emerge. Social movements are also using the new technologies and there are signs that old movements and new ones are shifting, creating networks of resistance and hope.

Views on social change and participation

Based on notions of Critical Theory and Critical Education, Byrne (2005) discusses three views of social change within traditions of social policy: classical liberal and neo-liberal; social democrat; and communitarian traditions. Some reference to these points of view was made while reviewing the different types of social movements involved in the creation of services for young children, but it is worth contextualising the meaning of social movements within particular ideologies, as the actions of civil society groups relate to them.

The classical liberal, neo-liberal and related visions. These points of view tend to see capitalism as an unavoidable reality. Therefore, efforts to promote social change seek adaptation to market forces. Social exclusion is not seen as a process but rather as an issue of state resulting from individuals' failure to take the 'right' decisions. The role of the state is basically to remedy individuals' failure by providing training to help them adapt to employers' needs. Many consider that this is the point of view adopted in England by the New Labour government since 1997, an issue discussed in Chapter Two. In the Minority countries, this perspective sees

services for young children and their families as a means of encouraging people living on welfare support to join (or rejoin) the labour market, favouring a market-like provision. This is the vision that Haddad (2002) identified as mainstream in the current globalisation phase, more concerned with responsibilities to meet the market forces than with defending rights, particularly those of women and children.

The social democrat and related visions. This vision, in a critical manner, supports capitalism and the free-market forces. It acknowledges that these produce unequal societies and proposes a strong role for the state in regulating and redistributing wealth among the population through high taxes and the provision of services accessible to all. Services for young children are seen as a right of women and children themselves. In the Nordic Countries, this has led to services for children from very early ages complemented by generous leave for working parents and the professionalisation of staff. This vision attempts to maintain social exclusion at its minimum, although there are some indications that the Network Society is extending its model of market welfare in services for young children in these countries (Myers, 2000).

Communitarian and related traditions. These traditions maintain that capitalism should evolve differently, preventing the need for social exclusion. In the 'Real Existing Socialism'³, provision for young children was aimed towards universal access to services and, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, tended to take the shape of market-like services, losing the criteria of universal access and holistic visions (Haddad, 2002). There is little

literature on current schemes, although these tend to be provided by non-governmental and international organisations. These continue to demand universal access based on a human rights discourse, although not necessarily supporting a return to socialist states.

We present now one of these cases that emerged in the *Cultural Revolution* phase and which during the *Globalisation* phase has developed links to other social movements with broader aims. In recent years, this tradition has led to the emergence of experimental experiences and social movements resisting the force of globalisation under a free-market vision, in a view that Castells (2004) summarises as *no globalisation without representation*.

4. From the micro-system to the macro-system: ordinary people influencing global structure

This section discusses the way in which Critical Education has been able to develop socially excluded minorities into spokespeople influencing parts of the social structure in an attempt to change their conditions and take control of their lives. The section presents an example from the Majority Countries and then discusses it at the same time as introducing related literature.

4.1 Community participation in a grassroots experience in a Mexico City shantytown (*Nezahualpilli*)

Nezahualpilli is an independent, community-based preschool scheme that started late in 1981 at *Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl*⁴. In spite of the royal connection in its name, this was one of the many shantytowns resulting from the intense rural migration to Mexico City caused by the effects of

industrialisation of the country and subsequent impoverishment of rural areas⁵. It was established in a land without any infrastructure and the place accommodated people coming from various regions of the country, including various ethnic minorities.

Soon after the establishment of the shantytown in 1945, inhabitants rallied to initiate a social movement aiming to provide the town with basic services and to obtain legal ownership of the land. Between 1949 and 1959, the population grew from 2,000 to over 80,000 inhabitants, a size big enough to claim the right to become a town with its own government, which was achieved in the early 1960s, condition that gave inhabitants more opportunities to negotiate their demands locally. By the year 2000, the official population was over 1.2 million. From the early days, the social movement was divided into different organisations, some of them opposed to each other and related to different political parties; others remained independent and critical of the establishment. The area has been stigmatised and it is still associated with crime and poverty.

In 1981, a team of educational researchers established links with some of the local mothers from *Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl*, all of them wishing to give their children and other children from the community a satisfactory preschool service. Together they established a preschool⁶. At this time, preschool education was not compulsory in Mexico and few government-run sites provided services. Some mothers were unhappy with these services and believed they were discriminatory. Relationships with teachers and educational authorities had not been easy. Children were accused of being

'lazy' and teachers blamed parents' poor backgrounds for the *limitations* seen in their children (this situation is reported also by Lott, 2001). Activities at the site were generated from situations different from the children's everyday lives, and parents were expected to support their children at home. Many parents had long working hours in a growing informal economy.

Nezahualpilli set in motion a process inspired by Freire's ideas. A team of researchers came from the *Centro de Estudios Educativos* [Centre for Educational Studies, CEE], a NGO supported by the Jesuit Catholic Church, with a commitment to working with excluded groups. The project was sponsored by national and international funds along with the own community. Activities consisted in developing parents as educators and over time it constructed a curriculum based on children's everyday lives. One of the main principles of the scheme was that the work with children could only have meaning alongside work with parents and the community. Some local families could not provide their children with breakfast or buy school materials. At the beginning, some of the children were left alone at home or on the street while families worked long hours away from home. For these reasons, health and care services were not seen in a fragmented way. The aim of the scheme was to enable the community to transform its context of *marginality*⁷.

The programme started by working with volunteers. They had agreed to participate in an educational process in which they would become responsible for running the preschool. Over time, the scheme consolidated and staff could be paid. The process was based on the resources of the group itself. Most mothers had little education, but the group started with people who

were literate. The first step was twofold: firstly, initiating a group process in which participants began to develop trust relationships and an action-research project (Chambers, 2003; Aguirre, Zorzil *et al*, 2001; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). The aims of the research were to identify the conditions of preschool-aged children and the resources that the community had in order to start a preschool project. The external researchers started to lead the process, but according to the principles of the methodology, all the participants were learning in the process and the researchers were keen to avoid creating a hierarchical relationship with community members.

The development of social relationships was as important as the construction of knowledge, as the team's commitment and resources determined which implementations would be possible. In the initial sessions, participants talked about their community, their children and the type of aims they would like to achieve. The methodology was more or less the same as that which the project would develop for children. Once a theme emerged, participants engaged in activities that could provide them with information and means for action. They visited some other schemes run by other independent groups, also based on Freire's ideas. In these, they had the opportunity to observe sessions and talk with people engaged in the process. Back at their own base, mothers talked about what they had seen and took more decisions about what they needed to know and the activities they could begin. During this phase, the external researchers offered guidance as well as books and papers on related subjects. The process started with what participants knew. They explored what they considered necessary and at a workshop they drew conclusions and made new plans. They also had the opportunity to practise

what they were learning. Later, these observations would be more focused on enriching each other's practice. After around 100 hours, the group decided who would participate as an *Educadora Comunitaria* (community pedagogue) or who would support other committees.

Preschool began with a group of *Educadoras Comunitarias*, but also with groups supporting management and food, as the group had decided that offering meals to children was essential. During the first months of operation, the *Educadoras* worked closely in committees with the external researchers to raise themes, agree issues that needed to be discussed and draw conclusions. Over time, these committees focused on meetings analysing each other's practice, recording observations and drawing conclusions, constructing a shared knowledge. At the same time, the members of the board met to discuss the type of education that they wanted for their children.

As a result of this process, the Board on which the *Educadoras* sat drew up a curriculum, which included pedagogical strategies and demanded frequent interaction between children and their families in the form of 'homework' (usually children asking other family members questions about their families and community). It also required interaction between the children and community members, either as part of the activities children decided at their own committees or through the regular presence of parents and community members in the school.

The most important principle for the Nezahualpilli programme was *democracy*. In discussions, participants concluded that their marginalisation resulted from a lack of democracy and their exclusion from the construction of

the nation. Their aim was to create a space in which democracy could flourish and where the community could establish constructive dialogue with those who kept them marginalised. This was to be reflected in the aims for children, adults and the community.

The emerging curriculum was structured around eight interacting principles. This would be developed in the daily practice and the curriculum would guide adults' interactions in child-centred activities. These aims were:

- **Autonomy:** defined as a series of skills to establish and guide children's relationships with their surroundings. The aim ultimately attempts to develop children able to 'govern themselves'. This aim was directed at encouraging children to develop their own points of view, but also to be able to modify them through communication with others, in the committees for example.
- **Problem solving:** preschool would stimulate children's activities by offering a range of materials and times in which they could experiment with their own ideas and, together with other children, solve problems.
- **Creativity:** this aim was related to offering children opportunities to construct their own knowledge, not only linguistically but in a 'hands-on' manner with a range of local materials and social situations. Classrooms were organised into corners: home, construction, reading and writing, sorting and counting, experiments, library, arts, water and sand.

- Independence: defined as the ability to take decisions and put them into practice. Independence, however, is delimited by norms, particularly those of social relationships. Parents had worked on the definition of these aims and they had discussed their meaning and importance. In this way, staff and parents had common agreements on children's processes and limits.
- Responsibility: this has to do with social relations and the commitment to the group process. It was important that children understood that the group depended on everybody's initiatives and participation. Responsibility was understood as a responsibility towards others.
- Self-esteem: the experience strived to support children's development in an environment in which they were respected, valued, loved and supported, confident of their ability to initiate activities and relate to others.
- Criticism: this was seen as the ability to defend one's point of view, but also to listen to others and change that point of view if necessary (self-criticism).
- Solidarity: unlike mainstream services that promoted individual fulfilment as the ultimate aim, participants decided to support the value that had made Nezahualpilli possible. The aim was to raise their children with a clear notion that the community working together and with all its members supporting each other could overcome the marginalisation they experienced.

The aims for parents were similar and these were summarised in a key concept: *autogestión*. A translation of this concept is difficult. According to the *Collins Spanish Dictionary* (2003), it means 'self-management'. However, in the field of *Educación Popular* (people's education), *autogestión* refers to the process in which a socially excluded group develops knowledge and skills to construct and implement its own educational work. It is usually associated with the broader aim of changing conditions of exclusion. Ultimately, it is the process in which participants are able "to govern themselves" (Pérez *et al*, 1991: 41). Nezahualpilli shares some points in common with other grassroots preschool experiences, for example that of *Reggio Emilia* in Italy (Edwards *et al*, 1993, Dahlberg *et al*, 1999). However, what distinguishes this scheme is the context of exclusion in which it began:

"... as marginalised people are not the group in power, they must adopt a critic position to the ideas people in power want them to introject while dismissing their own culture. This is the reason marginated people should work collectively against such impositions and work in their own interest, also contrary to those of powerful groups ... " (Pérez *et al*, 1991: 55, my translation)

Nezahualpilli's autonomy and shift of aims

After five years, the external researchers left the project, although they continued to support the community and its practice. By that time, the *Educadoras* had developed skills and confidence. The project seemed stable although not free from difficulties. The scheme continued to be supported by international and local sponsors and the project had started to expand. It had developed a scheme on a rural site (although this closed after the second year) and it had developed services for children living on the street as well as play-based activities for younger children. It had also developed a licensed

primary school, which, in fulfilling official requirements, preserved Nezahualpilli's values. This last action showed that maintaining a positive relationship with mainstream inspections was possible.

At the same time, various other community-based schemes had asked for support to establish projects. Some of the *Educadoras* became external researchers themselves supporting those groups and acquiring considerable experience working with adults and children. Participants achieved better conditions, including their own economic situation, but still shared solidarity; some of them achieved university degrees. Nezahualpilli still offers *communitarian preschool* services after almost 25 years.

The Inter-American States Organisation reports that various other community-based initiatives supported by Nezahualpilli framed cooperatives and still work in Mexico and other Latin American countries (OEI, undated). Just as in the Italian experience (Clément *et al*, 2000), the concept of a cooperative is based on the development of networks of support (Adler-Lomnitz, 1977), related to working needs but also to solidarity and broader aims.

Over time, aims beyond those directly related to the preschool expanded. In 1992, as part of a research project aiming to reunite the experience of various community-based services for young children and their families (Linares, 1992), Nezahualpilli's *Educadoras* worked with other NGOs, learnt their aims, their methodologies and experiences. The research was valued by participants and they decided to continue enriching each other's views once the study had finished. Together, they created a network of NGOs

working with children and young people. This network was named the *Mexican Collective Supporting Children* (COMEXANI). Among many activities, it has published five books on the state of infancy in Mexico. These aimed to provide an alternative vision to the official reports submitted by the government to the UN as part of its responsibilities under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989). The fourth book even carried a foreword by Eduardo Galeano, a well-known Latin American intellectual, who had quoted some of the previous COMEXANI reports⁸. Together with members of other NGOs, some of the *Educadoras* participated in UN meetings, becoming Mexico's unofficial spokespeople in international fora. This status gave them more influence nationally. These experiences also gave them an opportunity to meet other Latin American NGOs, with which they began to undertake some activities in the region (see for example Fundación Renacer, undated, in Colombia).

As part of COMEXANI's activities, many *Educadoras* received a university diploma at the end of the *Evaluation of Social Development Programmes* course. This course was run by the prestigious *Universidad Iberoamericana*, part of the Jesuit Catholic Church's educational system. On this course, participants had the opportunity to talk with some of the best-known Latin-American researchers on *Educación Popular*, and designed or improved the evaluation of their own projects (Martinic, 1997). This was particularly useful as much of the international funding was being cut as a result of Mexico's inclusion in the OECD, as an acknowledgment of the improvement of the country's macro-economy, the effects of which had

arguably never been reflected in the well-being of the country's most vulnerable population.

But this event took its toll on many NGOs, including COMEXANI, which was supported by these international funds. For a while, member organisations funded COMEXANI's activities but finally it was disintegrated. One of the founders of COMEXANI told the researcher that the group decided not to continue for the additional reason that members considered its task fulfilled. Many of the members were too busy to engage in COMEXANI, as many of them, mainly women, were by then leading other NGOs or networks of NGOs. In our informant's opinion, members' interests had matured, and they were attempting to influence broader social change. Many were involved in influencing social policies and working hard to achieve a change of regime. The ruling party had enjoyed 70 years of presidency, in spite of sustained opposition and accusations of corruption and electoral fraud. In 2000, the ruling party finally left power peacefully after a defeat in an election legitimised by all political parties for the first time in recent history. However, the new government kept the same neo-liberal vision and opposition did not wane.

At the same time, the emergence of the *Zapatista National Liberation Army* (EZLN) had a profound impact on most organisations with a communitarian view, nationally and internationally (Durán & Higgings, 1999; Morton, 2002; Otero, 2004; Langman, 2005). This event inspired all those who believed that a better world was still possible to call for global organisation; a call to which many of these organisations decided to respond. At the time of writing, late 2005, they were continuing to establish contact and

work with other networks of social movements, most of them already having international links, as well as continuing to work in Nezahualpilli and related community-based initiatives. Preschool education is now compulsory in the country.

In this sense, COMEXANI did not disappear. It extended its agenda to other networks of NGOs in which COMEXANI ex-members ensure that children issues remained in the new agendas.

4.2 Grassroots organisations, social movements and other issues of bottom-up capacity-building processes

a) Definitions

The Nezahualpilli educational experience brings to the discussion many of the main issues of grassroots social movements as well as the issue of participation of civil society in programmes for young children, parents and families. A starting definition of grassroots organisations is the following:

“... Grassroots organizing is a form of collective advocacy in behalf of a shared cause or direct action in the service of achieving a collective goal. It is locally mobilized and primarily single-issue based. Members of grassroots groups are local residents who organise themselves, seek to influence more powerful others, are not appointed, elected or recruited except by themselves ... and are unique in that they use any of a wide variety of methods in working toward change ...” Andrisin, (1996:4)

Like other social movements, grassroots organisations seek to influence social change in the majority to achieve either cultural or economical conditions or, more often than not, a combination of both. However, we can refine this initial definition.

We have already discussed how cultural life is constructed by linguistic and non-linguistic symbols and how these can be interpreted differently between participants and in different situations. The Nezahualpilli scheme showed us how they were not based on a single issue and even how issues extended to broader contexts. We also agree with Joachim (2003) when she sees some NGOs as grassroots movements. This implies that participants might live locally, but may also organise, debate and demonstrate together despite living in separated locations in a big city or even in different cities. New technologies allow participants to overcome physical distances.

In defining grassroots as social movements, we must be cautious and distinguish them from similar organisations. Social movements seek social change, although this can be defined in various ways. Some NGOs may be social movements, or part of them, and may receive public funds. Other NGOs may not necessarily seek social change. The same can be said for charity organisations and some other groups from the voluntary sector, or non-profit making organisations as known in the US, which can also receive public funds (Nash, 2002; O'Neill, 2002).

As discussed in Section two, social movements emerge from conditions of exclusion and attempt to change that situation; they are fundamentally seeking change and inclusion (Bettencurt, 1996; Friedman, 1996; Woliver, 1996; and Pilisuk, McAllister *et al*, 1996; Lofland, 1996). On some occasions, this exclusion is found among immigrants, who, in the case of programmes for children, may not understand the fragmented concepts of

education and childcare (Sandfort, 2004, 2005, 2005 b) or more general linguistic issues (Smith 2005).

b) Grassroots organisations can fulfil needs and influence change on various levels

Various reasons can lie behind people's participation in grassroots movements, among them clearly those articulated linguistically in a movement's aims, but also personal, communitarian and political reasons as well as the hope that the world can be a better place (Woliver, 1996). A social movement's ethos can offer participants an opportunity to live alternative ways of life, constructing affective relationships, solidarity and a general sense of hope and happiness (Adams, 2003; Andrisin, 1996; Hercus, 1999; Jasper, 1998; Taylor, 1995, 1999). This can be particularly appealing in a world that perhaps offers less and less chance for people to fulfil their emotional lives (Pilisuk *et al* 1996; Bettencurt, 1996); participating in a grassroots social movement can become a way of life.

Consequently, people can also give meaning to their lives, devoting themselves to social change. If they manage to achieve some of their demands, sometimes they will shift towards new social spaces while preserving their values (Adams, 2003; Einwohner, 1999). That seemed to be the case in Nezahualpilli, where participants established dialogues with other social movements nationally and internationally through networks of NGOs and by experimenting with new ways of debate, respect and tolerance (Andrisin, 1996; Bettencurt, 1996). This dynamic process of shifting from the local to the global context is what Woliver (1996) called a *fluid perspective*

(see also Swidler, 1995). Such shifts tend to take place in the form of networks (Lister, 2000; Castells, 2001, 2004). In terms of the ecological model presented in the first section of this work, grassroots social movements, like Nezahualpilli, may start locally but eventually could engage with governments and local and international organisations, as the project in Reggio Emilia, a well-known Italian preschool scheme, has done (Edwards, year1993, Dahlberg *et al*, 1999).

The flexibility that allows these groups to shift their aims and relate to other groups is partly due to their structures. Grassroots organisations – more often than not – develop flat structures facilitating participation and inclusion. This helps them to identify and address participants' needs, hopes and desires for change, providing them with a caring, supportive and stimulating atmosphere (Leonard *et al*, 2004; Pietroburgo *et al*, 2004). This can even be reflected in the participation of volunteers, who have no reward other than the satisfaction of helping to achieve something they believe in and perhaps even constructing an identity (Roberts & Devine 2004; Sandfort, 2004, 2005, 2005b; Bettencurt, Dillman *et al*, 1996; Richards 1985).

In the political field, they can mature and shift into more organised NGOs striving to influence policy-making, achieving the inclusion of some of their members in political posts while maintaining links with their bases (Barry *et al*, 2004). In some cases, they even influence profound cultural changes beyond their original aims (Brown-Nagin, 1999).

c) Grassroots identity: structuring experience and group dynamics

The intense emotional experience of participating in a grassroots social movement and inclusion in a context of support, reciprocity and commitment promotes the creation and preservation of identities in a structure that Adler-Lomnitz (1977) called *networks of mutual reciprocity and support* when studying the way extreme socially excluded groups maintained solidarity to overcome oppression (see also Polleta & Jaspers, 2001). These networks can, in some cases, shift towards structuring social movements (Woliver, 1996; Hourigan, 2001).

Identity, commitment and hope require participative organisations that encourage those who put their effort into believing that they can make a difference (Pratkanis & Turner, 1996; Bettencurt, Dillman *et al* 1996, Richards, 1985; Oberschall, 1993). Participative organisations do not necessarily limit themselves to face-to-face interactions and can use new technologies, improving the likelihood of inclusion and influence (Hourigan, 2001, Castells, 2004). Some grassroots organisations are culturally diverse and, in spite of their differences, they can establish new norms to include their diversity in what Gongaware (2003) calls *metatribal* identity, or Marx-Ferree & Roth (1998) name *inclusive solidarity*, when referring to social movements within networks of social movements.

d) Limitations and dangers of participation in grassroots movements

Naturally, participation in grassroots movements entails risks and disappointments, among them sectarianism and fundamentalism. Perhaps one of the best-documented cases of this was the feminist movement in

England, which could not reconcile intra-group differences and in 1978 decided to expel black women and men supporting feminist causes. This situation is perhaps related to the subsequent low profile of the British feminist movement (Nash, 2002; Cole *et al*, 2001). Participants tended to experience difficulties in their families and their personal relationships (Mann 2002). In a broader arena, grassroots movements can experience marginalisation within networks of social movements (Sandfort, 2004, 2005, 2005b), as feminists experienced a lack of understanding from other male-led movements in what Taylor (1998) called *friendly fire*.

On the rare occasions in which grassroots social movements achieve a massive success but fail to shift aims and adapt to new contexts, participants can experience isolation and a general feeling of depression (Adams, 2003).

It is perhaps Castells (1983, 2004) who has drawn up a broader theory on social movements and grassroots in particular. In the context of the *Network Society*, grassroots social movements are seen as a defensive reaction to the global trends and changes influenced by the new conditions of production, power and experience. In this sense, grassroots movements are a rebellion against the global, but people organise locally, around more comprehensible and concrete issues in their immediate experience. The result cannot be a romantic vision of social change.

Although social movements can influence social change on various levels, it is only when these movements are able to combine these dimensions of local demands, power relationships, community experience and consciousness as a citizens' movement that the changes they can exert can

be more meaningful and long-lasting. This level of organisation and consciousness demands involvement with operators in the media, professionals and political parties; all this accompanied by a certain margin of independence and skilful leadership. Without attempting a universal law, Castells theorises on the outcomes of different arrangements of these factors (in a similar way to the ecological perspectives of Cochran, Figure 2, and Myers, Figure 3). The different combinations of power, community and experience could explain the influence of the social movements that the author has studied for a period of over 30 years. Failing to meet some of these features results in movements having their influence diminished. These become either *reformist*, when movements win the specific demands they fought for but without changing the power relationships; *utopic*, insofar as they achieve changes in their immediate context in terms of community relationships and organisation, but with little influence on the broader population or state's organisation; *corporate*, when little emphasis is made in community organisations but they still achieve improvements in services; and *urban shadows*, when political parties artificially create a community organisation to cause agitation.

e) Involvement of external agents

The role of external agents intervening in, supporting or investigating grassroots social movements and educational schemes is another recurrent theme in the literature. In the Nezahualpilli scheme, the external agents – educational researchers – were fundamental in the beginning of the movement. However, the participation of external agents can be problematic and their presence requires clarification. In some countries, current policy-

making attempts to make communities *independent* from experts, assuming that communities strengthen services when they use their own resources, such is the case of England, to which we shall refer in the final section of this chapter and in Chapter Two. However, there seems to be an agreement in the literature about the benefits and the need in communities for external support (Mann, 2002; Pilisuk, McAllister *et al*, 1996).

Naturally, Critical Education supports the presence of researchers. This may facilitate processes and access to sources of information, perhaps functioning as a sort of internal voice, which may not have answers but whose questions may maximise the benefits for participants, communities and the broader community (Myers, 1992; Kroeker, 1996; Yeich, 1996). When social movements are funded by the state, at least partially, these external agents can see their role diminished (Dunkerley, Scourfield *et al* 2005), an issue relevant to the specific context of England, discussed in Chapter Two.

5. From the macro-system to the micro-system: Institutions leading social change

The second approach to services for children, families and communities is government-led initiatives. These can also require community involvement but this has a different nature, with the balance of decision-making favouring the government. Different governments, however, may use this approach to strengthen decentralisation and regional autonomy. The following example, also from Mexico, refers to the Globalisation phase, in which international agencies play an important role.

5.1 A World Bank compensatory programme for socially excluded parents (PRODEI, Mexico)

The Early Education Project (PRODEI)⁹ was established in Mexico in 1993 as part of a series of compensatory educational programmes targeting the poorest population of the country, which not surprisingly corresponded more or less with the population with the lowest educational achievements. The project had been developed by international agencies and a World Bank social development loan funded its implementation. The programme comprised funding for six years and there was an agreement that an evaluation should take place half way through, in 1996. Data presented in this section corresponds to the study undertaken for that purpose (Delgado, 2000). This consisted of twelve ethnographic case studies and a final meta-analysis¹⁰. Here we shall focus on the results covering community participation.

According to official statistics, PRODEI helped to boost services for young children and their parents, from 190,504 children in 1992 to 948,164 in 1996, almost a fivefold increase. In the same period, the number of parents attending parenting courses grew from 132,336 to 838,756, over a sixfold increase.

Although the main aims of the programme were directed at children, PRODEI worked exclusively with parents, and consequently the statistics on children mentioned above were in fact an approximation of the number of children under the age of four associated with parents attending the programme. Of the five main programme objectives, three were directed at children, the development of social, emotional and cognitive areas. The fourth

aim was directed towards improving child-rearing practices and the last was directed at the community, and aimed to increase awareness of children's rights and encourage community action in favour of children's well-being.

Clearly, the programme had some deficiencies. With a simple examination of the holistic framework for planning (see Figure 3), it could be said that PRODEI provided a complementary service to children's development through their parents, but it could not reach its ambitious aims on its own. Furthermore the programme was designed to run only one 64-hour course in a two-hour weekly session for eight months. In spite of these limitations, the evaluation found evidence of some positive short-term effects, mainly related to mother-child relationships.

Among the main results of the evaluation were issues of participation, which are the ones we shall discuss below.

Although most activities took place with parents, PRODEI had not developed a single aim for them. The first three aims implied that parents should be passed information and 'good-practice' on child-rearing practices. The fourth aim, directed at improving child-rearing practices, was the only one in which parents could participate more actively. PRODEI produced a textbook, which was given free of charge to participants and contained basic information on parenting¹¹. Its aim was to generate discussion on child-rearing practices. This, however, presented some difficulties, as a large percentage of the parents were illiterate. The problem was particularly notable within the monolingual indigenous populations, as the languages they speak, of which there are at least 56, have no standard writing system. Textbooks had been

designed mainly through images illustrating issues dealt with in the sessions. In the planned 64-hour course, there was no time for addressing parents' illiteracy.

In order to set up the programme, the community had to sign a 'contract' with PRODEI, in which community members would commit to forming a 'Pro-Children Committee'. Committees were expected to support the programme's activities and, at the end of the programme, they were expected to continue promoting activities benefiting local children, without any other financial or technical support. Community members, sometimes with responsibilities in other governmental programmes or a certain reputation within the informal community's network of relationships, joined such committees. They were expected to promote activities immediately and would receive three or four training sessions.

Committee members considered in the evaluation reported that they supported the programme in the form of home visits and others were able to sponsor materials for the sessions. Mostly, they told researchers they had signed up simply because it was a requirement of the authorities in order to implement the programme, or because it might benefit somebody and they did not want to be an obstacle to the programme. Many ignored what was expected from them.

There was evidence that in one place only the Committee had undertaken action decided on by participants. This was an indigenous community, perhaps the most traditional considered in the study. It was a very small community, with fathers working land in a coffee growing area.

Migration was low and population was largely monolingual. There were no services in their community and feeling that they had support from PRODEI, they decided to demand – not for the first time – drinking water for the community. After a while, orders from PRODEI headquarters in Mexico City gave instructions to ‘calm the community down’. PRODEI was not going to collaborate in the struggle against another governmental office. The aim of creating awareness of children’s rights apparently did not consider exerting pressure on any governmental office.

One community member who had been briefly trained for the process in each community led the sessions. Among the communities studied, all observed sessions took the format of a formal school session, in spite of the fact that CONAFE, the providing institution, had long-standing experience in developing and providing non-formal education. The problem was partly the lack of time to implement the programme and the scarcity of community members with a ‘satisfactory’ profile to take the job with little training. Also, in most communities PRODEI would provide a single course, hoping that communities would continue to spread the benefits of the programme. That meant that the programme could not afford to ‘waste’ resources training staff who would only work temporarily for the programme. Although there were people with degrees from higher education, they tended to take the more permanent posts in the programme’s local headquarters, all of them in capital cities, or as supervisors visiting people on the front line and offering them support.

In spite of this situation, the evaluation showed that there was no direct relationship between group leaders' level of education and successful outcomes. 'Successful outcomes' were considered to be those where participants had a good opinion of the programme and reported positive changes in themselves and in their relationship with their children. Myers (1992) and Evans & Myers (2000) had already reported that communities with a strong community identity and a background of strong organisation tended to gain more benefits from community programmes. The sites with successful outcomes had one thing in common: the development of community-led activities (see also Brookfield, 1992).

For example, in one indigenous community, as a result of PRODEI sessions, participants had organised a weekly cookery workshop. Observations of these unplanned sessions highlighted the informal environment in which women exchanged opinions about their children and about their husbands. In this town, fathers were seldom supportive of the programme, as they wanted to keep the tradition of tight control over women. Some had opposed their wives' attendance. Some mothers who did not participate in the formal sessions had joined these cookery sessions. As part of the study, researchers also interviewed mothers who had declined to participate in the programme. They knew little about the formal sessions but they were very aware of the existence of the cookery sessions, and they wanted to know more. The mothers behind this initiative had something in common: they were either widows, single or with partners who were working away for long periods – sometimes illegally in the US.

One of the young women attending the cookery sessions had a confrontation with her husband, and unusually in this kind of ethos, she decided to leave him. This is not very frequent, as the community's main activity is subsistence agriculture, in conditions where working hands are required and single women with young children would be particularly vulnerable. In the cookery group she had found support from her peers and the sessions had been partly planned to help her out, sharing the scarce food they had for themselves. Another young woman used to live at her mother-in-law's house and she had difficulties challenging the older woman about child-rearing issues. The mother-in-law was convinced that hitting the children was the best way to educate them and our interviewee believed that PRODEI was right, that children could be raised without hitting them. Her husband was working away, and she was, comparatively, living in better conditions than her peers as he sent her money regularly. She shared some of this money by buying food from the city market for the weekly session. It was this female space that husbands wanted to avoid and that could well fit Baldock & Hadlow's (2004) concept of *male veto*, which they studied in another context.

In another case, in a poor suburb of a coastal city, mothers had also organised activities different to those of PRODEI. After the sessions, participants continued to talk informally at the beach. While caring for their children collectively, they also shared experiences. The group coordinator had reached high school. She had joined the programme after the initial training had taken place, replacing someone else who had left the programme during the first sessions. In her case, training had consisted of a few hours with the supervisor. She was a young mother and, like most mothers in the

programme, she took her children to the sessions. From the first session with the group, she tried to motivate participants by taking some time to talk about her life, and about how the textbook – which she read from cover to cover in an effort to compensate for the lack of training – had helped her to change her relationship with her children and her husband. As time went by, participants began to talk about their experiences too. The group coordinator knew the textbook and her *Coordinator's Guide* very well, and she gradually found a way to relate conversations to the available information. Participants who needed more time to talk suggested continuing conversations at the beach.

Other sites also reported implementing the programme in a non-standard way, either because they thought it would be better or because nobody indicated which methods to use – for example, those who joined the programme after the initial training had taken place. One group leader from a rural site (non-indigenous) was joined by her husband leading the group as an unpaid volunteer. Both believed the programme was providing useful information much needed by the community. This was the only site in the sample in which regular male attendance was reported.

In these three cases, group coordinators had committed themselves to the programme and reported benefits to themselves and their children – those who had them, that is.

Contrary to the practice of some regional headquarters which wanted to ban any non-standard activity, the evaluation concluded, in accordance with Richards (1985), that voluntary work and self-generated initiatives could be considered a strength of the programme and that supporting those

activities would be beneficial. It was also reported that some authorities had stopped a group coordinator who was providing two sessions weekly because not every participant could attend on the same day, fearing that she would demand extra payment. In another case, participants had decided to work on Sundays, but were forced to change the day as it was the supervisor's day off and she required observations to be made once or twice during the course. Institutional practice seemed to have more importance for her than the participants' decisions.

The evaluation also suggested that Pro-Children Committees should be seen in a different way, perhaps as a product of the scheme and not as a requirement. In some cases, these committees had more chance of continuing their activities if they included people who believed in the PRODEI message, such as the group coordinators mentioned above. Trust and participation seemed to need time to develop; demanding them as a requirement made little sense to participants.

The concept of 'community' also deserved reconsideration, as the programme was expecting to produce a change in the community's vision, perhaps implying that even those who did not attend the 64 sessions would change their child-rearing practices. The changes reported by group coordinators also offered opportunities to think about how the programme was benefiting them. PRODEI considered group leaders as employees, but they were also community members. This implied that setting out aims for parents and staff could facilitate certain cultural changes as opposed to thinking only about children and considering adults simply as a means to reach children.

5.2 Community participation in government-led initiatives

Perhaps the fundamental question on participation regarding government-led processes is the extent to which programmes can coincide with people's ideas of their past and hopes for the future. This approach can put effort into the individual dimension and little or none at all into changing the conditions of inequalities, particularly when the government itself is linked to the market forces (Babajanian, 2005; Finn 2003; Shephard 2003, Barnes, Newman *et al*, 2005). Clearly, in the above example the idea of promoting alternatives to subsistence agriculture or very low wages for coffee labourers was not considered as a means of improving children and families' well-being. Neither was the idea of supporting a community in its demands for infrastructure to provide drinking water.

PRODEI's aims seemed to represent a quick solution to ancestral exclusion and did not consider broader educational aims such as participants' literacy, particularly in indigenous populations. The model claimed to promote a fairer start for children living in these communities, attempting to make participants fitter for school, improve their cognitive, social and health conditions so they had more chance of *success* in life. But what opportunities can be found in subsistence agriculture?

For Lister (2000), there is an intrinsic contradiction in programmes aiming to develop communities or individuals without distributing wealth and still sustaining a developmental discourse:

"... A society that condones excesses of poverty in the midst of wealth, or arbitrarily rewards one skill with one hundred times the wages of another, is not recognizing its citizens as of equal worth ... When the gap between rich and poor opens so widely, it

becomes meaningless to pretend that we have recognized all adults as equals ...” (Phillips in Lister, 2000: 101)

In spite of this situation, there was some evidence that PRODEI managed to create some spaces in which communities reported favourable opinions, positive changes, with participants taking decisions and implementing actions. However, these spaces needed recognition, as all of the reported spaces emerged from non-standard implementations, and required support, both financial and technical.

a) The logic of targeting and funding issues

The establishment and development of services for young children, families and communities is a complex and long-term task. In the holistic framework for service planning, discussed in Section one of this chapter, Myers (1992) recommended starting with vulnerable groups, even if the intention was to achieve universal access in the long term. The strategy of targeting is common in the context of social programmes dealing with poverty and the intention is to optimise resources, reaching those who need them most. It is under these conditions that programmes of non-formal education are created and promoted. Myers sees them as a valid and functional option, particularly when these are part of broader activities and long-term intervention in which voluntary mothers receive financial support while training and eventually gaining paid employment. However, Rosemberg (2002) criticises international programmes – particularly from the World Bank, as in our example – for promoting programmes run ‘on the cheap’, based on low-paid jobs particularly for socially-excluded women who, in the best case scenario, will still retain low-waged jobs once fully trained. Although non-formal programmes are

important and help to provide services quickly, national governments and international organisations may be overlooking the fact that it is the community itself, with its voluntary work and low-paid jobs, that is paying for the services at a higher price than the middle-class population who are provided with preschool and other care services (see also Myers, 2000b; Bridgen & Meyer, 2005; Ross & Kemshal, 2000).

Harris, Cairns *et al* (2004) observe how volunteers give more than they receive and they also argue in favour of community participation in the evaluation of projects, as the organisations involved to evaluate cost-effectiveness and communities tend to pay attention to different issues (see also Ross & Kemshal, 2000).

Chinsinga (2005) also analysed the logic of targeting. He showed how different communities, particularly traditional ones, might have different concepts of need, equity and solidarity among their members (see also Ross & Kemshal, 2000); consensus should not be taken for granted and universal solutions carefully adapted to the contexts. As a result of these different concepts, people can decide either not to participate in government-led initiatives or do so just to bring some help, but with little commitment and trust, as was the case with the Pro-Children Committees. Driver & Martell (2002) analyse how some participative programmes are prescriptive rather than developmental and argue that participation has to be seen in broader terms, not only with users. This also demands longer-term projects.

b) Partnerships, committees and boards

The social space where *the community* – defined in various ways – met with the authority of the programme providers was the *Pro-Childhood Committee*. These spaces are central to the community participation process within government-led initiatives. In England, boards are also the space where authorities and community members meet and form ‘partnerships’. However, “remarkably little is known about how to translate the rhetoric of partnership working into practical reality” (Asthana, Richardson *et al*, 2000: 781). Dorsner (2004) sees partnerships as an extension of marketing strategies in developmental programmes and argues that in many cases partnerships fail to identify established networks of relationships within communities and seek to start from scratch, becoming an obstacle to meaningful participation. Like Giroux (2001), he sees the lack of participation in this type of programmes as an indicator of a lack of meaning or resistance to prescribed solutions. In the PRODEI experience, such spaces were formal but did not become a space for discussion and agreements (see also Babajanian, 2005). The process of creating the right conditions and the achievement of trust between parties can take a long time, particularly when there is a history of injustice and neglect, as in our case (Ross & Kemshal, 2000). Consultation and participation cannot be a one-off event (Cook, 2002) and must favour communities’ times and requirements (Harris, Cairns *et al* 2004), unlike our case in which communities were forced not to meet on Sundays.

c) Issues on representation: who participates?

Babajanian (2005) found that sometimes when government-led programmes ignore the established local networks of relationships, external programmes could strengthen formal authoritarian relationships, which are not necessarily keen to encourage participation (see also Carabine & Monro, 2004). He called this a 'predatory capture'. However, Barnes, Newman *et al* (2005) also document how in the process communities are capable of structuring new networks and changing their informal leaders, in some cases towards more participative conditions.

Lister (2000) also advocates the need for time and funds to develop participative strategies, for communities to establish the ways in which people can formally or informally represent them. Similarly, Myers acknowledges that partnerships should consider the process of participation and representation within the broader concept of community development:

"... Communities, like individual human beings, bring to the process of constructing their own futures certain cultural and social characteristics of an organic nature. A community, to develop, must also initiate, explore options, and learn by trial and error. It needs space to do that. Moreover, institutions in the larger environment, with whom communities interact, must recognize that individual communities are different and that they change over time ..." (Myers, 1992: 317).

This chapter has dealt with the ecological vision in which services for young children, families and communities can be conceived, planned, implemented and evaluated in holistic ways. Different persons and groups participate in the demand for services, in their planning and implementation from families and communities to international agencies. We have also seen

how these services have emerged in many countries as a result of social movements, originating grassroots movements, mass movements and different types of non-governmental organisations attempting cultural changes. The Critical Education framework also helped to explain how changes can be achieved from grassroots organisations through a process, which implies the construction of meaningful knowledge that can help to change the state of being, particularly from the perspective of socially excluded groups. This process, however, requires the participation of external agents such as the media, professionals and political parties. Finally, we have also presented some of the main discussions around two types of participation namely community-led and government-led intervention. The following chapter is a contextualisation of these elements in the particular case of England, where our two case studies were carried out and where national policies only began to be implemented from 1997.

² For an analysis on international regulations see Gormley (2000). See Moss (2000) for international staff development.

³ The term 'Real Existing Socialism' is used to differentiate particular social, political and economical organisations from the theoretical terms of 'Communism' and 'Socialism' (see, for example, Hersh & Schmidt, (1997).

⁴ *Nezahualcoyotl* (1402-1479) was the name of a poet, architect, philosopher and king of *Texcoco*, part of the Aztec Empire (SEGOB, undated). *Nezahualpilli* was the name of his son and the scheme makes reference to the meaning 'the children of *Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl*'.

⁵ For a study on shantytowns in Latin America, their role in the industrialisation of these countries and their utility for global economy, see Castells (1983).

⁶ Henceforth, all information about the scheme is taken from Pérez, Abiega *et al*, (1991) and some interviews with participants undertaken by the author in 2005.

⁷ 'Marginality' is the term used in the original.

⁸ In his book '*Upside down: A Primer for the Looking-Glass World*' (2001)

⁹ In Mexico *Preschool Education* refers to children from three to six years of age and Early Education to children under three.

¹⁰ The final study including one of the case studies were published; the rest remained in restricted circulation, however, I would like to mention the other participating researchers: Luisa Güido, Robert Myers, Adriana Gil Juárez, Paz Echeñique, Bárbara Pintos, Lauro Medina, Héctor Zarauz and Claudia Rojas.

¹¹ School textbooks are provided for children free of charge in primary school and more recently also for those in secondary school. In many of the poorest communities, such as those in which the research took place, these are the only books that families would ever have (CONALITEG, undated)

Chapter Two. England, New Labour and recent policy development for young children, families and communities

This chapter deals with the context of English policies for services for children, families and communities. As mentioned in Chapter One, England is one of the last Minority Countries to develop these policies partly because social movements could not persuade the government to do so. Although various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social movements had attempted to encourage former governments to develop these policies arguing children's and women's rights, it was not until 1997 with the return of the Labour Party to power that policy development considered these services to be a government responsibility. The new government based this development partly on notions from the 'Risk Society' theory, which is also known as a 'Third Way' in practice. Such a view claims to attempt a mix of the best of the socialist values of solidarity and capitalist efficiency promoting a free-market, with the assumption that social justice is inextricably linked with a strong economy.

In less than a decade, the amount of resources and the expansion of services have been considerable and have been carried out with the involvement of both private and voluntary sectors. Changes have taken place alongside major governmental structure reforms and responsibility has been transferred from health services to education and, more recently, has been seen as a shared duty between education and work departments. Such was the relationship that sought the goal of eradicating child poverty by 2020, mainly through facilitating childcare and parents' participation in the labour market, particularly single mothers.

Broadly speaking, reforms have had considerable support, although some criticisms have also been made. Perhaps the most important criticism is related to the lack of discussion about goals and strategies, which seems to reflect a governmental assumption of consensus. Children-centred approaches, on the other hand, seem at times secondary to economic goals. Particularly important for this study is the discussion on community participation, which was given an important role in earlier policy developments and seems to have weakened in more recent initiatives.

Policy development considered in this chapter attempts to provide services with an holistic vision for children, families and communities and to integrate services, particularly education and childcare. Chapter One Sections 4 and 5 have already discussed the two main approaches to developing such services: community-led and government-led development. Each one of these has advantages and limitations and requires different types of community involvement. The length of time, availability of resources and the way in which cultural change can take place are part of the conditions that can influence the development and implementation of such services. Communities, particularly those living in social exclusion, might have developed clear ideas about the conditions behind their exclusion and their expectations for the future that could emerge in the creation or implementation of the programme. This chapter will be looking at the literature that could shed light onto the way the new programmes deal with these issues.

This chapter is organised in four sections. The first deals with the broader political context, the 'Third Way', and its implications for welfare and

services for young children, families and communities. Section Two highlights some of the main developments in the intense policy making that has taken place since 1997. Section Three discusses the main issues regarding the implementation and results of the Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes, two of the main governmental initiatives developed during the period and considered in the two case studies of this research. The fourth and final section reflects on the meaning of these developments within the notions of the ecological frameworks reviewed in Chapter One Section 1.

New Labour, the 'Third Way' and the broader context of reforms

Chapter One Section 3 has already introduced some ideas about different political traditions and the way in which these see social change. It was stated that England is considered to be a liberal economy, a political tradition that believes that markets are self-regulating and, under the right conditions, can produce societies in which all members can satisfy their basic needs. This is possible because the production of wealth, which is believed to start from the effort and initiative of private companies and individuals, is distributed to the rest of the population through their participation in the labour market and as consumers (Byrne, 2005; Esping Andersen, 1999).

The market, through the offer and demand of commodities and services, is able to shape the type and cost of services through its own competence. Good and reasonably priced commodities and services will attract the preference of consumers. Commodities and services that are not able to satisfy consumers have either to change or to disappear.

Welfare systems within this tradition tend to act in the wake of market failures, that is in those circumstances in which markets are not able to work because of failures in either offer or demand. Failure in offer refers to a lack of services and failure in demand alludes to the difficulties people have in paying for services (Daguerre, 2004; Land, 2002).

Because liberal economies believe in the benefits of the market, public investment has not the priority to develop government-funded provision; rather it is used to support offer and demand, trusting in the benefits of the self-regulating market (Cole, 1999).

This section discusses the principles of the 'Risk Society', the background to the implementation of the 'Third Way' – terms used indistinctly throughout the study – and the main criticisms of it.

1.1 The Risk Society

National policies for widespread and coherent service provision for young children, families and communities were limited in England until 1997, when the Labour Party returned to power after 18 years of Conservative government. Following the use of *Third Way* policies in the US during the Clinton administration, the new British government used a discourse in which terms associated with socialist views such as 'social justice' and 'solidarity' were used to promote competition and the free-market (Dean 2003; Prideaux, 2001, Daniel & Ivatts, 1998).

Some of the assumptions underpinning the Third Way were taken from Anthony Giddens' (1994,1998,2000) developments of social theory, to the

point that he even became a government advisor. The 'Risk Society' theory has analysed contemporary societies after the fall of the Soviet Union and under the global circumstances ruled by capitalism and free-market forces. It proposes that governments have lost power to global industry and their new role consists of devolving power to people and letting entrepreneurial innovation flourish. Less government intervention would promote the emergence of enterprise relevant to a local ethos.

For this vision, markets work because individuals are able to assess their risks in taking chances, making judgements and taking responsibility for their mistakes. People's choices would regulate services and only those satisfying service users could see their funding renewed. It is this capacity that makes functional subsidies for consumers and incentives for providers. Trusting in people's choices and securing diversity in provision, it is argued, is a matter of justice and a better solution than imposing on them a monolithic institutional view.

The principles of efficiency are applied to these supports and accountability procedures are put in place. A test-based criterion is required for consumers; subsidies are given to those who genuinely need them, and every attempt is made to avoid abuse. For providers, quality criteria are also imposed through quality control; taking care of taxpayers' money is an issue of social justice as well (Walker, 2002; Taylor-Gooby, 2001).

In the Third Way, welfare services acquire a particular meaning: welfare is seen as an obstacle to the free-market. There also seems to be a return to the 19th century vision of the 'underclass' as the recipients of welfare.

People living on welfare are viewed as having arrived in these circumstances because of the bad decisions they have taken. They have failed to assess their risks and now depend on the state to meet their needs. Welfare beneficiaries represent a heavy burden carried by the successful entrepreneurs. New policies dealing with a socially excluded population attempt to include them in the labour market, providing them with training in the areas that need a labour force and encouraging them to break with welfare dependency (Byrne, 2005; Prideaux, 2001). Participation can be controlled and predictable (Simmons & Birchall, 2005; Walker, 2002; Dorsner, 2004)

As discussed in Chapter One Section 3.3, criticisms of this point of view are largely based on the values and beliefs of other political traditions. Of these other traditions, the next section will discuss communitarian visions, which do not agree with the self-regulating market and its assumed benefits.

1.2 Communitarian criticism of the Risk Society

Communitarian visions – among them, social democracy – do not believe in the benefits of the market, particularly in the assumption that wealth is eventually distributed purely by market forces. According to this view, government intervention is needed to secure fair conditions and remedy the unequal conditions that market forces inevitably produce. Social-democratic views believe that the current organisation is able to bring about social justice with government intervention, and communitarian views believe that new ways of social organisation in which such inequalities do not even occur must be sought (see Chapter One Section 3.3).

For these visions, reducing the complexity of social policy to market-like solutions overrides discussions on values and beliefs, focusing exclusively on technical issues.

The first criticism refers to the ultimate aims of policies: do they promote citizens or consumers?

While the official discourse stresses the creation of local tailor-made solutions, demand influence is restricted to managerial issues, not in the discussion of values, beliefs, aims, approaches or evaluation strategies. The political questions of *what* actions and for *whom* have been exchanged for a technical question of *what works*; policy has been stripped of conflicts and interests and is seen as a technical issue: New Labour assumes that every participant shares the government's broader aims, values and beliefs (Taylor-Gooby, 2001).

The creation of the Social Exclusion Unit and the speed with which it has developed, for example, is a clear indication for Lister (2000) that its process has not required the involvement of the excluded. Non-organised community members are encouraged to get involved in the services and make choices on how these work. They may be able to change providers and refine some strategies, but the path to influencing government decisions is closed: available choices are for consumers, not for citizens (Barnes, Newman *et al* 2005; Kenny, 2002).

The introduction of tight control over the use of resources and the establishment of targets for providers might have also led to the disempowerment of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In Chapter One

Section 4, it has already been discussed how some NGOs attempt to influence policy making and have become spokespersons attempting to establish a dialogue with those in power. In the next section, the role of NGOs is discussed more deeply, but for the time being it can be said that NGOs have participated in consultations since the early days of the New Labour reform. However, there seems to be some evidence that receiving public funding alongside tight control has left them little room for manoeuvre (Williams & Roseneil, 2005). Evidence-based and accountability requirements for funding have forced them to dedicate most of their time to gathering data, analysing it and submitting reports at a pace dictated by the government. This situation has diminished their resources and the time available for analysing and discussing policies or for focusing research on other areas of their interest. In some instances, government requirements have overwhelmed smaller, community-based initiatives and some of those services working with young children, far from benefiting from government initiatives, have actually disappeared (Baldock, 2001). It seems that although NGOs have more governmental resources than ever before they are paying the price by seeing their aims shaped for them and their autonomy diminished. In this sense, the voluntary sector seems to be considered by the government similarly to the private sector; as a provider who is paid to do a job within particular conditions, but whose opinion and criticism is not required: providers, not citizens.

According to this viewpoint, the government intervenes in the market assuming that it can accurately interpret people's choices and develop a system able to discriminate between services that would work properly in

normal market conditions. In this way, the government can indeed become the 'user' who decides which community-based services should survive; it could be not the market's 'invisible hand' but the government's regulations deciding which organisations survive (Babajanian, 2005; Burau & Kröger, 2004).

The issue of rights: conditional or unconditional?

A second discussion on the broader reforms of the Labour Government alludes to the relationship between rights and responsibilities. One of the issues criticised refers to the inalienable nature of rights and the way the Government's plans for social change may be compromising them.

The alternative discourse to the 'two Rs' of rights and responsibilities is summarised by Lister (2000) as the 'three Rs' of risk protection, recognition and redistribution. Three rights aligned to a view that contests the assumption on value consensus.

Following Labour's first year in office, the Welfare Reform (Acts of Parliament 1999) came into force. This distinguished 'active' from 'passive' welfare. The 'active' form, the one Labour promotes, is about getting people off welfare and into work. The 'passive' form is the one that keeps recipients dependent and out of the labour market (Malmberg-Heimononen *et al*, 2005). The underclass, the passive population receiving benefits, is closely surveyed to make sure abuse is avoided. (Byrne, 2005; Prideaux, 2001).

Risk protection relates to the support that workers have when, for reasons beyond themselves, either personal or related to the national

economy, they are not able to work. Providing risk protection helps individuals but also intends to maintain a labour force fit to rejoin the labour market wherever each individual's experience and skills may be useful. Seen in this way, risk protection is a workers' right but also can be beneficial to employers as they can save the need for training. The right to risk protection may elevate its costs in the current economical conditions in which temporary and part-time jobs are becoming the norm (see Chapter One 3.3).

As part of current policies, risk protection tends to be limited and conditioned in an attempt to minimise the time for which benefit recipients are 'passive' and to encourage them to 'take the risk' to rejoin the labour market. However, such changes might be overlooking other circumstances. Driver & Martell (2002), for example, reported how the new policies restricting and conditioning support make difficult conditions for families, particularly those with young children living in social exclusion. They found that the transitions between welfare and paid job cause delays in the delivery of benefits and put these families in critical conditions. Far from encouraging people to work, Lister (2000) discusses various studies concluding that low and conditional benefits may also be hindering people's inclusion in the labour market. Some of those who have gone through those transitions consider that the risk of losing income during transition is not worth the effort of obtaining a temporary low-paid job. Moss (2004) goes further and even asks whether being employed or unemployed is a matter of choice.

Women, ethnic minorities and people who have suffered accidents are among the vulnerable groups that are being particularly hard hit by the new

welfare policies (Taylor-Gooby, 2001), as these groups find it more difficult to find jobs than their male, white, healthy counterparts. Under this vision, reconsidering the historical and structural conditions that create exclusion, he argues, is something that new policies have not done. The Risk Society ignores the conflictive issues of the broader social structure and focuses on individuals' skills and attitudes. Bolzan & Gale, (2002) report similar conditions for elderly people and mental health patients.

Conditioning rights has been a strategy to direct social change, but this vision suggests that the set of rewards and punishments used to direct such changes might have not been properly assessed. The stick may be so hard that is compromising the integrity of those it attempts to educate.

Recognition relates to the acknowledgement of diversity, the existence of different minorities with their sets of values and skills, and the ways in which only some of them are valued in the mainstream. The skill of profit making, for example, is valued over the skill of caring for children and elderly people in current social policy. In spite of notions of universal rights, disabled people, ethnic minorities, women and other minorities have seen their opportunities reduced for historical and political reasons. Some minorities have become social movements looking for recognition and inclusion through their involvement in policy development (see Chapter One Sections 1.2 and 4.2 and Lister, 2000). The political vision that focuses on this unequal access to the job market, unfair payments based on discrimination and broader social contribution is what Levitas (1998) calls the "Redistributive, Egalitarian Discourse" (RED). The government's discourse, on the other

hand, attempts to put the divisions of class, gender and race as problems that have already been overcome. It is the social residuals, the underclass, who are seen as the divisive members of the society. New Labour acknowledges diversity but distances itself from recognising the social conflicts and social movements that made them visible (Williams & Roseneil 2005; Dorsner, 2004; Taylor-Gooby, 2001).

According to Levitas (1998), New Labour has substituted RED for a “Social Integrationist Discourse” (SID) of social exclusion. SID assumes that jobs are available, provide sufficient wealth and are ethically good for everyone. SID ignores the fact that the new breed of jobs are low-paid, may not provide sufficient resources to diminish poverty for those taking them, that all jobs cannot be equally satisfactory and that wealth and power are unequally distributed among social groups (see also Chapter One Section 3). For SID, if people cannot achieve wealth, it is because they have not developed their skills and have failed to make the right choices, implying that members of the *underclass* deserve their low place in society. The problem in this viewpoint is deep inside the individuals, not in the social structure: if something needs government intervention it is individuals’ skills, self-confidence and aspirations (Byrne, 2005; Taylor-Gooby, 2001).

But even within SID, rights and responsibilities have developed unevenly: responsibilities have increased for workers and welfare recipients and have diminished for employers (Lister, 2000; Cohen *et al* 2004). New Labour has also been less enthusiastic about promoting rights. Regarding children, for example, Williams & Roseneil (2005) identify major contradictions

in policy developments. The importance given to children can be illustrated by the intense policy development and structural reform – which is the subject of the next section. However, this is contrasted with the power exerted to imprison the parents of truants, the unusual establishing of 10 years of age as the age of criminal responsibility, and the use of custodial sentences for children between 12 and 14 years of age. The Third Way policy development seems contradictory in promoting rights but imposing limits that may result in an opposite effect:

"... paid work overshadows care, parental responsibility dwarfs practical support, punishment undermines protection, tradition transcends diversity, and economic competitiveness outplays social justice. The figure of the child emerges as the most legitimate welfare subject. This is a vulnerable child in need of protection, an eventual adult in need of training and potential deviant in need of discipline ..." (Williams & Roseneil 2005: 188)

Redistribution Traditionally, the Labour Party has been seen as the 'left wing party' and the aim of achieving a more equalitarian society has been associated to it since it was founded. Since 1997 with a Labour government, England's wealth has increased; however so has polarisation. This means that the gap between the richest and the poorest has broadened (Byrne, 2005; Shephard, 2003; Prideaux, 2001; Palmer *et al*, 2003; Gordon *et al*, 2000). During the same period, the number of homeless has also risen and it has been reported that single women with young children have had particular difficulty saving, investing and paying insurance because of the limitations that part-time and temporary jobs offer them (Taylor-Gooby, 2001; Smith, 1999). However, the strong emphasis on market-like solutions may be detrimental to rights (Graefe, 2004). Myers (1992) distinguishes between policies promoting women's rights and those promoting women's incomes. Emphasis on either of

these aims may produce different outcomes. Programmes emphasising women's incomes, for example, may overlook issues on integrated and holistic services for children, and pressures for extending programmes quickly may result in low quality services.

In spite of these criticisms, services for young children, families and communities have become key in the government's attempts to mitigate and eventually eradicate child poverty. The rest of this chapter is dedicated to presenting current discussions on the creation and development of such services. Particular attention is paid to two developments, as these attempt to offer integrated and holistic services for children and families: Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes.

Policy development for services for young children, families and communities

As discussed in Chapter One Section 1.2, England is one of the last Minority countries to develop policies for national services for young children. This was partly the result of eighteen years of Conservative government and its ideology that saw children as a family's private matter, in which people wishing for or needing childcare or other services would have to pay privately for these services (Daniel & Ivatts, 1998). As in other countries, various groups and individuals in England tried to persuade the government to formulate national policies in accordance with the 'redistributive, egalitarian discourse' (RED), in which concern for women's and children's rights were behind the intense lobbying (Cohen *et al* 2004). Such policies were not

developed until the Labour Party returned to power in 1997. Developing policies so recently has had important implications.

Chapter One Section 1.2 discussed the four phases of the international development of services for young children and their families. There, we discussed how the third phase, the 'Cultural Revolution', encouraged the development of innovative services, with an RED vision and holistic approaches (Haddad, 2002). But England's developments have taken place almost one decade after the 'Globalisation' phase took over the planning and implementation of these services. In this phase, after the fall of the Soviet Union, services tend to function in a market-like system, holistic approaches tend to give way to fragmented views. In other countries, social movements have emerged to defend established services and the RED vision behind them. But England was different; there were no national established services to defend.

Some of the most influential NGOs in the area of early years childcare and education had long advocated the development of national policies and soon after the new government took office, these had the opportunity to participate in the consultation process for strategy planning. During New Labour's Comprehensive Spending Review (HM Treasury, 1998), limitations in the conventional ways of analysing services for children were evident. The commission responsible decided to carry out a cross-cutting review including thirteen Departments providing services for children.

The review concluded that childcare services were patchy, expensive and practically nonexistent in deprived areas. The lack of services was closely

linked to the astonishing statistics locating one out of three children in England living in poverty (Rahman *et al*, 2000) Services were diverse in nature and quality. Some, however, had developed holistic approaches and some of these became the first Early Excellence Centres. The situation of Local Authorities was not different: some had already decided to develop such services and had years of experience while others did not provide any service other than the statutory targeting of 'children in need', a responsibility of the Department of Health.

By and large, services were fragmented, with split departmental responsibility and with low levels of public funding (Cohen *et al*, 2004; Baldock, 2001).

2.1 Policy development since 1997

The following is a brief chronological account of the policy development carried out from 1997. This brief review is useful in aiding the understanding of the importance and extension of changes in this period and the key role that two of its initiatives, Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes, have had. These two programmes are in the background of the two case studies of this research and will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

- 1997: Soon after the new government took office, the pilot Early Excellence Centres programme begins (Sure Start website, undated). This programme had the aim of experimenting with ways of providing holistic and integrated services, that is, offering combined childcare and education services and encouraging the collaborative work of different

governmental offices, private and voluntary sectors. They began to operate in some of the country's poorest wards. Community participation in the establishment of aims and strategies to implement them was promoted. The programme was the joint responsibility of educational and welfare offices

- 1998: the National Childcare Strategy is announced (DEE, 1998). The government declared that the market has not worked in creating childcare services and made a commitment to create 1.6 million new childcare places by 2004, and to recruit 80,000 childcare workers. Provision would be developed by the joint effort of the government and private and voluntary sectors. To justify the Strategy, the government used some of the main arguments that NGOs have been using for years to advocate government action in childcare services: the lack of provision in deprived areas; the high cost of services; its uneven quality and high levels of child poverty. The National Childcare Strategy established three main aims:
 - Raising the quality of Care, through the establishment of the Early Excellence Centres; support for parents, carers and local providers; and regulating services and improving training;
 - Making childcare more affordable, through the childcare tax credit; and
 - Making childcare more accessible by increasing places, improving information about existing provision and encouraging diversity of provision to provide parental choice.
- 1998: Childcare services, traditionally responsibility of the Department of Health, are transferred to the Department of Education. As stated

before, this transference would facilitate the subsequent emphasis on educational and job related issues. For Cohen *et al* (2004), the creation of new government offices dealing with early years provision can be interpreted as a change in priorities. A change from welfare services that used to deal with children 'in need', to educational services, with a universal discourse but with an approach similar to the formal education system.

- 1999: The Sure Start Programme is launched (Sure Start website, undated). It was designed by HM Treasury and became the cornerstone of the government's aim of tackling child poverty. Initially, £450 million were invested to create 250 programmes by 2002. The four main aims of the Programme were:
 - Improving health;
 - Improving ability to learn;
 - Improving social and emotional development; and
 - Strengthening families and communities.

The relationship with the Early Excellence Centres programme and the ways in which these might have complemented one another have not been clear. However, Early Excellence Centres could deal with older children. The fourth aim, of special interest to this study, was later withdrawn.

- 2000: *Curriculum Guidelines for the Foundation Stage* is published (DfES, 2000). This curriculum is set to unify activities in every site providing for children from three to five years of age. This action

consolidated the educational component of policy development for children, families and communities.

- 2000: The Sure Start Unit is created, Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes along with other related initiatives are part of its responsibilities. The Unit remains part of the Department for Education and Employment. Other departments continue to be involved with their different agendas, perspectives and funding.
- 2001: The Department for Work and Pensions is created in June. This Department will also deal with the Sure Start Unit, particularly linking services providing training and facilitating the targeted population's participation in the labour market. From its creation, the Sure Start Unit was partly its responsibility. For Cohen, Moss *et al* (2004), services continued to be fragmented and the various offices involved in them approached them with their own agendas and funding.
- 2002: The Spending Review (HM Treasury, 2002) shifts Sure Start aims and sets the target to reach 500 Local Programmes.
- 2003: The Ministry for Children, Young People and Families in the Department for Education and Skills is created. Integration of services goes beyond childcare and education, formally integrating services for families. The Sure Start Unit, the Children and Young People's Unit and the Connexions Service National Unit, together with their budgets, are brought together within the new organisation (DfES, undated). The Sure Start Unit changes its name to *Sure Start, Extended Schools and*

Families Group. The Minister for Children, Young People and Families with responsibility for Sure Start, reports jointly to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Sure Start, undated). Schools, along with reception classes, are not part of the Ministry's responsibilities.

- March 2004: after the green paper *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury, 2003), the *Children Bill* is published (Acts of Parliament, 2004). As a consequence of the tragic death of some children placed and cared for, Lord Laming's recommendations made clear that, to some extent, these were the consequence of poor co-ordination between governmental offices and a failure to share information, among other issues. The *Every Child Matters* document was published as a part of a process of consultation on how better to protect children and coordinate services. Services would provide for children and young people from birth to 19 years of age with the following five main objectives:

- Being healthy;
- Staying safe;
- Enjoying and achieving;
- Making a positive contribution to the community; and
- Economic well-being.

Further changes were announced to the way Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes work and give way to the Children's Centres that will build on their experience and continue to provide integrated services for children and families.

- July 2004: As part of the Spending Review, the *Child Poverty Review* is produced (HM Treasury, 2004). In this document, the government announced its plans of achieving a progressive universalism of childcare services. It planned to provide for 2 million children by March 2006 and announced increases in support from Tax Credit, from £350 million under Working Families' Tax Credit in November 2002, to over £700 million under the Working Tax Credit in 2003-04. In April 2004, help towards childcare was reaching 318,000 families, up from 180,000 in November 2002. An extra £669 million would be given to Sure Start for the 2007-2008 period and plans included the creation of one Children's Centre in each deprived ward.
- December 2004: The Ten-Year Strategy for Childcare (HM Treasury, 2004) is published. The document put emphasis on providing choices for childcare, among them an extension of maternity leave to nine months from 2007. Children's Centres would offer information, health, family support, childcare and other services for parents and children. And 2,500 Children's Centres would be in operation by 2008 and 3,500 by 2010. By 2010, the Government set the goal of offering 20 hours a week of care for 38 weeks annually for every child between three and four years of age and after school childcare for all children aged three to 14 for eight hours on week days. The document also emphasised availability, quality and affordability.
- January 2005: Glass (2005), one of the designers of the Sure Start Programme, declares that Sure Start has been, in fact, abolished as

the community participation component has disappeared from policies in the announced Children's Centres.

- November 2005, the Childcare Bill (Every Child Matters, undated) is introduced. While it attempts to ensure childcare places for every working family, it talks about “childcare and services for children under five and their families”, which suggests a return to fragmented services. The emphasis seems to move from children to adults, particularly the issue of reducing welfare and promoting participation in the labour market. The Bill acknowledges that the centrally-driven strategy of creating childcare services, particularly in disadvantaged areas, has been successful. However, it also says that parents and providers have been uncertain about sustained support; the Bill attempts to secure this support. New measures on inspection are also announced and with them new ways of measuring quality.
- March 2006: the Department for Work and Pensions publishes its report *Households Below Average Income* (DWP, 2006) in which it states that the government fell short of its target of diminishing child poverty by 25 percent (100,000 children ‘before housing costs’ or 300,000 children ‘after housing costs’). However, the publication confirms that the government has lifted 700,000 children out of relative poverty.

The fieldwork for this research was carried out between October 2002 and March 2005. It concluded a few months after the announcement of the creation of the Children's Centres. For that reason, it focused on Early

Excellence Centres and Sure Start Programmes. Before presenting some discussions about the implementation and impact of these two initiatives, let us take a closer look to their aims and principles.

2.2 Early Excellence Centres

Created in 1997, their mission was to develop a 'good practice' of holistic and integrated services, providing for children but also for families and communities. Its core activities were (Sure Start, undated: online edition):

- "... the provision of good quality integrated early education and day-care for children requiring centre-based extended-day and extended year provision.
- parental and carer involvement in the education and care of children e.g. schemes for family learning, developing parenting skills, raising parents' expectations and in other ways
- support services for parents and carers of children, e.g. home support, drop-in facilities, counselling and information services
- effective early identification and intervention for children in need and children with special educational needs, with a view to improving the children's prospects and, wherever appropriate, achieving inclusion in mainstream provision
- access to adult education and training by parents of young children and other adults, including those seeking skills and qualifications for employment
- raising standards of integrated early years provision amongst other early years providers, including voluntary and private providers, childminders and other carers, by contributing to the training and development strategy of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership and through the development and dissemination of good practice ..."

These actions took place while attempting to (ibid):

- "... develop effective multi-agency collaboration between education, social services, health, community services, other agencies and employers in the provision of services
- pay particular attention to the promotion of social inclusion for isolated and disadvantaged families, equal opportunities and race equality in all aspects of the work of the centre
- co-operate with schools and providers of before- and after-school care to promote continuity of educational provision and study support
- monitor and evaluate the effects and effectiveness of the Centre's work ..."

Some of the first Early Excellence Centres were established services, some from the voluntary sector, some were supported by Local Authorities; the rest were new. By January 2006, there were 107 Centres expected to become Children's Centres, although this decision would rest with the respective Local Authorities.

2.3 Sure Start Local Programmes

Sure Start Local Programmes were developed firstly in the 20 percent most disadvantaged wards across England for children under three and their families. By January 2006, there were 524 Sure Start Local Programmes working with families with children under four, as the age of entitlement to services had been extended. The aim of the initiative was:

"... To work with parents-to-be, parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of babies and young children – particularly those who are disadvantaged – so that they can flourish at home and when they get to school, and thereby break the cycle of disadvantage for the current generation of young children ..." (Melhuish *et al*, 2004: 2).

Each programme was expected to build on existing services.

Eisenstadt (2002) – the head of the Sure Start Unit – attributed three key principles: community involvement; coordination among existing services from governmental, voluntary and private sectors; and cultural sensibility, given that greater numbers within the ethnic minority population were more likely to be living in poverty. These three principles and performance targets, the way in which the Local Programmes are monitored, were closely related to the way in which 'community' was defined and its involvement encouraged.

It has already been mentioned that the original objective of 'Strengthening families and communities', was removed after the *Every Child Matters* Green Paper. The aims were changed to the following:

- Family Support;
- Advice on nurturing;
- Health services; and
- Early Learning (Sure Start, undated: on line edition).

This study will provide an interpretation of these changes, but for the time being, let us take a look at how this feature, which functioned while the fieldwork to this research took place, was seen.

3. Community involvement in Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start programmes

This section discusses the literature relating to the ways in which ‘community’ and its involvement have been seen and encouraged within these programmes. Most references relate to the Sure Start Local Programme, but those relating to the Early Excellence Centres are clearly signalled.

3.1 Defining community

Chapter One discussed the difficulties that may arise in attempting to define ‘community’. It was stated that some times ‘community’ is used to refer to service users or, seen in another way, the population that the programme defines as being entitled to services. On other occasions, the term refers to people living in geographical areas, and sometimes it refers to self-defined communities. For both programmes, wards were selected on indicators of deprivation and a local partnership decided the catchment area. Each Sure Start Local Programme would work with 400 to 800 children and their families within the geographically delimited area (Sure Start, undated).

Chinsinga (2005) reports how communities can have different visions of entitlement, resource distribution, accountability and evaluation from those

defined by external agents (see also Dorsner, 2004). The same can be said for people living in social exclusion and the way they see their conditions and options (Richardson & Le Grand, 2002).

This section presents a discussion on defining community in three dimensions: defining characteristics for entitlement, the use of outreach services, and the identification of the 'hard-to-reach' population.

a) Limitations of criteria for entitlement to Sure Start Local Programmes

The Sure Start National Evaluation (Tunstill, Allnock *et al*, 2005) reported that definitions regarding entitlement have caused some difficulties in the programme's implementation. It could be argued that this was the result of assumptions made about potential users. Opening times, for example, tended to take place on weekdays during working hours, which made it difficult for working parents to attend. Although Local Programmes attempted to provide for every child, in practice the focus was on families in which some, at least the attending adults, were not working. Children's age limits might also have hindered continuity for parents attending whose children reached four years of age. Age as an entitlement criterion and not parents' decisions, it seems, was the factor determining when parents should leave services.

Geographical delimitation of catchment areas has caused some problems too when parents outside the catchment area, when the boundaries were not always clear for community members, applied for services. In the best cases, these services were provided but not considered for performance targets. In the worst cases, services were denied. Some of these difficulties however, may be overcome as services gradually become universal.

b) Out-reach services and 'hard to reach' population

One of the performance targets every Local Programme had to report was related to visiting every family with children under four years of age in the catchment areas (Sure Start, undated). This action was related to two aims, one of them being the integration of services. In an attempt to register all the potential users for any service for young children or families, staff from all services were expected to visit families and be able to refer them to any pertinent service available in the area. For this to work, services should collaborate towards developing a common assessment procedure and a strategy for sharing information. The second aim was related to the third principle of the programme, cultural sensitivity, which aimed to reach isolated families that former services hardly provided for, perhaps because their cultural backgrounds and language made it difficult for them to find access to services. This principle was the notion behind the concept of 'hard-to-reach' population:

"... Sure Start's response is to encourage a combination of open access and targeted services to ensure those most hard to reach are offered something appropriate, while maintaining the community-based approach ..." (Eisenstadt, 2002:3)

'Out-reach' services represent a profound change in the way many Local Authorities offered services; these services helped to reassess the way professionals related to community members and the assumptions behind particular schemes. The result has been positive for service users and service providers as it has promoted trust and improved access to services (Tunstall *et al*, 2005; Wiseman & Wakeman, 2003; Vimpani, 2002).

However, in many Local Programmes and other welfare services there are still an undetermined number of people who do not wish to get involved

and the reasons for this are largely unknown. Cook (2002) argues that the term 'hard to reach' can be ambiguous, misleading and counter-productive when used in a pejorative way. The author reports various studies in which those who had been labelled 'hard to reach' were contacted and showed surprise at their inclusion in such a group. He concludes that, often, 'hard to reach' means 'hard to engage in a positive manner'. The author considered that every person who was susceptible to being critical of the scheme was a candidate for being labelled 'hard to reach' by service providers. Similarly, Gustafsson & Driver (2005) argue that those 'hard to reach' are mainly those who resist imposed norms, almost reaching in practitioners' eyes the pejorative category of 'anomic', which was discussed in Chapter One Section 5.2. Morrow *et al* (2005) report how, in spite of the lack of understanding of the reasons for some still preferring not to get involved, no effort was made by Local Authorities or central government to understand the causes. However, considerable work was put into reporting the numbers 'reached' periodically, suggesting that reported numbers might reflect the pressure to report performance targets rather than certain groups of the population. Carpenter *et al* (2005) report that their sample of practitioners frequently labelled young Asian mothers 'hard to reach', although they could not find any evidence supporting this assumption.

Dorsner (2004) identifies distrust and the failure to explain or communicate aims and long-term expectations as possible causes for community members refusing to participate. For people to get involved, clarity in the aims of the programmes and in the implications of involvement is necessary. The same goes for convincing people that participation is

worthwhile, alongside time for the development of trust (Brown & Liddle, 2005; Melhuish *et al*, 2004; Campbell, 2003; Morrow *et al*, 2005). It is also necessary to consider a parent's ideas about holistic services and fears about the quality of services (Rahilly & Johnston, 2002).

It seems as if the centrally defined terms of community and participation do not always match the ideas of community members and practitioners. While out-reach services seemed to produce benefits such as the development of trust and increase of service users, entitlement criteria have caused confusion about who are entitled to services. The pressure to report performance targets on the 'hard-to-reach' population, on the other hand, may be more related to the strategies of control and surveillance studied by the post-modern view (see Chapter One Section 3.2) than to the usefulness that such numbers can have in planning or evaluating services.

3.2 Community involvement in the different phases of the programmes

Community involvement was sought through the inclusion of local parents and carers on partnership boards in charge of the design, management and delivery of the programmes (Sure Start, undated). Their involvement attempted to ensure that the needs of their families and other similar families were met. This section discusses the literature regarding community participation within three different phases of the programmes: consultation, implementation and evaluation.

a) Consultations

Community members were expected to get involved in the programmes' decision-making process through their direct participation in boards and

through processes of consultation. In this way, each community would choose its representatives on the boards and, additionally, consultations still could take place and influence decisions.

The Sure Start National Evaluation (Melhuish, Anning *et al*, 2004) suggests that there is a contradiction between a development approach and the managerial focus that the programme had. The difficulty was that for community members to take decisions, it was necessary that they understood the programme and the implications of their participation. However, the programme had deadlines to meet and demanded quick results from what is fundamentally a long and complex process. Chapter One Section 5.2 discussed how community members need time to develop trust in institutions, professionals and representatives. It is only with trust that community members can seriously consider proposing changes and commit to grounded rules. Otherwise it is unlikely that they would commit to the programme, even if this were in accordance with some of their values and beliefs. They need to put together a group that can construct its own project and the social relationships that can implement it: they need time to become a community (Tunstall *et al*, 2005; Morrow *et al*, 2005; Campbell, 2003; Wiseman & Wakeman, 2003).

This is the reason why Cook (2002) considers that consultations should be considered as processes, not events. Cook reports that an overload of consultations with unrealistic schedules for planning has been found in many welfare services and that there seems to be confusion between participating strategies and consumer rights forms, as is the case of “comments, compliments and complaints” (p. 522). Harris *et al* (2004) report difficulties in

the implementation of consultations, from timetables drawn up to suit politicians' agendas to demands for consultation beyond some of the participating NGOs' capability and resources. Under these circumstances, participants were likely to experience a sense of uncertainty and rushed change.

Consultations tend to be directed to the broader community and usually end with the participation of representatives. The way some people have gone on to become representatives is unknown and their role has not been fully understood. However, Barnes, Newman et al (2005) and Dorsner, (2004) report how some processes initiated by these programmes have also helped communities to redefine their informal networks and the way they nominate representatives, which has also helped to strengthen their involvement and commitment.

Service users' participation, on the other hand, tends to be closer as relationships with professionals are more frequent, but 'community' then becomes narrowly defined as 'service users'. Service users' participation, however, has not necessarily been smooth in all cases.

As Cook (2002) found for other welfare services, considerable complications emerge when participants question government's criteria, boards have come up with plans which are beyond 'local scope' and have demanded solutions that the government was not ready to implement (Osgood, 2005). If these consultations were community-led, as the programme seemed to encourage, the Central Government would have to change national policies as a consequence of listening to communities, at least relaxing the tight control that it exerts. But the government operates with

what Burau & Kröger (2004) call “centralised decentralisation”; democratic processes are welcome as long as they coincide with the official view.

Lack of time to create agreements and relationships, and the existing limitations on the scope of potential decisions, have led Gustafsson & Driver to state that "parents, in effect, are powerless in the governance structure of Sure Start" (2005: 539).

b) Implementation of the programmes

If the consultation phase began to show some of the contradictions between community-led and government-led approaches, it is during the implementation phase that these become clearer. The following quotation presents the official view attempting to make these approaches complementary:

“... Sure Start has its own Public Service Agreement, with a very explicit set of objectives and targets. The benefit of such a clear statement from Ministers on what Sure Start is expected to achieve, is that it allows for considerable diversity at local level in programme design. Essentially, local providers and parents determine the inputs that are intended to achieve centrally determined outcomes ...” (Eisenstadt, 2002:4)

According to this, it is ministers who have the last word on what Local Programmes have to achieve and the timescales in which they must do it. But Local Programmes work in partnerships with private and voluntary sectors. For Byrnes (2005) partnerships are always established in unequal conditions and private and voluntary sectors cannot see the government as an ‘equal partner’, particularly if the last word comes from ministers. For these sectors, the pressure comes from both sides, from the demands of the community and from the performance targets imposed by the government. The following performance targets were established by the Public Spending Review for

2001-2004 and exemplify the type of achievements that every Local Programme, in spite of the specific conditions of their local ethos, was expected to achieve:

“... Objective I: Improving social and emotional development

1. Reduce the proportion of children aged 0-3 in the 500 Sure Start areas who are re-registered within the space of 12 months on the child protection register by 20 per cent by 2004.

Objective II: improving health.

2. Achieve by 2004 in the 500 Sure Start areas, a 10 per cent reduction in mothers who smoke in pregnancy.

Objective III: improving children's ability to learn.

3. Achieve by 2004 for children aged 0-3 in the 500 Sure Start areas, a reduction of five percentage points in the number of children with speech and language problems requiring specialist intervention by the age of four.

Objective IV: strengthening families and communities.

4. Reduce the number of 0-3 year old children in Sure Start areas living in households where no one is working by 2004 ...” (HM Treasury, 2000: on line edition)

Demanding that services reach targets means that those actions decided by the community and not considered by the government had little chance of being met or at least being given the same amount of time, resources and continuity. Furthermore, it can be contradictory when communities do not accept the content or time lines of targets; or even more so when they think in terms of alternative views (see also Moss, 2004; Barnes, Newman *et al*, 2005; and Williams & Roseneil, 2005).

As mentioned above, NGOs participated in the formulation of the first Spending Review in 1998 and some of their experiences and ideas did seem to influence policy development, particularly the holistic approach given to Early Excellence Centres. However, with the transition from the pilot Early Excellence Centres to a more job-seeking approach with Sure Start Local

Programmes, their influence seems to have weakened. Williams & Roseneil (2005) document how many NGOs acknowledge that they have been listened to, and during recent years they have received more funding from the government than ever before. In their study, these authors found that most NGOs feel that the green paper *Every Child Matters* reflects many of their ideas. However, they also are critical of the way policies are being implemented. In other welfare services, there is some evidence that NGOs feel excluded from policy formulation (Roberts *et al*, 2000, 2004; Harris *et al* 2004).

Relying on the government as the main or only funding source can be counterproductive for the voluntary sector because its organisations may have to re-align their beliefs in order to access the funding stream. Harris *et al* (2004) suggest that the government is controlling the way EU funding reaches NGOs, part of the voluntary sector, in an attempt to impose even tighter control on them. In Canada, Foster & Meinhard (2005) report how NGOs are depending more on governmental funding and on consequently being subjected to strict evidence-based conditions and this is decreasing their role as spokespeople and means that their activities are being shaped to fit those areas that the government demands. The combination of intense work and a dependency on evidence-based funding is disempowering them. These circumstances have also begun to be reported in England, where Laforest & Orsini (2005) report how NGOs are increasingly focusing on evaluation in an attempt to keep their funding and to the detriment of their political development.

It may also be the case that not all NGOs have all the resources and expertise to deal with task demands. This may be the reason for the disappearance of some of the smaller NGOs reported by Baldock (2001). If NGOs are seriously considered by the government to be part of the solution, perhaps more effort to develop and strengthen them is needed (Myers 1992). As social conditions change, even the most successful programmes need updating and the independent viewpoint which NGOs offer is needed to maintain the social construction of these programmes. As argued in Chapter One Section 4.2, some groups in the voluntary sector are those communities which have organised themselves to satisfy their own needs. Seen in this way, current policies are not strengthening community-based organisations and are replacing them with more profit-making oriented organisations.

Market-like solutions are based on the disappearance of organisations that are not fit for competence. However, the disappearance of private organisations is different from the disappearance of voluntary organisations. Above, it has already been suggested that New Labour policies seem to promote consumers rather than citizens. Others (Burau & Kröger, 2004; Choen; Moss *et al*, 2004; Osgood, 2005) claim that each Local Programme could become a means to achieve decentralisation and to strengthen democracy, but only if bottom-up, capacity-building processes were given more importance. This include ministers who, until now, have decided what Sure Start is, what it has to achieve and the speed with which it has to achieve it.

c) Evaluation

Like consultations, notions of evaluation involve contradictory visions. Ross & Kemshal, (2000) found that many evaluations were made on the assumption that everybody agreed on the aims of the scheme. They found that service users tended to think differently from institution representatives. This is particularly true when evaluations place emphasis on money (see also Smith, & Bryan, 2005). The authors argue for a funded partnership in evaluating policies, aims and targets, not only processes. Similarly, Morrow & Malin, (2004) report that community members participating in some Sure Start Local Programmes were more interested in strengthening their community through networking, while staff were more concerned with fulfilling national targets, even if these were not part of the community members' vision.

In the US, Smith & Hodgkinson (2005) Lincoln (2005) and Cheek (2005) associated the evidence-based strategy with an attempt to control scholars' methodological approaches, theoretical backgrounds, and themes and issues, alongside a consequent reduction of independent criticism. In England, scholars do not seem to be considered part of the 'community' but as part of service providers who compete to fulfil Local Programmes' needs for evidence of their success. Evaluation becomes part of the required paper work but within the programme, and there seems to be little room for criticism. In this sense, evidence-base strategies may also be disempowering researchers.

An epilogue to the ways in which communities have participated in these programmes seems to be the announcement of the Children's Centres, as developments of Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local

Programmes. In these, community participation will acquire a less predominant importance, in what Glass (2005) considers the 'abolition' of Sure Start (see also Moss, 2004 and Cohen *et al*, 2004).

4 Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start programmes: outcomes for community members, professionals and communities

After the above discussion of participation in the programmes, this section presents the literature on outcomes of these programmes. However, there is no long-term evidence of lasting effects, as both programmes are relatively new and are about to change with the introduction of Children's Centres. The section reviews changes at the individual level, on practitioners and on the wider society.

4.1 Individual changes within families

In accordance with international experiences, there seems to be some evidence that preschool education has brought about long-lasting positive effects in England (Goodman & Sianesi, 2005; Paull & Brewer, 2003) and there is even confidence that Local Sure Start Services will strengthen higher education (Ryan, 2005). For Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local programmes, there is growing evidence of positive short impact for children and women. In some cases, women attending services learn to speak in groups, represent other parents, participate in decision-making and eventually apply for jobs and get them (Tunstill, Allnock *et al*, 2005; Morrow & Malin, 2004; Attree, 2004). Some come from isolated circumstances and when they feel that the programme has been beneficial, they become the best promoters

of services, and experiment with identities, power relations and knowledge (Carlson & West, 2005).

The principal criticism, as we shall see later, concerns the reduction of the scope of outcomes to an individual level. Although these achievements are important in their own right, they are insufficient when considering holistic perspectives.

4.2 The changing role of professionals

One of the main repercussions for professionals is what Anning & Edwards (1999) have called the emergence of “communities of knowledge”. In many cases, practitioners who previously worked in fragmented services have been involved in the planning and implementation of holistic services. In order to achieve this, some have gone through a process of team working with professionals from other backgrounds, setting up a shared terminology, values and beliefs, standardising data gathering and data sharing procedures. In this context, professional identities have started to blur. Furthermore, current policy is encouraging professionals from the voluntary and private sectors to participate in the process through partnerships (see also Bagley *et al*, 2004; Campbell, 2003). Among the first Early Excellence Centres, Bertram, Pascal *et al* (2004) report that some service users have become service providers, blurring professional identities even further.

Although the process of integration can be exciting and challenging, it has also put practitioners into difficult situations, some of which have to do with the contradictions of bottom-up capacity-building and government-led processes. Like service users, practitioners have had little influence in the

setting up of policies. Under these conditions, professionals and organisations have been rushed to deliver and show evidence of their achievement. In an attempt to keep their jobs, some professionals dedicate all their time to achieving targets and having to implement policies which they do not believe in (Dunkerley, Scourfield *et al* 2005; Gustafsson & Driver, 2005; Bagley *et al*, 2004; Attree, 2004; Campbell, 2003: Carpenter *et al*, 2005). In other cases, they do so contrary to their pedagogical understanding (Moriarty *et al* 2001). This is a situation that resembles what Whitty *et al* (1998) described as conditions of high levels of surveillance and reduced professional autonomy in formal education for older children.

Roberts & Devine (2004) focused on voluntary staff. According to them, many volunteers base their actions on values and beliefs and they can leave more easily if they do not agree with procedures (Tidwell, 2001). Current policies may also disempower the voluntary sector by reducing the number of volunteers when they cannot offer an opinion on aims, ways of implementation and evaluation.

In the Early Excellence Centres, intense innovative work, demand for training, paper work, lack of time for team working and the insecurity caused by continuous changes in policy have caused anxiety and disappointment among practitioners. On top of this, communities set up extensive agendas and staff doing the same job are paid differently at the same sites (Bertram, Pascal *et al*, 2004).

Frustration, despair and anxiety have also been reported among Local Sure Start staff (Brown & Liddle, 2005: Melhuish *et al*, 2004). In these local

services, many initiatives concentrate on, and all of them demand, time for data gathering (Campbell, 2003), with constant policy changes (Carpenter *et al* 2005) and a tight regime of inspection organised at the top, which itself produces difficulties in evaluating holistic processes (Hudson, 2005; Cohen *et al*, 2004). In other cases, professionals have had to work at changing parents' fragmented notion of care and education, and encouraging their involvement in bottom-up, capacity-building processes only to end up marginalising them when policies change (Moriarty *et al*, 2001).

In other cases, professionals who believe in community-led development attempt to reinterpret government impositions and reconcile positions (Bagley *et al*, 2004), but other providers feel insecure about the viability of this within market-like provision (Rahilly *et al*, 2002) and the more recent turn favouring government-led schemes. Politicians prefer quick results and sometimes elections and political crises can put more pressure on front line staff to deliver (Vimpani, 2002; Roche, 2004).

Another related problem has been the resistance of staff to losing their status. Some professionals feel the need to have more meetings with community members to exchange ideas before taking decisions (Attree, 2004); in other cases there is a defence of professionals' knowledge and their power in technical tasks (Barnes *et al*, 2005; Kenny, 2002; Morrow & Malin, 2004).

4.3 Community

a) The broader strategy

Alongside other policies developed by the Social Exclusion Unit, Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes have been seen as a means to tackle social exclusion and child poverty.

The initial objective of eradicating child poverty by 2020 considered a reduction of a quarter by 2005 and of half by 2010. However, there might have been a change of priorities:

"... success in eradicating child poverty could be interpreted as having a material deprivation rate that approached zero and being among the best in Europe on relative low incomes ..." (DWP, 2003: par 12).

Horgan (2005) considers that this new formulation in fact accepts a percentage of one out of ten children living in poverty. It would still be a considerable achievement, but it would also represent a change of priorities: who would be left out?

Although the UK's economy has been rather favourable during most of the first eight years of the Labour Government, there is evidence that the government is not creating the type of jobs that could help welfare recipients to escape poverty by participating in the labour market. Current global trends make the available jobs mainly unstable, low-paid and part-time (Bridgen & Meyer, 2005; Byrne, 2005; Horgan, 2005; Finn, 2003; Shephard, 2003; Lewis, 2003, Bub & McCartney, 2004). As mentioned previously, the nine percent of children living in extreme poverty have been more susceptible to deprivation during their parents' change in source of income, that is, during the changes

between welfare and low-paid temporary jobs, particularly among ethnic minorities (Adelman *et al*, 2003; Farrell & O'Connor, 2003).

Although complementary policies such as child benefits seem to be reaching children and changing their conditions (Blow, Walker *et al*, 2005), not all entitled children have been included in the scheme (Adelman, Middleton *et al*, 2003). Paull & Brewer (2003) report that only three percent of entitled families were making use of childcare tax, mainly because they still would have to pay 30 percent of the price. Overall, they are critical of results. They see care credit as insufficient, particularly as the cost can be so different between regions. In spite of the increasing availability of childcare, some regions still experience a considerable shortage. They believe that the target of getting 70 percent of lone parents into work is ambitious and will not be achieved just by increasing childcare places without providing full-time and stable jobs.

In an evaluation of the 'wrap around services' Smith, Sylva *et al* (2004), did not find evidence of the scheme helping parents to participate in the labour market, although they warn of the limitations of their sample. In the case of these services, decisions and changes were undertaken by providers with little parental involvement.

In early 2006, the Department for Work and Pensions published statistics indicating that the government had missed its initial target to reduce child poverty by a quarter by 25 percent (DWP, 2006). This admission is useful in provoking a reflection on the use of targets and the meaning of reaching them. If the Government were to be judged purely by targets, the

number would have to represent a failure. However, statistics also indicate that 700,000 children have seen the economical conditions of their households lifted. As discussed in Chapter One Section 3.3, poverty is only one cause of social exclusion, but nevertheless is perhaps the most lacerating. Necessarily, the way in which ministers establish targets needs to be questioned, but more important is the meaning attached to them. Instead of creating a situation that determines awards and punishments, targets could also be indicators of where policies need to be reconsidered. Perhaps they could even be useful in acknowledging the differences that communities and Local Programmes face and the different times and resources they might need to reach them; evidence as a means, not as an end.

b) Sure Start Local Programmes

As discussed above, community development has been largely seen in financial terms, in the increase in the number of welfare recipients receiving training and obtaining jobs. Consequently, the strengthening of informal networks, solidarity and collective discussions of complementary and alternative actions have not been promoted with the same resources, time and technical support. Where these have appeared, it has largely been due to participants – organisations, community members and professionals – having enriched the process with community-led initiatives, taking advantage of the spaces left free by the intense process (Carlson & West, 2005; Gustafsson & Driver, 2005; Osgood, 2005; Attree, 2004).

There seems to be wide agreement that the programmes are by and large ignoring social structures and real possibilities of access to full-time,

decently-paid jobs (Attree, 2004; Bagley *et al*, 2004). The result is that the programme is attempting to reduce the number of welfare recipients who will not be able to improve their conditions (Ryan, 2005; Byrne, 2005). For others, Sure Start Local Programmes are more a managerial strategy than a developing scheme, in accordance with neo-liberal policies, and are becoming increasingly authoritarian (Carlson & West, 2005; Moss, 2004).

Furthermore, there is some evidence that Sure Start Local Programmes are themselves operating through low-paid, under-trained support staff (Attree, 2004). Voluntary staff are sometimes recruited within targeted communities, with little chance of career development: an undervalued part-time job itself. Osgood (2005) reflects on the implications for unemployed women when joining Sure Start Local Programmes as support staff:

“... the ‘Welfare to work’ agenda encourages mothers to exchange unpaid childcare work for low-paid work in order to employ another woman, on low wages, to provide childcare. Whilst short-sighted and unemancipatory to both educarers and working class mothers working in other low-paid employment sectors, this gender loop is likely to remain since it goes to considerable lengths to ensure the political-economic landscape is characterized by low unemployment with limited burden on the welfare state ...” (295).

This picture brings us back to some of the ideas discussed in Chapter One Section 1.2. There, we discussed how the current Globalisation phase of services for young children and their families were characterised by the predominance of market-like services and the potential backlash against women and children’s rights in the ‘redistributive equalitarian discourse’ ‘RED’. These circumstances also went alongside the often-ignored cost for community members while implementing non-formal educational programmes

based on voluntary work and low wages (Rosemberg, 2003; Myers, 2000b; Cohen *et al*, 2004; Hanh & Raley, 1998; Mook *et al*, 2005).

5 Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes: how holistic are they within an ecological framework?

To conclude this chapter, we shall summarise some of the key ideas exposed by discussing England's case within the holistic frameworks reviewed in Chapter One Section 1.3.

We had mentioned that, by and large, social change takes place within complex social structures, with contradictory ideas moving simultaneously among the different social spaces, from individuals and families to communities, institutions and the wider society (or micro, meso and macro-systems in Figure 1, page 21). In that sense, 'pure' government-led or community-led developments are prototypes that in practice are rarely found. It has also been discussed how policy development in England started with an attempt to mix both approaches, but has increasingly become government-led, particularly with the announcement of the new Children's Centres. However, there is also increasing evidence that Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes have achieved important cultural changes, particularly among community members' self-confidence, practitioners' skills and the integration of services.

Regarding the wider social space, or macro-system as it was called in Figure 2 (page 24), the change of government in 1997 seems to have been the most important causal factor behind the policy development, along with its

concern for child poverty. Among the intervening factors, we have also highlighted the socio-political and economic ideologies, in this case the 'Third Way' implementation of policies for welfare services. In this context, priority has been given to market-like services with a strong emphasis on reducing welfare through childcare services and parents' training so that they can join the labour market. We have also mentioned the advocacy role of some NGOs, which have participated in the first comprehensive review and in the formulation of the *Every Child Matters* green paper. In spite of their lobbying efforts, these NGOs did not seem to be part of broader and more influential social movements, which in other countries forced governments to implement services in the previous 'Cultural Revolution' phase with a redistributive equalitarian discourse (Haddad, 2002). In this way, policy in England has developed practically unopposed.

Regarding the way these services have developed, we find contradictory features. Chapter One Section 1.3 discussed an ecological framework to assess and develop services for young children, families and communities (see Figure 3, page 33). This considered three interacting dimensions: the ages contemplated in the strategies; the set of values directing them; and the influence that all participants, individuals, communities, organisations and governments have on each other. Concerning the ages attended by services, we have seen Myers' (1992) recommendation of considering from prenatal ages to eight years of age when planning holistic services. With the creation of the Ministry for Children and Young people, England considers policies from the prenatal stage up to 19 years of age, making it the broadest possible view. However, this vision is not

necessarily holistic with coherent and comprehensive policies throughout all services providing for these ages. In the case of Early Excellence Centres, and particularly Sure Start Local Programmes, these were specifically limited to children under five. After this, services lose most of the holistic and integrated benefits for children over that age. England has an unusually early age for starting primary education at five years of age, from which age services for children centre on a formal education format, and considering the great proportion of children in reception classes, the age is effectively four years (Cohen *et al*, 2004).

In respect to the planning guidelines, that is values and beliefs directing the services, there has been a transition, which started by targeting deprived populations and turning gradually into universal access with the forthcoming Children's Centres. A multi-faceted strategy has been central to both Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start programmes, with emphasis on community participation, although this has been centred more on managerial issues and an announced loss of importance. Both programmes have emphasised the need to 'begin where people are'. But funding resources and evaluation have been imposed regardless of the differences that sites might have found and despite the opinion of participating parents.

Finally, in respect to the way individuals and organisations influence one another, both programmes provide for children in centres, supporting staff, parents and carers. Although both programmes claim to carry out community development activities, we have seen that widely this means encouraging participation in the labour market, predominantly in unstable,

low-paid jobs. Likewise, both programmes attempt to strengthen institutions, working through partnerships and 'joined-up' actions. As we have argued, it is the 'strengthening demand' feature, the one referring to participation, that has more limitations and it is in this feature that community-led and government-led contradictions are more noticeable. In terms of Figure 1 (page 21), people in the micro-system have the opportunity to influence the meso-system; there is more interaction between families and services, particularly in the form of outreach services. However, consultations, programme implementation and evaluation processes are hardly taking a bottom-up, capacity-building direction. Furthermore, relationships between families and services may even decrease with the forthcoming developments. Other external agents, such as scholars, do not seem to play an important political role.

From this perspective, we are ready to explore how members from two sites accept, resist or propose alternatives to the notions and implementation of Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local programmes. We turn now to present the methodology used to carry out our case studies.

Chapter Three. Methodology

The theme of this research is community involvement in services for excluded young children, families and communities. Two questions underpinned the study:

- why do practitioners, volunteers, and community members get involved in programmes for children, families and communities and
- how and under what circumstances can this participation become a meaningful experience?

By 'meaningful experience', this study referred to the reconstruction of the meanings and knowledge of participants' everyday lives in such a way that they could:

- take control over their lives through the development of certain social relationships. These relationships would allow and encourage participants to engage in activities likely to overcome the difficulties of individuals within the context of families, the local community and the broader community.
- Such social relationships involve the construction of knowledge closely linked to potential political and ethical implications of that knowledge. Ultimately, to overcome difficulties it is necessary to understand the political and ethical context in which those difficulties originated.
- 'Meaningful experience' implies the holistic notion of relationships between individuals, families and communities. Educational programmes promoting meaningful experience – that is critical education – therefore tend to encourage participants' involvement in decision-making at all these levels.

Potentially, the process of 'taking control over their lives' encourages participants' involvement in the discussion of policies affecting their lives.

The concept of meaningful experience derives from the main objectives of critical education, reviewed in Chapter One, Section 3 (Freire, 1970, 1972, Giroux, 2003; Kincheloe & MacLaren, 2005; Dahlberg *et al*, 1999, 2005)

To explore this theme, two case studies were carried out with the aim of exploring how communities accept, resist and propose alternatives to government initiatives during each programme's creation, formulation of aims and implementation.

The study took place in England and consisted of two case studies carried out simultaneously. Both were related to the Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes.

The fieldwork to the **Castle Children's Centre**, an independent service participating in the Early Excellence Centres programme, took place between November 2002 and June 2004, a period of 19 months. For the second case study, a government-led initiative, **Stanford Family Service Network**, the fieldwork was conducted between June 2003 and March 2005, a period of 21 months. Both case studies were developed using an ethnographic approach through interviews, informal conversations, observation and documentary analysis. However, the different contexts for the two sites required the development of specific adaptations in methodology.

In order to study community involvement in the development of local services, the research needed to deal with values, beliefs and social relationships, consequently an ethnographic approach was used, as this

offers qualitative strategies for studying these issues. This chapter is divided into five sections. Section One presents an overview of the main characteristics and recent developments on ethnography and grounded theory, the main methodological approaches underpinning the study. Section Two refers to the selection of the sample, the two case studies and the research participants. Although both ethnography and grounded theory require a simultaneous process of data collection and analysis, in order to make a clear exposition of these processes, Section Three deals with the methods of data collection while Section Four discusses the process of analysis during that phase. Finally, Section Five details other aspects of the analysis undertaken with issues related to the theoretical linkage and comparison of cases developed mainly once data collection had finished. Since ethical issues were paramount in the development of the fieldwork in terms of relationships with participants, of data collection and analysis, and of theoretical issues, a space in each section is dedicated to their discussion.

1 Ethnographic approach and grounded theory: empiricist, post-modern and critical views

This section reviews developments on ethnography and grounded theory, from empiricist views to the post-modern turn and subsequent critical views. Such transition is important for this study as it uses some post-modern developments within a critical context, a theoretical background that allows the study to make claims of validity, although restricted, when relating cultural processes to issues of social exclusion and social justice. While reviewing such developments, the section also offers some basic concepts underpinning the methodology used in this study, although further details are provided

throughout the chapter when referring particularly to issues of data collection, analysis and validity.

1.1 Ethnographic approach

The ethnographic approach is both a method and a product (Brewer, 2000; Werner & Schoepfle, 1987; Hammersley, 1990). In the early 20th century, ethnography was developed in the anthropological disciplines to study cultural issues in contexts different from those of the ethnographer. Researchers spent a considerable amount of time studying, describing and theorising about their data in order to understand findings within a context based on the informants' viewpoint (Patton, 1990; Fontana, 2002; Angrosino, 2005; Potter, 2003). Different cultural viewpoints, it was argued, could be understood only through a long process of close relationship with informants and through observations. The combined use of methods, particularly interviews and observations, for data collecting give ethnography an iterative nature, as data collection and analysis take place simultaneously in the fieldwork. In this way, data collection is eventually shaped by the patterns and contradictions that the researcher is able to find while collecting data and this makes it possible to focus further observations, conversations, interviews or collection of cultural artefacts in order to study emerging issues more deeply. Ethnography is characterised by the unstructured way in which it starts and the iterative way in which data collection and analysis are carried out (Saukko, 2005; Tedlock, 2000,2005; Schwandt, 2000; Adler & Adler, 1994).

Over time, the use of ethnography extended to other social sciences in the study of institutions and subcultures within the researchers' own ethos.

The main methodological issues, such as the use of interviews, observations and their iterative nature, remained. The following can be taken as a work definition:

“... Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally ...” (Brewer, 2000:10)

This definition makes reference to the notion of “*naturally occurring events*”, an empirical view that sees events taking place independently of the researcher, who becomes involved in the ongoing events and through the use of ethnographic method is able to ‘*capture*’ the meaning of the observed events. Ethnographers are usually not interested in introducing experimental situations, controlling the conditions of observation or participation. Such involvement, carried out with care not to intervene in everyday life, also leads to another approach known as ‘participant observation’ (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Tedlock, 2005; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Reason, 1994).

Ethnographic data consists mainly of narratives referring to observations of everyday life and transcriptions of interviews or informal conversations. Ethnographic analysis usually consists of summarising and relating segments of text, allowing researchers to theorise based on the collected data. Not every ethnographic study, however, attempts to theorise; classification and construction of typologies are common ethnographic results (Silverman, 2005). In order to study the emerging categories for a prolonged period of time, ethnography always uses case studies; nonetheless, not every case study is carried out with an ethnographic approach. ‘Case study’ is a

term that can be used in different ways. When related to ethnography, 'cases studies' allude to research in a specific site or with a particular group. Ethnographic approaches allow researchers to better understand complex and situated problematic relationships, in which the sequence of events and detailed relations between events can be explored (Stake, 2005). There are no established steps for carrying out a case study and procedures have to adapt to existing conditions in the field. Long periods of study allow researchers to immerse themselves deeply in both the cultural setting and the collected data (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005).

The qualitative nature of ethnographic research does not necessarily attempt generalisation from its findings and theories, but a certain generalisation is possible when emerging theory is linked to broader theories (Silverman, 2005; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). One of the main difficulties in analysing ethnographic data is the management of large quantities of information gathered over time in the form of research journals or interview transcripts, documents, and eventually other cultural artefacts. Thus it is necessary to contemplate ways to synthesise information and facilitate the study of relationships. This study was interested in theory building and consequently it was decided that grounded theory, seeking to relate emerging theorising to broader social theory, was to be used.

1.2 Grounded theory

Grounded theory is one of the methods used to analyse qualitative data in a process starting while data is being collected and finishing after fieldwork has concluded. The analytic process is based on the constant comparison of data

along with the creation of increasingly complex ways of understanding it.

Charmaz defines the method as follows:

“... The term ‘Grounded Theory’ refers both to a method of enquiry and to the product of enquiry. However, researchers commonly use the term to refer a specific mode of analysis ... Essentially, grounded theory methods are a set of flexible analytic guidelines that enable researchers to focus their data collection and to build inductive middle-range theories through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development ...” (Charmaz, 2005:507).

The use of grounded theory allows attention to be paid to systematic relationships between chunks of data even if these come from different sources. As will be discussed later, using different data collection methods is not always a straightforward action and grounded theory can help to relate data in a coherent way, maintaining clarity of sources and meanings within the broader context of the research (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Grounded theory has two phases, one related to data management and another to theory building, each putting emphasis on a different type of coding. This process requires all information to be presented in the form of text, although the use of software allows the inclusion of images and sounds attached to the text (Weitzman, 2000).

Codebooks, the first type of coding, are made by reading the data line by line or sentence by sentence and assigning a key word or sentence that describes or synthesises the comprised meaning. For Brewer (2000) this type of coding is data management and does not include analysis, however Miles & Huberman (1994) argue that this level of coding does involve analysis. Codebooks facilitate access to data and represent a first step towards summarising and relating meaning. Codebooks are constantly revised and

improved, as new information is likely to refine the meanings they highlight (Spiro *et al*, 1987). If codebooks respect research participants' worlds, they are also known as "*in vivo codes*" (Dey, 1999; Clarke, 2003; Agar, 1996). The second phase of the analysis and coding is the inductive analysis. In this, coding is the result of the analysis of processes explaining the meanings of social relationships or systems of beliefs and values. This type of coding is known as '*open coding*' and theory building consists of explaining the relationships between open codes, abstract concepts and grounded data, which is possible through the connections that coding has enabled. In this sense, resulting abstract concepts are always close to the data.

Grounded theory was originally developed by Glasser & Strauss (1967) as an attempt to give qualitative research a rigour that could validate its findings. The developments of social constructionism and the subsequent post-modern turn have brought about an important debate and a development in the way ethnography and grounded theory are seen. These criticisms and current trends on these methods are the subject of the following sections.

1.3 Social constructionism, the post-modern turn and critical views on qualitative analysis

Chapter One has already introduced some of the main ideas underpinning social constructionism and post-modern social theories. Chapter One Section 2 discussed cultural psychology, one of the theories studying how social life is constructed symbolically. Chapter One Section 3.2 discussed the post-modern view on services for young children and families, a view focusing on how these social constructs structure individual and social relationships and how those constructs relate to power. In the context of qualitative

methodology, the post-modern turn arguably developed when methodological issues were studied as social constructs.

The post-modern vision has been a critical response to the way ethnography had been carried out during the 20th century (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). According to this point of view, discourses on qualitative research and ethnography are, like the rest of the social world, social constructs built through communication, and not objective methods able to reflect neutrally and completely the 'reality out there'. One of the main analytical tools that post-modern approaches have developed is called 'deconstruction' (Denzin, 2005; Norris, 2002), which consists of analysing the ways in which social constructs were developed, considering their relationships with broader value systems, and the social relations of groups that participated or were excluded from those constructions. In this sense, deconstruction *unmasks* the symbolic power of discourses taken for granted and their role in legitimising existing relationships of dominance and resistance. The *deconstruction* of ethnography was the basis for the *reconstruction* of its history discussed here.

Lincoln & Denzin (2000, 2005), Guba & Lincoln (1994, 2005) and Vidich & Lynam (2000) reconstructed the history of ethnography based on the way its underpinning theoretical framework considered reality – from a reality which is completely independent to a socially-constructed research process. Notions of a '*reality out there*' have direct implications for strategies of data gathering, interpretation and validation. As a result, these authors classify historical phases, from which the post-modern turn is of particular interest for

this study. A further phase, the return to critical theory, is also presented here, but this has been drawn up from different sources.

1 The traditional phase, from the early 20th century until World War II. Ethnography was characterised by its attempt to offer valid, reliable and objective texts about 'other' cultures. Those other cultures in this phase were colonised countries. Examples are the works of Malinowski and Margaret Mead.

2 The modernist phase, from the years immediately after World War II up to the 1970s. The idea that ethnography could only produce valid theory in the context of particular time and space is widespread. Cultures evolve and ethnographic products could not be timeless. Ethnography needed different methods from those used in the natural sciences and these could be rigorous and sophisticated. Grounded theory was developed to give ethnography a systematic nature.

3. The phase of blurred genres, from 1970 to 1986. Researchers from different social disciplines studying related issues were using ethnography and other qualitative research methods. As a result, competing theories emerged not only between disciplines but also within them. This brought about a discussion of the boundaries between the social sciences and their theories. Geertz (1983) represents the end of this period by declaring that competing theories were interpretations, suggesting that the use of empirical criteria was not enough to judge their value.

4 The post-modern turn. This phase started when the question about the relationship between language and reality was posed. According to social

constructionism, post-modern theories and their developments on qualitative research (Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Turner & Bruner, 1986; Clifford & Marcus, 1986, Geertz, 1988), language is a symbolic system used to represent reality, but it can only achieve this partially. Values, beliefs and the political standpoints of researchers and research participants are always an inevitable part of the ethnographic process.

Deconstructions of methodological issues began to circulate. In ethnography, data, analysis and products consist of language, which can be in the form of descriptions, transcripts, or theories. If language was unable to reflect 'the reality out there' neutrally and accurately, then ethnography could not be neutral or accurate. The problem was that ethnography could only be a representation of reality, but never the actual reality; it is always an interpretation. This was named the 'crisis of representation' (Lather, 1986, 1993).

If this were true, strategies to validate findings such as triangulation, grounding, plausibility and relevance, used during previous phases, were unable to make ethnography neutral and accurate. Rather, it was argued, such terms were used to legitimate the use of the power of the ethnographer over research participants, and between groups of ethnographers. Such power was used to legitimise the classification of studied cultures and to give a hierarchical structure to groups of competing ethnographers. This was the 'crisis of legitimation' (Denzin, 1997).

Both crises gave way to yet another crisis, the crisis of praxis. This questioned the possibilities of social change derived from ethnographic

theory. If reality were socially constructed, what could be the role of ethnographic narrative? Values, beliefs and political standpoints were necessarily part of ethnography and nevertheless this was sometimes used as if it was objective and politically neutral (Schwandt, 2000, Landson-Billings, 2000).

5 The post-modern experimental writing. New ways of writing ethnographies were experimented with. These included performances, fiction, critical journalism and others. Some ethnographers attempted to reach broader audiences with formats different from those developed for academic purposes. Former ethnographic and social theories were deconstructed showing limitations in the understanding of feminist, racial, and sexual minorities' issues. Research looking for *grand narratives* – that is, universal principles – was replaced by more local, small-scale projects.

6 The sixth phase, the post-modern backlash and the return to critical theory. Some of the features from the broader, post-modern social theory have gone through intense criticism. Some (for example Baudrillard, 1986) took post-modern ideas to the extreme of declaring that reality did not exist. Post-modern social ideas had developed from the criticism of orthodox psychoanalytical, structuralist and Marxist visions. Such theories were seen as totalitarian and their notions of predetermined ends – reason over emotion, grammatical structure over meaning, or communism over capitalism respectively – were criticised justifying, to some extent, relativist and nihilist views. Using these ideas, Fukuyama (1992) declared *The End of History* as the triumph of global capitalism illustrating the way in which post-modern

developments could be used to justify existing *status quo* and to dismiss criticism (see Jameson, 1991, for a critic of the political effects of extreme post-modern ideas). Derrida (1994), one of the leading post-modern authors, reacted by calling for a new international left to oppose the forces of the global capitalism. But this implied an acceptance of the existence of a *reality out there* and more materialistic issues, a commitment to relate social theory to social change favouring social minorities. Derrida did not argue for a return to orthodox Marxism, but rather to dismiss the universal claims of its orthodoxy conserving the main values of social justice and solidarity. This was a clear approach to Critical Theory (see Chapter One Section 3).

In the particular context of ethnography and qualitative research, Gergen & Gergen explained this backlash in the following way:

“... If one cannot legitimately claim truth through observational method, then accounts of poverty, marginality, oppression, and the like are similarly rendered rhetorical. Remove the rational and evidential foundations from empirical science and you simultaneously remove them from the sphere of value critique”
(Gergen & Gergen, 2000: 1037).

The third edition of the influential *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), which in previous editions had put emphasis on post-modern developments, was dedicated to issues of social justice. This can be interpreted as an attempt to reconcile post-modern views with a commitment to social justice (although there are some other justifications, see, for example, Smith & Hodkinson, 2005). In other words, the argument that there was no *reality out there*, turned into a statement that *theories and methods have limitations* in representing that reality. Some (Giroux, 1999, 2003; McLaren, 1999; Bishop, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005;

Plummer, 2005; Mouffe, 1993), argue that a critical theorist could take advantage of the useful analytic tools developed by post-modern authors by framing them within the broader tradition of critical theory. This argument was also behind the structure of this research, which includes the post-modern developments on early years within the section on Critical Theory (Chapter One, Section 3).

With a clear interest in socially excluded communities, this research relies on critical theory and seeks to contribute to current discussions on how services for young children, families and communities can help in tackling social exclusion. Therefore, theories and methodological developments which consider post-modern developments within critical theory underpin the study. The following section discusses how current developments in ethnography, grounded theory and ethical issues were used and considered in this study.

1.4 Current trends on ethnography and grounded theory: validity and ethical issues

Current developments in ethnography, grounded theory and validity necessarily consider issues on social construction of reality and post-modern criticism. Over all, there is a widespread idea that the use of ethnographic methods cannot guarantee objective theorising. Although validity still relies largely on the rigorous use of methods for data collection, it nevertheless has also extended to consider the way in which data is interpreted (Bryant, 2003; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). This includes the ways in which researchers participate in the social construction of the research and its findings, a process known as reflexivity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Gergen & Gergen, 2000). The following points give a brief view of some of the current trends, and

particular issues are more broadly discussed throughout the chapter as it deals with data collection and analysis.

- Data, particularly interviews and observations, are considered as the product of social interaction between research participants and researchers. Language and other symbolic systems mediate data collection and theory building developed from it can only give a partial view of the studied phenomena. Ethnographic theorising can only be set in a context (Tedlock, 2005; Atkinson & Coffey, 2002; Holstein & Gubrium, 2005).
- Interpretation should also be considered as a social construction. Including informants' opinions facilitates results to be meaningful not only for academic purposes but also for wider audiences. Ethnography seeks to be meaningful to participants, avoiding previous dangers of becoming exploitative and showing participants in a way in which they could not recognise themselves (Smith & Deemar, 2000; Charmaz, 2000, 2005; Silverman, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a; Schwandt, 1996).
- Current views on validity rely on ethical issues. This is reflected in the way in which researchers relate to participants and the commitment to promote social justice and, broadly speaking, to collaborate ethically in the construction of better worlds (Christians, 2000, 2005; Denzin, 2005; Lather, 1993; Heller, 1988).

The following sections discuss how these principles were used throughout the data collection and analysis phases.

2 Sample. Case studies and participants

The selection of the two case studies considered in this research responded to the need for understanding the process of social change within two different conditions: one in which changes were community-led and one in which such changes were government-led.

2.1 Site one: The Castle Children's Centre

The Castle Children's Centre was already a well-established site, 25 years in development, during the research period. It had been awarded Early Excellence status after the establishment of the Early Excellence Centres programme in 1998. Its practice was valued and embodied new policy developments by the government, particularly its holistic and integrated approach to young children and families. It was acknowledged as an innovative site, which had emerged independently prior to the development of current policy. The Castle Children's Centre represented a service that had grown out of community action and initiative. The service was considered a partnership between the government and the independent service within the new policies.

In this sense, the Castle Children's Centre was chosen because there were good reasons to believe it was an unusual case in terms of the length of time it had been operating, the notable achievements of its practice and, particularly, its potential to represent a community-led initiative. This is what Stake (2005) calls the selection of an 'intrinsic case study'; a study that is considered to be worthwhile exploring and making public its experience.

2.2 Site two: Stanford Family Services Network

The Stanford Family Services Network had been providing services for only two years as part of the government initiative at the beginning of this study. In a partnership between Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes, practitioners were still developing ways to offer integrated and holistic services. This case had had two practitioners for most of its first two years and two more staff members had joined just before the beginning of the study. These four professionals were employed by the Local Authority and closely followed policy lines in the context of government-led activity. In spite of its short history, this scheme was considered successful within the Local Authority and aspects of its services had already been replicated in other local Early Excellence and local Sure Start sites.

The Stanford Family Services Network represented an 'instrumental case study' selection (Stake 2005), insofar as the researcher did not know much about it, but he assumed that it could help to understand how other similar cases might work, particularly in the context of government-led initiatives.

Differences between these case studies were not limited to the assumed community or government origin of initiatives and the number of years for which each site had provided services. Some other major differences also became evident as the research developed, such as the number of associated practitioners and the opening times, the type and size of the target population, the type and range of available services and the means of community participation. The following table summarises the main characteristics of the case studies:

Table 1 Summary of the characteristics to the two case studies

Site	Number of years of operation	Number of staff members and opening times	Type of population served	Type of services	Community participation and service development
Castle Children's Centre	25 years, community initiated service	75, most of them full time but with flexible arrangements plus volunteers Services are open daily, including weekends and holidays. After school and emergency services available. The Centre also works abroad	405 children from 4 weeks to 16 years of age, and up to 18 if they have special needs, attend daily. Open to adults from the wider community with special emphasis on social minorities. Services available in various languages	Integrated care and education services Support for parents/ carers and families with over 30 different services Support for minority groups in the community, including children, adults and groups	The Centre is described as a co-operative. Professionals and community members share responsibility for funding, planning and developing services
Stanford Family Services Network	2 years, Local Authority service	Five part time members Operates 12 hours a week during school term times	As part of the government's requirements for entitlement, a minimum of six adults belonging to families with children under three years of age are needed per activity. Families must be living in a specific geographical area	Out reach service Courses on parenting and personal development Support to established institutions in developing new services for families with young children	As national policies require, community members are expected to participate in local boards and take decisions alongside professionals

The selection of these case studies provided an opportunity to explore the way practitioners and service users interpreted government initiatives, the

way they made sense of them, and the ways in which social change might be taking place.

2.3 Research participants

The Castle Children's Centre had two main sites and offered a number of services; some of them on an out-reach modality. Some of the services offered could deal with sensitive issues. Consequently, it was decided that research participants should be selected from those working in the main sites, in activities that were less intrusive to observe. The following table lists the staff members who participated, their roles and their backgrounds:

Table 2 The Castle Children's Centre participants

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Background</i>
<i>Laura</i>	Programme manager	White European, early 40s
<i>Maggie</i>	Finances	White European, mid 40s
<i>Kalilah</i>	Supervisor	Pakistani, early 30s
<i>Farah</i>	Supervisor	British-Pakistani, late 20s
<i>Ghayda</i>	Supervisor	Somali, early 20s
<i>Rasha</i>	Key worker	Pakistani, early 20s
<i>Hamid</i>	Site manager	Pakistani, mid 30s
<i>Akram</i>	Key worker	British-Pakistani, mid 20s
<i>Peter</i>	Support	British white European, late teenage
<i>Tim</i>	Support	British white European, early 20s

Adult service users, however, were more difficult to include. Some of them either worked full-time, attending the Centre for limited periods to allow them to collect their children or to participate in services for which observation on sensitive issues was difficult. This limitation was partly overcome by the use of case studies from secondary sources.

For the Stanford Family Services Network, three practitioners and six service users participated in the research. Table 3 below lists those who participated in the research.

Table 3 Stanford Family Service Network participants

<i>Practitioners</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Background</i>
<i>Margaret</i>	Family support development worker	White English, early 40s
<i>Patricia</i>	Community teacher	White English, mid 40s
<i>Jodi</i>	Support	White English, late 30s
<i>Service Users</i>		
<i>Amelie</i>	also a volunteer	White English, early 30s
<i>Diana</i>		White English, 50s
<i>Andrea</i>		White English, mid 20s
<i>Elizabeth</i>		White English, mid 20s
<i>Withheld</i>		Arabic, mid 20s
<i>Withheld</i>		Arabic, early 20s

The Stanford Family Services Network study included six service users as research participants. Since ethnographic research requires time to gather information, to organise and analyse it, and also to share emerging interpretations with participants, all six participants were people who had attended services for at least 15 sessions. Four of them had attended services over one year and two for over five months. The latter two left the services suddenly, leaving their cases incomplete, which is the reason their names do not appear in the table. However, their departure is analysed in Chapter Five, which presents the Case Study for this site and offers insights into the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of some who had attended over a longer period.

2.4 Ethical issues

During the first encounter with the research participants, it was made clear that their involvement was voluntary and time was taken to detail the type of activities that the researcher was going to carry out as well as the sort of information that was likely to be required from them. Anonymity was reassured; all names and places have been changed. It was also agreed that activities would take place at times convenient for them. Their right to withdraw was also to be respected and participants were encouraged to express any concern they might have during the research period. In this way, the researcher sought to fulfil the British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (BERA, 2004).

3 Data collection

As discussed in the first section of this chapter, this research was conducted using an ethnographic approach which included the use of interviews, observations and documentary analysis. Current approaches tend to see the social processes involved from the outset to the production of results. Data in this sense is not just 'collected'; it is constructed through a research relationship that the researcher establishes with research participants. The researcher's background, the chosen strategies and interactions all structure the meanings that can be attributed to the data. It is for this reason that data is analysed from the ways in which it is obtained (Tedlock, 2000; Brewer, 2000; Stake, 2005).

Data collection methods allowed the researcher to identify issues as they emerged and to understand the nature of the relationship with the

participants. This section deals with the process of data gathering and although analysis was also required during this phase, this is presented in the next section with the aim of facilitating the presentation of the chapter.

Data collection comprised three different methods. These were:

1. A series of tape-recorded interviews with participating practitioners;
2. Observations of daily activities on both sites. Records were kept in a field journal and these comprised
 - Informal conversations between the researcher and the research participants
 - Informal conversations between participants made in the presence of the researcher
 - Observations made by the researcher; and
3. The collection of documents drawn up about the sites, which was possible only for the Castle Children's Centre, as no documentation about the Stanford Family Services Network had been drawn up.

These methods are discussed in the following sections.

3.1 Interviews, conversations and the development of research relationships

Because this research was underpinned by an approach that considered participants' points of views important not just for ethical reasons but also in terms of interpretation, interviews and informal conversations were the most important sources of data collection and interpretation (Lofland, 1971). Observations and documentary analysis were used to enrich the content of interviews and informal conversations (Atkinson & Coffey, 2002; Chase 2005).

Interviews with practitioners took place at different times during the study. During the initial interview with each participant, some time was taken

to introduce him or her to the research and to deal with the ethical issues related to participation as mentioned above. Once each individual had consented to participate, a first interview dealing with general issues was conducted. The same procedure took place in both case studies. Appendix One presents the interview guide used during the initial interview.

On average, the first interview took 30 minutes. This, however, was not undertaken as the first activity with every participant, as times were arranged to suit his or her schedule. In the Castle Children's Centre, four participants were interviewed during the first contact and the other four were interviewed during the first four months of the research. For the Stanford Family Services Network, no one could be interviewed in the first encounter. The three staff members were interviewed during the first three months of the research. On those occasions when the first interview could not take place on the first day, the researcher sought an initial informal conversation with practitioners about the activities of the research and the ethical use of the information obtained. Nevertheless, these issues would be resumed with more detail during the first interview. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and later returned to participants to verify that the resulting text accurately reflected their views. As transcriptions demand a certain degree of analysis, more details of this process are provided in the section dealing with analysis. Only Rasha, from the Castle Children's Centre, preferred her interview not to be recorded. In her case, the researcher recorded all he could remember as soon as the interview finished and this was transcribed and returned to her for her to confirm that the transcript reflected her views.

Interviews were open-ended to facilitate the emergence of issues not previously considered by the researcher; this is the reason why open-ended, in-depth interviews are the indicated type for ethnographic studies and interpretations based on grounded theory (Spradley, 1979; Johnson, 2002; Warren, 2002). Seven participants in the Castle Children's Centre and one in the Stanford Family Services Network talked about more issues than those in the interview guide, thus enhancing the scope of the research from the first encounter and initiating a trusting relationship with the researcher. The different reception the researcher found from different participants also gave an insight into the ways in which the researcher's presence was perceived. We shall come back to this point later.

A second interview took place approximately half way through data gathering. This would re-examine some passages from the transcripts of the first interviews and in each case would include further questions about the way each participant's experience had caused changes in themselves, their expectations for the future and the relationship with Local Authorities and Central Government. Interview guides were drawn up individually from issues identified in the first interview, informal conversations and observations. The second interview remained open-ended. In the Castle Children's Centre, for example, this second interview included issues such as the history of the Centre with Laura and Margaret, the participants who had worked in the Centre for the longest period. At the end of this second interview, the transcript of the first interview was handed to every participant to confirm that the sense of their answers was being reflected and also offering the chance for further conversations to explore anything else they considered important.

Later, participants also received a transcription of the second interview and could also comment on that.

Unstructured interviews allow analysing *in situ*, a process integral to an ethnographic approach. To take advantage of this, the interviewer must be able to analyse emerging themes not previously considered, evaluating the convenience of deviating from his guide to explore the potential importance of emerging themes and their relation to other themes and issues of the particular interviewee and the whole research (Carlson & West, 2005; Scheurich 1995; Kong *et al*, 2002; Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Koheler-Riessman, 2002). On the other hand, interviews are also social relationships in which the researcher can set up the conditions for the development of a trusting relationship with the interviewees. This is only possible if the interviewer is able to interpret more than the answers which the interviewees give to questions during this social relationship, making sure that interviewees feel comfortable with the way questions are being posed, particularly when exploring apparent inconsistencies or touching on delicate issues. This is what Fontana & Frey (2005) call an 'empathetic interview' and was the model that underpinned interviewing in this research.

During interviews and informal conversations, themes such as the relationship some participants had with authorities or the way some of them had dealt with racism in their lives emerged. Besides the usual procedures of initiating an interview, creating a good rapport, closing the interview and then summarising findings and reassuring participants (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Ryen, 2002), the interviewer had to be able to interpret the interviewees'

emotional responses and react to them. He could either express verbally the feelings the interviewee may have gone through during the experience, thank the interviewees for their openness and trust, or reassure them about how valuable their experiences were for the research and for the relationship with the researcher. The interviewer eventually took turns to talk and so relax the emotional tone of the interview, and when he considered that the interview could get out of hand, he changed the theme that might have caused distress or perhaps delayed its exploration for a more suitable time. Unstructured interviews require the interpretation and consequent reaction to the meaning of the discourse but also to the construction of trusting relationships (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, 1998, 2002; Dingwall, 1997).

A third interview was undertaken in the Castle Children's Centre with key informants Laura and Maggie. These were carried out near the end of the data-gathering period in which the researcher shared many of his interpretations and overall vision of interpretation, as a preamble to the writing up of the report.

Analysis in situ and ethical issues: developing research relationships

Ethical issues were not restricted to the basic procedures already mentioned. The development of research relationships with participants also relied on ethical issues (Christians, 2000, 2005; Saukko, 2005). Participants would continue to reflect on issues which emerged during interviews or informal conversations and would seek time to continue their discussion. In a sense, staff reflecting on research questions was considered to be an indication that questions were meaningful (Warren, 2002). However, they would also

express a preoccupation with the way the researcher was going to portray them, indicating that the relationship warranted reassurance. The following informal conversation with Margaret, from the Stanford Family Services Network illustrates this. She is referring to a previous interview in which the researcher had inquired about the way mothers attending the service had experienced personal development in overcoming isolation and depression. When the observed activity finished, she asked the researcher to stay and she said:

“... Remember that you asked me last week, about how these courses can actually help mothers with their depression? I forgot to mention the group process, oh dear it is so basic and I forgot it! Coming to the sessions and discovering they are not the only ones going through difficult times, feeling alone at home, with broken relationships and few aspirations: that alone makes them feel better. And part of the process consists of bringing them to the group and listening to other people’s experiences, encouraging them to do things, positive things for them when they feel better. I was so worried I didn’t tell you this last time. You know I don’t want you to think I’m not a good professional! (laughs) ...” Margaret

In this informal conversation, Margaret was giving important information about the research and about her relationship with the researcher. On the one hand, she was still thinking about the previous interview, and was enriching data gathering. On the other hand, the researcher interpreted this as a sign that she may have been expressing her preoccupation with being seen as a “bad professional” and also feared the researcher’s intention of judging her. After this comment, the researcher decided to reassure Margaret that her work was well-valued by the researcher and that the aim of the study was not to judge her work, but to learn from it. She was also reassured that she would have opportunities to see the way that the information was going to be

organised and that *she would have the power* to develop her comments and to participate in the process of interpreting data. She was happy with this reaction. Later, she developed her points of view on the interview transcripts and also made comments on the research report in progress.

Part of the information gathered using interviews and informal conversations was used to enrich the data-gathering process and the relationships with participants. The latter were not necessarily part of the findings of the research. A considerable amount of information was used to guide the process of collecting data, suggesting the questions to ask and identifying emerging categories. But part of the data gathered and its analysis *in situ* was used to develop the relationship between the researcher and participants.

3.2 Observations: conversations, activities and physical arrangements

As mentioned before, observations collected two types of information: informal conversations and descriptions either of social relationships, physical arrangements or activities. Observations were recorded in a field journal and interpretations about them were brought back to participants either during other informal conversations or interviews.

This section discusses the way in which observations were collected and used. The first section refers to informal conversations either with the researcher or among participants. The second part refers to the observation of activities and physical arrangements. Because it was considered that

recording observation requires some type of analysis, issues on the field journal are dealt with in the section on analysis.

a) Conversations with the researcher

Because the main source of information and validation was considered to be the ongoing communication between participants and the researcher, conversations were considered to be an extension of interviews (Silverman, 2000, 2005, Atkinson & Coffey, 2002; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). As shown in the example above, the researcher actively sought opportunities to strengthen data collection by combining interviews and informal conversations. This way of proceeding makes the research more likely to become multi-voiced and avoids interpretations based solely on the researcher's views (Tedlock, 2000; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Angrosino, 2005).

Conversations with participants gave the researcher a background to understanding the activities he was going to observe, about the people who were going to attend, or about activities and thoughts that came to participants' minds before or after activities had taken place. Informal conversations also facilitated insights into the way relationships with the researcher were being developed. To avoid being too intrusive, the researcher decided not to take notes during conversations or during activities and there was no question of recording these conversations, because this would have destroyed their spontaneity and their essential informality

Informal conversations were the main source for data collection with Stanford Family Services Network service users. This site opened part-time

and service users attended for a limited period, only when group activities took place. However, opportunities for conversation would present themselves during the development of these activities, during break times and in the brief periods before and after activities took place.

b) Conversations between participants

During observations, participants had different kinds of conversations among themselves. At the end of every observation, the researcher would aim to record the content of conversations that related to the research interests. Although people had given consent to participate in the research, it was considered that the use of these conversations was not ethical. Therefore, conversations between participants were considered exclusively as a trigger to raise issues during conversations with the researcher or during interviews. In this way, information that was considered important by the researcher was always interpreted in collaboration with participants.

c) Observations of activities and physical arrangements

During the research period, both sites were visited regularly for observation. These observations were useful for building trust, helping the researcher to understand the broader context of services, and exploring how the community ethos had evolved. Descriptions of physical arrangements and an analysis of how these related to social processes were developed from observations (Angrosino & Pérez, 2000; Atkinson & Delamont, 2005; Lofland & Lofland, 1984). The Castle Children's Centre was visited 120 times. These observations included mainly early education for children aged three to four

years, sessions in which participating staff were involved, but other services were also observed such as:

- After school services
- Translation services
- Individual school support for older children
- Antiracist activities directed towards community colleges involved in racial incidents
- Festivals organised by the Centre
- Support for other community-based organisations
- Conferences offered by staff members
- Guided visits to overseas groups and institutions
- Activities promoted by the Centre and other groups and institutions to promote inclusion of both genders and cultural diversity among early-years staff nationally.

During the first four months of the research, observations took place three times a week. Afterwards, observations took place once a week or during special activities, such as agreed interviews or festivals.

For the Stanford Family Services Network, observations took place during the weekly sessions and were directed at local young mothers during school term times. Four courses of 12 weeks each were observed on two occasions, giving 96 observations in total. All these observations took place at Stanford House, the Network's base. In addition, eight more observations took place at toddlers' groups, four of them at Stanford House and four more on the premises of another nursery supported by the Network. Overall, the Stanford Family Services Network was observed 108 times.

With the aim of not being too intrusive, it was after observations had finished that notes were taken or recordings made.

d) Issues on validity

During the first sessions, notes were taken after activities had finished. Later the researcher decided instead to make tape recordings at the time and then transcribe later in an attempt to preserve more detail.

By directing the decisions about further exploration in the process of data gathering and in the use of theory, field notes helped to triangulate information and, in doing so, they were also helping in validating that data management was systematic. Triangulation was not considered as a means to ensure that collected data reflected the *reality out there*, but rather that data was thoroughly analysed and that emerging findings from the three methods used in the study were considered and their meaning corroborated with the research participants (Silverman, 2005; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Richardson & Adams, 2005; Saukko, 2005)

e) Ethical issues

At the beginning of every activity, mainly courses on parenting and toddlers' groups, the researcher was introduced by staff members. A brief introduction of the research was presented and attendees were assured that the researcher was going to observe the development of activities and would include information about those who wanted to talk to the researcher about their experience. It was made clear that participation was voluntary, that anonymity would be assured and that participants would have the opportunity to add to and approve what the researcher might say about them.

3.3 Documentary analysis

Documentary analysis was carried out for The Castle Children's Centre only. No documentation existed relating to Stanford House.

Seven documents drawn up about the Centre either by staff members or external agents were considered in the study:

- Two evaluations undertaken for the Early Excellence programme; these were prepared by an external evaluator along with staff members;
- One article published in a journal on early years issues by staff members and the external evaluator;
- A chapter of a published book on early years education and diversity;
- Two internal documents on policies implemented by the Centre; and
- An account of meetings with representatives of the Local Authority drawn up by Centre staff and an external researcher.

To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, these seven documents appear in the Case Study as 'documents withheld' 1-7.

The use of these documents was subordinated to data collected and interpreted through interviews and conversations. Two of them were of particular interest as participants referred to them at different points. These were the journal article and one of the evaluations. As a result of the mentioned evaluation, staff members decided to invest some time in reconsidering the Centre's main aims and policies. The journal article was one of the results of such effort and participants felt that it reflected their views well.

The second document, one prepared as part of the evaluation, was also referred to during conversations about service users. Staff members had recently put considerable effort into drawing up a series of service users' case studies for the evaluation.

For these reasons, documentary analysis was used to continue and reinforce data collection through interviews and conversations. Perakyla's suggestions about analysing documents were useful:

"... An informal approach, may, in many cases, be the best choice as a method in research focusing on written text. Especially in research designs where the qualitative text analysis is not at the core of the research but instead is subsidiary or has a complementary role, no more sophisticated text analytical methods may be needed ..." (Perakyla, 2005: 870).

Although issues and interpretations arose from the analysis of documents, these were used during interviews or conversations (see also Prior, 2003 and Hodder, 2002).

4 Analysis during data collection

Throughout this chapter, it has already been stated that the ethnographic and grounded theory approaches used in the study required a simultaneous use of data collection and analysis. Examples of how interviews and informal conversations were used have also been presented when discussing the development of research relationships (Section 3a of this chapter). This section presents further details about the way data was analysed. First, the ways in which data was recorded is presented; these include interview transcripts and the field journal. After this, some further issues on grounded theory are discussed.

4.1 Instruments

a) Interview transcriptions

Verbatim transcriptions were attempted. However, in the context of methods based on social constructionism and post-modern views, the possibilities of

carrying out verbatim transcriptions are questioned (Poland, 2002; Johnson, 2002; Chase, 2005). In a first test, transcripts attempting to maintain the silences resulted in a text which was difficult for participants to understand. So it was decided that instead of attempting verbatim transcriptions, the transcriptions made would give priority to the participants' meaning, and consequently these were edited, avoiding repetitions and making the flow of ideas easy for the readers to follow (Atkinson, 2002). Afterwards, participants' approval of interview transcripts became the way to validate transcripts and the means of avoiding researcher bias or misunderstanding. Complementarily, validity was also sought through the use of a high-quality tape-recording (Chase, 2005) with the use of a digital mini disc recording.

b) Recording observations, the field journal

Observations and informal conversations were recorded in a field journal. Records were kept using two leaves divided into three sections per observation. On the right-hand leaf, notes were made and care was taken to include descriptive narrative. The left-hand leaf was divided into two columns. The right column was for the researcher's notes signposting any need for further exploration, for highlighting the emergence of new issues, and for indicating data related to the relationship between participants and the researcher. The left column was used for memo writing, a strategy used for analysis and dealt with below. An example of the field journal is shown in Appendix Two.

4.2 Data management and analysis during collection

All transcriptions and field notes were analysed with the help of the programme Atlas.ti in order to facilitate data management. This software claims to have been developed particularly for analysis based on grounded theory (Atlasti, undated). The software was used for managing data in the form of text from interview transcriptions and observations.

Section One of this chapter has already mentioned the two main analytical steps needed to build theory according to grounded theory, a management phase and an analytical one characterised by different codes: codebooks and open codes respectively. Texts were analysed phrase by phrase focusing on meaning several times throughout the research (Charmaz, 2000, 2002). Considerable time was dedicated to coding, particularly once every round of interviews had been transcribed as the field journal structure allowed the same process after every observation. However, coding was a frequent activity. Every time the software was used to define and redefine codebooks, an attempt to create open codes was also undertaken. Contrasting and saturating emerging categories was one of the ways of identifying gaps in information and focusing data collection (Seale, 1999; Spradley, 1979; Becker, 1998). The software also facilitated focusing emerging categories in particular individuals and activities (Kelle, 1997; Lonkila, 1995). Because the case studies had started with a difference of seven months and their selection was made on the basis of their assumed contrasts, their analysis remained independent during data collection, with the exception of memo writing which sign-posted potential comparisons.

Reflecting on the data, organising it and testing different ways of presenting it offered new ways to reflect on the data, not only for the researcher but also for participants when the researcher took ideas back to the field for discussion. In this way, grounded theory was used to manage data and encourage participation, in what Charmaz (2000, 2002) calls a 'constructivist grounded theory'. Such a viewpoint is congruent with the broader views of qualitative research validity in terms of involving participants and making findings relevant for them (Saukko, 2005; Silverman, 2005; Tedlock, 2005; Smith & Hodkinson, 2005).

Although during the last decade discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of using software as a tool for managing data have been common (Fetterman, 1998; Fielding & Lee, 1998; Coffey et al, 1996). Brewer (2000) and Weitzman (2000) state that it seems that the use of software for data management is now widely accepted. Although it is recognised that software can facilitate data management, scepticism about its potential for actually making more complex analysis remains, particularly when ethnography seeks to relate to broader theory (Friedman, 1990; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Such a point of view was shared by the author, particularly regarding the comparison of the two cases and the use of theory, issues which are discussed in a later section.

4.3 Concluding the fieldwork

Concluding an ethnographic study is a difficult decision. The literature suggests that the end can be considered when the researcher is just as able to explain the group's everyday life as any member (Silverman, 2005, Brewer,

2000). In the case of the Castle Children's Centre, two situations offered evidence that this point had been reached. The first one was when a TV production took place. A documentary on some of the Centre's innovations was being made. As a result of the ongoing process in the Centre, staff members asked the researcher to participate as somebody "who knew the Centre well". During the informal conversations that day, staff members reaffirmed that they were happy with the researcher's points of view. Further evidence of this validation came when a publishing house expressed its interest in producing a book on the Centre and the researcher was invited to participate. This was not only because staff members agreed with the researcher's account of the Centre, but also because they considered that the study had, to some extent, enriched their understanding of their work, the aims of their organisation and the implications of these in a broader social context.

The Stanford Family Services Network study had a different end point. One of the Network's main activities was a series of 12-week courses on mothers' needs and parenting during school term times. Observations and service users' case studies showed that attending these courses twice was a regular practice among some participants. Research was therefore enriched by observing each one of the four courses twice, having the chance to explore the meaning of this course repetition and the way these activities were developed with people who had previously attended them. Because courses took place during school term times, the end of school term was a convenient time to end data gathering. In March 2005, all four courses had been observed twice. Additionally, Patricia, one of the key staff members

participating in the research, was going to stop offering courses at Stanford House, the main observation site, to work temporarily in a different part of the city. By that time, the research was closely following four service users and two of them were referred to a different site at the end of that term, as they had already attended every course twice. The other two participants were considering ceasing attendance at services for reasons relevant to the study and detailed in Chapter Five. Other research participants had stopped attending Stanford House and had already validated the data concerning themselves.

5 Subsequent data analysis

In ethnographic approaches, it is considered that data analysis starts with data collection, although for Miles & Huberman (1994), for example, the process starts even earlier, with the selection of cases and research participants. Previous sections have made reference to the relationship between data collection and analysis; this section refers to other analytical processes that did not relate to data collection in a direct way. Section a) refers to the three strategies considered in the study, section b) presents considerations on the ways in which the researcher influenced data collection and analysis, and section c) summarises the limits of the study.

5.1 Methods of data analysis

a) Memo writing

Memo writing consists of a register of insights, hypothesis or doubts that demand attention at times different to their writing. These were registered in the reserved section of the field journal or in the reserved space that the

software makes for them. Memos can trace potential relationships between different segments of data both during and after the collection phase. Such relationships can refer either to specific participants, or to experiences among participants, or to different sources of information. In this sense, memos suggest categories for further exploration of themes and issues. Memos can also consist of a record of decisions taken about data gathering. At other times, the researcher would associate emerging data with previously analysed data and memo writing would simply evidence the need to explore and develop relationships (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Dey, 1999; Charmaz, 2002).

Memo writing can also help to link emerging data with theory. Memos would start to highlight potential ways of relating emerging categories with existing literature, highlighting potential relationships and interpretations between first-hand data and theory, thus building a body of knowledge.

b) Theoretical linkage

As stated above, one of the main aims of ethnography, seen from a constructivist and critical standpoint, is to relate small-scale data to broader social theory (Tedlock, 2005; Saukko, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 2005, 2000). For this reason, although interpretation is widely seen as an iterative process between the researcher and research participants, the literature also warns against limiting interpretation to them and encourages theoretical discussion of ethnographic findings (Silverman, 2005; Walkerdine *et al*, 2001; Farmer, 2001; Bourgois, 2002; Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970).

To a large extent, the theoretical framework presented in Chapter One was the result of reflecting and understanding data not only in terms of

participants' views but also within the broader context of social theory. The Castle Children's Centre, assumed to be a community-led scheme, raised issues little explored in the literature and their analysis presented an exciting challenge. Data collection was also accompanied by a literature review regarding emerging ideas. Although Chapter Four presents the Castle Children's Centre case study, some findings need to be mentioned here. The study of the Centre not only confirmed that assumption but also went further; relying on literature, the Centre could be thought to be a social movement. Literature linking social movements with services for young children and families was then searched.

The Network Society theory (Chapter One Section 3.3) provided an adequate background that could not only explain the collected data but also presented the opportunity to consolidate and progress data analysis. An example of how theory helped to reinterpret and focus data collection is provided in Appendix 3.

c) Comparing case studies

The final level of analysis, comparing the two case studies, was the phase in which theoretical issues were more evident. As mentioned above, the case studies were selected on the basis of on their assumed differences, and comparing them in evaluative terms was not part of the aim of the study. Rather, the opportunity to compare the case studies was related more to providing more opportunities for theorising. Silverman (2005) and Stake (2005) discuss how, when developing collective case studies, it is a common practice to develop a middle-range theory for one of them and later test it on

other cases to maximise the theoretical benefit for them. Fine & Weis (2005), talk about 'compositional studies' in which data is analysed by putting emphasis on the similarities and differences of case studies and then relating them to the specificities of their contexts, an approach used in this study.

Although the comparison of case studies began during the data collection phase, this was largely restricted to memo writings. The main categories of participation, community-led and government-led development as well as the active role of communities in programmes for young children, families and communities, were defined only when case studies were compared once advanced drafts of both case studies had been developed. These categories considered together, in the researcher's view, are able to summarise and give a sense of the wider findings of the study. However, the concepts of community-led and government-led development can also be reductionist and can give complexity to the findings if taken out of context. For that reason, the subtitle of the study, *Two case studies of one NGO and community members accepting, resisting an proposing alternatives to government programmes*, was preferred, as it makes it explicit that both types of development can house a community's participation and can provide participants with meaningful experiences.

5.2 Researcher's influence on data collection and analysis

The way the researcher's presence influenced participants' behaviour during observations was different at each site (for a discussion on reflexivity, the way in which researchers influence research see Bryant, 2003, Guba & Lincoln, 2005 and Schwandt, 2000). The Castle Children's Centre was a

scheme in which cultural diversity was well-valued. Being a Mexican male, dark-skinned and with a foreign accent seemed to have facilitated the researcher's acceptance. As will be explained in Chapter Four, part of the curriculum developed in the Castle Children's Centre was based on the people who attend services, and their cultural background is part of how young children know and learn to appreciate their uniqueness. The Centre has a policy of including a 50 percent quota of male workers. In this way, the researcher's presence was not surprising for participants. It even triggered a few activities initiated by children in which he was asked to talk about his cultural background and to work with a four-year girl for a Christmas celebration. Many staff members had gone through the process of arriving in the city without knowing anybody, and knowing little about the local culture. Soon, attitudes of solidarity began to be expressed and one of those was being keen to participate in the research. The researcher's gender and cultural background seemed to give him almost an insider status, facilitating the establishment of research relationships, although naturally care was taken in collecting data about the development of these relationships (Dumbar *et al* 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Tuhiwai, 2005)

During his first interview, for example, Hamid quickly usurped the researcher's interview guide to talk about sensitive issues. He began telling his story about how risky it could be for "dark-skinned guys like you and me" to work in the early-years field. Staff members would constantly ask the researcher how he was settling down in the city, offering to socialise and making sure the researcher had a good experience beyond the research

itself. These attitudes were also important for understanding some of the processes discussed in the case.

The Stanford Family Services Network, on the other hand, was a site working 12 hours a week, in which the main activity was the development of two-hour session courses. This site was in an area of town that had had racial incidents in the past. When the research started, activities were running with white English female participants only. Staff members were cooperative and welcoming, but the presence of the researcher in the sessions was clearly surprising for some participants. During the development of activities, some participants confided in the researcher that they had never chatted with an overseas person and expressed their surprise to see the male researcher participating in activities such as sewing and cooking. Some pictures of the researcher taking part in these activities were placed on the entrance board inviting fathers and minority groups to join activities. Some of the participants were single mothers or had difficult relationships with their partners, some of them would ask the researcher to give his “male point of view” on different issues. Gaining service users’ trust took longer than in the Castle Children’s Centre and becoming a ‘fly on the wall’ was more difficult.

In the first attempt to carry out an interview with one of the service users, some participants reacted by making jokes about the researcher’s ‘real intentions’ to maintain private conversations. As a consequence, it was decided to avoid circumstances in which the researcher was seen alone with any of the participating mothers. Data collection relied exclusively on conversations during activities when no misunderstandings could arise.

Another major difference resided in the degree of independence that staff members had. The Castle Children's Centre was a long-established service that emerged as a community initiative and through the years remained an independent organisation. Since being awarded Early Excellence Centre status in 1998, the Castle Children's Centre became a partnership between the government and the independent organisation. The Stanford Family Services Network was a government initiative set up through the local Early Excellence and local Sure Start programmes, so the Local Authority paid the staff members. During interviews, Network staff members talked freely about their experiences. However, while validating data the researcher was asked not to include some comments gathered during the interviews. Some staff members did not feel comfortable with the idea that their opinions could be traced by any authority and decided not to take the risk. Over the research period, some staff members would revise the way in which some information was to be shown. As a result, some issues did not get participants' consent for publication.

5.3 Limitations of the study

Throughout this chapter some of the main limitations of the study have already been mentioned. Among them, the following were highlighted:

- By using an ethnographic approach, the study can only be partial. Its validity is restricted to the time and space in which it took place. However, significant efforts were made in order to achieve validity during data collection and analysis.

- The lack of inclusion of current service users in the Castle Children's Centre. This limitation was partly helped with the inclusion of case studies from the Centre's evaluation and with interviews of service providers who previously had been service users.
- For ethical considerations, interviews were not conducted with Stanford House service users. Particular case studies of them were drawn up based on data collected through informal conversations. Each participant nevertheless gave approval to his or her particular case study.
- The lack of inclusion of children's views in both sites. Because of the time constraints, the study dealt only with adults.
- The lack of inclusion of Local Authority representatives. The importance of these figures increased as the research unfolded, but it was not possible to include their views.
- Service users did not see the final version of the Stanford Family Services Network case study. This was due to the fact that the study finished when the last participants had left the services.

The following chapters present the findings from both case studies. Because these were different, it was decided to present them separately. However, the Conclusions section resumes the discussion on some of the main differences and similarities among them.

Chapter Four. Case Study 1. The Castle Children's Centre

The Castle Children's Centre has been in existence for almost 25 years. It has grown from a childcare provision in a local church hall to an influential and innovative service for children and families. The service operates on two sites in a large English city and has links abroad. The Castle Children's Centre works as a Community Co-operative providing services through the support and direction of a Management Board as part of a bottom-up, capacity-building process. It has remained independent of Local Authority structures. Studying the Centre illustrates how community participation has been central to its development and success. This case study seeks to illustrate four aspects that seem closely aligned to the Centre's achievements and continued existence:

1. The Centre was created as a community initiative providing early years education that has grown to develop family services. Likewise, the Centre is a network of services seeking to develop the community.
2. The services provided at the Centre are based on a set of values and beliefs shared by service users and service providers. These form the basis of a common identity.
3. Participants have developed innovative services and their identity through a long process that has involved social conflict and resistance. The Centre has not only been a means for the community to resist social exclusion, but also to developed alternatives for services for children and their families and even a cultural option for the wider

community. The Centre can be seen as a social movement attempting social change.

4. Since the Labour reforms, the Centre has gone through an ambiguous period in which it has received some support, but has also experienced pressure to change its identity, relocate or even disappear.

The case study aims to illustrate how the Centre has become a social arena where community identity is forged, where alternatives to mainstream practice evolve, and where the community strives to tackle its condition of social exclusion. Over the years, the Castle Children's Centre has also expanded services to ten countries in North Africa and the Middle East. Additionally, the Centre has become a participant in international policy-making. But the Castle Children's Centre and its alternative policies and practices can only be understood within the social context from which they have emerged. Who are the service providers and service users? What conditions are they resisting? What means of resistance have they created? Why have they resisted for such a long time? Is there a chance that this resistance will wane? These are some of the questions that this case study explores.

This chapter is organised into five sections. The first section presents the origins and history of the Centre, sets out the context of exclusion from which it emerged, and explains the way in which it has shifted its aims and developed its practice. Section Two presents the values and beliefs that structure its daily activities and innovation. Section Three discusses the way in which participants have developed their identity. Section Four explores the

ways in which such identity has facilitated the establishment of links abroad and has attracted negative attention from certain groups. Finally, Section Five examines how Labour government reforms have affected the Centre.

As was mentioned in Chapter Three, the case study was carried out between November 2002 and June 2004 through an ethnographic approach that included interviews, observations, informal conversations and documental analysis. The Castle Children's Centre was chosen because there were good reasons to believe it was a community-led initiative. When the researcher learnt about the Centre, it had already been in operation for 22 years, since 1979. Its developments of holistic and integrated services for young children, families and its community had been acknowledged and had won Early Excellence Centre status from the beginning of this programme in 1998. All this made the Centre a potential relevant case whose history was worthy of note, or in Stake's (2005) terms, an 'intrinsic case study'.

The study followed ten staff members, interviewing them twice during the process, also recording informal conversations and opinions on the organisation and interpretation of the data. The exceptions to this were Laura and Maggie, who were interviewed three times as they had been in the project for longer and could provide more information, particularly about the history of the Centre.

1 History. An holistic and integrated alternative to fragmented and scarce childcare and community services

Currently, the Castle Children's Centre has two main sites in England. Both are located in the inner-city region of a large northern city with a population of over half a million. The Local Government ward in which the Centre is located is among one of the poorest 20% in England, with a considerable ethnic minority population (document withheld 1¹²). The Castle Children's Centre emerged from a context in which poverty and related exclusion were part of everyday life for a section of the community. As discussed in Chapter One Section 4.2, community-based organisations and urban grassroots social movements emerge mostly from such conditions.

During the last years of Labour Government in the late 1970s, a Community Programme childcare provision was established in the local ward, through government funding. This was a forerunner to the Castle Children's Centre. Some of the current members of the Centre were part of this scheme and spent over one year offering childcare services to the local community. When the Conservative Government came to power, the funding for the Community Programme ceased. The Centre emerged and developed during its first 18 years under a Conservative Government, which broadly saw childcare and related services as a private matter and that people wishing for these services should arrange to purchase them individually within the existing market. Poorer communities, however, attracted little interest from the private sector (see Chapter Two Sections 1 and 2).

Members of the Centre staff have different recollections of when the Centre actually began. Some mention 1979, when the state-supported

Community Programme first began (document withheld 2¹³). Some others consider the Centre's beginning to be when it started to run independently, in the hall of an old church in 1981 (document withheld 3¹⁴). Laura, the project manager, evokes the origins of the Centre in this interview extract in which she draws attention to a nursery school in the area that local parents did not seem to feel comfortable with:

"... I came to the city doing children's work and the community around this area asked me to get involved to set up some services for them specifically. The local provision that was being provided by the Department of Education didn't actually meet the needs of the children and families involved. They felt there was discrimination against them because they were lone parents or from black ethnic minority communities and because they were poor. Some of the children were very poor. The poor clothes they used caused offence to the richer people coming from outside of the areas ... That's what they were going through at that time ..."
Laura

As noted by Laura, the Centre began its work from an agreement between practitioners and community members who decided to continue the activities of the soon-to-close Community Programme. It seems that the community members felt they were being discriminated against at the nursery run by the Local Authority as well as in other groups in the wider community. It can also be inferred that those service users had established a good relationship with Laura and other service providers and trusted them sufficiently to communicate their feelings and needs. They probably also believed that an alternative could be developed. Together, staff and community started running a small childcare service and began to look for funding. The origin of the Centre was therefore a mutual agreement between service users and service providers based on the need to meet problems that

mainstream services could not. There also seemed to be a clear idea about what these services should not be: discriminatory.

This seems to be what Castells calls the “exclusion of the excluders by the excluded” (2004:9). Here, the feelings and the decision to take action uncover a set of values that can eventually gather people to resist the oppression or exclusion to which they feel subjected. Exclusion seemed to be apparent not only in the lack of services but also in the little understanding that established services had of the community’s feelings and needs.

Unlike Local Authority childcare services, which were mainly part-time, the Castle Children’s Centre aimed to provide full-time services, allowing parents or carers in some cases to gain qualifications and eventually jobs. But also the Centre aimed to meet other needs such as those of the ill and disabled, single mothers, women victims of violence, families going through crises, ethnic minorities and other families that could not meet their needs *via* the mainstream services. Among these groups were immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers who needed to learn the English language, to deal with Local Authorities and to know their rights and which services they were entitled to. In this sense, the Centre emerged in accordance with the age which Haddad (2002) has called ‘Cultural Revolution’, in which women’s and children’s rights were paramount, and with a strong commitment to social justice (See Chapter One Section 1.2).

According to conversations recorded in the field journal, Maggie, in charge of finances, recalled that the staff attempted to match community needs with the actions and organisation of the newly-created Centre. Mothers

wishing to start a career in childcare could take their children to the Centre while getting training from qualified staff. The Centre would provide training and trainees would collaborate in keeping the Centre open full-time. The community's involvement was a necessary feature. Those who could would pay for the service but the Centre attempted to maintain an open-door policy. Service users wanted a service that would not discriminate against anybody and many would have no money to pay, at least not until they got a job. When life improved, some of them would return the favour, as will emerge later in the case study.

In this way, the Centre started running a full-time childcare service without any external support. Today, we know that the Centre not only survived 18 years of Conservative Government but also managed to grow and develop innovative services in such an way that the Labour Government in 1998 named it one of the first Early Excellence Centres. How could they achieve this? Where did the resources come from? How could they develop such levels of expertise? It was not easy. Maggie recollects the problems of the early days:

“... It was very demanding and worrying for the people because there was no guarantee it was going to survive, going to be financially secure. In childcare it's a very dicey business. If you don't have people that sponsor you or pay your salaries, it's very difficult because you have your children here. Then, the children leave, they go abroad, they go to school, so you could lose ten children in a matter of a week and ten children are each generating 24 pounds per day for you. And you were carrying a lot of free children as well – these children needed a place to stay, needed accommodation. But we created a lot of problems ourselves ...

Generating the money has been difficult over all these years. There have been times in the office when we wanted to cry because we needed £500 at the end of the week. It wasn't a

money-spinner – it was never out to be an enormous attraction for anybody's money or wages. In the early days we were working for £50 a week, doing crèches at the weekend, we were doing all the training we could do, and it was very difficult. But I think because there was a lot of dedication, a lot of people who worked at the Centre without wages just because they believed in what we were doing ... Some people work here for nothing. They would be here even if they had to find part-time work elsewhere to keep the Centre going. A lot of people would be prepared to do that ..."
Maggie

Maggie mentions many important points in this passage. Firstly, the commitment of people involved was – and remains – strong. The staff have worked full-time at the Centre, and additionally worked weekends to offer crèche services, for small salaries. The motivation for this job has never been financial; it has never been part of the private sector. According to Maggie, it is because they believe in what they do at the Centre. It is based on values and beliefs.

Maggie also notes that, although the economic limitations were considerable, staff remained firm in their aim of providing for children and families which could not afford to pay for the service, knowing this could create a difficult situation. Constructing non-discriminatory services became one of the core aims of staff and community members. It seems that the Centre became a symbol of those values and beliefs in such a way that service providers and some service users have believed in its importance and that it was worthwhile to keep it going. This conviction has been so strong that people dedicate their time, work and resources to the Centre and to what it represents. At different times, many people have worked without receiving any wage, and sometimes they have given other resources to keep it running. As the study will show, this community support has remained over the years.

Solidarity has been a major resource for the Centre. But as Maggie continues to explain, staff also developed multiple skills that were used to generate money by offering services for the wider community:

“... In the early days when we were generating the money, the Out-of-School network first started from [the old church hall’s name], and we’d have our staff going to various out-of-school provisions. So we’d keep all the out-of-schools in relation to the finances where we’d pay our staff and then at the end of term we’d bill the out-of-school. So our staff was running everywhere to try and generate money to feed back into the system. An awful lot of problems arose trying to generate finances and finances and finances. And of course the staff was doing anything in relation to crèche working, out-of-school working, feasibility studies, business plans, working in child protection areas, contact centres. Any way we could generate the money ...” Maggie

Although the Castle Children’s Centre’s priority has been the socially excluded community it emerged from, the lack of childcare services in the wider community became a resource for the Centre. Maggie, Laura and the rest of the staff developed a variety of services for the wider community. These services were producing a profit, which was used to maintain the core childcare service at the old church hall. Complementarily, these activities were also based on values and beliefs. Among these profit-making activities, the Centre trained some people from the wider community as childminders, and carried out feasibility studies for people who wanted to start private childcare or preschool services. The Centre staff knew that the Local Authority could not always deal with certain children with special needs and developed the expertise of assessing and designing provision for them and for their families, which did generate income from the Local Authority. The Centre began to develop as part of the community voluntary sector with a social enterprise

vision based on values and beliefs (see for example Fitch, 1996; Clément & Gardin 2000).

The Centre was soon training community mothers not only as support childcare and education staff, but also in a series of more specialised activities. Complementarily, they found alternatives for funding activities. Integrating childcare, education and community services began early in the Centre's history.

By providing services for the Local Authority and the wider community, the Centre could offer socially excluded families access to its services. This was possible through the extended working hours that staff dedicated to the project along with the community mothers' support as volunteers. Some of those volunteers eventually became staff members themselves. The difference between service users and providers and between community and practitioners was quickly blurred, as has been the case in other community-led development schemes (Bertram *et al*, 2004; Chapter One Section 4.1).

Shifting aims and creating alternatives

1984 was a very difficult year for many in the north of England. The area around the city in which the Centre is located was affected. A major social movement arose to resist the closure of the coalmines and the end of a traditional way of life for miners and their families. Mass movements emerged. In this interview extract, Laura explains the repercussions of that social movement on the Castle Children's Centre, as the social exclusion and feelings of being discriminated against spread to a considerable number of people in the wider community:

“... staff and people in the community have come from a background of oppression and we had things like the miners’ strike, that was very extensive and damaging to our communities, destroying our heavy industry and also steel strikes. We had major attacks during the steel strikes. People lost their jobs overnight. We had a changed community where people had not been politicised previously but became politicised overnight as a result of heavy changes in politics and heavy police intervention, and their rights had been taken away and their communities had been eroded ...” Laura

In this interview extract, Laura underlines again the conditions staff and service users shared at the Centre. According to her, the miners’ strike, mass movements and the repression experienced by many in and around the city brought about deep changes in the wider community.

Laura continues to explain how the new meanings that emerged from the mass movement shifted the objectives and activities at the Centre:

“... we had steel workers who left their jobs as miners and came to the Centre with no qualifications. They went on to do childcare qualifications, some even doctorates. Others became social workers. Young men came as well as women in the same situation: without qualifications. They went through the system with NVQs, and they would choose how far they wanted to go. But also they had personal development such as driving lessons and they were supported also to train overseas. So they got a wider experience as part of professional development as well and that’s the kind of process. It is about encouraging people to do what they want to do really. Within the constraint of the budgets (laughs) that’s the thing isn’t it really? ...” Laura

According to Laura, in those troubled times the Centre took in some of the ex-miners. This action brought about a series of innovations at the Centre. Some of the ex-miners started to work at the Centre receiving training and gaining qualifications. This was partly the origin of the Centre’s policy of having a 50:50 ratio of men to women on the staff. Over the years, the arguments for the policy developed in different directions. It was a non-discriminatory policy for men because miners needed to overcome their

situation; for women because it could show that mainstream childcare was thought of as a gendered activity; and for children because it would offer them the opportunity to grow up establishing meaningful relationships with both female and male staff members (Cameron, Moss & Owen, 1999; Moss, 2006). We shall return to this point later when discussing values and policies.

Laura also mentions the expansion of the training programme: it was not restricted to childcare, early education issues or working needs. Social work, health services, legal issues and driving lessons were included. The Castle Children's Centre has not only supported people in gaining qualifications directly related to the activities undertaken on its premises. During the fieldwork period, some of the research participants undertook training overseas, one of them in Pakistan and another in Germany. In informal conversations, some research participants mentioned former colleagues who had obtained qualifications in technologies and in the performing arts. Service providers and service users have been encouraged through the training programme to obtain qualifications in spite of not having a direct relationship with activities within the Centre. What is the logic for this? Again, the values and beliefs shared by the community can explain this situation; many at the Centre have not had the resources to allow them to choose the areas they wanted to develop professionally. The training programme aimed to facilitate the development of participants in their desired areas and this was not having the Centre's development in mind, but a broader community development.

But there are returns to the Centre; former trainees support the Centre. Laura continues to explain the relationship with some of those who have received the support of the Centre:

“... And of course, some of those who have left continue to support us as well or have their own children in here and linking to projects so the Centre has maintained the links with lots of them. Some have also come back and helped us as volunteers ...”
Laura

According to Laura, some of the people who have benefited from the Centre continue to maintain a relationship with it. Either they have their children at the Centre, paying for the service and helping to support new families who are unable to pay, or they offer their professional services when someone at the Centre needs them.

Relationships based on identity and solidarity are the basis of what Adler-Lomnitz (1977, 1994 and Adler-Lomnitz & Pérez, 1988) calls ‘networks of reciprocal exchange and support’. Such networks have allowed the Centre community to overcome difficult times while developing a commitment with others. Later, some of those who were helped could assist others in need. This is possible when identity is shared. Networks of reciprocal exchange and support are community resources. These can be financial but are also social and emotional resources, which members going through difficult times can hold on to. The development of networks of support reaffirms the identity and sense of belonging among community members and strengthens the potential of the community as a whole. The concept of networks of support can also explain why it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between staff and service users. Those who have been helped tend to help others when they

are better placed, service users become staff and the staff have eventually benefited by making use of the networks of reciprocal exchange and support, as the case study will also illustrate.

As the Centre started to expand in its range of activities, and in the number of children that were cared for, the church hall became insufficient. Additionally, as a result of the Children Act 1989 (Acts of Parliament, 1989) the church hall could not longer be considered fit for the purpose. Staff and community members got involved in another major event; the acquisition of their own building:

“... So we found ourselves in a position where we had a building that couldn't accommodate the children ... we found this place [one of the current sites] and had to generate over ¼ or ½ a million pounds to move in here, but we needed more staff. At that stage we were generating £50 a week and that was quite a frightening experience because we were caring for many children and we were caring for new children. So we needed new staff in relation to these children and needed qualifications in relation to this staff. The process required ¾ of a million ... the place has always run because goodness always comes to the Centre, because you have to help people ... and nobody's done that at the beginning ... it has maintained itself from the beginning ...”
Maggie

With difficulties, but with a firm belief that the Centre was worth it, Maggie speaks of the considerable amount of money the Centre required to continue to exist during this period. This is also the time when the Centre became a co-operative, establishing a formal structure. From a symbolic point of view, the informal social relationships reflecting solidarity shifted into a new phase. There was a risk that a formal structure could put off some community members or change the type of commitment developed so far.

The Centre needed to change. The number and diversity of members, the formalisation of the structure and the need for a new building required a transition. And this whole process of change needed to maintain the original values and beliefs.

Although Calhoun (1994) does not discuss childcare or community development services, his work is relevant here. The emergence of the Castle Children's Centre's can be described as a period of *resistance identity*. Calhoun's standpoint considers the emergence of identities in the process of resistance to the domination of groups in power, that is, identities behind social movements. From Calhoun's point of view, the clue to understanding how people organise themselves to resist domination lies in the shared set of values and hopes of how society should not be: a rejection of their future of exclusion. This is the starting point for many community-based organisations and grassroots social movements (see Chapter One Section 4.2).

In our view, the most convincing argument for seeing the Castle Children's Centre as a social movement is the transformation that this *resistance identity* subsequently underwent.

Castells (2004) sustains the hypothesis that major social movements and mass movements, such as the miners' strikes, can transform the *resistance identity* of community-based groups like the Castle Children's Centre, shifting their identity into a *project identity*. Like *resistance identities*, *project identities* resist domination, but they also propose – and eventually implement – alternatives to oppressive mainstream ideas. It seems that the miners' strike changed the Centre not only because it had to provide for more

people but also because it encouraged the development of innovative practices such as the inclusion of male workers in its activities. The event also changed the composition of service users and service providers and led the Centre to form part of a wider struggle against social exclusion. It also made it necessary to implement new means of organisation in order to include a growing number of participants and their diversity.

In Chapter One Section 2.2, mass movements as a means for social change were discussed. In their development, new meanings are created and groups tend to reorganise (see also Fernandez Christlieb, 1999; Delgado, 1992), as seems to have occurred in the case of the Centre. This shift, however, did not mean a change of values and beliefs, but their consolidation and expansion into new activities. From creating an alternative to scarce and discriminating services, the Centre turned into a provision that would cherish and attempt to develop practice, based on inclusion, participation and reciprocity, and would also seek social change. To discuss the characteristics of such social change, however, is necessary to discuss first the set of values and beliefs at the basis of that identity and practice.

2. Values, beliefs and practices structuring social spaces and services

Over the years, the Castle Children's Centre has developed integrated and holistic services for children and families. This section discusses the ways that the values and beliefs of the Centre's identity are at the basis of innovative policies and practices. The first part of this section discusses activities with children. The second looks at activities for families and the wider community.

2.1 The Centre and the core activities with children

This section pays attention to the physical organisation of the premises and the development of the curriculum for young children.

a) Physical arrangements

Currently, the Centre's staff in England comprises 74 members on two sites, including off-site activities. They provide for over 700 children every day ranging from a few weeks of age to 16 years old, although some exceptions are made for children up to 18 years of age if they or their families have special needs. The main site is located about half a mile from the city centre. It consists of a set of two prefabricated buildings constructed for temporary use after the Second World War. The bigger one is nearly 35m in length and houses the main services for young children, which are organised by age into three sections. In the baby room, as its name indicates, childcare is offered for children from three months to 24 months, although younger children can be accommodated. Base One works with toddlers, from 12 months to 30 months, and Base Two for children from 31 months to the day they enter primary school. Base Two offers Early Education services plus the extended childcare service.

The three services run from 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday, albeit staff are found working for longer periods providing for those who require different times. In addition, the main building accommodates the main offices, toilets for children, toilets for adults, a kitchen and a staff room.

The smaller of the two buildings is half the size of the one described above. In here, some other activities take place, from childcare for older

children to some of the community services that the Centre offers. Childcare services are after-school services for children from five to 16 years of age and a Holiday Club. The after-school sessions combine leisure and academic support. Academic activities consist of homework clubs and services catering for special requests raised by children. Childcare services operate on weekdays, weekends and holidays. Additionally, there is one multi-use room. In this, the medical service, counselling, staff meetings and other activities take place.

The space between the two buildings is used for outdoor activities; it is the main play area when the weather allows it. It has different toys, bikes, balls and a toboggan. An extra space is located in the external part of the set of buildings and is a green area with some swings and other rides for children.

The interiors are decorated with images of children of different races, with adults, women and men of different ages playing and interacting with children in diverse ethnic and European dress. From the entrance, the Centre is multi-lingual, with notices in different languages and alphabets. Handmade toys also reflect the cultural diversity of the Centre. Diversity is also found inside, with notices for adults and children, which are located at different heights on the walls. This is an acknowledgement of the different heights of children and adults, but also of the Centre's wheelchair users. The value of cultural diversity and the promotion of meaningful relationships between children and staff of both genders are integral to Centre policy.

The Castle Children's Centre's second site is on the top floor of a central building in the same city. At first, this site offered services to those

working for other organisations in the building, combining the opportunities of a paid job and childcare for those who needed it. At this site, some of the workers were lone parents. To have childcare services at the workplace before 1997 was certainly unusual and made working more viable for those parents, especially for single mothers. Currently, conditions have changed and the Centre offers services for parents other than those working at the site. Its location is strategic for those who use public transport – both train and bus stations are located nearby. The premises are smaller than the main site. Nevertheless, Site Two can still provide for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers, with sections organised in the same way as those of the main site. Activities are basically the same. It is not unusual to see staff working between the two sites. The decor is very similar to the main site, with photographs of children and adults of both genders reflecting the cultural diversity of their community. There is a roof terrace for outdoor play, a kitchen, a staff room and toilets for children and for adults. There is one room used as a Contact Centre. Contacts are supervised meetings between family members and children who have been taken into care. Contact work is undertaken in partnership with the Local Authority. At different stages of the Centre's history, this activity has played an important role on two fronts. The first is the relationship with the Local Authority, working in partnerships and representing one of the diverse sources of income for the Centre. The second is staff development. The Contact Service demands highly-specialised work and the Centre's staff developed as trainees and later became trainers, enhancing both their professional skills and a means of additional income for the Centre.

In this way, the spatial arrangements reflect the diversity of the community in culture, age, language and gender. They also reflect some of the developments made in order to increase incomes. The physical arrangement, it seems, differs from the perception that part of the community used to have of mainstream services in the early days: the physical space becomes a means to express rejection of exclusion.

b) Child-centred activities in a culturally-diverse curriculum

Being part of the core activities at the Castle Children's Centre, practice with children has developed very clear policies reflecting the values of the Centre's project identity. In the following quotation from one of the service's brochures it is stated that:

"... In the Centre each child is acknowledged as a unique person with an individual personality, learning style and family background. All interactions with the children are responsive to these individual differences ..." (document withheld 2)

The Centre was set up as a resistance to discriminatory services, particularly against ethnic minorities and those living in poverty. Opposed to this, the policy emphasises attention to family background, but also considers children's personality and learning styles. Some children attend full-time while others do so on a part-time basis. A child-centred approach facilitates this because, although most activities are group-based, every child can go at his or her own pace with the support of staff. Personalised records allow taking advantage of children's chosen activities, as personnel identify the areas of the curriculum that children have achieved or those that need encouragement. In the following quotation from an article written by staff members, they explain the idea of child-centred activities in a culturally-diverse curriculum:

“... we have long believed that we must work with the child in the context of her/his family life and the wider community. We believe that children learn best when their self-identity is strong, when they can see their life style and family members are valued, and when they come to recognise and accept that there are many ways for people to live their lives ...” (document withheld 3)

In this way, the culturally-diverse reality of the Centre becomes part of the curriculum. Learning to accept and respect diversity is one of its main values. The curriculum however, is not limited to illustrating cultural differences and working towards tolerance; it seeks to encourage meaningful relationships among its members.

In the following quotation, staff members explain some of the ways in which they integrate diversity into everyday activities:

“... Staff build diversity into curriculum implementation and planning, as part of the daily experience of children and parents. Festivals are celebrated, therefore, within a wider context of understanding and experience that the children, staff and parents are developing together, over time. Visitors come regularly to talk about their cultures and re-affirm their own children’s cultures ...” (document withheld 2)

Festivals, talks by community members, toys from different cultures and the composition of the staff and community members in terms of age and backgrounds are part of the environment in which children choose their activities and become subjects of their own learning. Language is another element of this culturally-diverse environment. Children as well as staff members develop linguistic skills that allow them to establish meaningful relationships. According to staff members, some children have spontaneously developed skills to read Braille because they live together with blind children.

Peter, one 19 year-old research participant, for example, commented to the researcher that he could speak some basic phrases in Swahili, which

he learnt in order to interact with one of the children. Akram, another research participant with a British Pakistani background, learnt some Spanish from the researcher and together they worked with a four-year old girl who wanted to sing a Christmas carol in Spanish during the Centre's 2002 Christmas Festival – which she did very well. The Centre is multi-lingual not just because people come from different backgrounds but also because they are interested in understanding other people's language and cultures.

In some cases, entire families would not speak English or would do so only in a limited way. Cultural diversity among the staff and volunteers makes it likely that the Centre can provide for these families, giving linguistic minorities more confidence in using the Centre. Services are available in over 13 different languages (see Wall & Sao Jose, 2004, for a discussion on the importance of this facility). Some of the parents and staff members dress in traditional clothes, mainly Asian or African.

The Centre has developed services for children and families with disabilities and terminal illnesses. This is also a development of the equal opportunities policy, in which the Centre considers these circumstances as part of the community's diversity. Same-sex couples with children, single mothers and those with diverse family arrangements are among service users too (see Dornbush *et al*, 1988 for a discussion on family arrangements). The Centre seems to represent a friendly option for them.

Two different categories of staff work with children in Bases One and Two and are responsible for implementing the curriculum and integrating the cultural diversity of its environment: the key worker and the supervisor. Most

key workers are developing their skills and getting formal qualifications while they work. Supervisors, on the other hand, are fully qualified and are themselves trainers. Supervisors not only make sure that children are properly cared for, but also help trainees to reflect on their practice and support their professional development. In a document drawn up for parents, the following explains the role of key workers:

“... In all forms of provision, the Centre operates a key worker system. On arrival, each child and their parent/caregiver is introduced to their key workers. The worker remains in this role for the duration of the child’s attendance, paying special attention to their interest, development and needs. We recognise that all children may need some time to become used to unfamiliar adults and surroundings. An early and good relationship with one particular person speeds this process ...” (document withheld: 4¹⁵)

Each key worker is responsible for keeping each child’s record up to date. The curriculum used at the Centre naturally considers the Foundation Stage Curriculum, but it is not limited to it. Some of the children at the Centre have gone through difficult times and another type of attention may be required before this can be meaningful. Kalilah, a 30 year-old woman with a Pakistani background, is one of the supervisors participating in the research. In this interview extract she explains how this personal approach also allows staff to enrich children’s self confidence:

“... the time that the child is with you from 8.00 till 6.00 you try and fill that gap in their lives and you make them feel that they’re the most important people and that they deserve all the love and care. And that’s what we’re here to give them. And that’s where the one-to-one contact comes in: children usually build a bond with one or two members of staff that they’re confident with, and let them know how they feel. It’s just trying to build on their little lives and making them feel they are wanted, that we love them and that we’re here for them ...” Kalilah

In this way, curriculum and practice encourage children to develop their potential and the key worker system facilitates the identification and meeting of special needs. Children are encouraged to develop their self-esteem and to develop their knowledge in an environment that appreciates their uniqueness. But unfortunately, sometimes this uniqueness of children and families is not well-valued outside the Centre. Consequently, policies and practices directed to the wider community have also developed. But before discussing these activities, let us discuss the structure of the Centre, as this creates the social space in which values and beliefs are translated into practice.

2.2 The Centre as a space for community discussion and decision taking

a) The Centre as a co-operative

The strong relationship between service users and service providers, which was essential in setting up the Centre, has been given a crucial role in the organisation's structure:

“The Centre is a co-operative run on egalitarian lines, managed by a committee of staff, parents and service users (parents and children) ...” (document withheld 2)

This quotation makes the value of participation clear. The management committee becomes the social space in which service users and service providers take decisions in a collective way. Dialogue and participation are at the heart of the decision-making process and formalising their use constitutes an alternative to the mainstream service in which service users had felt powerless. Notably, children's points of view are also considered. Their voice is part of the management committee. As a way to make this possible, the Centre has a Children's Council, in which children discuss the things that

worry them and collectively decide on the ideas that their representatives – children on the Council – take to the management committee. Another piece of research that considered the Centre’s organisation found that service users are very aware of the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and that:

“... It is clear that informality and accessibility were seen as integral to perceived equity and parity. A majority of respondents had been involved in [some process of decision-making] ...”
(document withheld 5¹⁶)

The co-operative structure shows participants that, in practice, alternatives to the mainstream are possible. By implementing this alternative organisational structure and changing the power relations between participants, the Castle Children’s Centre has implemented in its ethos the principles of Critical Education: not just changing the role of participants but changing the structures that produce inequality (see Chapter One Section 3, Castells 1983, Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005).

Because service users have the power to participate in the decision-making process, developing specific and flexible ways to support children and families has become part of the daily activities at the Centre. Cultural and personal differences have produced personalised ways to tackle difficulties. This flexibility has become “the norm not the exception”, as some members of the Centre described it elsewhere (document withheld 5).

Participation in decision-making is a powerful formula for innovation, which is enhanced precisely by another of the Centre’s notable characteristics: diversity (Mugny & Perez, 1987, Moscovici & Doise, 1994; Banting, 2005)

Cultural diversity is a valued characteristic at the Centre. The management committee attempts to reflect the diversity of the community.

Documentation affirms:

“... Thirteen ethnic groups are currently represented on the management committee, from 75 groups currently using the Centre, and committee minutes are produced in nine languages, plus Braille and on Tape ...” (document withheld 2)

The use of different languages is one of the ways in which the Centre shows acceptance of and respect for the cultural diversity of its community, but it also encourages people to understand other people's points of view and engage in dialogue with other community and staff members. In the terms used by Dahlberg, Moss & Pence (1999), the management committee seems to have turned into a social arena. And in this social arena, the community maintains the initial force of its social movement: a permanent discussion on members' everyday lives and the creation and strengthening of alternative ways to live in accordance with its values and beliefs. In Chapter One Section 4.1, we discussed the Nezahualpilli preschool scheme, a similar case in which the community-based organisation defined itself as a co-operative. This has also been the case in some Italian schemes (Fitch, 1996; New, 1993; Clément & Gardin 2000). In these cases, communities opposing exclusion set up holistic services for children, families and communities sharing material and cultural resources.

At the Castle Children's Centre, spaces and organisation have been set up to reinforce two of the main values of its project identity: encouragement for participation and respect for cultural diversity. As a result, the management committee has created an alternative way to establish power

relations between service users and service providers in which the search for flexible ways to meet people's needs takes place. This is the context in which service users and service providers interact. Let us take a look now at the way some of these values and practices have shifted when dealing with circumstances beyond the Centre and the work with children.

b) Extending services to families and community

The Castle Children's Centre identified the importance of working with children and their families early in the development of its work. Parents and carers have participated in the creation, implementation, expansion and strengthening of the Centre. With that support, the Centre has developed a wide range of programmes providing for families rather than solely for children. In this quotation, Laura explains how an holistic vision in the Centre is needed to confront the multi-faceted effects that social exclusion has on families and communities:

"... Poverty is a big issue. Making a nice environment in the nursery is not enough – and this is not disrespect to the nice nurseries – because you go through the beautiful and gorgeous places and what they see is that nursery is an oasis for the children. It doesn't matter what happens outside, at home or in the community as long as we provide them with a nice little environment, use the fancy equipment and have a nice time with the staff there. But if they go back home and that home has been burnt down because they are Pakistanis, or if the mother is mentally ill and she can't cook dinner for him or anything, that doesn't bother us because we are in the oasis. That is an alien concept to us. We try to think we can do something for the whole of the child's life. That's what we are looking at and the whole of their families' lives, like in the whole of the community's life. There is no point in a child coming here and after a couple of hours of niceness go home to poverty and be picked on for the race, because his mum is a lesbian or his dad a gay or whatever. We have to look at and work with families to do the best for all ..."

Laura

Here, Laura states that children are always seen within their context. Cultural minorities are especially in danger of being socially excluded. The development of inclusive policies and practices at the Centre is paramount to changing the conditions oppressing the community, but on their own, these policies are not enough.

Four areas are presented below in an attempt to summarise the services that the Centre provides for families. These are:

- Off-site services for children;
- Physical and mental health services;
- Economical support; and
- Advice on local services and legal advice.

Off-site services for children. Complementing the full-time service at the Centre and the weekdays and weekends after-school services, the Centre has trained people from the community as childminders. In this way the Centre has been able to link families with special childcare needs to childminders in the area, meeting the needs of families and offering jobs to the locally-trained network of childminders. The service was particularly important before the 1997 reforms. To make things easier for disabled parents and others who may need it, the Centre has its own minibus.

Physical and mental health services. At the main site, medical advice is offered at least once a week together with translation facilities for those who do not speak English. Farah, a woman in her 20s with a Pakistani background and the second supervisor participating in the research, illustrates this situation in this interview extract:

“... we have a doctor here working on Thursdays and – this was one or two days ago – the parent who came to see the doctor, she was an Asian lady so she couldn't speak English at all so I went with her to explain to the doctor what's wrong with the child and whatever There's a lot of support for the parents ... it doesn't matter about their backgrounds. Depending on what they need the centre is always providing support for them ...”. Farah

In this way, linguistic minorities feeling insecure about speaking English find easy access to the community paediatric consultancy, a facility not always available in mainstream services. Home visits can also be arranged.

Health is important in the Centre's holistic vision and physical activities are encouraged not only for children but also for over-50s, as part of a self-organised group initiative. Documentation shows:

“... While ethnicity, culture and lifestyle need to feature within curricular experiences, so too does an holistic approach to physical well-being. The 'Fit Kids' sessions have proved popular and beneficial. These incorporate teamwork through vigorous and culturally diverse team games. Diverse images, cookery, shopping and access to hairdressers, personal trainers and make-up advice enhance personal image, increase body awareness, and widen understanding of nutrition and health. Advice and guidance is given to staff, children and local community members to build self-confidence and self-esteem. For example, a teenager with severe facial scarring and a young child with hair loss from chemotherapy have been helped through these facilities ...” (document withheld 2).

Health, as suggested by this quotation, is seen alongside body awareness and self-esteem in an holistic way. This is the reason why mental health also receives attention at the Centre. Counselling services in different forms of psychotherapy are offered. For this, practitioners consider cultural differences in the provision of services, trying to match linguistically both community members and professionals, many of whom are volunteers. There is also awareness of other culturally-sensitive difficulties, such as women with

traditional backgrounds who would rather be seen by professional women only.

Over the years, practitioners have also come across difficult cases when children go through terminal illness and death. For them and their families, care and psychological support are offered, as well as facilities for funeral services.

There is also a support group on female circumcision, a sensitive area since it is related to religious beliefs. Documentation reveals:

“... The Centre supports a female circumcision group, with 205 women and girls currently attending. The focus is on self-care, social activities and awareness raising within cultural dimension. Legal advice is extended in a non-judgemental way while child protection is prioritised ...” (document withheld 2)

The group mentioned in the quotation is one of the few spaces where families of a religious minority can express their worries about the issue as well as get information about current legislation. This was another community-led initiative. Late in 2002, an incident was recorded in the researcher's field notes that reinforced the need to handle female circumcision in a culturally sensitive way. The Local Authority sent a letter to various persons in the city – some of whom were not Muslims – warning of possible imprisonment for parents who took their daughters out of the country to have the circumcision carried out during the holiday period. Members of staff reported to the researcher that this produced indignation among some members of the group as some questioned whether the Local Authority had the legal right to rule what people could or could not do in other countries. In the eyes of some staff members, this kind of incident showed why many community members

preferred the services offered at the Centre, where they could express their concerns without being criminalised. The Centre's policy coincides with the government's, but unlike it, it believes that change should not come through imposition but rather through the discussion and understanding of traditions and of people's concerns.

Nutrition is another important strand to the health work at the Centre and its outreach activities. Since many children – and staff members – have breakfast and lunch at the Centre, culturally-sensitive options are available, considering cultural diversity such as Muslim Ramadan and Catholic Lent, for example. Nutrition and diet workshops for adults consider these factors too.

Support services dealing with family development and parenting are also available on site and in the outreach services. Among them are groups supporting fathers and grandfathers reflecting on their roles at home and the way they relate to children and women, as well as the role of male workers at the Centre.

Health services are an example of how the Centre has developed its holistic vision: it works with children, families and groups within the community. It also considers cultural diversity, religion and age groups and includes body image and self-esteem. With their practice, these services offer an alternative to the fragmented vision of mainstream services that tend to see health, nutrition, culture and self-esteem in separate ways.

Economic support. These services are particularly important, since the context of the community is one of social exclusion:

“... Financial security is an aspiration for local community members, service users, and staff. So the Centre operates credit unions for each of these groups, with increased take up each year and word gets around. The Centre also operates a ‘Letts Scheme’ where skills and resources are swapped without the exchange of money ...” (document withheld2, 2002:16)

The resources around the Centre have increased to the point where they can offer credit to a group of people that mainstream banks would hardly consider. Again, power relations are challenged and alternatives are created at the Centre. This activity demands resources, of course, but also a high level of expertise. The Letts Scheme also shows the basic procedure of the networks of support built around the Centre. Additionally, there is a resource centre, in which different goods such as furniture and domestic appliances are available for emergencies, when, for example, community members have been evicted from their homes or when teenaged single mothers are just starting out.

Just as staff members have long supported community members gaining qualifications, community members support others gaining qualifications in different areas:

“... A range of workshops are held for parents and other carers who, in return, bring their skills to the curriculum and to other parents/carers – multi-lingual workshops, woodwork and computer skills are some examples ...” (document withheld2, 2002:15)

The community shares knowledge and material through trust relationships resembling what Anning & Edwards (1999) describe as a *community of knowledge*. But at the Centre, this concept is expanded: not only is knowledge constructed and shared, but also so are material resources and identity. In the process, service users, including children, participate along

with professionals, for example when teenagers lead computing courses for adults. Equally, the areas of knowledge are expanded by those that community members themselves bring to the Centre. The financial area shows how innovation has developed from the co-operative's board committee. It also suggests that education, on its own, may not be sufficient to tackle poverty and exclusion. Changes are needed now, not just in the future.

Advice on local services and advocacy. Over time, staff have encountered different cases of community members unaware of their entitlement to governmental support, such as income support, care for the disabled or elderly family members, and other benefits. Practitioners advise them on procedures to access these and also offer more general legal advice. Other studies suggest that socially excluded people tend to have little access to legal advice (Buck *et al*, 2005; Pleasence *et al*, 2004, 2004a).

During an interview, Ghayda, a woman in her early 20s with a Somali background and the third supervisor participating in the research, gave this example of the kind of support that community members can find at the Centre:

"... One woman that we know, she was going to be evicted from her house. She has seven children, very young children and she was going to be evicted from her house because the Council said that she wasn't paying her rent. She couldn't understand, she was getting letters from the government and from the Council saying "you're going to be evicted on that day, you're going to be evicted on that day" ... "you need to pay this, you need to do that". And because she was only on income support she couldn't pay this and she was getting very worried and very ... her children came to the nursery and this lady came to talk to me because I could speak Somali. And she came to talk to me and said I've got this problem and I've got no one to help me, is there anything you could translate or ... could you come to the council with me and

tell me what they need from me? And I translated so she did understand. So me and [name of another person] went with this lady. We wrote some letters to the council and in the end she was able to stay at her place and she's very grateful to us. It was just a misunderstanding what happened but if we hadn't sorted it out she would have been thrown out of her house with seven children, seven young children, so they would've been on the streets ..." Ghayda

Over the years, some staff members have gained qualifications in giving legal advice and together with lawyers supporting the Centre through the networks of support, the Centre is able to offer this service in various languages. But sometimes these actions get the Centre into trouble:

"... The Centre works with some of the most marginalized groups in our society and regularly advocates on their behalf. This can bring Centre staff into conflict with mainstream authorities, ideas and perspectives. But we consider it essential both in terms of support to marginalized groups and in challenging endemic inequalities and oppressions which manifest themselves in language used and positions taken ..." (document withheld 2)

This extract illustrates how the Centre's activities attempt to change the social relations that disempower families. At the same time, it locates this process in a context of conflict and resistance. The innovative practice is meaningful to the community insofar as it helps to change oppressive conditions. In the following sections, we discuss how the Centre has managed to influence some sectors of the wider society and Central and Local Authorities. But first, let us see how values and beliefs have forged participants' identity.

3 Who are the community and how does their identity develop?

Identities forged through social movements are a matter of choice. This circumstance differentiates resistance identities and project identities from other types of given identities such as ethnic or gender identities.

While maintaining the Castle Children's Centre for almost 25 years, service users and service providers have had to convince first and foremost their own community that the values and beliefs they share are worth fighting for (Castells, 2004).

This research found differences within staff members and volunteers. To understand these differences we classified them into three groups based on the way they have accepted the project identity and the way they relate to the Centre. These are 1) the core team, 2) the wider network and 3) new comers, and these are described next.

3.1 The core team: shaping life projects through the identity project

The core team is very visible. Its members are constantly at either of the two sites, supporting off-site activities and representing the Centre when dealing with authorities and other groups. All of them have spent a number of years working at the Centre. Six of them participated in this research. Two of them, Laura and Maggie, started to work in the Centre when it opened almost 25 years ago. The rest have joined more recently, twelve, ten, nine and four years ago. Five of them are female and one male. All have acquired multiple skills and become trainers themselves, not only in childcare or early education issues, but also in a wide range of subjects such as social work and law.

When something unexpected happens at the Centre, they are the people from whom the rest of the staff asks advice. Because of their expertise, part of their daily activities is to supervise new staff and trainees, but they also work with children and families. It is not unusual to see them also helping children during meal times or comforting them if they are upset.

Five of them had gained qualifications in early education or childcare before joining the Centre. They were, naturally, expecting to develop themselves in this area. This is the case, for example, of Farah, one of the supervisors we have already referred to, who has worked at the Centre for 10 years. In the next interview extract she talks about how she joined the Centre:

“... Oh God it was such a long time ago! (laughs) ... well, one of my friends was working here and I always wanted to work with children. That was something I always wanted to do. I came for that interview; it was not only that I had a friend. There were some vacancies. So I applied for the job and I got it. Basically my friend told me about the vacancy and I just came and got the job, and I’ve been here ever since! At that time there were no specific expectations; basically give the children what they needed and obviously to gain some qualifications while working here – which I’ve gained. I had done a teaching course before, and then we did advanced play work, and since then I’ve been working with children with disabilities. I’ve done those courses and I’m hoping to do my level four as well. There’s quite a lot of qualifications I’ve done since I came to the centre which is good because you get them as you’re working ...” Farah

In Farah’s case, there was an initial interest and with time and support she has gained various qualifications. Word of mouth was how she found the Centre. Similarly, Kalilah was very attracted to working with children, but after college she started working in an administrative job at one of the local hospitals. Due to family issues she had to leave the job to spend some time in Pakistan, her birthplace. That led her to change her career. She started a

degree in childcare at the city's university, where she saw an advert for the Centre offering jobs. She continues on her development at the Centre:

*“... I was doing a job share and my main work was working on the admin side of things rather than with the children which I did for about two years. Then, when I finished my childcare qualification I got promoted and I spent more time in the Bases in terms of curriculum, dealing with the staff and so on. So it was basically luck you know ... I kind of can't believe myself in terms of how I got here because it wasn't something I planned to do when I left school and then went to college and university ... I don't know how it came into my head (laughs) and up to this day I'm still here!
...*

*“I did childcare courses, starting with NVQ level one, two and three and then also had a qualification from Pakistan, which is like a master in childcare. You just extend it by doing another year or so in here to get to that standard, because I wasn't born in this country and English is my second language. Then I kept on travelling back so I got the schooling system in both countries ...”
Kalilah*

Through the Centre, Kalilah found a way to work in her desired field and also discovered the scheme supported by the Centre of working whilst earning qualifications.

Hamid's case is similar to Kalilah's. In Pakistan, his home country, he got an economics degree at the university. He is part of a large family and was frequently in charge of caring for nephews and other relatives' young children. Later, he became a volunteer working with the children of Kashmiri asylum seekers near the border. It was there that he met some of the Centre's staff as the Centre was starting activities there, which we shall discuss later. His experience with children, deeply affected by this situation, impressed the staff. At that time Hamid, who is 34 years old and has been working at the Centre for almost 13 years, worked with orphans, mutilated and traumatised children. His interest took him on to obtain a teaching degree. As part of the

training programme, Hamid came to England to obtain qualifications and equally importantly, to help in the Centre with refugee children. He continues his story:

“... I did a BEd and a teaching course, and I did NVQ Level 3 and 4, and I was a primary teacher in a school. And I wanted ... I learnt lots of things and these children need to learn, you know when they are 2, 5 years old. They need to learn more things to go to school. And I wanted to just give them something. You know, so they can make themselves perfect when they grow up. That's why I stayed in this field. And I think I'm doing very well ...”
Hamid

Hamid was evidently very interested in developing himself in the early years area, and changed his economics career for early education. Later the Centre found him to be a very important part of the team, having a broad experience with asylum seekers and refugees, both adults and children.

In the following paragraph, Ghayda, one supervisor to whom we referred previously, illustrates some of the reasons why the core team has developed its commitment to the Centre:

“... many children come here from different backgrounds: refugees and things like that ... I mean they are not very confident in themselves and when they come to this kind of environment they always feel very shy and very timid, so it's good for them to find people like me with different languages and find out that they can communicate ... I mean ... I was one of those children. When I first came to this country I didn't speak any English and when I came to school, there weren't very many Somali children. I think it was me, my brother and probably another person. Very few people and the teachers ... there were no teachers at school who spoke Somali and I know it was very very hard because I used to feel very left out and not with them because I didn't understand what they were saying. I couldn't ... they would give me books to read, they would give me maths questions to do. I couldn't do that because I couldn't understand it. So I was always behind you know. I was always a level behind everybody else. But as my language got better I became ... I beat them at what they were doing before so I'm very proud of that and I feel I could do that for children who are coming here now ...” Ghayda

In a sense, Ghayda makes reference to the deep relationship between the Centre and the community. Somehow, her story uncovers periods of her life when she was socially excluded, in her case by language as a recent immigrant. It is meaningful for her to help others in the same situation.

The Centre evidently has a commitment to supporting the community. But Maggie, responsible for the finances, speaks about how the Centre has enriched her life:

“... When I first came down here I was pregnant and I’d just had a baby who was a year old, and had another that was about four; and then a girl who was about nine. So I was happy, because the children could stay with me and if I had to work I didn’t have to leave my children. So in the beginning, I found it very easy-going, very different from the fields of work that I’d done in the past. I particularly liked it, and I was very unhappy being at home all the time, and I think when you’re unhappy in a relationship, you put more work into a working relationship. So the Centre became your life and became your focus besides the children in life. In effect, it could have been ... people would say it’s a bad thing in reality in relation to family life. But it was a much happier life than what I was experiencing, and had ever experienced. So I was quite happy working alongside the children and the people I was working with.

“The Centre has helped me travel the world; it has helped me have a lot of qualifications; it’s giving me a lot of experiences. Too many experiences, some very very bad experiences but on the whole some very very good experiences, lots of very interesting and nice people and we’ve looked after a lot of nice children in need, with disabilities, children from different backgrounds ... I’ve learnt a lot about cultural dimensions. Mainly in childcare, gained an enormous amount of experience, which I’d never gained elsewhere ...” Maggie

Here, Maggie values the qualifications she has gained but she also values the facilities the Centre offered her when she was pregnant and had young children. During those years, not many women had access to those facilities. The possibility of travelling and other personal experiences feature among the reasons for her gaining satisfaction from her career.

In the next interview extract, Kalilah adds even more reasons for the core team to have developed a strong commitment to the Centre as she mentions the personal support she has received and the access to the network of support built around the Centre:

“... It’s very rewarding. Working with the children and here it’s more like a family atmosphere you know. You don’t feel like you’re away from home, you’ve got all the support and everything you need: you could talk to people and then, all the services that the centre does provide ... you don’t really have to go out. If you need counselling you can have it in here, anything that might be bothering you. If you needed a lawyer you can have it from here, you don’t need to go around and shop around for services. It’s the support more than anything; even when it comes to more personal things in your life you’ve got a hell of a lot of support from the staff. And most important it’s the children and parents; it is very rewarding. It has been, it has been. When I first started here I wasn’t really sure I’d spend the rest of my life here. But I’ve been here for the last 10 years of my life and God knows for how long ... (laughs) ... I don’t have any intention of moving on ...”
Kalilah

Kalilah also talks about emotional aspects. To her, as it was for Maggie, the Centre is a friendly place, almost like a family. She also explains how these facts played a part in her decision to stay permanently in the Centre. In other words, how her activity at the Centre has become her own life project (see Chapter One Section 4.2, also Adams, 2003; Einwohner, 1999).

The author’s field notes consistently recorded staff and service users referring to the Centre as a ‘family’. All the people included in this group stated at some point that they are not planning to leave the Centre. They could, as some of them have done, interrupt their activities to gain more qualifications abroad or to take long breaks with their families – especially those with overseas families. But the Centre seems to be more than a job: it

seems to be part of their life projects (see Chapter One Section 4.2, Pilisuk et al 1996 and Bettencurt, 1996)

3.2 The wider network

The creation of the networks of support has already been discussed during the analysis of the Centre's history. The people considered as part of the wider network share some – if not all – of the values and beliefs of the Centre's project identity. They have also decided to support the community with their expertise in different areas through the Centre. They may not work at the Centre's premises or exclusively for its community, but they are available to help out in maintaining and strengthening its project identity.

In this section we consider four cases. Two of them are from the research participants and two more were taken from an evaluation of the Centre drawn up by staff members and an independent researcher (document withheld 5).

The two research participants represent one very special part of the staff. Both are young male workers, nearly 20 years old, who have spent part of their childhood at the Centre as children cared for.

Peter was 19 years old at the time of the first meeting with the researcher. He explains why he decided to work at the Centre.

“... I used to come here as a kid, to the out school service. My sister, who is nine, used to come here to the baby room, Base One and Two, and one of my best mates, his mom works here. So we just come here after school and kind of it's always been here for ten years, so it's something I just feel natural doing.”

“The first day I worked here I really enjoyed it, because the kids they make me feel good! just going around and they just being so innocent I just like it very much now because I only come here about 3 days a week. But first it was more and they made me feel good, they made me feel like a little younger and gave me some energy back or something like that. And it was so much better because before that I was working at Domino’s pizza and that was a boring part-time job. I worked at nights. Now I work in the daytime, I can still do school, and can have like a social life in the evening, so it’s the best job, the best part-time job I could find ...”
Peter

As with some other new personnel, Peter has had the experience of working elsewhere and has appreciated that activities at the Centre can be organised to match his needs. He may leave the Centre if a university in a different city accepts him, but he is planning to study something related to the Centre’s activity: child psychology. He is not yet clear about what he would like to do in the future but wants to stay in touch with the Centre and, as he mentioned during an informal conversation, “collaborate with the cause”.

Tim, the second staff member in this group, grew up as Peter’s best friend. Both attended after-school activities at the Centre. He remembers making friends with the other children of different races and religions. He was 20 years old at the time of the first interview, worked at the centre on a full-time basis, and had started his NVQ in childcare. However, he had not decided whether to stay and undertake a career at the Centre or attend university and study fashion design, which also attracts him. For him the most important thing in the Centre is that “you spend your time helping others rather than just helping yourself all the time”. He remembers some of the other children at the after-school services and he is now aware that some of them had difficult backgrounds, a fact that was previously less clear to him. Like Peter, he also refers to the Centre as a ‘big family’. During a conversation

at a lunch break he said: “even if I decide for fashion design, there are different ways to help the Centre, for example working on weekends or even just making donations to one of the programmes”.

Both Peter and Tim are still undecided about their careers, but it seems that they have already decided to continue supporting the Centre, either as staff members or through the networks of support.

Like them, the following cases show people sharing the values and beliefs of the Centre and deciding to expand the networks of support that the community has constructed around the Centre. In Chapter Three, it was mentioned that the case considered a recent evaluation as evidence. For this, staff members and an external researcher dedicated considerable effort into developing a series of service-user case studies. In the following case study, Amani’s story is shown. It can be seen that her life changed for the good through the Centre’s support and that she decided to stand for the values and beliefs that had supported her.

Amani’s case study

“... Amani is of Yemeni/Syrian origin. She gave birth to her son Hani when she was 15 years old. He was born with cerebral palsy. His father abandoned them when he knew his son had a disability and has not seen him since. Amani was referred to the Centre by her Community Social Worker. She was traumatised by the experience of birth and by the disability of her son. Her family also were distressed by the circumstances. Culturally specific Arabic speaking workers were allocated to assist Amani with Counselling Support. Home based support was put in by the Centre to help Amani acquire the specialist parenting skills necessary to look after her son and to also extend this to her family. Amani also helped with her schoolwork and the Centre ensured input from the Local Authority and helped her secure benefits, which she was entitled to. Amani and her family remembered her life as “being over”.”

Her family were encouraged by the Centre staff to see the potential for the future life for them all and Amani was supported to consider college courses having successfully achieved 5 O Levels.

As Hani was growing older the Centre allocated a nursery placement for him and Amani went on to do her A Levels and gain a place at University to study to become a doctor.

She is now into her third year and wants to be a paediatrician. She helps the Centre facilitate a special needs support group for parents and regularly acts as an Advocate for teenage mums ...”

(document withheld 5)

Amani's case illustrates many of the points discussed throughout this chapter. Among them the holistic approach in which the community supports the needs of children and families, the relationship that the Centre has established with the Local Authority, and the degree of expertise that the Centre has developed in culturally diverse contexts. But at this point, it is the epilogue to the story that uncovers how some service users, after overcoming some of their difficulties, decide to support other community members through the Centre, constructing solidarity through the networks of support.

The next case illustrates these points also, but here we see some new meanings created by the Centre. This case is particularly interesting because it shows how community members define who belongs to the community and the innovative ways that they have found to support each other:

Carly's case study

“Carly is of Irish ethnicity and is aged 10 years. She came to the attention of the Centre as a result of her attempting to commit suicide due to racist bullying in her school environment. Medical staff felt that this was ‘not a cry for help but a serious attempt which may be followed by a further action in the future to curtail her life’.

The Centre provided therapeutic support to Carly to ascertain her concerns and to help her confront these fears in a rational manner.

Family support was also extended to her parents as they were living on the edge policing her 24 hours a day, sleeping in shifts. Counselling was also available to them as they were suffering anxiety, regret, fear and guilt. This enabled them individually and collectively to review the episode of concern, the build-up to it and the way forward for them as a family. Additionally a Centre Advocate worked corporately with the statutory sector to put into place new expectations and guidance for schools in regard to protection issues. The Centre confronted, with the staff at the school, the culture of bullying that was endemic and Carly chose to return to the school to face those who had bullied and disempowered her with the help of Centre Staff. She gained control once more and was provided with positive methods to deal with future bullying by the Centre. She has since made friends in the school and is making excellent progress. Carly now knows through the hard way that she is able to make a stand in the knowledge of her inherent self-worth. She now acts as a Peer Counsellor in school and has spoken at children's conferences nationally on the issue of bullying" (document withheld 5)

Children are at the heart of activities at the Centre. But as this case shows, children are not only recipients of services and of adults' attentions. Children participate in the construction of the project identity, becoming social subjects and strengthening the networks of support built around the Centre. Carly's case also illustrates another strand to the work at the Centre; the need to influence social change in the wider community, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The four cases presented in this section had one thing in common: all of the subjects had benefited from the Centre and had subsequently decided to correspond with the people who had helped them and the community to which they decided to belong.

In the informal conversations with participants, we learnt of some other people who were able to form part of this group. The difference, however, is

that they decided to support the Centre without first having been benefited by the Centre's services and support. Over the years, many professionals have come across the Centre either through their professional activities or through word of mouth, valuing its practice. They have decided to support the Centre, expanding the network of support. We can only hypothesise that they have decided to support the Centre because they share some of the values and beliefs of the Centre's identity.

3.3 New comers

This third group is composed mainly of people who are relatively new to the Centre and are in the process of getting to know its ethos. We see this as a transitional group formed by those who do not share the identity, but may do so over a period of time. For some of them, the Centre came first as a temporary job, without any previous background in childcare or early education and, in some cases, without a clear intention of remaining either in the Centre or the field of early years. Two research participants were included in this group.

Rasha, a female worker, is 21 years old and has a Pakistani background. She did not know anything about the Centre before the local career office directed her to apply for a temporary job, almost three years before the initial interview for this research. At that time, she had applied to study business administration at the local university, but she had not been accepted.

Working at the Centre was a way for Rasha to earn some money while waiting for her next opportunity to apply to the same or another university. But

the experience at the Centre has changed her. She still wants to get a degree, but has changed her path. This time she will apply for childcare or early education. One of the things that have favoured this change is her experience with the scheme of training while working. When she was accepted on to the staff, she needed to gain qualifications and was supported by the training programme. She found that her originally 'wasted year' turned into a process of gaining qualifications in an activity that seemed more appealing at each step of the way. During this time, Rasha has worked in both Bases and the Baby Room, where she was working when the first interview took place. Rasha has decided to go to university even if this were to mean studying away from the Centre. It may be that she comes back with a degree or it may be that she works elsewhere. Rasha has not worked off-site and her contact with parents is reduced to the moments when they come to leave their children or come to collect them.

Although Rasha has benefited from the Centre's training programme and now enjoys working with young children, in her conversations she did not make reference to deep relationships with other members of the staff or community members. She has changed her career because she likes what she has learnt but does not seem to have developed a strong commitment to the values of the Centre. She was the only participant in the study who preferred not to have her interviews recorded.

Akram is a 24 year-old male worker. When the researcher first met Akram, he had only been working at the site for six months. Like Rasha, he did not have a background in childcare or any related issues. But unlike her,

he knew about the Centre: his sister works there. Akram knew about the existence of other male workers, the multiple services offered off-site, part of the Centre's history and the in-work training scheme.

Akram was working in one of the Bases as part of his training. Because of his recent recruitment, his work is constantly supported by the supervisor, but also by the other key workers at the Base. Before taking this job, he was studying architecture at the local university. Here Akram explains why he changed his plans:

"... When I first started working here, I just wanted to work and get my qualifications. Before here I was studying at the university for two years, doing architecture and then ... I never had a job before and this one seemed interesting. In an office it would be boring; and now I really like working here and I think I'll continue my career in here, so it's kind of changed my expectations of what I originally wanted to do. I really want to work in this kind of field. It's more enjoyable! Like for example being an architect is sitting there drawing in an office, it's like boring! This kind of job is more interesting. And the fact that you're talking all day to the children, you know, you interact with them and you do different activities. It's really interesting. This job is more ... is more varied you know? It's a job you don't do the same thing all day. It's kind of changed my career expectations ..." Akram

Akram has found his activity at the Centre to be a dynamic and inspiring experience. During the first interview with him, he was surprised by the Centre's management:

"... When I started working here, I thought it would be very strict, like in schools. How do you say it? with more strict people. In here there is a very relaxed management. It's really relaxed. Unlike in schools, here all the management can actually go and interact with children so it's very different and it's really good, it's like, you know, no one's really the boss. I think it's just that everyone who works here can actively interact with the children. Among all of us we do all the tasks and they're interested in my opinions. It's not them only telling me what to do ..."

This passage showed Akram making sense of working in an environment which is different from how he initially expected it to be. Although he was not fully qualified, he observed that everybody helped at every task, even those he was responsible for. Therefore his work is important. He was important and the Centre was willing to hear what he thought and felt about his work.

A notable feature of this group is its relatively recent arrival at the Centre. Both Rasha and Akram have changed their career expectations as a result of their experience with young children and other staff members. The training programme has supported them as it has supported many others over the years.

4 Extending the network and sharing identities

The Castle Children's Centre has influenced changes in the community from which it emerged. Such influence has extended to the wider community and to ten countries in North Africa and the Middle East, as well as to some other European countries. This influence is discussed in the current section while the influence exerted on Local and Central Authorities in England is the subject of the following section. We also discuss how other groups attempt to keep the community in its state of exclusion, in a process we have called *counter-resistance*.

4.1 Links with other social movements

The expansion of the Castle Children's Centre's influence can be explained by the same conceptual framework used in the last section: the construction

of a project identity standing for values and beliefs, which groups and individuals in the wider community can support or, potentially, attack.

The emergence of networks of support has already been discussed as the basis of the Centre's project identity, including different groups that connected with the values and beliefs of that identity. Over time, some immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers have also lived in the community and have used the Centre's services. Some of them have returned to their home countries, maintaining links with the Centre and initiating similar services in their own communities.

According to staff members and documentary evidence (document withheld 4), these initiatives abroad are independent, forming a network in which every node goes at its own pace but maintains the values and beliefs which originated them and continue to relate to the other nodes.

Other groups in Britain have also emerged from or been supported by the Centre, some of which eventually may have become social movements too. Laura offers her vision of the way the Centre has expanded:

"... The whole of the centre is built on social justice. It is not about the deserving poor or something like that. It's about everybody having a right to an equal life, to be respected and accepted for their differences and their uniqueness. That's really what it's based on. There is a multitude of different religions here and ... that is not the origin [of the Centre]. It's about social justice. That is not only on a local level, it's on a wider level as well. Many people would think ... children dying in South America or Africa. That's got nothing to do with us. We can only do what we can do here and that's it. But the centre, the staff and the community that use the centre don't see it that way, they think every life is interconnected and that even saving one life, or helping that person, one child, is better than doing nothing. So that's why nobody is rejected or turned away unless of course there are extreme cases that for example would be a threat to children or

adults within the communities or elsewhere, it wouldn't help. Of course we would have discussions about this; it would have to be a collective decision. Some difficult cases have been accepted and that had demanded more training ..." Laura

In this conversation, Laura talks about how the Centre's project identity has been developed towards broader contexts. It is not just about the children and the community attending the Centre. The Centre's policies and practice have a very specific context in which they have been developed and have acquired social value as they help in changing the power relations oppressing the community. Likewise, it can be observed how the initial resistance to exclusion has shifted towards a concept of social justice, which is seen also beyond formal borders of countries.

Although the Centre has maintained a low profile over the years, mainly because its services have always been saturated, its influence has spread. Different people who have known of the Centre's work have also helped to spread the new meanings that it has forged. This is the case, according to staff members, with some European authorities that are attempting to implement some of the Centre's policies and practices, for example in Belgium and Italy. During the study, some staff from European services visited the Centre and participated in some of the events. This does not necessarily mean that these people shared the Centre's identity; but at least it means that they shared some of its values and sympathised with the Centre.

This identification has encouraged links with other groups attempting to bring about changes coherently with the Centre's project identity. Some of those groups work with diverse situations such as the empowerment of

different minorities. These links have taken different forms, from discussing policies and exchanging experiences to training and advising emerging groups in organising, managing and funding their activities.

But the Centre's project identity has also attracted the support of other groups and individuals that show interest and offer their support in specific activities such as appeals, work to combat the famine in Ethiopia, or the development of infrastructure and support for children in Africa and the Middle East.

4.2 Facing counter-resistance

The Centre has also attracted the attention of other groups and individuals which resist the social changes attempted by the Centre. During the period of this research, the Centre was repeatedly vandalised. Attacks varied from graffiti, the intercom being broken, to a yet unresolved attack on one of the women of the core team, who was repeatedly hit in the face to the point where it remained swollen for several days. Kalilah gives her views on the reasons for these attacks:

- "... I personally think it's because we have so many different cultures working together and the outside world doesn't maybe agree with it and they want the Centre to fail, I don't know, and it's trying to break us as a team. But we get through, you just get used to it, you expect that it's going to happen and you just come in on Monday and then you just pick yourself up ... and start all over again for the week and then, something else happens. So you just get used to the situation like that and you know it's going to happen and you come to terms with it. Because no matter how much you're going to try and stop it, we can't sit here day and night and watch what's happening and who's coming in. We've got CCTVs and everything now but still nothing, you know, it still happens. You've seen the Intercom is the recent one now. So it's just like, they break the security systems ... that we're having to open the door, and the Intercom's not working, you know, it's

things like that and ... But I think you get used to it – like human beings we just get used to anything that keeps on happening all the time – you just expect it, you know it's going to happen and there's nothing you can do about it. And I think it's in terms of the different nationalities in here. And I think purely it's all the races ...

- Racism?

-“Yeah, definitely, definitely ...”

Kalilah, like many other service users and service providers, has experienced racism in different ways, from verbal abuse to physical attack. Like Kalilah, Laura attributes attacks to extreme right groups. She continues:

“... We are constantly under attack with the building. The building is an old Quonset hut temporarily built in 1945 and it's still here, 2003. We've replaced the roofs and the internal structure, which cost us over a quarter of a million, but it's now deteriorating. And because you cannot protect it, you know metal windows, easy access it's consistently vandalised. This week alone we had two arson attacks, they tried to set fire to the building while we were working with the kids. They threw bricks through the doors and they smashed the fire systems, so they tried to kill the fire systems and set fire to the building at the same time so there would be no warning for us to escape or the building would be burnt to the ground. And we always get some leaflets from the British National Party. So I don't know it could be just kids, or it could be organized opposition and attack to the building because they don't like the principles of our organisation and the type of kids that are here. We spend over £4,000 every month just on maintenance and repairing the damages of things they've been doing again and again and of course the sense of message they are sending to our users is, is it safe to have our children here? Do they want to have their children in a poor building when they can take them to a newly-built private nursery equipped by Habitat or Ikea, one of the places that have been rebuilt with the government's money? Do they want to have them in a place like this? Where they are subject to that kind of threats and in a building that is not very pretty? And the facilities are being increasingly attacked. That's what we have to face daily ...” Laura

Like Kalilah, Laura tells of attacks by people who seem to dislike the cultural diversity of children, families and staff at the Centre. Counter-resistance frequently takes place against social movements such as the

Castle Children's Centre. For Castells (2004), attackers of projects supporting ethnic minorities and women are usually white men who feel their status to be threatened by the empowerment of minorities.

There has also been counter-resistance to the inclusion of male workers in the Centre. Hamid narrates the child abuse accusation he had to deal with:

"... Oh so many stories over these ten years, many stories. Lots of stories. Lots of ups and downs. Because when I started here, people's behaviour was like ... men in childcare, men working with children, maybe could abuse children. And there were big stories like this one: I had one false allegation against me when I was in the Centre. I moved here [the Centre's second site] in 99. I got a false allegation against me, because ... I was in court for child abuse, you know for child abuse, sex with a child. I was suspended from my job. Then an investigation took one week. It was a false allegation. The mother, she was from London. Actually, that woman was from London and she did that. And really that was bad because it was my ten-year career lost. The people they just threw them [away]. That wasn't a story, it was a real thing. And then my name being everywhere, you know, the Social Services, everywhere ... That was wrong; it was a false allegation against me. That just makes my life ... thinking it's very dangerous. That's why most men are very scared. They are scared to come into this field ..." Hamid

Hamid's case exemplifies how not every member of the community attending the Centre necessarily welcomes some of the policies developed by other service users and service providers. Although the inclusion of men in the Centre has been explained and justified over the years, some parents who use the service without knowing the Centre's identity have shown their disagreement. Fortunately, the rest of the staff provided key statements that showed that the allegation was false and Hamid was cleared. As a result of this experience, the Centre installed a CCTV system, which records all areas

on a daily basis. Hamid participates now in a forum where the problems that men in childcare deal with are discussed and where support is also offered.

In spite of counter-resistance, staff remain determined to go on. The next interview extract was recorded during a particularly difficult day for the Centre after a recent physical attack on one of its members. Laura said, referring to the reasons why she wanted to go on:

“... I think now it's just loyalty (laughs) and I think it probably goes for the sake of everybody. Of course you've got to be committed to this area of work. I think more and more it is about not letting people down and getting stuck in. Not walking away from the others. The situation now is also that you can really feel you can make a difference and commitments. And I think we are getting more and more wound down by the process of external agencies attack, but we will fight to the end. So I think it is standing your ground and letting them know we are here. Also loyalty to the people of the community and the others (workers) and members of the management committee ...” Laura

As this quotation suggests, in an environment where discrimination has been part of some service users' and service providers' stories, some of these experiences can actually increase the community's cohesion. Discrimination was part of the original conflict that made the community set up the Centre. It is still a major problem in the everyday life of the community.

Support for and opposition to the Castle Children's Centre have emerged in many sectors of society, partly because of acceptance or refusal to accept the alternatives it has developed. The next section discusses the relationship with Central and Local authorities, in which this series of agreements and disagreements have also taken place.

5 The Castle Children's Centre and its relationship with the Labour Government

By 1997, the Centre had operated for 16 years, independently and as a community co-operative. As discussed in Chapter Two, from that year, a new government started to develop major changes in services for children and families. These have expanded as never before in the country, emphasising access for poor communities and ethnic minorities. This section discusses how, in spite of what could seem favourable conditions, the Centre is struggling to survive. It might appear that new policies coincide with the Centre's vision, and in fact the Centre has been designated as an example of good practice by Central Government. However, major differences in the way the Centre and national policies interpret concepts such as 'community', 'participation', 'social exclusion' and 'innovation' are evident. It is likely that these differences have put the Centre into a different phase in which it has to resist new attempts to control its development, maybe to shift its identity or disappear.

As result of consultations in which NGOs took part, the government acknowledged that many of the preoccupations of the Centre and other NGOs were of primary importance. National policies began encouraging holistic and integrated services for children that would include families and communities. There was also a decided interest in reaching socially excluded sectors of society, including ethnic minorities and single mothers. The Castle Children's Centre was named one of the first Early Excellence Centres in 1998 and consequently acquired financial support from the government. This substantially changed some of the conditions of the Centre.

Through the Early Excellence Centres programme, the government aimed to learn from the good practice of established institutions working on integrated and holistic services. The innovative experience of these Centres would serve as an example of how new provision should work and, in the case of voluntary and private sector schemes, partnerships were established; in a joined-up effort local boards would determine the most effective ways to achieve national aims set up centrally. But there is some evidence suggesting that this interest and support have not been maintained (Williams & Roseneil, 2005; Cohen *et al*, 2004).

This section is divided into two parts, the first examines how the Castle Children's Centre and national policies interpret differently a series of key concepts. The second discusses the way in which the Local Authority has dealt with the Centre's dissent.

5.1 The alternative visions of the Castle Children's Centre

This section presents the differences between the visions of the Centre and those of the Government. These are organised into three parts: a) definition of community, a) definition of social exclusion and community development, and c) community participation and innovation. For this, the section summarises some the main findings while relating them to some of the concepts discussed in previous chapters.

a) Defining the community: entitlement for services or community membership

The Castle Children's Centre has maintained an open-door policy under which most people who need services and wish to participate can join the Centre. This attitude has attracted people from surrounding cities to

participate in the scheme. As previously discussed, it has also allowed the Centre to form links with other community-based organisations, some of them abroad.

The Centre's identity has also attracted the attention of other vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers, refugees and their children living locally:

"... They have come to the Centre because they believe it can keep them safe, will accept them for their differences and can understand their experiences as refugees..." (Document withheld 4)

Asylum seekers and their children are among the most deprived people in Britain and, as this quotation suggests, the Castle Children's Centre does not discriminate against them. The Government, on the other hand, offers only restricted services for them and their children (Children's Legal Centre, undated; Remsbery, 2003).

'Community' for participants in the Centre, seems to be a dynamic concept able to change to become more inclusive. Participation becomes the key to forming a self-defined community: those who want to participate and share their values and beliefs can become part of the community. The community-led development of the Centre has maintained its activity partly because it continues to include more socially excluded members, to discuss, implement and experiment with new means of dealing with the effects of their exclusion, and to attempt to change its causes.

Criteria for entitlement to publicly-funded services, on the other hand, tend to define the type of eligible service users and the circumstances in

which they can access services seeking a rational use of resources (see Chapter Two Section 5.2). The Centre seeks to broaden the concept of exclusion to include new members, while national policies attempt to make the concept more specific and to target populations. Even with the more recent intentions of universalising services, it is likely that some will be left out, such as asylum seekers.

Following national criteria would mean that the Centre should begin to discriminate over who should participate and hence belong to its community.

b) Defining social exclusion and community development

Another major difference between the visions of the Castle Children's Centre and the Government relates to the way they see the origin of social exclusion. As discussed in Chapter Two Section 1, current policies broadly see social exclusion as the result of individuals' failures to take the right decisions. Social exclusion thus is the result of individuals' inability to become entrepreneurs or to identify the needs of the market to direct their skills development. The holistic vision developed by staff and community members at the co-operative's board cannot accept that the problem of social exclusion and its potential solution is found solely within individuals:

"... The Centre is located in the inner city, a financially impoverished area sometimes depicted by the media as rife with drugs, crime and family break-up. There is no doubt that many of the children live with some of or all of these on a daily basis directly or indirectly. But this is not, by any means the whole story of inner city life, Centre practices aim to build on the best, while also confronting the realities and helping overcome the difficulties that arise from downward spirals of desperation and poverty and systemic forms of oppression ..." (Document withheld 4:14)

The vision of the Centre associates poverty with oppression; the origin of social exclusion is seen as embedded in the social structure. For historical reasons, women, ethnic minorities, aged people, families with ill or disabled members or with unconventional arrangements, have either been excluded from the labour market or have occupied the lower positions in it. Likewise, services have tended not to provide them with suitable solutions to meet their needs. In terms of the concepts introduced in Chapter Two Section 1.2, the Centre sustains a 'redistributive egalitarian discourse' (RED) and the government a 'social integrationist discourse' (SID) (Levitas, 1998). The Castle Children's Centre maintains the vision developed during the phase of 'Cultural Revolution' in the global perspective of services for young children and families while the government defends the discourse of the 'Globalisation' phase (Chapter One Section 1.2, also Haddad, 2002).

For the Government, policy development for services for young children and families is closely linked to the broader aims of developing communities. Community development, in the governmental view, translates into the number of people who change their 'passive' welfare dependency for an 'active' participation in the labour market, even if this is achieved through low-paid, unstable jobs (see Chapter Two Section 1, also Taylor-Gooby, 2001). For the Centre, community development has meant the inclusion and participation of the excluded minorities in a first stage, but later also of those who share their values and beliefs even if new members do not live in exclusion. Helping people to obtain qualifications and jobs has been important, but by no means the ultimate aim of the Centre. Community development has consisted of constructing networks of reciprocity and

support in which the community helps its members through solidarity and the exchange of resources, whether of a material, cognitive or emotional nature, while sharing the values and beliefs of the identity they strengthen on the way. By privileging the voice of those who have been excluded and the ways in which solidarity can integrate them into the community, the Castle Children's Centre has developed a feminist communitarian model of social inclusion (Christians, 2000, 2005).

c) Defining community participation and innovation

In the Castle Children's Centre, the community identifies its own needs; it decides how to implement actions, sometimes empowering the community by developing knowledge, social relationships and their identity. This process takes place through discussions and collective decisions at the co-operative's board. Participation encourages solidarity and support among members through the networks of reciprocal exchange and support.

As a co-operative, the Centre maintains a flat rather than a hierarchical structure. The Local Authority does not easily understand this type of organisation:

"... because there is such a mixture in our staff that again creates perceptions, I suppose it would be like a racist perception, that they cannot manage provisions, that communities cannot run provisions properly. Our status as a co-operative causes problems to them because they cannot recognise co-operative structures; they want hierarchies and that again has been a difficulty for them. They didn't want to recognise us as totally independent because we do push the boundaries and try innovative projects and try things and in the city; everything we try they try to kill. They exclude us from everything ..." Maggie

Although nationally, services for young people and their communities are going through a process of integration, in the eyes of Centre staff, they are still far from being flexible enough. In this next quotation, Laura recollects how some of the Centre's innovations can be such a novelty that they are not always understood, this one referring to the policy of having a 50:50 female:male staff ratio:

"... Because we have men here, that makes us a particular focus and I'll give you an example: we had a meeting with the head of service for our particular area of work some time ago. She asked us to come for a meeting in the Council, in the education department. All the managers were there. She took us to one side and she said basically to us "be it on your effing head my lady, if one of your men touches a child it will be your effing head that rolls". We were given the message very clearly that we had no support because we had men and encouraged them into the field of childcare. And we knew once again that we came under more scrutiny ..." Laura

In this quotation, Laura refers to the counter-resistance of the Local Authority to the policy of the Centre. It could be argued that the head of service Laura refers to was genuinely worried about men abusing children and that she was doing her best to keep children away from this risk. But the same action would be unacceptable later in time when the Sure Start Unit began to promote nationally the inclusion of men on the staff of early-years educational services (Sure Start, undated) – a recommendation partly influenced by the Centre and other NGOs during consultations. As mentioned in Chapter One Section 2, change and innovation are more likely to be achieved through discussion and Local Authority representatives, by avoiding discussion, were an obstacle to innovation. For the government, innovation has meant entrepreneurial innovation, new means to reach the centrally-defined aims, not to discuss and innovate those aims (Lister, 2000).

Similarly, other Local Authority officers have not welcomed or understood the participation of the Centre in other actions such as in the application for benefits, housing, health, identification of children in need and so on. It was not until national policies started to promote integrated and holistic services that the role of the Centre would be better understood. The reason for this is that the Castle Children's Centre is a social movement with a project identity; it has been innovative, creating new meanings and alternatives to the mainstream vision. This means that if the Centre manages to maintain its dynamic, it will probably remain ahead of government policy. But as Laura continues to explain, innovation has not always been successful. At this point of the conversation, she was referring to the discussions that take place at the Centre and how this process can potentially lead to innovative practices:

"... and there's lots of dialogue going on all the time ... I think that's why it becomes very innovative and progressive as well. That doesn't mean good (laughs) because some things we try and they don't work, and we try something else and something's got us into trouble for trying to respond to it, because the political world is not external to ourselves. Or because people don't want to hear what has been said for ourselves so they try to shut us down ..." Laura

Here, Laura seems to recognise some of the limitations of the Centre: not everything they have created works, they have experimented through essay and error and have initiated activities. Communities need this space to develop (Myers, 1992). But that also says something about the characteristics of the Centre: it is not a fundamentalist movement; it is open to criticism and revision. As will be discussed below, the Centre staff also acknowledge how the first years of the Early Excellence Centres programme benefited them

because the opportunity to interchange experiences with other services and scholars external to the Centre was facilitated.

Innovation at the Centre arises from a refusal to accept social exclusion. Therefore, innovation has a social value in itself; it is important and successful, in the eyes of participants, if it can help to achieve changes in established power-relations. Innovation is not politically neutral. Some of these differences were clear when, during the evaluation for the Early Excellence programme, Centre participants decided to carry out a broader evaluation, not only useful for the programme but also to enrich the Centre practice. Part of that information was included in annexes and reflected the different criteria that community members considered important (see Chapter Two Section 3.2, also Ross & Kemshal, 2000 and Morrow & Malin, (2004)

In this recorded conversation, Laura summarises the different visions of the Castle Children's Centre and the mainstream, represented by the Local Authority. She was reflecting on the origins of some of the innovations brought about at the Centre:

“... and I think that's a difference with this place and mainstream provisions; they have to be forced to change and they have to be changed from the upwards, not from down below. And that's the difference with us, we change from the grassroots up, because the need is there, not because the legislation is forcing us to change and we are committed to change for the needs of children, staff and communities ...” Laura

According to Laura, there is a substantial distance between the Local Authority and the organised community at the Castle Children's Centre. Throughout this study we have called these differences community-led and government-led developmental approaches. The Centre reacts as needs

emerge whilst the Local Authority is subject to the restrictions of its own structure and policies. Despite its efforts, the Local Authority does not have the flexibility to respond as quickly or holistically as the community members may need it to. This can create and sustain gaps in services. But the Local Authority can also offer counter-resistance when Centre staff evidence these gaps.

5.2 Dissent and counter-resistance: symbolic and political implications

This section discusses three different phases in the relationship between the Centre and the Local Authority after the 1997 reforms; an initial recognition, an uncertain period during policy changes, and a clear period of counter-resistance.

a) Initial recognition

As mentioned before, the Centre was named one of the first Early Excellence Centres. In this sequence, Laura explains how the programme initially benefited the Centre:

“... We’ve benefited greatly from the Early Excellence programme because for the first time we had core funding for particular projects. It has allowed us to be more innovative. We have to credit Central Government and the officers involved. They were very committed and we had a lot of innovation particularly in the early years of Early Excellence Centres. Today we don’t have to do very much with the new teams. But certainly in the early years they allowed for innovation, around the issues of quality, men in childcare, all sort of projects. It has been a very beneficial project for us. For ourselves in the city we have no support at all ... But the Early Excellence programme, it promoted us all over the country and we had thousands of visits in that period of time. We’ve had people coming from all over who came back and have used our documents, assessment process and sent us back information on their implementations of our fathers’ groups. We’ve

benefited as well and we've learned from them, that's been a good benefit ..." Laura

For the first time, enough money was secured for the core services, namely the integrated childcare and early education services. This meant that the Centre could secure its income and improve conditions for the staff as well as support some of the complementary services. Later, the Childcare Tax would also benefit the Centre as some community members would be entitled to this benefit (see Chapter Two Section 4.3).

As a means of spreading the Centre's practice, frequent visits and feedback from practitioners of other services for children and families were received and the Centre staff imparted a series of courses. The Centre established links with mainstream providers and also with researchers. Some of the withheld documents used in this chapter originated in these relationships.

Laura also mentioned that the first years of the Castle Children's Centre as an Early Excellence Centre were beneficial. Innovation in many of their projects was encouraged even further. Among them, a two-year evaluation took place. The study was undertaken by staff members and an associated researcher (document withheld 5). The evaluation found, among other things, that the Centre's staff had been too busy to stop and reflect on their practice, a common situation among community-based groups linked to social movements (Martinic, 1987).

One development derived from this evaluation was the reconsideration of their principles, which started with the analysis of their activities, values and the policies they had been implementing. This activity encouraged the

redrawing of policies, reaffirming their identity. The present study could potentially collaborate in this process, giving participants more material to reflect on the meaning of the Centre in the context of social change.

However, Laura also gives important indications that conflict was still present in the relationship with Central and Local Governments.

b) Uncertain role in new policy developments

After a fruitful initial relationship with Central Government through the Early Excellence Centres programme, more changes came in policy development, in the ministers in charge, and in structure (see Chapter Two Section 2 and Cohen *et al*, 2004). Laura continues to explain the uncertainty these brought to the Centre:

“... But then what happened is that the Sure Start [programme] was launched. This became a competitive programme and isolated the Early Excellence Centre’s provisions. That became very difficult really. Certainly now that Sure Start is taking over the Early Excellence Centres programme, we don’t know where we will stand when in March (2005) the money is taken away ...”

Laura

According to Laura, when the Sure Start programme was launched, circumstances changed. The contact with the new Early Excellence Centres Programme responsibilities became less frequent and it seemed to her that the interest in learning from the Centre’s practice waned. With the announced creation of Children’s Centres, the governmental funding also became uncertain. Through the considerable effort and advocacy of Centre Staff and its wider network, which included contact with politicians and media, funding was secured until 2006.

In keeping with the uncertainty mentioned by Laura, the researcher came across many difficulties in gathering information from official sources during the study, particularly on the relationship between the programmes and their continuity. The Early Excellence Centres web site was under reconstruction for almost one year between 2002 and 2003. When it finally reappeared, it was under the Sure Start Unit web site (Sure Start Unit website, undated). Baldock (2001) had already noted the negative effects of these drastic changes and the lack of consideration that Central Government had shown to practitioners without reassuring civil servants and NGOs involved in the implementation of policies.

As discussed in Chapter Two Sections 1 and 2, under the current Labour Government, policies for young children and their families have developed notably and more resources have been invested in services during this time than in the previous 30 years put together (Pugh, 2001; Cohen et al, 2004). However, the resulting set of services, although attempting to offer an integrated and holistic solution, have lacked a sense of vision and present a series of contradictions (Moss, 2001b, 2004; Williams & Roseneil, 2005). The way in which the Centre has been seen within policy development seems to support these claims.

c) Counter-resistance in the local political context

Chapter One Section 2.2 discussed how the power of minorities resides in their potential for dissent, and by doing so they undermine the establishment simply because they break the illusion of consensus and can encourage other voices to dissent and question the legitimacy of their exclusion. Establishment

can react by either dismissing those who disagree (psychologisation) or the message they stand for (*dénégation*) (Pérez & Mugny, 1987; Moscovici & Doise, 1994; Papastamou, 1991). In this section, these processes have been referred to as *counter-resistance* and so far these have alluded to groups of the wider society. Now it is time to refer the way government, particularly in the form of the Local Authority, has reacted to the Centre.

Chapter Two also mentioned that, currently, national policies are implemented through Local Authorities, so that the former are filtered through the interpretation and specific conditions of the latter. However, Local Authorities are also responsible for reaching targets established by Central Government and this may restrict some of their decisions, in a process that Burau & Kröger, (2004) call a 'centralised decentralisation'. Because local governments are the most immediately visible forces responsible for exerting power, grassroots social movements, which tend to emerge and act locally in the initial stage (Castells, 1983), often see in them the main subject which they attempt to oppose and influence. During the research period, the city was run by a Labour local government.

Above, it has been discussed how some of the Centre's innovations are meaningful to its members because they attempt to change the conditions that exclude them. But in this passage, Laura continues to explain how some community members have also taken a more direct approach:

"... because we came from a base of, I suppose, challenging Local Authority, that legacy has never left us. And we continue to challenge the Local Authority. We participated as witnesses in a case some service users initiated, accusing them of racism. It was

taken from the city to London, to the High Court. We won. And obviously they were not happy with us..." Laura

The Centre has attempted to influence the Local Authority, not only through its policies but also by supporting community members who seek and win court cases. It is not difficult to imagine some officers at the Local Authority seeing the Centre as potential threat. Apparently, the relationship with the Local Authority has reached a critical point and in the eyes of some research participants the Local Authority would rather see the Centre closed. And the expansion of the Sure Start programme first and now the new Children's Centres programme might have been used towards that end.

The following sequence of events relies on a chronology of meetings sustained between the Castle Children's Centre and Local Authority representatives (Document withheld 7)¹⁷:

- 1998 Under the Early Excellence Centres initiative, the Castle Children's Centre was preparing to take another major step in its development. New premises were expressly designed for the Centre and Central Government, through the programme, granted a quarter of a million pounds to support the construction of the new building. Other funding available for the Centre could not be granted until the new site was secured. Meetings with the Local Authority were arranged to discuss the next steps. Local Authority representatives cancelled meetings on several occasions. No other meeting took place for over a year and the granted money was not used.

- June 1999. Architects commissioned by the DfES recommended the consideration of an alternative site and a three-year extension of the period for the use of the funding for the new building.
- August 1999. The Castle Children's Centre obtains evidence that other Early Excellence Centres in the area had already started to receive and use their funding. The Centre applied for complementary funds from the European Union as part of the regeneration plans for the City. The application form needs to show proof of the cost of the land, information that can only be provided by the Local Authority, and to this point this proof had not been produced.
- September 1999. The first business plan is presented by the Centre to the Local Authority regarding the Early Excellence Centres programme. No response was received. Other applications for complementary funds were attempted. All options required official information on the cost of the land.
- November 1999 to October 2000. Various NGOs and Central Government personnel advocate in favour of the Centre.
- November 2000. A meeting takes place between the Centre and Local Authority representatives. Representatives state that a person linking the Centre with the pertinent Local Government offices will be named. Also they reassure the Centre that the document needed to apply for complementary funding will be available shortly.
- January 2001. Early Excellence central authorities warn that the money granted for the new building needs to be used as a new financial year will

soon begin. To this date, the Local Authority had not named a responsible link officer and no documents regarding the land have been produced.

- June 2002. Another meeting takes place as the extended date to the use of the funding is approaching. In the meeting, results from the evaluation and the commitment of complementary funding are presented, conditional on the confirmation of the Early Excellence Centres support. In this meeting, Local Authority representatives reveal for the first time that the Centre is not located within the area planned for regeneration by a margin of some 200 yards. A meeting with the officer responsible for establishing such areas is recommended; this was asked for and never took place.
- October 2002. An Area Planning meeting takes place and it is agreed that the Centre's bid should be supported. A few weeks later, minutes of the meeting arrived. These omitted the recommendation to support the Centre.
- November 2002. A letter from the Local Authority blames the Centre for the delay in the bid and states that the money has always been available but that the Centre has failed to follow the pertinent procedures. The letter suggests that the Centre has always been considered within the boundaries for regeneration plans. The letter also discloses that other government-led services in the area had been approved for development. Another meeting with the Regional Authority confirms that funding has been approved for other sites and not for the Castle Children's Centre.

Laura continues to explain the way she understands the role of the Local Authority in preventing the building of its new premises from taking place:

“... they stopped us with the land, the building was condemned three years ago in 1999 by the DfES’s architects. They gave £250,000 to build the place and we had to match the starting money. Because the city has [regeneration plans] and this Centre is a model in Europe, in various places in Belgium, Holland, Denmark, everywhere and yet, when we applied for the European funding. We had a tick in every box they were asking, training, supporting men into childcare, innovation, support for going back to work etc, etc, and innovation. We were rejected totally because the city council wouldn’t back us and would not move the boundaries 200 yards to include us. They moved it for their own provisions. So we understand what is happening here. They are building a new nursery off the road from us. A brand new nursery for themselves and not using the local provisions built by the communities. They want to build a fancy office and a fancy nursery side by side for themselves which will close down ourselves ...” Laura

During the period of Conservative Government, the Centre found a way to fund itself by providing services to the wider community and the Local Authority. The decision to exclude the Centre from the continuation of the partnership and the expansion of services through the Children’s Centres programme cuts government funds and reduces the means the Centre has had to fund itself.

Late in 2005, the money that had been offered to the Centre almost six years seemed to have been lost. With the development of new provisions and the unsuitability of the Centre’s premises, the Centre would either have to move from the community that it had served for over 25 years or disappear.

Although this research does not include the Local Authority’s point of view, some field notes do seem to support the Centre’s view. The second

case study of this research was going to take place in another community-led service supported by Sure Start. But before the study could commence, the Local Authority decided to cease its support to this site. This brought crisis for this service since it lost part of its staff and with them a number of children and funding. The service was struggling to survive. The site that finally became the second case study, the *Stanford Family Services Network* (in Chapter Five), was part of another Early Excellence Centre run by Local Authority employees. Although the Castle Children's Centre was located just a few miles away and had been named an Early Excellence Centre four years before, there was never any contact between them. As part of the activities within the Early Excellence Centre programme, many civil servants from all over the country had visited the Castle Children's Centre to learn from the experience gained there. But the Local Authority did not seem, at the time of writing, to be prepared to learn from it. This Labour local government seemed to run against the Labour Central government by dismissing the importance of the Centre.

6. Concluding comments: the role of community-led development within current policy for young children, families and communities

As mentioned in Chapter Three, this case study encouraged research participants' intervention in data analysis but also sought to relate findings to broader social theory. As a result, the case is able to draw some conclusions for two types of audience. This, however, should not be interpreted as if these were exclusive categories. The first one refers to those interested in theoretical developments and the second to those working in the field.

Regarding theoretical issues, section 5.1 summarises the main findings and puts them into perspective while comparing the community-led production of the Centre with the government policy development. Some of the main points were:

- The study confirms that an organisation with a community-led development in services for young children, families and communities can create innovative, holistic and effective services.
- Such organisations, when they have emerged from the context of exclusion, are likely to bring about ideas about the origin of their exclusion and the expectation of change for their future and for their children.
- Like the Nezahualpilli preschool scheme discussed in Chapter One, The Castle Children's Centre has developed its innovation seeking to change the relationships and views sustained by mainstream services. Innovation in this sense has meant the creation of alternative ways of providing services.
- The study was able to theorise the development of an identity based on values and beliefs that has been shared by members of the Centre. Such identity makes the Centre a social space that gathers collective effort to develop its community through solidarity and the exchange of resources that can be material, cognitive and emotional. In this sense, the Centre can be seen as a social movement seeking a cultural change. In the early stages, such change opposed the community's exclusion, but this later shifted to propose specific alternatives to mainstream visions.

This last point gives way to some complementary comments more related to those working in the field, particularly in the Castle Children's Centre.

- The Castle Children's Centre's future is uncertain, maybe even more than it was almost 25 years ago when it first emerged. In spite of the Centre's national and international reputation, it has struggled to survive during the Labour Government period.
- Following Castells' (1983) characterisation of grassroots social movements, it can be argued that the Castle Children's Centre has been an *utopic* social movement. This means that the Centre has created cultural alternatives that have substantially changed the life and experience of at least some of its participants and has even shifted to broader social spaces, somehow influencing policy development and other groups nationally and internationally. However, such changes have taken place almost incidentally, not because the Centre had actively sought to participate in formal political activity. Because utopic social movements seek cultural change and not formal political action, they tend to be politically defeated at some point. This seems to be the result of their efforts to expand their cultural alternatives through informal relations and maintain scarce contact with operators in the political and media spaces.

From this perspective, the Centre could have three options in the present circumstances.

- First, with the imminent need to relocate premises, the Centre could move to neighbouring areas with more favourable political conditions. Over the years some service users have come from these areas and may help to facilitate the change. Although moving will probably bring many changes, the Centre could maintain more or less the same characteristics, particularly the policy of not intervening actively in political activity.
- Second, the Centre could shift its identity towards a more politically active role, similarly to the way the Nezahualpilli scheme did. This would mean becoming spokespeople and attempting to influence policy development more decidedly. It could set up a network of dissident voices among community-led organisations, practitioners, scholars, politics and media to fill the gap of opposition to government initiatives in the field of services for children families and communities (Cohen, Moss *et al*, 2004). It could also help to consolidate the organisations it has helped to develop nationally and internationally.
- Third, members could decide that the time for concluding the Centre has come. In a sense, the cultural options that the Centre has created, such as its holistic view, and the string of services that respond to the values and beliefs of their identity, are an important reference that many groups and policy developers cannot easily ignore. To make public the Centre's history, achievements and end could make it possible for others to resume its work.

In accordance with the theoretical framework and methodology of this study, social theories, including this case study, cannot predict the future or

give 'the best' answers to the complex problems they seek to study (Castells, 2001). They can, eventually, raise meaningful questions that can help the Castle Children's Centre members in their decisions.

To conclude, we present the following paragraph, in which Castells refers to grassroots social movements in a way that can describe the nature of the Castle Children's Centre and its struggle:

"... they are more than a last, symbolic stand and desperate cry: they are symptoms of our contradictions, and therefore potentially capable of superseding our contradictions. They are the organisational forms, the live schools where the new social movements of our emerging society are taking place, growing up, learning to breathe, out of reach of the state apparatuses, and outside the closed doors of repressed family life. They are successful when they connect all the repressed aspects of the new, emerging life because this is their specificity: to speak the new language that nobody yet speaks in its multifaceted meaning ..." (Castells 1983: 331)

¹² A total of seven documents are withheld in order to preserve participants' anonymity. This one was drawn up for the Early Excellence Centres programme and describes the context of social exclusion of the community where the main site is located. It was produced in 1998.

¹³ This reference was drawn up by members of the staff and was published in a journal on children in the continent in 2002

¹⁴ This reference was drawn up by a researcher external to the Centre and published in a national journal on children and social exclusion in 1999.

¹⁵ This document is a prospectus explaining service users the aims of the Centre.

¹⁶ This reference was drawn up by members of the staff and an associated research. It was undertaken as part of the Early Excellence Centres Programme in 2000 and 2001

¹⁷ This document was used by staff members and the external evaluator in their attempt to secure funds for the Centre as part of the Early Excellence Centres programme.

Chapter Five. Case Study 2. The Stanford Family Services Network

The Stanford Family Services Network was set up in 2001 by the Local Authority through the Early Excellence Centres programme. Its aim was to assess established services for young children and their families and to plan and implement activities leading towards their integration in accordance with recent policy developments. Like other Early Excellence sites, it was expected to develop good practice to serve as a model for expansion onto new sites that began to take place in 2003, two years after it began working.

The fieldwork for this second case study was undertaken between June 2003 and March 2005. By that time, the Network had worked with a two-person staff working part-time, visiting homes and offering courses which attempted to meet the needs and interests of service users, predominantly young mothers. Activities had started to be replicated in other sites in the same city as a decision of the chair of the Early Excellence Centres programme. Two support members funded by the local Sure Start had joined the network a few weeks before the first encounter with the researcher, making the service a collaboration between the two main government initiatives. The Network services also included three toddlers' groups run by six volunteer mothers.

As discussed in Chapter Three, this study is based on interviews with the two practitioners who developed the services, and one support worker. In addition, every course offered at Stanford House, the Network's headquarters, was observed twice. During the 19 months of data gathering, the researcher kept a diary in which conversations with practitioners and service users were

recorded. As a result, this chapter presents three case studies of young mothers and one grandmother attending the Stanford House activities, illustrating ways in which participants have experienced services. Two more mothers participated in the research, but they left the service suddenly and, as a consequence, they did not validate their cases and are not included in the report. However, the reasons for their leaving are discussed.

This case study illustrates how the new service was developed and implemented and gives some evidence of its impact. Through the different sections, two main ideas are highlighted:

- 1- The Stanford Family Services Network strategy was designed on the basis of diagnosed needs of local mothers with young children through home visits. Among those needs not met were mothers' depression and isolation.
- 2- The strategy attempts to meet mothers' needs while developing their parenting skills and gradually reintroducing them to formal training and eventually job-seeking.

This case study aims to illustrate how community members participated in the service and whether their involvement helped to shape services to meet their needs. The case also explores how staff members have dealt with the challenges of setting up a new service and discusses their need to develop new skills and attitudes to community members.

The Chapter is presented in six sections. These were organised in accordance with the themes that emerged from interviews, observations and conversations. The first section describes the context in which the Network was established; Section Two discusses the history of the strategy developed; Section Three details the services offered. The fourth section discusses the effects of the strategy on participants as well as changes staff experienced. Section Five analyses the community's participation in the time planning, establishment of aims and contents, and definitions of community and participation. Finally, Section Six presents concluding comments.

1 The Context for the Stanford Family Services Network

The Stanford Family Services is a network of services supporting young children and their families. The Network is based in a large northern city with a population of over half a million. Some of the city's wards are among the 20% poorest in the country and the Network operates in one of those areas. The Network was set up in 2001 as part of the local Early Excellence Centres programme as an attempt to offer services in accordance with the policy developments discussed in Chapter Two Section 1 and 2. The aim of the Network was to identify the needs of young children and their families and to make sure that those needs were met. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to identify the way in which established services could improve and integrate their practice. This was possible through two strategies: enhancing the work of established services, and creating new services that met the unfulfilled needs of the community. This is the reason why the Stanford Family Services is not a site, but a network linking established services and offering complementary services.

From 2003, one of the two staff members also began to work for the Sure Start Local Programme. She began to replicate the activities developed at Stanford House and she also obtained funding for two support workers. In this way, Stanford House began to receive funding from both the Early Excellence Centres and the Sure Start Local Programmes.

The headquarters of the Network were set up in Stanford House, a former Victorian primary school, and were shared with a nursery and other social services such as housing and support for teenage parents. Some of the Network activities took place in the rooms of this building, but it also worked in other nurseries in the area.

Stanford House was located a few miles from the city centre. For many years the area had had a bad reputation, with high levels of crime and poverty. In the past, some racial incidents had also occurred. As a result, the Local Authority had decided to relocate some ethnic minority families, so most of the inhabitants of the area still had a white English background. Recently, the area had been considered within the city's plans for regeneration. Many old houses had been demolished and new ones were being built. Some ethnic minority members had moved in and would start attending Stanford House towards the end of the research.

In spite of the regeneration programme, activities at the Stanford Family Services Network had to deal with a certain degree of insecurity as the premises were vandalised from time to time, especially during 2003 and the beginning of 2004. During this time, there were two break-ins. In the second of these, all the computers from the different departments sharing the building

were stolen, and one staff member suspected that somebody who had attended one of the activities could have been involved by identifying where the valuable items were, as not all of them would have been easy to spot.

In a separate incident, some minutes before one of the activities with local mothers took place, an outsider stole a handbag belonging to one of the staff members. The situation was especially embarrassing because it happened in the furthest room from the main entrance, meaning that the thief had passed through the main door, which was coded, and in front of the internal entrance to the nursery and main offices. During the last six months of the study, the situation improved and security staff were hired.

2 History of the service: identifying and meeting the needs of young children and families

Integration of services began by assessing community needs and the extent to which established services was meeting them. When dealing with needs not met by any established service, the Network also developed new services.

In order to set up the service, the local Early Excellence Centres programme advertised two posts: a *family support development worker* and a *community teacher*. These posts were taken by Margaret and Patricia. Both collaborated in creating the Network strategy and were still the key staff of the service at the time of the research. Margaret had worked on her own during the first year and Patricia joined at the second. Both participated in this research and their points of view were paramount.

Margaret, a woman in her early 40s, successfully applied for the post of family support development worker. In this interview extract she explains the reasons for doing so:

“... I’ve been a nursery nurse for about 20 years and worked mainly in nurseries. My last post was Deputy of a nursery, but I found that it was becoming quite an admin task. I spent less time with the children and probably less time with the parents. And then this new post was advertised. It was funded by the Early Excellence: a family support development worker. It was a new job and nobody had actually done anything like it ...”
Margaret

As an early-years professional, Margaret had dealt with the limitations of previous approaches to working with parents. In this new role she found an exciting challenge. Margaret started to work alongside other educational, health and social services staff, as they visited mothers with young children. She also coordinated a series of meetings in which staff from these services worked towards integrating their work. Such integration involved three different actions: maximising the use of existing services; supporting the development of new activities in established services; and creating and offering new services meeting the needs that no other service met.

In order to maximise the use of existing services, meetings with staff from different services were held with the aim of improving understanding of each department’s work and resources. Participants developed an assessment strategy that included information pertinent to all services, plus other issues that Margaret considered pertinent. Local educational, health and social service departments began assessing the community’s needs from home visits. During the research period, every staff member from any of the three departments involved in assessment was expected to conduct home

visits, to identify a wider range of needs and to refer them to relevant services even when these were not part of their own department. During the research period, staff from different services would meet every two or three months. The frequency of these meetings contrasts with those reported by Anning & Edwards (1999), in which intense team working allowed participants to create a common language and knowledge-base. It was during the last six months of the research that these meetings started to be carried out once a week. The researcher was not allowed to be present at such meetings, as staff from other services had not agreed to take part in the study. No community members were present either.

The second part of the strategy was supporting the development of new services provided by each department. In the case of educational services, Margaret was able to support the creation of toddlers' groups and toy libraries. Later, the Network would also set up a library with materials that would aid adults in talking with children about delicate issues, such as their parents' divorce or the loss of loved ones.

The third part of the strategy was derived from the results of the assessment. A series of needs had not been met by any of the established services and the Network developed activities to deal with them. These needs related to young mothers' depression, isolation and parenting, issues that Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start programmes seem to be tackling successfully (Tunstall *et al* 2005, Gustafsson & Driver, 2005). In order to deal with them, during the assessment the option to receive one-to-one support through subsequent home visits was offered, an activity which Margaret

carried out. Later, she developed a course named 'Time out' and from its results further courses were designed and offered at Stanford House. During the research period, these courses occupied most of staff's time; consequently the research focuses on their development.

Almost one year after Margaret started to work on the project, a second staff member joined her. This was Patricia, who took the post of community teacher. She already had experience of working with adults, professionals caring for young children, and community parents. She designed and began to lead a series of courses offering a follow-up to the Time Out course, specifically on parenting issues. In this interview extract, Patricia explains her reasons for working in the Stanford Family Services Network:

"... I have an early years teaching background, and working in schools combined with doing training for nursery workers in a paying college. So half of my career has been spent with young children and the other half training people who work with young children. This work, it combines the two, because a lot of the other strand of my work is working with providers, improving the quality of what they do in terms of their provision for under fives, the work with parents is another strand of that. So I come in with both really and because it is pioneering it's very interesting, in developing that sort of work with parents. Because I think that when you work with young children very often the work has to engage parents, but you have to do it on top of your work with children. So when I worked with parents I did that outside my limit if you like, as an early years teacher. And I really wanted to sort of develop that work in its own right because I think, this engaging the parents is a way to raise achievement with children, which is what my job is all about. It is raising children's achievement and the work with parents is a really strong strand of that" Patricia

This interview extract highlights the importance Patricia gives to the relationship between adults and children in fulfilling the aim of improving children's conditions and opportunities. From her work experience, Patricia was convinced of the importance of the work.

After the first year of activities, mothers from nearby areas were asking to join the courses. Margaret decided to apply for more funding to extend activities to one of these areas. As discussed in Chapter Two Section 3.1, the establishment of geographical areas created some difficulties for practitioners, who had to decide between denying services or not counting families in their statistics. Margaret, working on a part-time basis, found a way to extend services to other areas, fulfilling targets and increasing her earnings. The funding came this time from the Sure Start Local Programme. Margaret continues to explain:

“... we have this area where both programmes are working (Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start) so I talked to Sure Start, and told them I was interested in doing something there [name of the area nearby], but because I only worked 12 hours, it would be difficult to actually set out something there with these numbers of hours. So they agreed to pay some additional hours and that’s been for quite a while now, almost a year, November (2003) is when they will review it and say whether they want me to keep on doing that ... And we run identical programmes: what we do in this site we do in the other as well, and they have been really successful ...” Margaret

After a few months, Margaret was also able to negotiate the funding of two Sure Start support workers for Stanford House. The new staff needed training, as they were not teachers. Towards the end of the fieldwork, a second community teacher would join the Network, so the team became a five-person staff. However, every staff member would be working on a part-time basis. As a result, the Network operated three days a week during term times.

The identified needs of local mothers lay behind the design of the Time Out course, which attempted to engage participants in group support

sessions, where they could work on their needs and could start to develop parenting skills. Later, mothers could attend follow-up courses, where these skills were developed in a deeper and more structured way, with the additional aim of reintroducing them to the world of studies and potential job-seeking.

The following section details the activities of the Network; later in the chapter the achievements and limits of the Stanford Family Services Network strategy are discussed.

3 Group support and family members' aspirations

This section discusses the services developed by the Network in order to deal with the needs of families that no other institutions were assisting. The discussion is presented in four sections according to the type of service. Section 3.1 deals with the outreach service, referring to the work undertaken on home visits. Section 3.2 discusses in depth the Time Out course and Section 3.3 analyses the follow-up courses. The process that most mothers experienced at the Stanford Family Services Network comprised these three stages, although these did not necessarily occur in that order. Finally, Section 3.4 discusses the activities observed at the toddlers' groups.

3.1 The Outreach service

The Network staff, along with health visitors and social workers, identified families with children under four years of age in the catchment area. During the first visit, an assessment designed by the inter-institutional groups was carried out and mothers were invited to attend the courses at Stanford House.

Additionally, they offered one-to-one support at home with any difficulties mothers might be experiencing with their children. In an effort to make their attendance more likely, the staff also said that they could facilitate the children's admittance to the nursery when the time was right.

Jodi, a 36 year-old woman and former childminder, was one of the support staff provided by Sure Start. In this interview extract she talks about the kind of activities she undertakes while on home visits:

"... we get there and say: we are home visitors from Sure Start and we are visiting all the families to let them know what sort of services we offer. Also we ask if the parents are stressed or if they've got problems with a child that they'd like extra help with. We put this on a referral form and then we've got those referrals to go and visit those people ... I'm visiting one lady because her little girl won't go to bed. So it's giving strategies that work for her, to help her with. And then I visited this other lady with difficulties with her son's eating habits and speech development so I've got access to work with them as well. So it's a huge range of problems: temper tantrums, potty training, eating, and all those sorts of behaviour problems ..." Jodi

As Jodi mentioned, the types of services offered by the Network dealt with parenting skills. Equally, they could refer families to other health and social services. However, not all families were receptive to these initiatives as Jodi continues to explain:

"... I've visited one lady twice now. The first time I was trying to bring her to the group but she's not been in contact, she has not been and that's a shame but you know, I don't want to pressure her to come in to the group. But I'd rather she called and said 'I'm not bothered about it', I'm not offended if she says something like that. And then I visited another lady this morning and it's quite hard to make them ... well I've only been on a few visits, but it's hard ..." Jodi

Some of the mothers started to attend courses at the Stanford Family Services Network after the first visit. Others accepted the personal support

and when they felt more confident with staff members they started to attend Stanford House. People who declined to attend services were identified as 'hard to reach'. As discussed in Chapter Two Section 3.1, the 'hard-to-reach' population is a common way to label those who do not want to participate in the service and whose reasons for this are not obvious or well-known. There was even one case in which one of the mothers attended the sessions only on condition that the support worker she knew could escort her for the first few sessions: this mother declined to participate in the research. Some others, however, knew about the courses by word of mouth and did not wait to be visited but referred themselves to Stanford House.

From the first visits, Margaret dealt with diverse behavioural difficulties in children, but also discovered that many of the young mothers were feeling overwhelmed caring for the children, depressed or isolated. Every Sure Start Local Programme is expected to develop services for mothers suffering depression (Sure Start, undated). Mothers with post-natal depression became some of those attending Stanford House.

Chapter Two Section 3.1 highlighted the fact that the outreach service was one of the most successful strategies developed by the new services, and participants in our case studies were attracted to the services through this particular service.

At this stage, community participation took place on an individual basis through home visits. As part of the assessment, community members were asked about the type of services they might require, particularly regarding parenting.

3.2 A break from the routine with young children: the Time Out course

It has been mentioned that the Time Out course was the first to be developed and that it attracted mothers from neighbouring areas. The course itself, and the favourable opinions of community members about it, were behind Margaret's success in obtaining extra funding for it from the Sure Start Local Programme. In the following recorded conversation, Margaret explains the reason for naming this course:

"... what I did find doing these home visits is that a lot of parents just needed a break, away from their children and for themselves. There was absolutely nowhere to take them to, so this is when I decided to set up this group. We call it "Time Out" because that is what it is, a time for them away from their children. When you actually ask them what they want to do, what kind of things they want to learn often they say, 'we don't mind what we do, as long as we have two hours away in something without the children' that's the main thing ..." Margaret

The Time Out sessions offered mothers an opportunity to break with the routine of their everyday lives, to reflect on their own needs and to help their children's development. It is interesting to note that some mothers seem not to care about what kind of activities were taking place; some of them seemed more interested in the break from their children than the crèche provided. During the research period, many mothers expressed this view in informal conversations. Perhaps a new service such as this made it hard for mothers to have a clear idea of what to expect. Patricia interpreted the situation in this way:

"... they come to get away from their children for a while, leaving their children at the crèche. And then they feel happy they can do something themselves, something creative; or find out about something, something for themselves, for their lives. And really that's where it starts and for that they identify their own needs they want to address ... and then as those needs are addressed

in a couple of weeks then they work in relation to their children's development ..." Patricia

According to Patricia, the group gives participants the chance to develop by reflecting on their needs. The role of the staff is to set up the conditions for this process to take place, and to avoid pressure or forced discussions. Thus the first step in the session is promoting a supportive atmosphere in which people can eventually feel confident enough to talk.

Margaret explains how this is done:

"... We start with crafts to make people more confident, because it can be really difficult to start coming to a group when you don't know anybody, and come to a place where you have to speak. With crafts, they have their heads down and they can do their things and they don't have to talk to anybody if they don't want to. But what we have found is that in the first few weeks it is really quiet, but then as people get to know each other they become more comfortable, more confident and actually a really vocal group. So we started to ask parents what they want to do ..." Margaret

Making crafts can be relaxing and during observations most participants seemed to enjoy the activities. Some were surprised with the results, as they did not seem to know they had the skills to create such attractive objects. After a few sessions, Margaret asked them about the kind of things they wanted to know. In both observed groups, no-one had suggestions straight away and group coordinators suggested the themes they had already planned. Perhaps this difficulty in obtaining quick and straightforward answers is the reason why the Time Out course comprises a broad range of interests: cooking sessions and talks on toddlers' and adults' nutrition; safety at home and first aid. Sessions took place with the assistance of other professionals, such as a nutritionist, a member of the fire brigade's educational department and a paramedic. It took two years to develop the

Time Out course and the observations of two different groups of attendees did not identify any variation. Because it required the contribution of other professionals, and because of the need to book a place on a course in advance, little changes were possible in content. Margaret and support worker Jodi led the two Time Out courses observed. At the end of every session, participants were required to fill in a small multiple-choice questionnaire with suggestions and opinions. Lister (2000), however, criticises the use of forms for complaints, praise and opinion as a substitute for more a comprehensive means of participation, arguing that these forms on their own are closer to 'consumer rights' than 'community development' strategies.

Creating a supportive group has been a key point in the development of the Time Out group. According to Margaret, relationships forged in the Time Out course help to promote self-confidence, important for the second part of the course, which attempts to explore and address the problems that mothers deal with in caring for their children. Margaret explains:

"... we do five weeks of parenting, looking at children's behaviour, which has been a request from parents. Sometimes they find children very difficult so we do it and talk about temper tantrums, sibling rivalry, just positive parenting really ..."
Margaret

In order to encourage mothers to talk about this issue, Margaret and Jodi talked about their own experience as mothers and the problems they had dealt with. The groups discussed their cases and that encouraged others to participate. Part of the sessions consisted of reflecting on the causes and consequences of children's behaviour and the way it relates to their parents' feelings, actions and circumstances. Reflecting on the way parents' anxiety

and conflicts influence children's behaviour is not necessarily an easy task, much less so when Margaret had to tackle it on her own, as she explained in this interview:

"... The only thing difficult [with the Time Out course] is running it by yourself, because what I do want the group to be is not only one where we pass on information. I also want them to feel they can actually come and talk to you if they wanted to. If somebody breaks down in tears in the group and needs some support I'd like to think that I can actually take those parents out and talk and that's very difficult if you're out there on your own, and I've found that hard. Whereas now at the moment, [there are] two behaviour support whom I now work with, so there are two of us now in each group. It has been brilliant, because it has happened and it happens quite often, when parents do get upset and one of us can go out, for ten, fifteen minutes or whatever and the group still continues ..." Margaret

The Time Out course can be intense for some participants. The course encourages reflection and eventually changes in the way mothers relate to their children and also in the mothers' own aspirations, depression and isolation. Carlson & West (2005) refer to this as a therapeutic feature of some Sure Start Local Programmes. During the development of these sessions, home visits and one-to-one support were still available. Some of the participants decided to ask for this personalised support after the sessions on behaviour. The last session of the course ended with a clear message: we all deserve to be comfortable with ourselves. Margaret explains:

"... at the end we do a 'pamper session', where we have a beautician to work with mothers, and that has been really very popular ..." Margaret

In the 'pamper session', mothers reward themselves after the intensity of the previous sessions. Activities might include massage, hair, skin treatments etc. This was the only session in which the researcher was not allowed to observe. This session reflects the feminine nature of the Stanford

Family Services Network's strategy and the dominant idea that caring for young children is also a female role. Before this research started, no man had participated in the programme either as a community member or staff member. During the research, it was reported that one man started to attend one of the groups taking place in another nursery supported by the Network, but left after a few sessions. During the last six months of the research, one man collaborated with the staff. He was one of the two responsible for running the crèche while courses were taking place at Stanford House. Crèche staff were not formally part of the programme and were paid out of Early Excellence funds. During the research period, the only action aiming to attract fathers was a display showing some pictures of the researcher participating in cooking and sewing activities (see Chapter Three Section 5.2 for an analysis on how the researcher's presence could have affected data gathering in this and in the first case study).

The Time Out course was designed to meet the needs of mothers identified through home visits that no other services were dealing with. These were related to the feelings of loneliness and depression and the group offered an opportunity to work on this within a support group. But the Time Out course was only 12 sessions and some participants wanted more support. Some of them took the course twice. On both occasions, at least four out of the minimum of six participants took the course twice. Soon it was clear that the work started on this course needed a follow-up.

3.3 The follow-up courses: parenting and family aspirations

Sessions on children's behaviour linked in with the courses developed by Patricia, the community teacher, as these focused more deeply on parenting. During the period of this research, Patricia had developed three different courses for mothers who in principle had been through the Time Out course: 'Story Sacks'; 'Music, Numeracy and Literacy'; and 'Helping our Kids'. As stated before, these courses were not arranged serially and the Time Out course was not a prerequisite to them. Patricia explains the difference between the Time Out course and these follow-up courses:

"... some of the work groups are doing are certificated courses. They are going to get some credits from what they do. The Open College Network will accredit the course, and they are looking for credits at level two, which is the GCSE level or NVQ level two. Hopefully they will get some credits at that level. There will be requirements for them to complete their level, which they haven't had before. It's been a very gradual introduction to this really. They'll have a requirement where they will have to complete tasks or do assessments in order to get the credits ..."

"It's as friendly as we can make it, but it nevertheless requires more from them. When they started [with the Time Out course], it was more picking them up and taking them to places. There are still elements of that, but now there is more of them knowing when things start, what times they have to come. And the accreditation is a necessary part of the course so it takes them a step further into reengaging with the world of work if you like. Hopefully most of them are sort of looking at what they'd like to do, where they'd like to take their working careers. So some of them have the opportunity to look at this for the first time in terms of choices as well. So it is really how it is working towards that ..." Patricia

The first course observed was the 'Story Sacks' (on the content, see Weinberger & Stafford, 2004; Archer, 1998). This course was about identifying children's interests and relating them to books. Mothers chose among the available books for toddlers in the Stanford Family Services

Network or could bring their own to suit their children's preferences. Mothers made cuddly toys, puppets, drawings, games or other models to complement the content of the books and make them more attractive to children. At the same time, activities encouraged children to relate to books, and parents were able to support children in this process by playing, talking and developing activities together. During the sessions, Patricia used some time to explain that toddlers, even when they cannot read or even speak, certainly develop skills and attitudes that will eventually lead them to read and write successfully. The manual work maintains the dynamics of the Time Out course, providing mothers with time to talk while working on the course, encouraging an informal and friendly atmosphere.

The second course, 'Music, Numeracy and Literacy', introduced mothers to the broader processes of language acquisition and to the mental processes that precede numeracy – such as classifying and serialising objects, and to literacy – such as recognising letters and numbers. Sessions included a brief introduction to children's development and the kind of stimulation that simple material could promote. Later, materials would be made and towards the end of sessions in the crèche mothers would test the material they had made during the session. Among the products, mothers made personalised nursery rhyme books with the songs each child liked, decorated with colourful drawings and family photos. Others would include a tablemat with letters and numbers, musical instruments and diverse games. Material published by The Basic Skills Agency (Buckton, C. 1996; Ebbut & Gifford 1998) was used to support activities and to provide ideas. The subsequent sessions would discuss how the materials were used at home

and whether children had found them interesting and mothers had found them useful.

The third follow-up course was called 'Helping our children'. It was a development of the 'Music, Literacy, and Numeracy' course but with a different format. Using video cameras, mothers would film their children playing at home. These films were the basis for discussions between parents, the community teacher and nursery nurses. The films were used to identify children's interests and stimulate discussion about their development and ways in which mothers and nursery nurses could work together to promote such development. Films were also useful for identifying what mothers considered to be 'bad behaviour'. This behaviour was reconsidered as part of every child's development – such as understanding why children scribble. At the end of the course, mothers would receive a video of their film. With the permission of participants, some of those films could be used in other courses for parents, enriching the Stanford Family Services Network's resources. Additionally, these videos gave staff more evidence of their work, as in the films, their strategies for dealing with behavioural problems and materials to stimulate children's development were spontaneously used by mothers and children. The videos were also useful as evidence of the scheme's success.

3.4 Toddlers' groups and libraries

In a complementary strand to the Network's work, activities also promoted the creation of new services among established institutions. In the case of the three local nurseries in the area, the new services were the toddlers' groups. Three groups were set up with the help of mothers from the community. Later,

a toy library and a library offering materials to support children's understanding and expression of delicate issues – such as their parents' divorce or the loss of a loved one – were set up. These libraries were available to every participant, as well as to health and social workers.

In the following conversation, Margaret explains how the toddlers' groups were set up:

“... The other part of my job is doing a plan for developing services for the area, and looking at any gaps that there may be. One of the gaps used to be that there wasn't a toddlers' group at the new childcare centre. It was a new building and I actually worked with the staff there to start running it. That one is actually running with parents, it is not staff from the nursery but community parents who are running it. One of the things the community teacher does is to train parents, who run these toddlers' groups. She encourages these leaders of the communities to do the course. I visit the group once a month to give them any kind of support they may need. There are two other toddlers' groups I support. We have now three toddlers' groups in the area. I go there and give ideas for activities, encourage parents to interact with children, give them ideas of the kind of things they can do at home. It may be just general things such as where they can apply for money ...” Margaret

The toddlers' groups running in the area offered one two-hour weekly session to local mothers with young children. Groups were run in each one of the local nurseries supported by the network. As Margaret mentions, the Network was supporting and encouraging community mothers to run these groups while nurseries provided rooms and educational materials. However, this work was voluntary and although there was some money available for activities and educational materials, neither the Network nor the nurseries could apply for it on behalf of the volunteers.

During the development of the 'Helping our Children' course, one of the nursery nurses participating expressed her worries about these groups. She

felt that the groups were not receiving all the support and acknowledgement they deserved. She mentioned how on different occasions parents had asked about the services and how nursery staff could not tell people about the group, as it was in practice an independent service. She thought that the toddlers' group should be seen as an integral part of the Network. During the research period, the Stanford House toddlers' group was also forced to change the day of its weekly meeting as the nursery put on some activities that day. Volunteers running the group told the researcher that this had not represented a problem for them, but they had felt uncomfortable that they had only been informed about the decision once it had been taken. The nursery nurse told the researcher about the incident too and she thought that the issue was confusing for parents and it made them feel that the group had no support from professionals.

This seems a vulnerable condition for the new services because they did not seem to be part of the formal structure of the nurseries or the Network. Later in the chapter, we shall return to this point, when one of the participants' case studies refers to her voluntary work in one of the toddlers' groups.

This research observed nine sessions of these groups, six in Stanford House and three in another nursery supported by the Network. Two local mothers at each site led the sessions. All four volunteers had taken a course with Patricia, different to those courses described above and with the aim of preparing them for running the group. This course was also recognised by the Open College Network and participants could gain credits if they applied. The toddlers' group sessions developed a basic routine in which children had the

opportunity to play freely with the nursery equipment or educational materials made by group leaders. Group leaders also encouraged adults to interact with the children while they were playing. They talked to children, asking questions about their activities and preferences, praised their achievements, helped them when children asked for help, and made sure children were safe at all times. Children had to be accompanied by their mothers or tutors in order to reduce pressure on the group leaders.

During the sessions, mothers also had a chance to socialise and some of them had made good friends with other mothers; most participants attended or had attended the courses. Towards the end of the sessions, children and adults had a drink and a snack, which was another opportunity to teach children basic table manners, and continued to socialise. Sessions normally finished with adults and children singing nursery rhymes. Afterwards, the rooms were cleaned and nursery materials were tidied.

The Stanford Family Services Network staff supported group leaders. They could, of course, ask for advice at any moment and received a visit from Margaret once a month, that is, every four sessions. But Margaret had also established links with the Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA, undated), an NGO that emerged in the 1960s to promote playgroups (see also Chapter One Section 1.2). The PLA agreed to visit each group once a month, so between the Network and the PLA, the local toddlers' groups received supervisory visits every fortnight, that is every two sessions.

The second activity was directed towards extending and supporting the work of existing services. This included the development of toy libraries, as Margaret explains:

“... there wasn’t a toy library in the area, so I set two up, here [at Stanford House] and in another nursery. So actually we have two in the area. They are small ones. They actually need more work but at least it’s a start. Family support workers may use them and take toys into families’ houses and leave them there for a while. Visiting like I do, I also may leave some toys and go back in a couple of weeks and change them. Other parents attending can also join the toy libraries. Anyone working in the nurseries can actually use them ...” Margaret

In accordance with Margaret’s statement, during the observed courses staff took advantage of the toy library. When mothers talked about their children and their interests, staff would also suggest taking some of the toys and explained how they promoted specific skills while addressing some of the children’s interests. Later, staff members would also set up a library with books designed to help children to understand difficult aspects of life. Stories would include characters whose parents were getting divorced, had lost a loved one, or felt lonely. Books were accompanied by drawings or cuddly toys and facilitated difficult conversations, as they encouraged children to talk about the characters’ situations and feelings, so children could manage their own feelings more easily. During the courses, time was set aside to present this library, and support for the books’ use and the circumstances behind their use was offered. Like the toy library, this resource was also available to the health and social services staff.

4 Repercussions: families' relationships and practitioners' new roles

Because this research began in 2003, two years after the Network had begun, it focused on the provision of the new services. These were the courses offered at Stanford House and the process that participants went through during that time, including home visits and attendance at toddlers' groups. By means of interviews, informal conversations and observations, this section discusses the changes to the roles of families and practitioners which have come about under the influence of these schemes. It also raises questions surrounding the depth and prevalence of the toddlers' groups, the main service developed in nurseries as a result of the Network involvement.

4.1 Changes in families

The strategy developed by the Stanford Family Services Network relies on the identification of families' needs. By involving all services available locally, it attempts to deal with those needs holistically. Equally importantly, this procedure is based on the data gathered during home visits. This means that institutions do not wait for families to ask for services. Instead they go and offer services to families in an attempt to reach those who would otherwise not be included. Home visits are also valuable as they offer advice on how to make the best choices among all the options available. This section discusses the experience of three mothers and one grandmother attending services at Stanford House. We discuss how they knew about the services, how they had been supported and the changes they had experienced. Case studies were undertaken with the consent of participants and are presented with their approval. All names have been changed.

Elizabeth is the first case presented. It illustrates the way outreach services were effective in involving her in the activities.

a) Elizabeth's Case Study: supporting single mothers.

Elizabeth was a young mother of three in her mid-twenties. She started attending the Stanford Family Services Network late in 2003 after receiving a visit from a staff member; she was referred because she felt depressed as she was separating from her husband. By that time, she had two children, a four-year old boy and a girl almost two years old. After a few months, Elizabeth became pregnant and continued attending the courses until the last month of her pregnancy. When her new baby was one month old, she returned to the courses, but since the crèche was only available for children over six months, she kept her son with her during the activities. By this time, Elizabeth's ex-husband was sent to prison. She attended the courses regularly but rarely participated in discussions or shared her experiences, however she was very keen on socialising with other mothers.

She made good friends with other participants and together they organised informal meetings to which they would take their children. They cooked together, watched TV and played with their children. She had the support of her parents who lived in a nearby city and as the research was concluding she was not contemplating gaining qualifications or looking for a job. By that time, Elizabeth had attended every course twice and was referred to a Sure Start Local Programme to attend different activities.

She was happy with the courses and valued making new friends. She also learnt to cook a few things and felt she got along better with her children.

What she did not like about the activities were the long summer break and the rare occasions on which sessions had to be cancelled.

In her mid-twenties, Elizabeth was suddenly a single mother of three. Being so young she had no formal qualifications and she was not planning to gain any in the short term.

Elizabeth had been contacted through the outreach service and although she did not suggest activities or course contents, she felt these were

important and missed them during the eight-week summer break. During the 'Helping our kids' course, her films showed that other mothers who had left the group continued to participate in the informal meetings, sometimes even following the activities Elizabeth was developing in the group. Chapter One Section 5 mentioned how in some other government-led programmes participants decide to create alternative meetings that sometimes are more attractive than the formal activities. Such alternative spaces can indicate that, in the eyes of participants, something is missing in the formal spaces. It is possible that opportunities for networking and mutual support could not be found within the formal space. When Elizabeth was asked the reasons why some of the mothers seen on her film had decided to leave the group, she said some of them found the sessions boring on the second time around. Another mother had had to leave the group when her child reached four years of age.

b) Andrea's Case Study: supporting mothers going through depression and isolation.

Andrea, in her mid-twenties, was a mother of two. She started attending the Network activities in May 2003, a few weeks before this research began. At that time, her youngest baby was almost six months old and health workers had referred her to Stanford House because she felt depressed. Although her parents lived near the council estate where she lived and would constantly support her, she did not know other mothers in the area and felt isolated. Her eldest child was almost two years old and she had experienced difficulties establishing meal and sleeping times. Staff had visited her at home and had supported her with the use of bedtime and meal routines, to which her son had responded very well. A few months later, Andrea separated temporarily from her partner and some of her son's difficulties reappeared. Later, she would get back with her partner and her boy's behaviour improved.

Besides receiving home visits, Andrea attended every course available twice as well as the toddlers' group at Stanford House. That means that during term times she would attend services at least twice. Andrea was a regular participant at the sessions and although she rarely spoke in the group, she participated more during the last six months of the research. Andrea and other mothers complained about the long summer holidays and the rare occasions when staff had to cancel sessions. She made good friends with other participants and also participated in the informal group which was referred to in Elizabeth's case. When her son was three years old, he was diagnosed with general underdevelopment. For nine months, the LEA did not offer him a place in any nursery or specialised support. The Network staff tried to support him by offering activities during his attendance at the crèche and through informal telephone calls with people they knew at the LEA's headquarters. One year and a half after she started attending Stanford House and her son was finally in preschool, she still wished to continue attending the courses. However, she was referred to a nearby Centre as by then she had already attended every course twice. She was not planning to continue formal studies or to look for a job.

Andrea valued her time at Stanford House. She considered that she interacted better with her children and understood that, unintentionally, her depression was not helping her children. She considered that as a result of her participation her children ate better and the whole family expressed their feelings more openly. She considered that she became a much better mother. The Network also helped her to understand that her child's slow development was not her fault and that he was receiving professional support.

Like Elizabeth, Andrea had gone through a period of depression, had been contacted through the outreach service, and had attended every available course twice. This situation seems to reinforce the idea that some participants need more time to overcome their difficulties.

Regarding the collaboration with established services, Andrea's case shows how this process has not been fully accomplished. Andrea's son spent nine months waiting for the LEA to assign a specialist service for him. During this time, the Network did not have the means to act on Andrea's behalf when dealing with the LEA, neither could they offer support other than the two

hours' crèche during course times and two more during the toddlers' group sessions. They could only make informal calls to people they knew. Formally, the Network was supporting Andrea because her second child was still under three, but her son was already the LEA's responsibility. This situation raises some further questions. Among them, the options that this scheme offers to those mothers who have not been able to overcome their difficulties or been able to get qualifications by the time their children were four years old.

The next case refers to Amelie; her case study is illustrative of the network's ability to change people's lives and the existing relationship between its supportive ethos, improvement of parenting skills and parents' return to the labour market:

c) Amelie's Case Study: the complete process.

Amelie was one of the community mothers who ran one of the toddlers' groups in the area on a voluntary basis.

Amelie, who was in her early thirties at the period of this research, was a mother of three children; the eldest was an eight-year-old girl whilst the youngest was 17 months. Amelie was not originally from the city and had come only recently to the council estate after marrying a local. After her youngest boy was born, she experienced post-natal depression. One of the things that upset her was that she did not know anybody in her new neighbourhood after being used to a very active social life in her former home. With a newborn baby, she felt she had no chance to socialise.

Late in 2002, she received a health visitor who invited her to the Time Out course and the toddlers' group. Amelie decided to take advantage of the services as she lived near Stanford House. She found the activities interesting and started making friends with other young mothers.

She also attended the toddlers' group, which was led by a nursery nurse who worked at the nursery at Stanford House. As a consequence, the nursery had to pay a supply teacher to cover the weekly two-hour session. The situation did not last long and soon the toddlers' group was to finish, she understood, because

funds ran out. Staff members encouraged attending mothers to continue with the activity. In order to do this, volunteers had to be trained with a more formal course. By that time, Amelie felt much better, had made friends and was enjoying activities at the House. That made her decide to volunteer to lead the group.

By the time the researcher met Amelie, in mid 2003, she was feeling happy and stated that her depression was completely gone. Leading the toddlers' group had made her very popular. She was no longer isolated and was planning to continue attending courses and running the toddlers' group for six more months. By then her youngest would have a place in the nursery, thus, she thought, there was no point in leading the toddlers group any longer.

Instead, she had decided to start attending the local college and gain qualifications as a hairdresser. Her mother and sister were both hairdressers and she already had some experience in the job as she used to help them. She wanted to start working at customers' homes and booking appointments at times that would allow her to stay with her children and maybe in the future set up a salon.

As in the previous cases, she disliked the long summer break, which left participants without the service for eight weeks. She and other participants decided to continue running the toddlers' group during the summer break in 2003 in public parks, as they were not allowed to use the nursery premises during that period.

Amelie valued her experience at Stanford House. She considered that her post-natal depression was overcome with its help, and thanks to her participation she felt well integrated into the community, where she had made many new friends. She also considered that her relationship with her children had improved. She was not aware of how much her depression could affect young children and she aspired to being a good mother able to support her children emotionally and academically at school. She also considered that her relationship with her husband improved when she understood better how to manage and express her feelings.

Amelie's case is another example of the way the Stanford Family Services Network finds mothers with young children in difficult situations and supports them through home visits and courses, introducing them to the world of study and eventually work.

However, the 19 months of this field study were too short to see whether Amelie's activity would lead to a permanent job, but this did not seem to be among her short-term plans. Amelie mentioned her desire to move away from the council estate. In her expectations for the future, she saw herself supporting her children in their studies and in an emotional way, but not necessarily as a woman with an academic career or with a full-time job. The idea of becoming a hairdresser was perhaps more related to her desire to organise her time according to her responsibilities while caring for the children. The influence of Stanford House seems clear in helping Amelie to overcome her depression, but less clear regarding her decision to work and select her future occupation.

Amelie's case was not the only one in which the Stanford Family Services Network had successfully supported participants in some way. During the period of the research, six more mothers mentioned to the researcher that they had suffered from post-natal depression and that groups had been important in tackling such periods. The same six participants also complained about the summer holidays. Such complaints also seem to reflect the fact that groups had become meaningful in their process of overcoming the participants' difficulties.

For Amelie, the link with other institutions seemed to be successful, especially that with the Open College Network. From her courses in Stanford House and the credits she had already gained, she decided to continue to study at the local College. However, she had not applied for the credits that

she could have gained. She did not see the point in applying for them, as there was no connection with hairdressing studies.

It is also interesting to note two things regarding Amelie's thoughts on her involvement in leading toddlers' groups. Firstly, she understood that the nursery had run out of funds and that either she took the initiative or the group would disappear. As was discussed in Chapter Two Section 1, partnerships were supposed to be set up in order to match services to local needs, favouring the emergence of voluntary and private sector organisations. But her participation – like that of the other volunteers – was not followed by further involvement in either sector. It seems that there was a lack of information or a misunderstanding relating to the aim of her volunteer work. In any case, it seems to reinforce the idea of a limited participation in the broader activity planning. In Chapter One 5.2, we discussed how some non-formal education schemes give more importance to reducing costs by relying on volunteers than to promoting community development more holistically; this seems to be the case for Amelie.

The last case relates to a grandmother, Diana, who was supporting her son and daughter-in-law in caring for their toddler.

d) Diana's Case Study: supporting informal arrangements for caring for young children.

Diana was a woman in her 50s at the period of the study. She had two sons, both married with one son each. One of them lived locally with his wife and their young son. Her daughter-in-law had been visited by a Network staff member, who invited her to attend at Stanford House. The family had already decided that Diana would care for her grandson when the mother returned to her part-time job.

Together, Diana and her daughter-in-law started attending Stanford House early in 2003, but after a few sessions it was only Diana and her grandson who were attending. Diana lived with her husband. Her grandson was not very sociable, according to Diana, and she found it difficult to care for him at home on her own. Like other participants, Diana found the Stanford Family Services Network useful and she decided to take all the support available. During her attendance at Stanford House – over 13 months – Diana took every available course, some of them twice. She also attended the toddlers' group. When she found out that staff supported other toddlers' groups in the area, she also decided to attend a second group on a regular basis. In term times, Diana would attend the Network services three times a week. It was possible for her to organise these days to fit in with her daughter-in-law's job. She regularly took part in discussions and was keen to socialise with the other participants. During summer holidays she formed part of the informal group continuing activities in public spaces.

Diana considered the activities were useful and that they had helped her to relate better to her grandson and to understand that the time she spent with him could be important. She was worried that the child seemed to respond better to her than to his own mother.

Diana stopped attending services when her grandson entered the nursery. She felt so grateful that she decided to donate some material for other mothers to use in some of the activities. Staff members tried to explain to her that they could not accept the donation, as there was money available for that purpose. She insisted on making the donation. Diana was not interested in gaining qualifications or looking for a job.

Diana had an arrangement with her extended family to care for her grandson. Her support helped the toddler's parents to work and save money, as is the case of many families living on low wages (La Valle et al, 2000). Diana was the only grandmother attending Stanford House during the research and no particular adaptation for this was made during her attendance; she was not interested in returning to studies or job seeking. She used the available services more times per week than any other participant during the observation period.

e) A summary of findings from across the case studies.

In all four cases, participants had been reached through home visits. Although services were relatively new, this suggests that the outreach service was achieving its aim of engaging community members; this is consistent with findings and opinions in the literature (Vimpani, 2002; Tunstill et al, 2005; Wiseman & Wakeman, 2003). All four participants reported benefits from their attendance, from overcoming depression to improvements in their relationships with children and partners. Data also suggest that overcoming depression, isolation or becoming economically active can be a lengthy process.

In all four cases, participants had attended some courses twice and all were using the toddlers' group. Equally, they all complained at some point about the long holiday break. The programme did not seem flexible enough to provide services throughout the year.

It seems that activities encouraging formal training and job-seeking were not successful. None of the case studies or any other participant during the research period applied to the Open College Network to claim the credits they could have gained, or completed the forms on which they needed to record the work carried out on the courses. Integration of services consisted of common assessment procedures and referrals, inter-institutional meetings seemed important during the first year of the Network's activities and subsequently these took place every two or three months. The Network seemed to have little communication with the LEA, and was not able to access LEA services in any formal way.

Community members' involvement took place through the assessment carried out during home visits and not in open discussion in boards. Andrea's case also highlights a limited involvement in planning the broader strategy. Toddlers' groups were not part of the nursery's formal organisation and seemed marginal to other activities.

Later in this Chapter, two more case studies will be used to discuss the limitations of the network's strategy. But first, let us take a look at the changes that practitioners have gone through, along with their opinions of the services.

4.2 Changes experienced by practitioners

The staff at the Stanford Family Services Network was a small team, an unusual size compared to some other services (see for example Bertram & Pascal, 2004 and Tunstill *et al* 2005). It comprised four workers at the beginning of the research period and later a second community teacher joined the team. Margaret, the family support development worker and Patricia, the first community teacher, had designed the strategy. Both had started their careers as early-years professionals and had developed an interest in working with parents through their experience. When the local Sure Start programme began to support activities at the Stanford Family Services Network, two years after activities had begun, two support workers began to assist Margaret in carrying out home visits and leading the Time Out course. Support workers were not required to have as much expertise as Margaret and Patricia, as they received training to develop their responsibilities. However, they also had experience in the area of early-years education. Jodi, for example, was a childminder and had supported a Special Education Department in one of the

local schools. Working with parents was not entirely new for any of them, but the approach certainly demanded the development of new skills. In this interview extract, Patricia continues to explain how new skills are not the only changes that her role has demanded:

“... I think a lot of the work is just as developmental for the worker (laughs) as it is for the parents who are involved. I think a lot of the things have changed in me in terms of the type of work and what you value. Unless you work with those hard to reach parents there’s a lot that is cut off. In terms of an early years teacher you know, I encourage parents to come, I’m very welcoming, I want to involve them in what we do here. But the way I was doing that was very restrictive. I tended to get parents that would have attended anyway (laughs) parents that would have an interest that had fairly positive views and wanted to work with the school. Those parents would have very clear aspirations for their children, for their future and so on.

“And then we could work in school supporting those aspirations and working towards them, so you’ve only got those parents and you could say to yourself ‘well, those I want to come they don’t come’, but in this job we say ‘what do we need to do to make them come?’

“We have to change in order to engage parents that are hard to reach. We have to challenge our own attitudes about that. I think that the negative views about schooling clearly points to where to start with many parents. And well, teachers are also responsible for a lot of that. So we need to challenge that as well. I think it would be possible if parents are targeted and there is a genuine feeling that we need to engage parents because that’s how our children’s achievements will be raised and it is not through SAT testing (laughs), it’s not through meetings at the end of key stages, that is not the way. Real achievement for children who are living in disadvantaged areas is working with parents and schools thinking what do we need to change in order to do that, so I think those have been big challenges for me ...” Patricia

In this extract, Patricia reflects on how institutional demands can become a barrier to working with parents when the latter do not participate in the formulation of objectives and strategies. If objectives and strategies are taken for granted, then the school becomes a ruling institution that might not

respond to people's aspirations and runs the risk of losing meaning in the community's eyes.

For Margaret, for example, the change that was needed to work in the community was major. As a deputy head teacher, she would call parents to school if she needed to talk to them. At the Stanford Family Services Network, she started visiting homes in order to see what parents needed and how established services could help them. Equally important was the detection of other needs that no service was meeting. Her experience at school was not enough for this and she had already developed social worker skills. She was able not only to diagnose problems and plan activities to meet them but also to convince mothers and inspire confidence.

Margaret had a good deal of experience working with children and adults. Nonetheless she had to develop new skills to lead support groups dealing with delicate and emotive issues such as divorce, domestic violence, depression, self-esteem, etc. Teachers, social workers and health professionals interchanging experiences and transferring their skills to one another is certainly a considerable change that has been taking place in some early years services throughout the country (see Chapter One Section 4.2).

But changes have not only taken place in the relationship with other professionals. In this conversation, Patricia reflects on attitude changes:

"... You obviously have to look at your job in a wider aspect of the work because some of those parents, unless they have some support they couldn't, they wouldn't engage. So you do what you have to do in order to get them engaged.

"When I was a lecturer in further education I started by sharing the learning objectives with people; we looked at an introduction and

talked about evaluation. You have to do things in the order of the needs of people because if you started out like that, it would just put people off. We have made mistakes in the past, I will tell you: We had a course where the accreditation was right at the beginning of the course. They were presented by an outside body with lots of papers to fill-in; and immediately they fled! You know, because their own literacy skills, their own attitudes towards learning need to be challenged to start with. I think that many of them had had many unsuccessful school careers themselves so, their attitude about school, about learning, about teachers ... I never introduce myself as a teacher! (laughs) I don't say I'm a teacher because their attitudes have been very negative; they've had bad experiences in school themselves. So the work really is about helping them to overcome those attitudes in terms of learning and seeing that they've got very positive things that they feel very happy and comfortable about.... So I think the role thing is very different ..." Patricia

In this extract, Patricia highlights some issues about community participation. The pace of the sessions is not decided by the amount of material and the available time, but by how receptive participants may be and the situations they may be encountering. Addressing the issues that are worrying them is a much more meaningful way to start the educational process. Simultaneously, the cognitive sphere of their development is not the only important factor demanding the expertise of the professional in every session. This is especially true when a certain number of the attending mothers are going through depression and loneliness. These changes are very much in tune with what community education demands: it is not only about transferring skills but also about making a meaningful learning experience that helps people overcome difficulties in life. However, it is not critical education as this does not relate issues to the broader social structure in brief, the process does not analyse the causes of social exclusion (see Chapter One Section 3, McLaren, 1999; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Freire, 1975).

Changes in practitioners' activities have had repercussions on their professional identity, on their practice and attitudes. But practitioners' identity also includes more personal elements, such as those Jodi mentioned while explaining the reasons for taking her current job:

"... A lot of us that work for Sure Start, we all have a story to tell. I had no confidence at all. My mum died when I was nine and with my dad's way of dealing with that, we would never speak about it. He thought he was protecting me by doing that. All I can remember as a child of 9 years, is getting all my information from my friends at school, what they overheard their parents were saying and so I grew up thinking we never talked about it because I never wanted to upset my daddy. But, I never had a close relationship with my dad. And I never thought I had one adult who I could confide in, so I grew up with no confidence at all. And it wasn't until I had my own children and started to do the childcare training that I actually developed my confidence. When I applied for this job there were two positions actually, the support worker and the health visitor. I applied for both because I really fancied the behaviour support but I didn't think that I was good enough to get it and it was actually working here that gave me a lot of confidence because everyone was really supportive, "oh you're really good at this", but it actually took me a long time to believe what they were saying. I'm not used to accepting that. So during the training and working in the school and everybody encouraging me actually gave me that confidence and I think: "if I can do it, you can do it too", you know, because I think having been through that experience myself makes me more enthusiastic to the parents, and I think they can really develop that as well ..." Jodi

This extract illustrates how committed Jodi is to her job and how she believes it is important to support parents going through difficult times. But it shows too how practitioners' roles can also be enriched by their own biographies. She went through difficult times in the past and, now, helping others brings fulfilment in her professional and personal life. There is a need to share with others what she has discovered and how it has enriched her life. This feeling is the basis for the potential development of a common identity

between practitioners and community (see Chapter One Section 4.2). This commitment reflects a potential transition from the notion of working *for* the community to working *together with* the community for a common good.

But not all conditions and practices at the Stanford Family Services Network support the development of such a common identity. The following section discusses some limitations of the Stanford Family Services Network's approach, illustrating some contradictions between a government-led initiative that encourages a certain level of community-led implementation.

5 Community involvement in the Stanford Family Services Network

The Stanford Family Services Network staff have developed strategies to identify and meet some of the needs of local mothers. Based on the number of mothers attending services and the opinions they have expressed, the local Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start programmes' authorities have decided to replicate the strategy in other areas of the city. However, staff have a critical view of the way some of those policies have been implemented and the kind of support they have received. This section discusses three institutional practices that limit the achievements of the Stanford Family Services Network approach. Section 5.1 discusses time planning; section 5.2 deals with the ways in which participants' needs are considered in the development of aims and course content, and section 5.3 discusses how the programme defines community and participation, and the implications of these definitions.

5.1 Time planning

The way in which the Stanford Family Services Network operates follows national policies and targets. In practice, this means that practitioners' activities are controlled through evidence-based criteria (see Chapter Two Sections 3 and 4). Patricia explains how this situation influences her work. In this conversation she referred to the way in which courses and evaluations are organised:

"... obviously the Government has implemented the two programmes [Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start] in order to kick-start processes and to get things going in areas. But I think it cannot only be short-term because everybody is reinventing the wheel really, within their own funding streams and obviously a lot of those funding streams need to justify the money they're getting. So a lot of the evaluation of your work really isn't about improving the work; it's about jumping through the hoops in order to get the money next time.

"Everybody, you know, they have their own funding for their courses and that's generating work that itself is just about the money but they distract you from the real work with parents, with providers of services or early education. I think that the government really has to address that if it really wants this to work out [she changes the conversation]... it is very confusing; it's confusing for parents too. Looking at how things work, who is responsible for this and who is responsible for that. So I think it would be better if it is mainstream and all under one group for the funding ..." Patricia

In this reflection, Patricia highlights some of the main problems which she observes in the practice of the Network. The short-term conditions of funding and evaluating activities seem to assume that the Network courses are finished products, ready to be exported to other areas and to obtain similar results under different conditions (see Harris *et al*, 2004; Moss, 2001, 2004). The current versions of these courses were achieved over two years of work and development, and they are still flexible and open to changes according to the needs expressed by participants. However, evaluative work

focuses on results rather than processes; for example, on how to improve their content of courses, the length of time needed, and the need to include new contents. It seems that many of these preoccupations have been taken over by the managerial activities that each course requires. In planning the courses, for example, practitioners needed to apply for funds before meeting participants. Although there was an assessment of the community's needs, the particular requirements of each participant might be overlooked. As suggested in Chapter Two 3.2, evaluation strategies seem to work rather as an end than as means, maybe even privileging control over development.

Patricia continues to explain the area that she would like to develop further but has not been able to reach, partly due to the lack of time:

"... I would absolutely like to do a lot more about child development, how children learn. I have to take that according to the group really ... I'd like to do a lot more about children and eventually that would be an aim in terms of taking care of children.

"I think too many of them, because it is about their own needs, it is not appropriate. I have to do that in small doses at a time, in terms of how they are coping with that and feeling ok with it. Because I think that many of these parents are living under stress that means that they haven't got a lot of time to think about engaging their children in learning and how they can best enhance their development, it has to be done very sensitively, I think ..." Patricia

Participants' case studies demonstrate the need to allow more time for them to overcome their difficulties and improve their parenting practices. In this extract, Patricia reinforces this vision. As a practitioner, she also feels that more time would allow the aims of the service to be met in a more satisfactory way.

As has been shown, some of the mothers found the courses useful and decided to take some of them twice. This, together with the apparent rush to deliver and show results, leads to further questioning: what is the assumption behind the expectation that every attending mother could regain self-confidence, develop parenting skills and get ready to participate in the labour market in 12 weeks, or through their attendance at four courses? What were the criteria for limiting such processes to term times?

Because only one Time Out course and one follow-up course were offered each term, after a while the only option that participants had was between repeating a course and leaving the programme. It would seem that the planning process did not consider that attendees could become pregnant again and therefore be entitled again to services, as in Elizabeth's case. Staff planned and led courses in a flexible way to avoid repeating activities and to offer useful materials and discussions to every participant, including those who were attending the course for a second time. In practice, activities seemed more like a permanent support than a series of courses, except that activities were interrupted during holidays and were determined by the LEA's academic and administrative year planning.

Holidays were among the major concern of attending mothers, particularly the eight-week summer break. If mothers were not always clear and firm in expressing what they wanted to do during the courses, they were certainly sure about what they did not want. They did not want to interrupt activities for such a long time. In the sessions prior to the summer holidays of 2003 and 2004, mothers would complain about the suspension of activities.

Some expressed that they would not “know what to do” for such a long time. In each one of those years, at least one mother asked for an emergency private session to try to convince staff not to take their holidays and to discuss existing alternatives for mothers. In 2003, two of the toddlers’ groups decided they would continue activities during summer time without the support of the nurseries or the Network. Community members had no voice in timetabling activities. In this sense, Diana, by attending a second toddlers’ group was attempting more control over this lack of control over planning.

During term times, one or two sessions were cancelled while staff members attended courses. The mothers’ reaction was similar. For some of them, it might have been the break from caring for their children, for others the chance to socialise and mitigate loneliness or to experiment with meaningful ways to relate to their children; but they seemed to find courses meaningful. On one occasion, when a session was to be cancelled and participants were informed about the cancellation, they suggested they could still meet and carry on activities, suggesting the group was eager to take the lead. But they were told that crèche workers could not be hired if staff were not on the premises. So they met at Elizabeth’s house, as they did on some other occasions.

After the summer breaks mainly, but also after Christmas and Easter holidays, the number of course participants decreased during the observed period and it would take a few weeks for some of the courses to regain the minimum number of participants to justify funding. Some of those who left did not return at all. Richards (1985) had already argued how the lack of

continuity in non-formal services for young children and mothers can put participants off and undermine the trust they might have developed in institutions. Tunstill *et al* (2005) had identified this as a common practice in Sure Start Local Programmes.

Institutional timing can also affect practitioners' work. Patricia mentioned how part of her job deals with "jumping through the hoops" of targets and funding. Practitioners are required to submit evidence of their work and success. In the case of the Stanford Network, this was no different and they had to prove sustained attendance by participants. These numbers naturally mean attendance, but our case studies would not allow us to relate attendance with job-seeking or training except in one case. For Diana, these aims were not even appropriate. Attendance could relate to the overcoming of depression and isolation for Amelie, but not necessarily for Andrea or Elizabeth, who after eight courses were referred to another area as there were no more options for them. Our case studies show some of the difficulties that interpreting statistics can bring (Myers, 1992). Among those limitations, performance targets would demand to know the number of course participants. The fact that each one of the service users considered in this case took each of the four available courses twice might not be so easy to infer. An attendance report could be an indicator of how much each practitioner worked, but not of the time participants required to satisfy their needs.

Course evaluations present further challenges for interpretation. The Open College Network provided a series of diaries in which participants would

write down the activities they undertook in the sessions, at home with their children, and in subsequent reflections. Such diaries were the evidence participants would need to gain credits from their course attendance. As mentioned before, not a single participant filled in the diary, so we have to assume that analysing diaries would not reflect the whole picture of the impact of activities; examining statistics out of context could only provide an incomplete picture of the impact of the programme.

5.2 Definition of aims and course contents

As discussed in Chapter One Section 5, community participation in the establishing of aims, content and strategies is a fundamental action in running educational services for community development. The Stanford Family Services Network staff have based their strategy on the needs which they have identified through outreach services and those which participants have expressed during the courses. But some other community needs emerged during the courses and did not receive as much attention as parenting issues did. The following example was observed during the development of one of the two Story Sacks courses observed.

The group had developed strong links among most participants since they took the Time Out sessions together. The Story Sacks course still offered participants time to talk about other interests. All eight mothers attending regularly were young and lived on the council estate. Five were living without a partner or were going through a break-up. During the course, they would discuss their problems with the accommodation they had and the ways they dealt with it. They would give each other advice. Talking about the desire to

move out of the area was common and participants refer to the area as “the ghetto”. They would discuss their lives with – or rather without – their partners. On some occasions, participants would ask the researcher to express his opinions and give the “male point of view”. In the final session, one of the mothers asked for some time to discuss loneliness and sexual life. She talked about her abusive partner, about how she decided to finish her relationship, and about using sex toys to meet her “woman’s needs”, living more happily on her own than in a bad relationship. Patricia explains her point of view on giving them time for these discussions:

“... what you can expect of the group is very much determined by the group, not by me as a teacher. Normally your expectations about how the group is conducted, what behaviour parameters there are, those sorts of things are dictated ultimately by the teacher, or the person responsible for the group. And that again is about ground rules coming from them, reflecting their development as a group, about how they are going to conduct themselves and what they are going to allow themselves and what they’re not. Obviously there are bottom lines to that but you want them to enjoy what they’re doing and you want them to sort of build up a respect about the group that belongs to them. They have ownership of that. I think that’s the only way to do that, they wouldn’t come if you established the ground rules yourself and laid down the parameters to start with. A lot of that comes from them at the beginning and things like the swearing you know, if you’re going to have that if they are talking about them going to have their Anne Summers parties and those sort of things (laughs) ... I could come to the group and say ‘we are not having this ... well this group is not about that,’ but then you wouldn’t succeed in engaging them. It has to come from them I think, so that again it is very different as well ... and harder in many ways (laughs) because your own role is not in control there! (laughs) ...”
Patricia

In this quotation, Patricia acknowledges the importance of the needs and interests emerging from the group. Although the course was flexible enough to spare some time for this discussion, perhaps the issue deserved more attention or the presence of another professional, as was the case

during the cookery, safety and first aid sessions. Being a young, single woman with children is not an unusual situation among a socially-excluded population (Chambaz, 2001; Lewis, 1997) and the Network's assessment had already shown that the feelings of depression and loneliness were among the most relevant needs not dealt with by any other service. One of the difficulties staff mentioned previously was that sometimes mothers would not care about the course contents as long as they had a crèche, but this did not seem to be the case. There is no doubt about the staff's expertise and professionalism. What can be questioned is the ability of a very small team, all with an educational background, to improvise specialised services relating to the emerging needs of housing, loneliness and sexuality. Perhaps a project as complex as this deserves more staff with a diverse background, and better access to other services and assessments during the course, and contents should not be restricted to parenting needs. The Story Sacks, on the other hand, was one of the accredited follow-up courses for which practitioners needed to apply for funds in advance and show evidence of its results. Substantial changes were therefore unlikely. Needs detected may produce changes in subsequent courses, but this may not meet the needs of the people who actually raised them.

The events described above took place during the last session of the course before the summer break. No action followed the episode. Although isolated and depressed women formed the majority of participants, it seems that group leaders could take five minutes out of the course to talk to those who burst out in tears, but could not change the courses substantially.

Participants asked on different occasions for individual support, but course contents did not reflect changes from these events.

Another event may help to illustrate the difficulties found by the scheme in involving the community in the establishment of aims and strategies directed towards them. The event happened in the same city, but independently of the Stanford Family Services Network. Jodi mentioned the event. Some of her Sure Start colleagues were setting up a Time Out group for fathers elsewhere:

“... It’s the same material that we use in the Time Out but they try to do things in a different way. It’s what they call ‘bloke’s breakfast’ and dads came along and they said it was a very casual meeting, they just sat down in comfortable chairs, not seats around a table and they didn’t have videos or anything like that. Fathers were asked to establish five points that they wanted to cover. They had a cup of tea and they really enjoyed it and they came back the following week. One of the parents became the leader and they carried out like that and they found it quite successful. But I know that the men’s project has turned out to be quite difficult to involve at the moment. I think fathers are worried about what actually they would be expected to do. I think they are worried about participation and what they are going to be asked to do ...” Jodi

The Time Out course was developed from the needs of young mothers, some living in isolated circumstances. Assuming that fathers would be keen to work on their parenting skills under similar circumstances may not be appropriate. Some of these fathers were, as confirmed by Jodi, facing their children’s (or their own) Anti-Social Behaviour or Truancy Orders – situations that presumably will be more common in the forthcoming Children’s Centres. Here, too, institutional targets may have been pressuring practitioners to deal with fathers without allowing time and resources to develop contents and strategies.

The local Early Excellence and Sure Start programmes have the responsibility of providing services for a large population in the city, but it is worth considering the way in which services expand and replicate successful experiences. It may be that institutions are rushed to implement actions without exploring and considering the views of potential participants (see Myers, 1992 for a discussion on extending small experimental schemes).

5.3 Defining community and means of participation

Chapter One Section 5 discussed the difficulties and implications of defining the concepts of 'community' and 'community participation'. When there is a self-defined community either by ethnicity, cultural background, religion or political inclination, it is common to respect the community's established formal or informal network of relationships. But the Stanford Family Services Network worked in a community defined by its economical levels and geographical location. This section discusses the implications of those definitions.

Diana's case has already been mentioned. When leaving, she decided to donate some material to the group for them to continue making handcrafts as a demonstration of how much she had appreciated the support she had received. This was in recognition that others would find the activities meaningful. But accepting the material as a manifestation of her commitment and her solidarity with the other mothers was not institutionally correct, as there was already money available. Staff's actions are not in discussion; they acted professionally and knew that there was no need to accept donations. However, such institutional practice might have become an obstacle for Diana

to collaborate in shaping a common identity with other participants in the development of their community. It took a long discussion for staff to decide to accept the material, but after this uncomfortable outcome Diana did not go back to Stanford House. If this manifestation of identity and solidarity had been directed, she could have gone back to other sessions and shared her experience with new participants. Maybe she could have explained to them why the courses and the toddlers' groups had been so important for her. Her grandson's entitlement to services might have expired, but she could have become a resource supporting the rest of the community (Carlson & West, 2005; see also Chapter One Section 4.2 for the concept on networks of mutual reciprocity and support, Adler-Lomnitz, 1977, 1994).

The researcher experienced a similar situation. Towards the end of the period of the research, the course 'Helping our Children' started. This included the use of video cameras and the transfer of information between the video cameras, TV and video recorders. As staff were not very familiar with the use of these devices, the researcher was asked to help out. In return for this there was funding to pay for the support. The researcher offered to do it on a voluntary basis in return for the support he had received during the field study – a situation very similar to Diana's feelings. But there was a budget to spend and if this was not used the Network would risk losing it for future courses. Things became more complicated when the Local Authority refused to pay an unregistered worker. The researcher insisted that he could help on a voluntary basis. In the end, staff members decided to pay the researcher and take a receipt with which they could later claim the amount. But the situation made it clear that, in practice, the policy of letting practitioners and community

members decide how to use resources was not present at the Stanford Family Services Network. This event generated two main questions: what criteria are used to decide who belongs to the community, and how people should participate?

Of course, there were no repercussions if the researcher was not considered part of the community. Institutional definitions, however, seemed to become an obstacle in a later episode, this time affecting community members.

This happened when members of minority groups started to attend activities. As mentioned before, some racial incidents had taken place in the past and most residents of the area were of a white English background. With the regeneration plans taking place, ethnic minority members were taking some of the new houses. Two young mothers with an Arabic background started to attend the Helping our Children course late in 2004. They attended courses wearing traditional dress. Although one or two other cultural minority members had attended some activities of the Network, these two women were the first to attend Stanford House and were the only ones observed in the research period. One of the first difficulties was that the newly-attending mothers were still learning English. That caused the first session to be challenging, but fortunately one of them could deal with the language sufficiently well to help by translating most of the session for the second woman. In the following session, staff members had arranged with the LEA for a translator to be present. This facilitated activities and communication. Unfortunately, that was the last time the translator would be available as she

was taking a new post elsewhere. Before the translator left, she was asked if she knew somebody else who could help out with the translation. She did. But the translator's replacement had to be registered with the Local Authority in order to be paid. The people she could recommend were not registered workers and she was not able to say whether they could register. Although finding a translator was possible, paying for their work was not easy. Once again, practice seemed to respond to institutional needs rather than the needs of the new participants. It was not possible to have a translator again.

Over the weeks, the two Arabic women attended Stanford House while improving their language proficiency at the local university. Both attended regularly, were keen to share experiences and claimed that they enjoyed sessions. Although they knew each other before the course, they developed a friendship and were supporting each other away from Stanford House; they did not get involved with the informal meetings organised by other attendees, as these sometimes included alcohol. By the time they joined the group, participant numbers were dwindling. Besides the Arabic women, there were just two other mothers attending the sessions on a regular basis. Funding required a minimum of six participants for the sessions to continue. The course would run to the end of the planned 12 weeks but activities could not continue if new mothers did not join the group.

Early in 2005, the group was told that the course would end by Easter, as numbers had not increased. For the next session, the two Arabic women had done their part. They had invited four other Arabic women with young children that they knew. All of them attended that session wearing traditional

clothes. In this way, the two Asian women believed, it would be possible to continue activities.

Unfortunately this was not the case. The reason was that funding would be available only if participants were living in the catchment area. The new Arabic mothers were living in different parts of the city. They would be welcome to attend the course but they could not be considered within the quota. This naturally did not make either the regular participants or their guests happy. Staff members provided them with addresses and numbers of other Early Excellence and Sure Start premises nearer their homes and could do nothing but apologise for the situation.

Once again, an institutional practice seemed to have determined who belonged to the community and had even established dividing lines which community members were not aware of.

Although national policies emphasise the importance of providing services for minority groups, since they are more easily at risk of social exclusion, catchment areas seemed to run against the informal links within which community members relate.

6 Concluding comments: community and institutions – can the lead be shared?

The Stanford Family Services Network was selected as a case study for this research assuming that some of the features of its practice could give insights into how other participants might have understood government-led initiatives and how policy developments were being implemented. Because the literature

offers other studies on similar sites, this was possible to some extent and references are signalled to related issues in other studies.

The Network, however, presented some particularities. Among these, three are of interest: the small number of participating staff, its network structure, and the collaboration between Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes.

As discussed in Chapter Two Section 2, most services within Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local programmes existed on sites offering services and working towards their integration and the development of holistic views (Sure Start, undated). As a result of this, professionals from different governmental departments and with different backgrounds initiated a process that in some cases developed towards a 'community of knowledge' (Anning & Edwards, 1999), that is, the development of shared understanding about how others work, and their backgrounds and strategies to complement each other's work. With its structure, the Network attempted the same without creating new centres and linking established services through referrals with a reduced number of opportunities for practitioners to discuss issues beyond setting up a common assessment strategy. During the first year of activities, this Early Excellence Centre had just one staff member, and although Margaret worked alongside members of other institutions, it is difficult to imagine that these conditions were favourable to the development of the alluded processes.

The structure also seemed to make it difficult for community members to participate in the planning of the broader strategy; this did not take place

through discussions in boards meetings at any centre's premises but individually through home visit assessments, a procedure much less favourable for innovation (Moscovici & Doise, 1994; Pérez & Mugny, 1987). As a consequence, service users did not have the opportunity to meet each other and much less to discuss aims or contents, until they attended the courses that had been planned in advance. It seems that, by the time participants could reach these discussions, holidays or the end of entitlement to services became other features reducing the possibility that this dialogue might take place.

In Chapter One Section 4.2, it was discussed how communities need time to develop relationships and trust among participants and with institutions before commencing to take responsibilities and decisions. Mothers organising informal meetings, caring collectively for their children and deciding to carry on activities during summer holidays, can be interpreted as a development of such features and an indication that programme activities and contents were considered meaningful. However, it can also mean that these key processes were taking place away from the institutional ethos. It seems that, as it happened on the PRODEI scheme (Chapter One Section 5.1) participants saw potential benefits from their involvement in the government-led programme, but they needed longer time, more support and more opportunities for discussion in order to be able to take more advantage of it. Because they did not seem to find these within the institutional practice, informal spaces tended to develop and even attracted some of the mothers who, for various reasons, had already left the programme.

The structure of a network, in this case, seemed to have isolated practitioners and reduced community involvement; a situation aggravated by the limited number of staff members. Other studies can illustrate how an ongoing interchange of ideas among bigger teams of practitioners, and of these with service users, can set up more favourable conditions for innovation and community involvement. Community members' involvement in board discussions not only facilitated consideration of their points of view in the broader strategies, but also became itself a learning experience, useful for some participants in the development of self-confidence (Chapter Two Section 4.1). Selecting community members' representatives could also become a means to trigger discussions about the type of services and activities participants considered pertinent (Barnes *et al*, 2005).

Collaboration between Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes also raised some questions. As mentioned in Chapter Two, during the first years of these programmes, relationships among these and their continuity were uncertain. Practitioners carrying out the same activities for both programmes might reflect the confusion that quick changes represented for Local Authorities and practitioners. The results of the strategy developed by the Network were considered successful and its strategy started to be replicated in other sites of both programmes, in the case of fathers' groups, maybe even without properly assessing the implications of their use with different populations and conditions. In spite of this, the Network did not seem to expand its geographical area and or the number of staff members as a result of the recognition of its success; rather it seemed a result of practitioners looking for extra income and resources. Arguably, these

practitioners received as little support and recognition as their colleagues in the PRODEI scheme in rural Mexico, and the recommendations relating to the pertinence of considering practitioners' – and particularly volunteers' – needs and development within the aims of the programmes seems pertinent too. As was the case with the Castle Children's Centre study, this case study did not include interviews with Local Authorities representatives and therefore cannot present a more complete picture of local plans for implementation.

There are different ways of considering volunteers' work and their importance within programmes for young children, families and communities. Chapter One Section 5.2 introduced a discussion between considering their work as a means to reduce the costs of interventions and as a means to strengthen community development. The six volunteers running services for the Network were recruited from among mothers attending services and consequently they were part of the targeted population that its activities were attempting to reach. Amelie's case illustrates how her involvement as a volunteer seemed to support her process of overcoming depression and isolation while boosting her self-confidence. It also shows how the new services implemented by the Network relied on the work of socially-excluded participants, maintaining them out of the formal structure of the institution and without the possibility of facilitating funding other than offering advice. As a result, Amelie would leave the programme, taking with her skills and knowledge which were important for the programme. Amelie had won the trust of other community members and she was part of the emerging network of informal relationships, two necessary features to make this type of programmes work. Moss (2002) and Dahlberg *et al* (1999, 2005) have

discussed how current policies in the UK have opted for not investing in a long-term development of staff providing early-years services and relying on a para-professional workforce, which Osgood (2005) sees as part-time, low-paid and unstable jobs that do not help socially-excluded women. Rosemberg (2003), Myers (2000b) and Cohen *et al* (2004) have discussed how non-formal educational programmes tend to run 'on the cheap' and are common in the mainstream neo-liberal vision of services for young children and their families, hiding the real costs this type of intervention represent for communities, who pay with their undervalued work and restricted access to training that could change this situation.

Finally, the study highlights some differences in key concepts between those established in national policies and those emerging as notions from the community. This is related to issues on time planning, aims and contents, and community and participation.

Time planning: activities at the Network were determined by institutional planning for educational services. As a result, the Network operated on a part-time basis during term times. Community members complained about the eight week summer break and other interruptions, some of them took available courses twice and some had to be transferred to other services when there were no more courses to repeat. Community members did not have any influence in determining the length of courses or their entitlement to services.

Definition of aims and course contents. Courses considered community members' needs through an assessment carried out during home visits. After

that, courses would gather participants' opinions and suggestions. As courses required planning and Local Authority approval in advance, there was little room for changes other than alternative activities already considered in the planning. Changes could only take place in subsequent courses. Some time was available for personal support at Stanford House and individual support through home visits. These conditions seemed to reduce the possibilities for group discussion and the subsequent development of informal relationships, trust and innovation.

Defining community and means of participation. Consistent with the Sure Start National Evaluation (Tunstall *et al*, 2005, Melhuish *et al*, 2004), defining entitlement to services by geographical criteria and children's age seems to have restricted the possibilities for community involvement and has caused confusion and suspicion among part of the population. In this study, Arabic women were unaware of these criteria and that seemed to be the reason behind their decision to leave the programme. Likewise, Local Authority requirements for voluntary work also seemed to have restricted some resources otherwise available to support courses.

Chapter Six. Conclusions

This research examined community involvement in services for young children, families and communities. Two questions underpinned the study:

- why do practitioners, volunteers, and community members get involved in programmes for children, families and communities and
- how and under what circumstances can this participation become a meaningful experience?

By 'meaningful experience', this study referred to the reconstruction of the meanings and knowledge of participants' everyday lives in such a way that they could:

- take control over their lives through the development of certain social relationships. These relationships would allow and encourage participants to engage in activities likely to overcome the difficulties of individuals within the context of families, the local community and the broader community.
- Such social relationships involve the construction of knowledge closely linked to potential political and ethical implications of that knowledge. Ultimately, to overcome difficulties it is necessary to understand the political and ethical context in which those difficulties originated.
- 'Meaningful experience' implies the holistic notion of relationships between individuals, families and communities. Educational programmes promoting meaningful experience – that is critical education – therefore tend to encourage participants' involvement in decision-making at all these levels.

Potentially, the process of 'taking control over their lives' encourages participants' involvement in the discussion of policies affecting their lives.

The concept of meaningful experience derives from the main objectives of critical education, reviewed in Chapter One, Section 3 (Freire, 1972, 1979, Giroux, 2003; Kinchloe & MacLaren, 2005; Dahlberg *et al*, 1999, 2005)

This chapter presents the conclusions of the study and is divided into three sections. Section 1 presents methodological considerations of the study and its limitations. Section 2 presents the major findings of the study, particularly the theoretical considerations regarding participants involvement in community-led and government-led initiatives. Finally Section 3 reflects on the implications of these findings on three levels: theoretical implications, implications for NGOs and implications for other non-formal groups and for mainstream policymakers.

1. Methodology: the nature of the findings and limitations of the study

The research comprised two case studies using an ethnographic approach through interviews, informal conversations, observations and documentary analysis. In order to achieve theoretical insights, the ethnographic procedure incorporated a grounded theory approach to data analysis, aimed at theory generation. In this way, the analytical process was based on the constant comparison of data along with the creation of increasingly complex ways of understanding it (Charmaz, 2005; Atkinson & Delamont, 2005; Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Silverman, 2005).

The fieldwork was conducted on two different schemes, one being a community-led scheme and the other a government-led initiative. The **Castle Children's Centre**, a community-based co-operative participating in the Early Excellence Centres programme, took place between November 2002 and June 2004, a period of 19 months. For the second case study, the **Stanford Family Service Network**, a site combining the Early Excellence Centre and Sure Start Local Programmes, the fieldwork was conducted between June 2003 and March 2005, a period of 21 months.

The following points give a brief overview of the methodological approach of the study:

- The data, particularly interviews and observations, were considered to be the product of social interaction between research participants and the researcher (Tedlock, 2005; Atkinson & Coffey, 2002; Holstein & Gubrium, 2005).
- Data interpretation was also designed as a social construction. Including informants' opinions allowed the results to be meaningful not only for academic purposes but also for wider audiences (Smith & Deemar, 2000; Charmaz, 2000, 2005; Silverman, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a; Schwandt, 1996).
- Current views on data validity rely on technical rigour but also on ethical issues. Care was taken to ensure that participants could recognise themselves in the results, attempting to avoid exploitative relationships while conducting the studies. Because research itself is a social

construction, the ethical and political implications of the study aimed to reflect and discuss its potential use in the construction of ethical social relationships and ultimately social justice (Christians, 2000, 2005; Denzin, 2005; Lather, 1993; Heller, 1988).

Although the appropriate selection of a case study can produce valuable insights, the inclusion of two case studies strengthened the possibility of theory building (Silverman, 2005). From the beginning of the research, the Castle Children's Centre was identified as a well regarded scheme whose history and development were considered to be worthwhile exploring. This is what Stake (2005) calls selecting of an 'intrinsic case study'. This particular Centre not only offered an opportunity to develop a middle range theory about community-led schemes but also to contrast this to the way one government-led initiative worked. In this sense the second case study, the Stanford Family Services Network, represented an 'instrumental case study' (Stake 2005). The simultaneous study of the similarities and differences between both cases enriched data gathering and theory building. Constant comparison, the basis of the Grounded Theory method, is the basic process of identifying relevant questions and formulating hypotheses about possible explanations. Subsequent data gathering helps to confirm or reformulate such explanations. By comparing case studies it was possible to create not only middle range theories that allowed each case to be understood separately, but also broader categories confirming that the cases did indeed differ in nature and accounting the political and ethical implications of those differences (Fine & Weis 2005).

The theory building process was not limited to the data gathered on site; the relevance of hypotheses and emerging explanations was enriched with the study of another, broader, social theory as a potential framework for explaining the data. Although ethnography can potentially be limited to producing typologies, one of the main aims of constructivist and critical ethnography is to relate small-scale ethnography to a broader theory. This is also a way of validating the results (Tedlock, 2005; Saukko, 2005; Silverman, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, 2005).

Limitations of the study

This section presents the limitations of the methodological approach and the implementation of the study, discussing briefly the implications of these limits.

- By using an ethnographic approach, the study can only be partial. Its validity is restricted to the time and space in which it took place. However, significant effort was made in order to achieve validity during data collection and analysis through the use of quality recording devices, participants' involvement in interpreting data and theoretical linking.
- The study did not include service users from the Castle Children's Centre. Potential research participants were either busy or experiencing personal difficulties that meant they were at the Centre for limited periods. This limitation was partly overcome with the inclusion of case studies from the

Centre's recent evaluation and interviews with service providers who previously had been service users.

- For ethical considerations, interviews were not conducted with Stanford House service users. Particular case studies of those users were drawn up based on data collected through informal conversations. Participants gave their approval to the way his or her particular case study was drawn up.

The lack of inclusion of Local Authority representatives deserves a particular mention, as the importance of the Local Authority's role became increasingly clear as the research progressed. This circumstance makes the study partial in nature. As an independent provider, the relationship of the Castle Children's Centre and the Local Authority was complex and had varied over time. To have taken a Local Authority perspective would have required substantial interviews with a range of Local Authority personnel and this was not a strand of the research it was possible to pursue in the time available. As for the Stanford Network, some practitioners did not want the Local Authority to know that a research was being conducted on the site and openly expressed their fear of being identified as the source of any criticism. Reference to the Local Authority is therefore made from the participants' points of view and the researcher's interpretations. However, because both case studies shared the same Local Authority, some evidence supporting participants' views could be provided. The most important, in the researcher's view, was that, in spite of being named one of the Early Excellence Centres, The Castle Children's Centre was not considered as a model to learn from locally, as national policies suggested it should have been.

2. Major findings

The detailed and prolonged study of both cases and their comparison – during the data gathering and analysis – allowed a middle range theory to be developed of community involvement within programmes providing for young children, families and communities.

Two main issues emerged: the nature of involvement in community-led initiatives and the role of government initiatives in facilitating or obstructing such involvement.

2.1 The nature of involvement in community-led initiatives.

The case study of the Castle Children's Centre offers an explanation of the way in which one community set up and developed innovative services based on a set of values and beliefs relevant to its community. In its 25 years of existence, the Centre has managed to remain important to the community, becoming a forum for its members to identify their needs and plan activities to meet them. At the same time, the Centre was successful not only in maintaining community involvement, but also in diversifying its activities while spreading its values, beliefs and activities to new contexts, notably to ten countries in North Africa and the Middle East. It also established links with other groups in Europe and North America. To achieve this, the Centre managed to link its local demands to broader social conditions, each time beyond its local ethos.

In this way, the Centre, its development, the successive shift of its aims and its expansion through space and time represented a conceptual challenge. Through constant comparison with broader social theory it was

possible to identify current literature on social movements as the key theoretical background to understanding these events.

- The origins and development of the Castle Children's Centre were related to the conditions of social exclusion of some of its members. The Centre was set up in response to the closure of a Local Authority provision that left community members, many from ethnic minority groups, without the service. The Centre also attempted to offer an alternative to the practice of mainstream services, which was seen by its members as discriminatory. Local demands resisting exclusion and triggering discussions and action are behind the emergence of grassroots social movements (Bettencurt, 1996; Friedman, 1996; Woliver, 1996; and Pilisuk, McAllister *et al*, 1996; Lofland, 1996).
- Under these conditions, initial identification of needs and planning took place within informal spaces in a close relation between practitioners and service users. The resulting solidarity has remained over the years. The stories of research participants show how the Centre has helped its members during difficult times, and in return, they have supported the Centre in various ways, including volunteering to help other community members. Due to the long history of the Centre, this means that many have become professionals and either work at the Centre as practitioners, or remain nearby to help when necessary. This is the case of physicians, social workers, lawyers, filmmakers, teachers, psychologists, activists for different social causes as well as hairdressers, craftsmen and even children helping other children.
- The Centre also became a means for community development. Supporting the activities of the Centre meant helping other members of the community. The economical struggle to maintain the Centre has been won through the continuous support of the community with the resources they bring back to the Centre. These comprise knowledge, the development of profit-making activities, professional services and others. This process

resulted in the establishment of the Centre as a co-operative working on principles of democracy and solidarity.

- The Centre has been maintained through the networks of mutual reciprocity and support (Adler-Lomnitz, 1977). A common path for community members to get involved in the Centre is a sequence consisting of arriving at the Centre for help, overcoming their difficulties and then helping others in return. For this to be possible, the development of a commitment and sharing of values and beliefs is necessary. These elements form an identity. Such an identity was not based on professional or ethnic terms. Members of over 75 ethnic groups use the Centre, 15 languages are spoken and staff and service users differ in gender, age, ethnic background, religion and sexual orientation. The shared identity, therefore, has been constructed around the Centre and its supportive role, local demands and planned actions: it is an identity created through a social movement. Over time other professionals and groups have supported the Centre on the basis of sharing its principles.
- The identity of social movements can go through two phases: resistance and project identities (Castells, 2000, 2001, 2004). The Centre has not only opposed the exclusion and perceived discriminatory practices of the mainstream but it has also developed innovative practices. Those who participate in social movements do so voluntarily; 'community' is then built around a self-defined sense of belonging that stretches through the network of relationships that members establish.
- There are two main sources of innovation at the Centre. The first refers to the cultural diversity of the Centre. Its members need to create a 'common ground', broad enough to include every member. The *resistance* to exclusion has developed into a *project* of inclusion. Every activity seeks to include all members involved and respect their differences; the Centre quickly went from only working with young children to considering families and other community members. Diversity is valued in terms of background, gender, age, language, religion or sexual orientation. Members have been able to overcome their differences thanks to the

vision of their project. The second source of innovation is the hope for a better future. Innovation challenges the way mainstream practices were seen to perpetuate exclusion. In this sense, innovation is a political activity attempting to change power relationships. The examples are the fierce initial opposition from the mainstream to support the inclusion of male staff, the reticence to deal with the Centre in areas such as housing and benefits as well as recognising its co-operative structure. This situation has led to an ambiguous relationship with authority: on the one hand, Central Government named the site an Early Excellence Centre and has helped to fund its core activities; on the other hand, the Local Authority seemed to have opposed its innovation on a number of occasions. The Local Authority has not considered the Centre in the development of the new Children's Centres and did not seem to use its experience in the development of local services. The Centre may be forced to close as a result.

The Castle Children's Centre is a notable case but is by no means unique. Chapter One Section 4 presented the *Nezahualpilli* scheme, which started more or less at the same time as the Centre. Similarly, it emerged from a socially excluded community that organised itself into a co-operative and that has spread its influence to other sites in Mexico and abroad. *Nezahualpilli* also established links with other social movements and networks of NGOs. Many of its members currently lead some of these organisations with broader aims of social change and with more defined political roles. The Parents' and Children's Programme (PPH) in Chile (Richards, 1985) also emerged from non formal spaces and managed to link in with broader political issues even under the difficult conditions of a dictatorship. It is also possible that the *Reggio Emilia* scheme (Edwards *et al*, 1993) can be thought of as a social movement. The specific element this research brings to the discussion of community involvement in this type of programme is the theoretical

background on social movements. But before considering the implications of this, we should present the second major set of findings: the role of government-led initiatives in encouraging or inhibiting community involvement.

2.2 Community involvement in government-led initiatives

The interest of the research focused on how institutional practice could potentially encourage and take advantage of the resources that community involvement is able to bring.

The Stanford Network was created within the Early Excellence Centres Programme in 2001. One person ran the scheme during the first year and her activities consisted of evaluating the needs of established local institutions working with children and planning activities to co-ordinate their services. The activities were designing a common assessment of community needs and the establishing of strategy for referring people between the services. Collaborative work however did not continue after the strategy was defined.

Through the process of assessment, it was found that certain community needs were not being met by any established institution and the Network developed a strategy to meet them. The main activity during the following years of operation was designing and implementing a series of courses for mothers with children under three years of age. Most participants had expressed during assessments the isolation and depression they were going through after the birth of their children. In accordance with national policies, the activities aimed to offer a space for socialising and encouraging members to return to studies as a necessary step to their participation in the job market. National policy development also placed a great deal of

importance on community involvement, particularly in the implementation of activities.

The study found that some participants were keen to get involved in the activities, valued the services and thought that their attendance had benefited them. Increasing their self-confidence and overcoming their conditions of isolation and depression were the most important benefits, along with the improvement in the relationship with their children and other family members. The aims of returning to formal training and job seeking were, however, less successful. Such findings seem to suggest that participants did not share the same priorities as the government.

However, the programme seemed unable to readjust its practice to local demands and failed to encourage long-term community involvement.

Community involvement during the planning phase was limited to the formal assessment undertaken by the staff members of any local services. Here, the potential participants were asked about their needs and practitioners designed activities to match. No research participant took part in a group discussion about the issue. Whilst attending activities, however, they were encouraged to write down their suggestions (see Lister, 2000 on the problems of considering suggestions as participation). When possible, these were considered in the courses, but at other times the suggestions would be considered for successive courses, run with different participants. Although courses, mostly on parenting skills and young children's development, were planned in a flexible way, certain issues aroused and were beyond the scope of course aims. Such was the case of participants' sexual life, a demand of a

group with a large number of single women wishing to find partners, as well as problems relating to housing and benefits. In some cases practitioners would refer participants to other services, but even when the problems could be related to educational issues the services would not always be available or provided as soon as participants would like.

Community involvement during programme implementation also showed limitations. Participants would constantly complain of the limited opening times and long holiday periods. In two different years participants decided to continue activities on their own, a sign that the programme was well-valued and community involvement was strengthening. But the institutional practice could not change and it was possible neither to extend opening hours nor to allow participants to use the Network's premises during holidays. The only way the Network could be flexible was by allowing participants to attend courses twice. During term times participants also organised informal meetings and these attracted mothers who had stopped attending services because they either had attended every course twice or were not interested in repeating them. The informal network of community relationships was not enriching the programme (see also Delgado, 2000).

During the fieldwork, no participant took part in any meeting discussing the programme's broader aims or planning of local strategies.

Institutional practice would also restrict the direct ways in which community members could participate in the programme, rejecting donations and conditioning volunteers' involvement to the Local Authority's approval. Toddlers' groups, run by volunteers, would only receive supervision, but it was

not possible to help them get funding or further support. Volunteers were exclusively mothers attending courses and would cease their voluntary work when their children were accepted in preschool. No longer-term strategy was planned for them.

Although comparing the Network with the Castle Children's Centre did not have the aim of judging them by their results, it is clear that the Network is acting as an institution external to the community. Community involvement was the key for the Castle Children's Centre to diversify the services it offered, to integrate community members beyond the core activities and to achieve long-term committed community involvement. By the end of the fieldwork at Stanford Network, none of the research participants were to continue attending services. Some had expressed their desire to continue activities and were referred to other services; the Network had nothing left to offer and was not ready to support local initiatives. Institutional practice became an obstacle to long-term community involvement and the scheme did not seem likely to continue after government funding cease.

3 Implications of the study.

This section discusses the implications of the study in three different – though related – sections. The first presents the theoretical implications of the study. The second discusses implications for community-led organisations proposing alternatives to mainstream views. Finally, although the study gave priority to those alternatives, implications for mainstream policy makers are also presented.

3.1 Theoretical implications

Introducing the concept of social movements to the study of services for young children, families and communities brings about theoretical implications. Although the study of social movements demanding services is widely documented (Haddad, 2002; Cochran, 1993; Bergman, 2004; Foley, 2003), their role in implementing services is not. To the author's knowledge, no previous study has dealt with this role.

Overall, the *Network Society* theory (Castells, 1983, 2000, 2001, 2004) offered a valuable framework for understanding the importance and development of the Castle Children's Centre. But this broader theory was also enriched by the study of how communities are constructed through *networks of mutual reciprocity and support* and identity (Adler-Lomnitz, 1975, 1994). The *cultural psychology*, the symbolic dimension and the group dynamics that have facilitated innovation related to *social conflict* were also important (Moscovici, 1984, 1993). The combination of these theories was possible thanks to the shared notion of networks, in the social structure, in community relationships and symbolic construction, respectively. The study enriches these theories around the following issues:

- Values, beliefs, thoughts about the past and hopes about the future are the basis for the creation of identities (Fernández Christlieb, 1999; Nash, 2002; Parekh, 2000). Professional identities in the services for young children and families have been studied before (Anning & Edwards, 1999; Edwards, 1999); this study gives evidence that service users in community-led initiatives can also develop identities.

- The study offers more evidence for the ideas that Moscovici & Doise (1994) and Pérez & Mugny (1987) developed, where innovation is seen to be a consequence of the diversity within groups and their dynamics opposing the norms in what were termed 'active social minorities'. Other concepts from *cultural psychology* also helped to understand the process of open and covert influence, and the strategies that the mainstream uses to oppose minority influence: 'psychologisation' and 'denegation' (Papastamou, 1991; Satterfield, 1996). Such concepts were developed from laboratory studies. Conceptualising the Centre as a social movement allowed the contextualisation of such terms in a social and political arena, offering evidence of their pertinence in naturalistic settings.
- The identity developed at the Castle Children's Centre not only opposed members' exclusion but proposed an alternative. Castells (2000,2001, 2004) distinguished these two phases, naming them 'resistance identity' and 'project identity'. His hypothesis is that such a shift is the result of episodes of social mobilisation. This study seems to corroborate such a hypothesis.
- Particularly in the case of services for young children and families, Dahlberg & Moss (2005) proposed the concept of 'minor politics' to refer to groups of parents taking decisions and developing service practices that met their needs. The concept, however, emphasises the sense of the 'here and now' and the concern with 'cautious, modest, petty details' as opposed to notions of a 'fantasised future' or the possibilities of social influence on a larger scale. We considered this term inappropriate for a

theory of the Castle Children's Centre – and also of the Nezahualpilli scheme. Evidence from the case study highlighted the importance of identities, which are necessarily forged with notions of the past and hopes for the future. For that reason the notions of 'active social minorities' and subsequently 'social movements' were preferred. Further research can explore the hypothesis that the concept of 'minor politics' is useful to the study of community involvement in formulating local demands and solutions while 'active social minorities' and 'social movements' are more appropriate for the study of such issues when they are linked to broader social issues.

- The international links developed by the Centre – similarly to those established by the *Nezahualpilli* scheme – can also be understood by considering them as social movements. Current social moments tend to use new technologies to establish alliances beyond local settings and international repercussions are becoming more frequent. Considering international links and phenomena such as migration may be pertinent to other studies in the field.
- Evidence from this case study allowed the development of theoretical issues around the concept of 'networks of mutual reciprocity and support'. In her classic study, Adler-Lomnitz (1975) studied the relationships of solidarity and interchanging of resources that an immigrant community developed in a shantytown in Mexico City. Such solidarity developed through the strengthening of a network of social relationships and kinship. This network was created along with an identity and provided members to

cope with its exclusion. Later, Adler-Lomnitz & Pérez (1988) and Adler-Lomnitz (1994) studied the process in different contexts. The Castle Children's Centre case study demonstrates that this process can also take place within social movements forging new identities.

3.2 Implications for NGOs and other groups working from non-formal spaces.

The Castle Children's Centre case study showed how its history was by and large the result of a struggle – or social conflict in symbolic terms – between local demands and mainstream services. By emerging, the Centre broke the illusion of consensus and the developing innovations challenged the way mainstream services were being provided.

The future of the Castle Children's Centre is uncertain, maybe even more so than it was almost 25 years ago when it first emerged. In spite of the Centre's national and international reputation, it has struggled to survive during the period of the Labour Government.

Following Castells' (1983) characterisation of grassroots social movements, we can argue that the Castle Children's Centre has been a *utopic* social movement. This means that the Centre has created cultural alternatives that have substantially changed the life and experience of at least some of its participants and has even shifted to broader social spaces, somehow influencing policy development and other groups nationally and internationally. However, such changes have taken place almost incidentally, not because the Centre had actively sought to participate in formal political activity. Because utopic social movements seek cultural change and not

formal political action, they tend to be politically defeated. Such defeat seems to be the result of their efforts to expand their cultural alternatives through informal relations while maintaining scarce contact with operators of the spaces of politics and the media.

From this perspective, the Centre has three potential options given its present circumstances:

Firstly, with the imminent need to relocate premises, the Centre could move to neighbouring areas with more favourable political conditions. Over the years some service users have come from these areas and may facilitate the change. Although moving will probably bring many changes, the Centre could maintain more or less the same dynamics, particularly the policy of not getting actively involved in political activity.

Secondly, the Centre could shift its identity towards a more politically active role, as the *Nezahualpilli* scheme did. This would mean becoming spokespeople and attempting to influence policy development more decisively. It could set up a network of dissident voices among community-led organisations, practitioners, scholars, politicians and media to fill the gap of opposition to government initiatives in the field of services for children, families and communities (Cohen, Moss et al, 2004). It could also help to consolidate the political role of the organisations it has helped to develop nationally and internationally.

Thirdly, members could decide that the time has come to close. In a sense, the cultural options that the Centre has created, such as its holistic view, and the string of services that respond to the values and beliefs of its

identity, are an important reference that many groups and policy developers cannot easily ignore. To make the Centre's history and achievements public could make it possible for others to value and resume its work.

NGOs can strengthen their political role by establishing links with other NGOs and social movements attempting to link their local demands to broader social issues.

3.3 Implications for mainstream policy-makers and authorities.

Government-led initiatives such as Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes have the potential to meet needs identified by the community, achieve committed community involvement and meaningful changes in participants' everyday lives. However, institutional practices can inhibit community members' involvement, their trust in institutions and the achievement of their aims (Carlson & West, 2005; Gustafsson & Driver, 2005; Osgood, 2005; Attree, 2004). This is particularly true when programme implementation requires community involvement. Involving community members in government-led initiatives necessarily implies changes in power relationships. Community members, not necessarily used to institutional rationale, can easily bring to the process local demands beyond institutional scope and bring alternative ideas about their problems and the ways to overcome them. Such alternative views may challenge the notions behind established institutional procedures, organisations and even general institutional aims (Babajanian, 2005; Finn 2003; Shephard 2003, Barnes, Newman *et al*, 2005; Chinsinga, 2005). In this sense, the main challenge for policy-makers is integrating local demands with governmental planning and

institutional aims with the cultural implications that such aims have for the everyday lives of communities.

To implement the Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes, major changes in policy development and institutional structure took place (Baldock, 2001; Cohen *et al*, 2004). However both case studies of this research illustrated how community members and practitioners were allowed only a marginal role in such changes. These cases also show how participants resisted and proposed alternatives to such policy developments.

The case studies showed the difficulties inherent in reconciling local demands with the central planning of objectives. A government programme based on notions of deficit was not able to include a co-operative based on values of participative democracy. While the Castle Children's Centre attempted to change the social relationships that excluded its members from decisions affecting their lives, the governmental programme attempted to 'educate' community members to fit in with the current social structure. While the Castle Children's Centre attempted to forge a community based on a shared set of values, beliefs, solidarity and an identity in a long-term project, the Stanford Network attempted a short-term solution whilst promoting market-oriented values and competition.

In the eyes of research participants from both sites, the Local Authority did not seem to consider their opinions. Some practitioners detailed their dissatisfaction with implementing activities in a way contrary to their professional opinion (see also Dunkerley, Scourfield *et al* 2005; Gustafsson & Driver, 2005; Bagley *et al*, 2004; Attree, 2004; Campbell, 2003; Carpenter *et*

al, 2005). According to national policies, community involvement should have been a key element of the Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes. Such involvement, however, was limited to the implementation phase. It did not extend to the discussion of objectives or the evaluation of results (Lister, 2000; Williams & Roseneil, 2004; Osgood, 2005).

Community members from the Stanford Network case study took advantage of the services of the Early Excellence and Sure Start Programmes whenever these related to their demands. However, they resisted the broader aims of returning to study and then work by ignoring such aims, perhaps because they did not have opportunities to discuss and understand the relevance that studying might have to their everyday lives (see Giroux, 2003). They were able to initiate independent activities that incorporated relevant issues learnt during some of the programme activities, but Stanford Network was unable to support and value the non-staff initiated activities as a means of enhancing its aims and achieving a long-term community involvement. The success of the programmes was also seen differently by community members and policy makers.

The concepts of evaluation, accountability and performance targets are closely related. The Castle Children's Centre study showed how accountability could have a particular meaning in a co-operative ethos. Activities were tailor-made and adjustments were made to include not only individuals, but also families, 20 years before this was important to the government. The success of the activities was reflected in the commitment developed by service users and their subsequent involvement in further

activities, in many cases through the shift from service users to service providers. The number of volunteers and activities emerging directly on the initiative of community members reflected the degree of success of the strategy and the ability of the Management Committee to promote and support community involvement. This strategy strengthened the principles of a co-operative organisation. Participants would be able to express their views and suggestions for the use of resources and outcomes of activities. Over time and with the increasing number of professionals, evaluations also became more formal and rigorous. Becoming one of the Early Excellence Centres offered support and resources for undertaking a formal evaluation. But the process was not free from controversy. Together with an external evaluator, staff members considered that the evaluation guidelines were insufficient given the complexity of the Centre, and that other issues important to community members were overlooked by national evaluators (see Dahlberg, Moss and Penn, 1999). The evaluations of the Centre included comprehensive appendices in an attempt to include the different interests and issues not considered within the programme guidelines. When accountability is defined in terms of performance targets and funding, it tends to ignore local demands. Holistic and integrated services demand more flexible means to assess the uneven way in which services demanding community involvement will inevitably develop (see also Tunstill *et al*, 2005; Melhiush *et al*, 2004; Ross & Kemshal, 2000 and Morrow & Malin, 2004).

Resisting mainstream views and formulating alternatives to these views are an attempt by community members to participate in the discussion of policies affecting their lives in their communities and the broader community.

Policy makers not only need to listen to local demands but also need to develop permanent ways to listen to them. Listening would demand changes in the way that power relationships have been established, turning from a centrally driven monologue into a discussion of how to translate policies to local circumstances; and also how to enrich policies with local knowledge and its political and ethical implications (Lister, 2000; Taylor-Gooby, 2001; Cook, 2002). Communities have diverse circumstances and characteristics; the vision of listening to local demands means doing away with notions of universal solutions for the diversity of communities' circumstances and characteristics (Dalhberg *et al*, 1999, 2005; Myers, 1992). Co-constructing policies sensitive to local demands means indeed that policy makers lose certain power, but more importantly means that solutions can be relevant to the local ethos and achieve long-term community involvement.

The Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes represented an important step towards diversifying solutions and promoting community involvement. But these solutions were limited to the implementation phase of the respective programmes. Innovation was welcomed for the purposes of achieving government aims, but was seen as either useless or even as a threat if it questioned the phases of target-setting and evaluation.

For these reasons, the Castle Children's Centre was considered as both a success and a threat at the same time. The Centre was flexible enough to meet local demands quickly and effectively while securing long-term community involvement, but it was a threat to the establishment because it

demanded that it participate in the formulation of aims and strategies for evaluation and accountability. Members of the Castle Children's Centre continued to resist and to propose alternatives to the centrally designed programmes. After a promising initial collaboration between the co-operative and the government, the Castle Children's Centre may be forced to close as a consequence of its exclusion from the local implementation of new policy developments.

Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes will slowly give way to the new Children's Centres. We will be looking with interest to see what kind of opportunities Children's Centres will offer for community participation and whether these can replicate the exemplary work of the Castle Children's Centre.

Appendix One. Interview guide used during the initial interview

Informant:

- Age,
- gender,
- services provided (now and in the past) (have they worked as volunteers?)
- how long have they been working in the Centre
- Background (nationality, languages)

Getting to the Centre

- How did you know about the Centre? (Word of mouth?)
- What were your expectations when you first came to the Centre?
- What made you decide to work here?

Centre services

- What do you think about the Centre services?
- What do you like the most about the Centre?
- What do you like the least about the Centre?
- Is there something you would like to change in the Centre?
- What do you think about the families attending services?

Impact

- Have the Centre changed you somehow?
- If you have to name the most important thing you have learnt from the Centre, what would it be?

Policy

- How would you describe the relationship between Children's Centre and the community?
- How would you describe the relationship between Children's Centre and the local government?
- What do you think about the Centre being named 'Early Excellence Centre'?
- Do you think national educational policies influence your work for good or bad?

Appendix Two. Example of a field journal

The following is an example from the Stanford Family Services Network of these notes:

<i>Social relations with participants</i>	<i>Emergence of issues and need to further exploration</i>	<i>Recorded observations and conversations</i>
Participant X has not given her consent to participate. It is the last session of the term, let us keep an eye and see if she comes back.	Group activities are meant to promote group cohesion and help participants in their development. Could group leaders identify that the group did not accept participant X? Is there anything they could have done to integrate her better with the group? And will something be done?	The observed session was the final of the 'Story Sacks' course. Participants finished their work and helped each other using sewing machines, cutting and pasting material for cuddly toys and boards. At the end, most of them exchanged telephone numbers and expressed their desire to keep in touch. Participant X wanted to keep in touch with the rest of the group; she had some cards with her telephone numbers on and handed them to other participants. Four of them did not accept them and only one accepted a card. Nobody gave her their telephone number in return

Appendix Three. The use of theory in analysing and validating data

Chapters Four and Five present the findings of this research, but it is important to mention some of these findings in order to talk about the way in which theoretical validity formed part of the analysis of data. Emerging results coincided with the existing theoretical background of understanding values and beliefs as a powerful source of social change. It also coincided with the idea that social change takes place with certain resistance. But the case of the Castle Children's Centre also indicated that these values had been constructed over a long period of time, with such strength that the community's identity had also been constructed on the basis of those values. Emerging categories also showed that processes of social change, social influence and social conflict were taking place, but the case also seemed to suggest that this identity had been forged during periods of social conflict. Data seemed to suggest that the Centre was a social movement. It was therefore necessary to find a broader social theory that could explain this case more satisfactorily. The Network Society Theory (Castells, 2000, 2001, 2004) offered a background in which the emerging categories could be understood. This meant that the data required a new analysis to test if the theory could not only enrich the understanding of emerging categories, but also data gathering. According to this theory, social movements can have two types of identity: *resistance identity* and *project identity*, and the switch between them is possibly triggered by the existence of a mass movement. The analysis had to see previous categories under this light to test if the theory could offer deeper insights into our data. Preliminary categories included a broader category named 'History of the Centre' and this contained two subcategories:

'Recognising the need for services' and 'Consolidation, commitment and innovation'. The way in which theory enriched categorisation of emerging issues and themes is illustrated in the following table:

Enriching emerging categories through theoretical analysis

	<i>Previous Categories</i>	<i>Redefined Categories</i>
Broader Category	History of the Centre	Identity Development
Subcategory	First activities, compensating for the lack of services.	Resistance Identity phase, self-organised community recognising the need for services
Subcategory	There was not subcategory	Mass movement (miners' strike)
Subcategory	Consolidation, commitment and innovation.	Project identity, innovations in practice and creation of services

While the 'previous categories' column could somehow distinguish two phases in the development of the Case, the 'redefined categories' column could further identify the existence of a crucial event clearly distinguished in the theory. Although the existence of mass movements had been noted during interviews, their importance had not been fully appreciated in the early stages of the data collection. In this example, the theory did not encourage further data gathering; it encouraged a different way of interpreting the data already gathered. A similar process occurred when analysing other categories such as the network structure and international connections, all of them discussed in Chapter Four.

The theory did, however, encourage the questioning of more recent events related to the Centre's link to other social movements and its role in encouraging other community-based services nationally and internationally.

Finally, the last stage of analysis consisted of planning the way data was to be presented. One of the most difficult decisions in presenting a qualitative report consists of selecting the most representative data and balancing an in-depth discussion with a reasonable length. One of the first decisions was to present the two cases separately and with a different structure, acknowledging that emerging categories were distinct.

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