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Leading Children's Centres: A study of seven leaders in context

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Abstract

The development of Sure Start Children's Centres was at the spearhead of New Labour's efforts to support vulnerable children and families in order to eradicate child poverty. Children's Centres were expected to provide integrated services for children and families in order to ensure that every child mattered. These Centres required a new kind of leadership which was different from that found in individual professions such as education or health but has been relatively unexplored. Through studying the life stories of seven Children's Centre leaders from a specific local authority, some insights are given on the leadership context in which they operate; the approach they take to leadership; and how their personal and professional biographies have prepared them for this work and enabled their success. The study concludes that the context is unique because of the widespread uncertainty about the purpose of the Centres, the adversarial relationships with the Local Authority and the dilemmas of working with a wide range of stakeholders. This has led to the presentation of a competitive, almost heroic, stance. Deep seated beliefs in social justice coupled with a rebellious nature have been essential in providing a foundation for the authentic leadership these leaders present. Their experiences of early work in non-traditional environments with other agencies have prepared them for and excited them about the Children's Centre leadership role. The Sure Start environment provided them with the opportunity for autonomy and being able to design provision which matched their concerns for social justice and allowed them to make a real difference in the community. The thesis challenges the 'new paradigms' of distributed leadership spreading from educational literature to the early years. It suggests that these Children's Centre leaders see themselves as mavericks who achieve results for their communities through autonomy and freedom.

Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

Goffin and Means (2009) suggest that there has been a dramatic change in the context of early years leadership over the last few decades. They write specifically that

> *Early care and education has risen in esteem as a public good, has become politicized, is expected to produce results, must organise itself as an effective delivery system and currently lacks the capacity to meet public expectation.* (p3).

In 2004, I was given the opportunity to teach on the newly introduced National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL). This programme was designed in response to the Every Child Matters Green Paper (2003) which *'identified the need for programmes to foster high calibre leadership in integrated early years settings'* (DCSF, 2005) and was aimed at developing the *'knowledge, professional qualities and skills of those leading such complex, multi-disciplinary teams and organisations'* (Pilcher, 2009, p105). On this programme, I was introduced to the concept of the Children's Centre and first met some of the Children's Centre leaders who would become the participants in this study.

Building on earlier provision, in particular Neighbourhood Nurseries and Early Excellence centres which were more direct precedents for more joined up services, Children's Centres were set up with the intention that they would be *'at the heart of the Government's drive to provide accessible, integrated early childhood services for all parents-to-be and families with young children'* (www.dcsf.gov.uk). The first 350 centres were generally purpose built service hubs targeted at the most deprived areas of the country. The government's intention was that by 2010 every community would have access to a local centre and that the Centres would provide children and family health services, childcare and learning, parenting support and help to find work or training opportunities.

Rather like the delegates on the programme, I was inspired by the Children's Centre concept and the work that went on in those Centres. Amongst the delegates were head teachers, whose work was familiar to me, together with other professionals from health, social work and family support backgrounds. All these people, despite their different professional heritage, were leading Children's Centres. I found this hugely fascinating and as a result, my work on the NPQICL programme has had the single biggest influence on my academic thinking to date. It

has been significant in terms of learning about and developing an interest in the sector, but also in my approach to pedagogy.

On commencing the EdD study, I reflected on my own journey to that NPQICL teaching room and this made me wonder about how others had got there. For one of my EdD assignments, I decided to trial a life story method and interviewed one of the NPQICL participants who had previously been a head teacher. I was amazed by how much she told me during the course of two interviews, some of which made me uncomfortable because it strayed into stories of failed relationships and some very personal material. However, she told me that reflecting on her life with a good listener had been helpful to her understanding of her own leadership journey and why she thought about leadership in the way she did.

Consequently, I initially decided to focus this thesis on head teacher leadership of Children's Centres. I interviewed a head teacher who had a children's centre on her site. The interview with the head teacher was interesting; however, it was clear that the Children's Centre was supplementary bolt on to her own work. She did not seem that interested in it, and there was certainly none of the integration that I was expecting. Having spent some time exploring this idea and presenting my thoughts at two conferences (Wainwright, 2008, 2009), I eventually decided that this approach would not give me the richness I wanted.

At the time, I also had access to the head of a local education service and interviewed her about leadership in the Centres. She gave me a good insight into what she felt was happening, but I knew from informal conversations with NPQICL delegates that this was not quite in line with their reality. The challenges facing Centre leaders were far more striking, and the role far more complex than were being portrayed. This heightened my curiosity about leadership in Children's Centres and shaped my study particularly in relation to a growing understanding that the early years sector (in the US in this citation) was '*at a crossroads and that this defining moment calls for leadership*' (Goffin and Means, 2009 p3). This echoes a view already raised in the UK in the Effective Leadership in the Early Years study (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2006) where it was suggested that, the increased emphasis on accountability and the '*achievement of excellence*' meant that the new '*...centres and all other early years' provision will need skilled leadership*' *(p5).*

This thesis, therefore, seeks to explore some of the key ideas around leadership in Children's Centres through studying the personal and professional biographies of seven leaders of

Children's Centres. It also looks to examine the context in which they work because the challenges of the context and the complexity of the leaders' work were remarkably different from those I had encountered in school leadership. It will look at the seven leaders' personal and professional biographies in order to seek some understanding of how they have developed as leaders, and finally it will throw some light on the ways in which they lead.

It will do this through a focus on my specific research questions:

- *What is distinctive about leadership in the children's centre context and how does this compare with other thinking about leadership?*
- *How do children's centre leaders' professional and personal biographies influence their understanding of leadership and the development of their leadership capability/ capacity?*
- *What is the approach to leadership in Children's Centres?*

Following this introduction, Chapter Two discusses the background of the Sure Start movement describing its origins and development. It then describes how the Children's Centres movement has formed as a result of the consolidation of its precursors and brings the discussion into the Local Authority in which this work is set. I have called this Northtown, a large Northern City which is in the top 20% of the country's most deprived authorities.

Chapter Three reviews the literature relevant to leadership in Children's Centres. The chapter does this in a number of stages: firstly setting out how research has tried to define leadership in general and then in the early years sector; and next moving on to exploring what many writers refer to as 'new paradigms' with a particular focus on an emerging field of study known as 'authentic' leadership. It then considers the literature around leadership in multi-agency settings in order to develop an understanding of the specific context in which Children's Centre leaders operate.

Chapter Four explores and discusses the narrative approach used in this study through explaining and justifying the research design in three stages: first, it explains the philosophical stance behind the chosen methodology, secondly it explains the methodology itself, and thirdly it provides an account of the research methods adopted. Potential ethical concerns are identified and the chapter illustrates how these have been addressed. It concludes with a discussion on the approach to data analysis and the validity or truthfulness of the approach.

Chapter Five gives a brief introduction to the participants' personal and professional biographies. This presents a picture of the participants' personal stories and their professional heritages, outlining how they have got to their current positions and something of the nature of the settings in which they work.

Chapter Six presents a thematised view of the data from the interviews conducted and Chapter Seven develops those ideas. The latter chapter draws together the research questions and the findings from the research. Agreements and disagreements between my data and that found by others are identified and the strengths and weaknesses of alternative interpretations from the literature are considered.

This final chapter of the thesis draws together the research questions and the findings from the research and makes explicit the knowledge claims arising from this study. It offers my reflections on the study and describes its strengths and limitations together with some suggestions for further research.

The thesis closes with a postscript on the world of the Children's Centre. It brings the reader up to date with key developments that have taken place since the research was undertaken, and, for the purpose of this study, provides an ending to the participants' stories.

Chapter Two: Background to the Sure Start Programme

The Sure Start programme as a whole is one of the most innovative and ambitious Government initiatives of the past two decades. We have heard almost no negative comment about its intentions and principles; it has been solidly based on evidence that the early years are when the greatest difference can be made to a child's life chances, and in many areas it has successfully cut through the silos that so often bedevil public service delivery. Children's Centres are a substantial investment with a sound rationale, and it is vital that this investment is allowed to bear fruit over the long term.

(House of Commons CSF Committee, 2010)

This chapter sets out to look at the philosophy, origins and purpose of the Children's Centre initiative from the early days of Sure Start local programmes and other significant projects. It explores the political nature of the context surrounding Sure Start and then looks at the specific Northtown environment, identifying some of the the challenges and opportunities which have faced, and continue to face the research participants in this study.

2.1. The History of the Sure Start Movement

The New Labour Government (1997-2010) saw Sure Start as a significant part of their attempt to eradicate social exclusion and to break the *'the cycle of disadvantage...so that children born into poverty are not condemned to social exclusion and deprivation'* (Blair,1999 p16). At the heart of this are issues of social justice. Clarke (2006) argues that, in tackling social justice, New Labour took an approach which managed to *'avoid both the determinism of structural explanations and an approach that sees social exclusion as the result of individual pathology'* (p700).

As Blair wrote in 2001 (p3),

We seek to combine American economic dynamism with European social solidarity, without the inequity of the one or the rigidity of the other...social justice must be founded on the equal worth of each individual, whatever their background, capability, creed or race.... the government must act decisively to end discrimination and prejudice.

The structural solutions adopted by New Labour policies attempted to use the tax and benefits system to redistribute wealth, and social integrationist solutions focused on the philosophy of providing '*work for those who can' (ibid)*.

A number of projects in the late 1990s, particularly in the US (e.g. Headstart, the Perry Pre-school programme, Chicago Child-Parent Centres and the Abecedarian project), produced a significant amount of research leading Government to think about how improving services for children could improve their well-being and ultimately reduce public spending:

> *The rationale for [Sure Start] was the evidence base from the United States programmes, which were targeted at poorer children. For example, Early Head Start in the USA found that, for every $1 spent in early years intervention, $4 was saved in crime, social security and mental health costs. There were statistically significant positive impacts on learning, social emotional development and parenting outcomes. Similarly, an evaluation of the Perry pre-school study by High/Scope found that, when 27-year-olds went through the programme, there was a positive impact in terms of arrests, drug dealing, earnings, education performance and stable relationships. There were also enormous cost-benefits. The study described it as an extremely good economic investment, better than the stock market during the same period of time.*

(Blackman, 2004, 472WH)

Whether or not this data directly led to the adoption of the initiatives undertaken by the government is debatable (CSF Committee report, House of Commons 2010) but the evidence influenced the case made to the Treasury's cross departmental review of services for young children that a programme should be developed for an age group which had not been the subject of previous policy. The review found that some young children were becoming increasingly disadvantaged as a result of what Hutton (2010) describes as '*disastrous social geography'* (p9) which in the ten years prior to the election of New Labour had led to the wealthy becoming wealthier and the poor living in areas that were '*blighted by run down social housing and over stretched schools*' (p10).

The Children, Schools and Families Committee report (2010) also showed that the variable quality and geographical coverage of the services that did exist tended to be focussed on older children. The report noted a real concern about the lack of co-ordination between agencies,

particularly in screening for those issues such as delayed language acquisition which was supposedly very common in young children. Because such issues were not defined as severe problems they did not receive attention.

The policy response to the review was the establishment of Sure Start and in the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review (House of Commons 2010) £450m of funding was announced. This funding was intended to set up 250 projects between 1999 and 2002 in areas where there were high concentrations of children in their early years living in poverty. The idea was to run these projects for seven to ten years with a ring fenced budget. Bids for the funding were invited from the country's 20% most deprived areas.

Initially known as Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLP), projects were managed by the Sure Start Unit under the direction of Naomi Eisenstadt, within the then Department for Education and Employment. Implementation was in six waves and the final SSLPs were awarded in 2003 when there were 524 local programmes in existence.

Broad-reaching guidelines were produced by the Sure Start Unit. SSLPs were asked to coordinate, streamline and add value to existing services in the SSLP area, including signposting to existing services. They were tasked with involving parents, being culturally sensitive and adhering to specific objectives relating to Sure Start's overall objectives and promoting the participation of all local families in the design and working of the programme.

The first guidance also outlined the core services that all SSLPs were expected to provide:

- outreach and home visiting
- support for families and parents
- support for good quality play, learning and childcare experiences for children
- primary and community health care and advice about child health and development and family health
- support for people with special needs, including help getting access to specialized services

However, these were simply guidelines and Lewis et al (2010) suggest that SSLPs enjoyed considerable autonomy and tended to be particularly responsive to those few local parents who engaged with the programme.

The process for setting up SSLPs was complex. Areas of need were identified by the Sure Start Unit and local districts were invited to bid for funding. Although this was not intended to be a competitive process, local areas often saw it as such (NESS, 2002). Invitations to apply for funding were sent to social services, education, health, voluntary organisations and *'other potentially interested parties like the police and library services'* (ibid p5).

The guidelines required that programmes should be run by partnerships of parents, representatives from the various key local agencies, such as health and local government, and others who were involved in improving the lives of children and families. Each partnership was to have a lead partner and an Accountable Body.

The NESS (National Evaluation of Sure Start, 2002) report indicates that invitations were not as widely available as they might have been and some PVI (Private, Voluntary and Independent) sector agencies had to demand to be included. The report found that most partnerships included parents, but numbers varied considerably with low parental involvement being the norm. It was difficult to involve parents for a number of reasons; those given in the report included the bureaucratic nature and jargon of the SSLP approach and that parents felt that they were not included in decisions made by the professional agencies concerned.

The Evaluation of Sure Start (Local Programmes) is extremely rich in material – the process started in 2001 and, as planned, ran until 2012. A dedicated website (www.ness.bbk.ac.uk) provides access to the plethora of data produced. The most relevant report for this study is the *'Early Impacts of Sure Start Local Programmes on Children and Families'* (NESS, 2005) because this provided some of the evidence for the later change in policy from SSLPs to Sure Start Children's Centres.

This report asked four questions:

- Do children/families in SSLPs receive more services or experience their communities differently than children/families in comparison communities?
- Do families function differently in SSLP areas than in comparison communities?
- Do the effects of SSLPs extend to children themselves?
- Are some SSLPs more effective than other SSLPs?

It concluded that families with greater social capital were better able to take advantage of the services available to them. However, the aim of the programme was to work with those of lesser

social capital such as teenage parents, lone parents and workless households; thus the aims of the programme were not being met. The report suggested that the demographics of the communities studied may have meant that the beneficial impact outweighed the adverse impact of the programmes in certain areas – however these were not the areas where there were more children at risk of failing. The report implies that the limitations of the programme's reach in these areas may have led to future costly problems for society, such as drug use and crime, again indicating that the programme was not being successful in its aims. The report also found that programmes that were led by health services were more effective than those led from other sectors.

The authors of the report are critical of the NESS research approach they were asked to take arguing that only limited evidence of the effects of SSLPs emerged and those that were detected were small. It should be noted however; that SSLPs had been in existence for only three years when the children and families were studied and was perhaps not even entirely *'bedded down'* and therefore not fully developed. This further cautions against drawing too strong conclusions from the first phase of the Impact Study designed to provide early insight into the effects that SSLPs might be having on children and families. The report led to claims that the funding had been wasted, notably by Maria Miller, the then Shadow Minister for the Family: *'Three billion pounds has been spent in the last nine years...and they are still not hitting seven out of 14 of their key indicators'* (The Independent, 8 May 2008).

Other writers put the findings down to methodological problems. Kane (2008) suggested that a random control trial (ruled out by the DCSF) would have provided more reliable results than the quasi experimental approach taken. She does add, though, that the continually changing nature of the programme would have hampered such a trial:

> *The rejection of a randomized trial has made interim evaluations difficult and—despite the sophisticated efforts of the current team—less comprehensive than they could or should be.*

> *(Kane, 2008, p161).*

Other difficulties are highlighted by Lewis (2011) who suggests that the wide, ambitious aims of SSLPs meant that it was an unfocussed programme possibly *'meaning all things to all people'* (p75). Some government identified targets were not necessarily supported by the local

communities – smoking reduction for instance. Lewis (ibid) quotes a voluntary agency which suggested that there was conflict between being target driven and having parents' wishes as paramount to their existence. She suggests that the ethos of the programme was about parent participation and child development. There was no emphasis on early year's education, and childcare was largely left to the Neighbourhood Nurseries.

A later report (DfE, 2010) again highlights the methodological problems with the evaluation programme and suggests that SSLPs had six positive benefits relating generally to parents ability to establish less chaotic home environments and children's physical health and two negative effects, mothers showing more depressive symptoms and being less likely to attend school meetings. Overall, the report concluded, there was limited impact on *'school readiness'* which, interestingly, did not feature in the initial aims of the programme.

2.2. Early Excellent Centres and the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative

Two other principle initiatives were running contemporaneously with the SSLPs, namely Early Excellence Centres and Neighbourhood Nurseries. Early Excellence Centres, generally focussed around nursery schools, were introduced in 1997 with funding set to last until 2006, the target being that there should be 25 of these centres by the end of the year 2000 and 100 by 2004. There were eventually 107 EECs (Parliament 2010). Their launch followed the Excellence in Schools' (DfEE, 1997) white paper and they were given the remit of developing *'high quality'* integrated education and day-care for young children and to:

> *Demonstrate effective co-operation and multi-agency working in the provision of services by Education, Social services, Health and other support and advisory agencies.*

> *(Pascal et al, 2001, p8).*

This remit was also aimed at combating social exclusion through working with families and to support other current initiatives including the *'The National Childcare Strategy, the Quality Protects Initiative, the Meeting Special Educational Needs Programme for Action, the Family Literacy Programme, Health Action Zones, Education Action Zones and Social Regeneration Programmes'* (ibid p8). This highlights the quantity of work being done by Government at the time to tackle the needs of communities and the sustained focus on children and families.

Perhaps the key feature of the EECs was the provision of integrated services. The review of 2004 (DfES) emphasised the positive impact of cohesive multi agency teams. The centres themselves varied enormously in structure and in provision, issues which were identified in the review. Campbell (2001) suggests that the Ofsted inspections may have focused on a single model of integration, making it difficult to report on the effectiveness of the Centres.

Funding for EECs was awarded, again, through competing bids based on what already existed and what the potential was to develop and provide services to the community they served. Two thirds of the EECs were located in areas identified as within the top 20% of deprivation.

Initial evaluation of EECs (Pascal et al, 2001) showed that they were appropriately meeting the needs of children and families through developing *'innovative and creative strategies to support those who are difficult to reach'* (p5). The centres provided good learning experiences for children who were benefitting socially and educationally from these experiences. They were also seen as supporting parents whose skills were also being developed. The report pointed out that strong leadership and management were essential in the sustainability of the programme. In summary:

> *The EEC programme is a relatively low cost, multi-faceted, intervention strategy, which has the potential to offer considerable cost savings over a range of social, educational, health and employment services......it demonstrates that such integrated, early childhood and family programmes, which offer intergenerational learning combined with family support, could be a powerful means of addressing some of the most pressing social, health and educational issues which we currently face. These include the increases in child poverty, ill health, underachievement, teenage pregnancy, male disaffection, social exclusion and long-term unemployment' (p5).*

The Ofsted (2004) evaluation of 23 centres concluded that EECs had both strengths and limitations. Generally they were good at delivering support for families and effective day care for children under three. They found evidence that increased childcare facilities were having a *'positive effect on reducing the effects of child poverty in some communities'* (p6) and that the leadership (all the heads of centres in the study were experienced head teachers) was good overall.

The limitations discovered were that the EECs were challenging to lead, manage and organise; there was a need for better staff training, and confusion existed between the remit of the centre and that of the Local Authorities.

The Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative (NNI) was introduced in 2001. The principal intention of this programme was to provide affordable childcare in deprived areas so that parents could go to work. Their focus was again in the top 20% of less well-off areas and the aim was to provide some 45000 subsidised day care places for children aged 0-5. This target was reached in 2004 and involved 1,400 settings (House of Commons 2010). Many of these settings developed from existing nurseries though some were specifically created. Vevers (2008, p1) comments on the initiative:

> They were created with the noblest of intentions - to provide childcare for parents in the most disadvantaged areas and enable them to find a route out of poverty through employment. ... Yet their three-year tapered funding was always seen as their Achilles heel.

The evaluation of the programme (Smith et al, 2004) identified a number of failings despite evidence of great success for individual parents. Only 10% of parents within the reach of the nurseries took up a place and some 40% of NNIs were located outside the 20% most disadvantaged areas. These findings caused Smith et al (2004) to question if there were enough childcare places created in the right areas, despite the fact that many places were unfilled. They ask: Was there was a mismatch between the provision of the setting and the needs of the community particularly in terms of the flexibility of opening hours; Could parents on low incomes afford the places; was there enough information available to parents through outreach; and would NNI have had a greater impact on communities if it had been more focused on its target locations?

2.3. The story post 2004

By 2004, there was a mass of data from evaluations of SSLPs, (e.g. Belsky and Melhuish 2007), EECs (Pascal et al, 2001, OFSTED, 2004) and the NNI (Smith et al, 2007 and ongoing).

The other significant piece of research carried out throughout this period was the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Report (Sylva et al, 2004). EPPE was, and continues to be, significant in understanding the importance of education and care for the early years and

beyond. The main findings from the initial research, which was a longitudinal study conducted between 1997 and 2003 on over 3000 children between the ages of 4 and 5, were that:

- *Pre-school experience, compared to none, enhances all-round development in children*
- *Duration of attendance (in months) is important; an earlier start (under age 3 years) is related to better intellectual development*
- *Full time attendance led to no better gains for children than part-time provision*
- *Disadvantaged children benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences, especially where they are with a mixture of children from different social backgrounds*
- *Overall disadvantaged children tend to attend pre-school for shorter periods of time than those from more advantaged groups (around 4-6 months less)*

(Sylva et al 2004, p1).

The report also identified significant issues in the quality of the provision and the importance of parenting highlighting the need for parental involvement in settings. In terms of quality, the research found a direct link between the quality of pre-schooling and intellectual and social development. The quality of the setting was influenced positively by the presence of staff with higher qualifications, particularly if the setting was led by a teacher, and a complementary approach to educational and social development contributed to better all round progress.

The importance of parental involvement was highly significant – it was found that children develop far better when parents were engaged in their development:

For all children, the quality of the home learning environment is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. What parents do is more important than who parents are.

(Sylva et al, 2004 p1)

2.4. Consolidation – the Children's Centre is formed

From the SSLPs came the concept of the Children's Centre, first mooted in 2003 by the Sure Start Unit, Naomi Eisenstadt saying that:

by embedding SSLPs in the local authority's strategic vision for the delivery of children's services in your area, we will ensure that the additional Children's Centres' funding will build on what you have already started and improve mainstream services

(Eisenstadt, 2003).

Government emphasised continuity and mainstreaming rather than change. Margaret Hodge, the then Minister for Children, suggested that the centres would be driven by the community (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005) with the same underpinning principles as the SSLPs. Beverley Hughes, the Minister for Children and Families, explained that SSLPs had been an 'experimental stage' which laid the foundations for a new, universal, mainstream service (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006).

However, Lewis (2011) suggests that, rather than continuity, the development of Children's Centres in fact represented a significant policy change and offers three reasons for the shift. Firstly, she suggests that SSLPs were not putting enough emphasis on childcare, both in terms of encouraging parents back to work or in terms of the child's cognitive development. These were two factors that Government saw as important in reducing social exclusion and therefore poverty and unemployment. This also fitted in with plans to extend schools' opening hours so that older children would be looked after from 8am – 6pm, again enabling parents to work.

Secondly, Lewis (2011) suggests that the agenda for Children's Services underwent more radical change particularly as a result of the new Every Child Matters policy initiated as a result of issues around child protection deriving from the Laming report (2003). Directors of Children's Services were appointed in Local Authorities and were tasked with providing integrated services for children. It would not have been logical to ignore the SSLPs in this. Whereas SSLPs had been area-based, Lewis (ibid) reports that arguments were made for a more universal provision where the greatest help could be given to those with the greatest need.

Thirdly, Lewis (2011) suggests that the National Evaluation reports provided strong evidence that the programme had failed. She suggests that this was particularly serious since the Government had committed to using '*evidence based policy...to identifying and funding what works*' (p79).

The Children Schools and Families Committee (2010) said, also, that this decision had been influenced by the findings of EPPE report (2004) with its emphasis on integrated education and care *such as that offered by early excellence centres'* (p3).

The formation of Children's Centres thus marked a change in Sure Start emphasis from support for children and families delivered in an autonomous way at local level, despite central control, to a mainstream approach focussed more on children's cognitive development and parental employment under the control of local government. Lewis (2011) argues that the Sure Start branding allowed the Government to claim success for a 'flagship' programme but at the same time change the original purpose of the programme to bring in new ways of meeting the original goal of dealing with social exclusion and tackle the criticisms that SSLPs were not working.

The Government's definition of a Children's Centre at the time was:

> *A place or a group of places*
>
> *a) which is managed by or on behalf of, or under arrangements made with, an English local authority, with a view to securing that early childhood services in their area are made available in an integrated manner;*
>
> *b) through which each of the early childhood services is made available; and*
>
> *c) at which activities for young children are provided, whether by way of early years provision or otherwise.'*

> > (Childcare Act 2006, as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009)

Children's Centres were introduced in three phases, 2004-2006, 2006-2008, and 2008-2010. The aim was that there would ultimately be a Children's Centre[1] in each area i.e. 3500 centres

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[1] An interesting point to note on nomenclature is that initially, CCs were designated as Sure Start Children's Centre, presumably to build on the brand. However this title was never adopted by many local authorities – who preferred the term integrated Children's Centre or more often, just Children's Centre.

by 2010. They emerged from a variety of backgrounds, for instance from SSLPs, from EECs, from Neighbourhood Nurseries and, as with SSLPs, many of them started from scratch. In phase one they were targeted at the 20% most deprived areas. Local Authorities were given a target number of children which they had to reach. The 800 Children's Centres in phase one were to provide the full *'core offer'* to the families and children in its area. The core offer was potentially huge. Each centre was required to be open for ten hours a day for a minimum of 48hours a week and was tasked with providing a minimum range of services: See Table 2:1.The quality of these services was to conform to National Standards, minimum qualifications for staff were laid down formally and the amount of data required on each area, and family, from the Local Authority, was immense.

By the end of 2006, it was expected that the 2,500 Children's Centres would fully cover the 30% most disadvantaged (known as *'super output'*) areas. The requirement for centres in these areas remained the same. However, outside these areas there was no requirement for full day childcare unless there was unmet demand. The catchment for these centres was proposed to be 800 children under the age of 5. By 2010, national coverage was expected through the 3,500 Children's Centres. In the remaining 70% of coverage, much more flexibility was introduced to reflect local circumstances and the requirements of the community. The catchment number of children varied from 600- 1200 children and the core offer was substantially reduced, represented by the blanks in Table 2.1. This increased flexibility meant that there was no longer the need for a specific building. Centres are obliged to provide access to the offers, not necessarily on a specific set of premises.

The Government's own professional qualification for children's centre leaders was known as the National Professional Qualification for *Integrated Centre* Leadership (my italics).

Table 2.1. The changing Children's Centre offer

2004	2010
Appropriate support and outreach services to parents/carers and children who need them	The offer of appropriate support and outreach services to parents/carers and children who have been identified as in need of them
Information and advice to parents/carers on a range of subjects including: local childcare, looking after babies and young children and local early years education services for three and four years olds	information and advice to parents/carers on a range of subjects including local childcare, looking after babies and young children, local education services for three and four year olds
Support to child minders	Support to child minders
Drop-in sessions and other activities for children and carers at the centre	Drop-in sessions and other activities for children and carers at the centre
Links to Jobcentre Plus services to support and encourage labour market participation, in order to help combat poverty.	Links to Jobcentre Plus services
Good quality teacher input (0.5 teacher per centre) to lead the development of learning within the centre	
A base for a child minder network	
Child and family health services, including ante-natal services	
Parental outreach	
Family support services	
Support for children and parents with special needs	

2.5. So what now?

Since the election of the Coalition Government in 2010, things are changing for Children's Centres though the rhetoric behind their remit remains.

> *Children's Centres have a crucial role to offer early help to families with young children...*
> *Their unique value lies in their ability to integrate universal and targeted services...*
> *working across a spectrum of need. We should be ambitious about the role they play in*
> *collaborative working and in early intervention, and how they can use their resources*
> *more effectively to improve outcomes*

(DfE, DoH, 2011 p55)

At the start of the term of the new Government, Sarah Teather, the Minister for Children and Families removed the requirement for Children's Centres in the most deprived areas to offer full day care, and for Centres to hire both a qualified teacher and an Early Years Professional. At the time, she also said that she would legislate so that disadvantaged two year olds receive 15 hours of free early education a week starting from 2013 which would be available from 7am to 7pm (Shukla, 2011).

The most recent Government publication in the field *Supporting Families in the Foundation Years* (DfE, 2011) has interestingly been published jointly between the Departments of Education and Health. While the final position on Centres has not yet been established, the document offers a number of clues as to what this might be. There is a proposed emphasis on

- The development of a new core purpose with early intervention at its heart (p4)
- The continued professional development of the workforce – including increasing the number of men involved
- An increased number of health visitors who will work closely with the Children's Centres
- Working with older children where it makes sense locally, giving them extra help when needed and bringing in professionals with specialist skills where necessary (p14)
- Greater community and family involvement in the running of Centres in order to develop an ' Understanding how Children's Centres can maintain effective engagement with families' (p43)
- Engaging more PFI sector organizations in the running of centres

- Looking at siting ' birth registrations in Centres, provide naming ceremonies, child benefit forms and other benefit advice' (p85).

Importantly, the report states that discussions are in progress on achieving '*greater clarity about how we measure outcomes in the early years, including through payment by results for Sure Start Children's Centres*' (p68).

Perhaps the most significant changes are in funding arrangements. Until 2011, £1,100m from a total Early Intervention funding budget of £2,400m was granted directly to Sure Start. This funding has been reduced to £2,222m for 2011-2012 in the new Early Intervention Grant (Home Office, 2011). This funding is no longer ring fenced and as a result Local Authorities decisions may have a dramatic impact on Children's Centres as they exist at present. In a debate in the House of Commons, Sharon Hodgson MP (Washington and Sunderland West) stated that

> *Reinstating the ring fence is not a panacea, but it would bring back the stability and security that the Sure Start network needs. It would let managers and staff concentrate on how to deliver the improvements that we all want in Children's Centres rather than forcing them to focus on financial fire-fighting year in, year out.*

(c229, Hansard, April 27th 2011)

This indicates a view that the Opposition see the effective functioning of Children's Centres as under threat.

2.6. An introduction to Northtown

This study is set in a large Northern city which I have called Northtown. Northtown is in the top 20% of the country's most deprived authorities. Roughly 25% of Northtown's population lived in an SSLP area and the first Sure Start local programme was approved in 1999.

By 2003 there were eight SSLPs all of which fell into the 30% most deprived areas. In 2006, when the Government changed policy so that local authorities became accountable for Sure Start programmes (Lewis et al, 2011), SSLPs were being run by three main providers, a children's charity, the Primary Care Trusts and a local community trust who each employed their Children's Centre leaders. On the arrival of the Children's Centres, Northtown decided to keep the SSLPs and introduce Children's Centres at the same time. The problem with this seemed to be that with three organisations running the SSLPs, there was no coordination. Though

government guidance was clear about building on existing provision, the Local Authority seemed not to heed this guidance.

Further complexity came with successive phases of Centres. The power held by the three providers ensured that elected members continued to fund their services at the same levels despite a reduction in Government funding and the need to develop other centres. As a result of this, the three providers were asked to provide Centres in other areas and the City contracted with these organisations to deliver the core offer who in turn further contracted to other providers from community and Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sectors. A strength of Northtown's offer was, seen by the Local Authority, to be the number of diverse community and voluntary organizations involved in the 36 Children's Centres, together with over 500 child minders who provided more than half of the services.

This complexity was then exacerbated by the introduction of multi-agency teams (MATs) in three service districts. The MATs have the responsibility for providing *'seamless and safe support to children and young people, giving them help at an earlier stage, rather than entering crisis services at a late stage'*, and are made up from Midwives, Health Visitors, School Nurses, Family Support Workers, Parent Support Advisors / Child Development Workers, Education Welfare Officers, Senior/Learning Mentors, Engagement with Learning Teachers, Family Aid, Primary Mental Health Workers and Social Workers for Prevention & Early Intervention (Northtown City Council, 2011).

2.7. Significance for this study

It is this complex social and political background that underpins the context in which the leaders in my study carry out their roles. The leaders themselves come from a variety of backgrounds and have worked in a range of previous environments, many of them having experienced the evolution of the Centres from SSLPs to their current roles. Social justice is at the heart of their work which is focussed around supporting children and families in the development of their social capital. However, delivering the changing core offer is embedded in a wider political picture where there is continuing uncertainty over the real purpose of Children's Centres and their future. Funding is being cut and the role of the Centres is being challenged by an increasingly school led system where poverty and deprivation is still a concern in the Centres' catchment areas.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to leadership in Children's Centres. It does this in a number of stages – by setting out how research has tried to define leadership in general and then in the early years sector. It then moves on to exploring what many writers refer to as 'new paradigms' with a particular focus on an emerging field of study known as 'authentic' leadership. Finally the literature around leadership in multi-agency settings is considered in order to develop an understanding of the specific context in which Children's Centre leaders operate.

3.1. Introduction

Cresswell (2007) asks that a literature review should accomplish a number of objectives, it should share results of other studies that are related to the research being undertaken and it should situate the research within the debates existing in the broader literature.

Building on this, Randolph (2009) states that conducting a literature review is a means of demonstrating existing knowledge about a field – this knowledge includes *'vocabulary, theories, key variables and phenomena, and its methods and history'* (p2), whereas Gall et al (1996) argue that the review can also play a part in providing boundaries to the research question and gaining methodological insights. In an alternative account Hart (1998, p27) gives further reasons for carrying out a review such as

- distinguishing what has been done from what needs to be done,
- synthesizing and gaining a new perspective,
- identifying relationships between ideas and practices,
- establishing the context of the topic or problem,
- rationalizing the significance of the problem,
- identifying the main methodologies and research techniques that have been used, and placing the research in a historical context to show familiarity with state-of-the-art developments.

Potter (2006) says that a review should paint a picture of the 'state of knowledge' (p174) and of the major questions in the subject area.

As in the case of this review, as Randolph (2009) suggests, the principle purpose is to *'provide a framework for relating new findings to previous findings in the discussion section of a dissertation'* (p3).

3.2. The current state

In some ways, the body of literature on leadership in the early years' sector is in its infancy. There is a limited amount of writing (though this is very slowly rising) and a 'paucity of research' (Siraj Blatchford and Manni, 2007, p7) in a context where there is a heightened potential for leadership development (Muijs et al, 2004). In her 2008 review of the literature on leadership in early childhood services, Dunlop cites only three published books (Moyles, 2004; Aubrey, 2007; Rodd, 2005). A library search in 2014 revealed fewer than 20 published books; this included revised editions of the three which Dunlop (2008) cited earlier.

There are a number of issues with existing work. Dunlop (2008) suggests that leadership is relatively unexplored in early childhood services, there is a lack of research activity and a relative lack of leadership development in early childhood and many studies have explored leadership as a 'micro concept', investigating leaders themselves or the immediate environments in which they work, rather than viewing leadership as a cultural system. By this, it is meant that neither leadership nor organisations are independent of a wider social context. The handful of books that have been produced tend to be under-theorised 'how to' guides for practitioners (e.g. Moyles, 2007; O' Sullivan, 2009; Garvey and Lancaster, 2010; Lindon and Lindon, 2011).

A comprehensive search for literature on leadership and Children's Centres delivered very few papers, Sharp et al, 2012, perhaps being the most significant. A similar search for literature on leadership and children's services also threw up very little research, Booker (2010) perhaps being the most significant. Neither of these publications refers to any of the books mentioned by Dunlop (2008) or referred to in my own library search, referring instead to the generic (business) literature – or in the case of Sharp et al (2012) largely to the limited field of NFER studies. Much of the current UK research into leadership in the early years seems to be based in school settings using models from education (Muijs et al., 2004, Taggart et al., 2000). Arguably, models of educational leadership provide the closest parallels to leadership in early year's settings – both sectors have children at the heart of their work; both are target driven, though educational leaders do not have the wider family responsibilities which are essential to meeting the core offer of Children's Centres.

The argument against the use of educational literature in researching leadership in Children's Centres is again that leadership in education does not have a unique identity (Sergiovanni

1994) and models of educational leadership have borrowed heavily from business literature. Hallinger (2008) suggests that this borrowing should be cautious because for instance, *'education organizations do not operate with the same clarity of goals and operational technologies often found in the private sector '*(p25) and the:

> *moral purposes of schools do not always lend themselves to business management tools that assume our ability to narrow broad visions into measurable targets (e.g. the balanced scorecard) (p24).*

Rodd (1995) has minimized the differences between Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC, the widely accepted term in the field) and the wider field of education stating that:

> *being a leader is not at all different from being a leader in any other field. Effective leadership, be it of a large multi-national company or a child-care centre, requires certain attitudes, attributes and skills (p. 22).*

Power (2002) takes issue with Rodd saying that she avoids a critique of the socio-political context which is significant in this area and which has become increasingly politicized (Goffin and Means, 2009, p3).

The difficulty in choosing a representative field of writing is recognized by Cresswell (2007) who suggests that the nature of exploratory qualitative studies means that not much has been published about the field or the topic so the researcher builds ideas through listening to participants. This means that some views from participants will of necessity be included in this chapter.

The approach of this review then is to identify the state of current research that relates to leadership in Children's Centres in order to provide a framework for interpreting participant data.

3.3. The historical context of research in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector

Study in the field of early years leadership has recapitulated the pattern of study into business leadership though over a much shorter period of time. Historical approaches to studying leadership in business examine the field through a number of lenses, notably trait theory, skills

theory, behavioural theory and situational theory (Northouse 2007, Eacott, 2010) and the early years literature has done much the same.

3.3.1. Leadership Traits

As with the research into leadership in business, Dunlop (2008) suggests that traditionally, research into leadership in the early years has been associated with the leader as a person. Such work has focussed on the traits of the leader herself. Those traits identified in the research include warmth, gentleness, enthusiasm, passion, inspiration and advocacy (Solly, 2003), caring (Osgood, 2004) and love (Dalli, 2005). Moyles' (2004) typology adds being visionary, flexible, and charismatic to the list and Aubrey's (2007) work adds rationality, knowledgeability and assertiveness. Aubrey (ibid) suggests that the traits of being warm, nurturing and sympathetic may be a *'distinctive feature of early year's providers and of female workers '*(p31).

Of course the critique of trait theory applies here as much as it does anywhere else. Almost as many traits have been identified as studies made and there is no definitive list of traits although there is a common argument that some traits appear more than others in leadership studies-technical skill, friendliness, task motivation, application to task, group task supportiveness, social skill, emotional control, administrative skill, general charisma, and intelligence seem to occur most frequently (Bolden et al 2003). However, different authors, through their research, define these skills in different ways. Durue et al (2011) criticise the research undertaken into trait theory suggesting that studies do not allow for the impact of traits to be assessed independently. From the perspective of this study, the most significant failing with trait theory is its *'silence on the influence of the situational context surrounding leaders'* (Ng et al., 2008, p733).

3.3.2. Leadership Skills

The focus on the skills (competencies) needed to be an effective leader in the early years is offered by Moyles (2004) who refers to management skills, including planning and decision making, and personal skills, such as time management and communication. Bloom (2000) adds technical, human and conceptual skills to this list. Rodd (2005) suggests that early childhood leaders need skills which are related to team work, motivation, support, role definition and goal setting. Scrivens (2002) sees building relationships, shared decision-making and empowerment of others as important characteristics of good leadership in early years. Kagan and Hallmark

(2001) add the idea of political awareness, interpersonal communication skills, group facilitation skills (mostly conducting effective meetings), decision-making skills (particularly participative management) and staff development skills.

In his work, Northouse (2010) offers three criticisms of skills models; that the skills often cited are not specific to leadership; that no links can be made between skills and performance and that it is difficult to separate skills from traits. Bolden and Gosling (2006) add that leadership occurs in situations and *'cannot be distilled into a number of constituent elements'* (p6).

Antonakis et al (2004) suggest that the evolution of thinking about leadership then moved from skills models to considering leadership behaviours (styles) where authoritative, laissez faire and democratic leadership styles were seen to have different effects on teams. Thinking about styles developed into ideas around transformational leadership (Burns, 1978, Bass, 1985, Jackson and Parry, 2008) and, I would argue, that current educational thinking around distributed leadership is within in the leadership style school of thought since someone (i.e. the leader) is doing the distributing; the distribution that results could then be seen as the product of a particular style. Lindon and Lindon (2012) concur and Sharp et al (2012), in their work, give an example of a children's centre leader who has a *'distributed leadership style where staff take responsibility for key areas'* (p51). The themes of transformational and distributed leadership are returned to when this review considers new paradigms.

3.3.3. Leadership Behaviours

If traits and styles can be rather challenging to pin down, the notion of leadership behaviours promises a typology that is grounded in observable events. Such effective leadership behaviours in the early years' sector, for instance as identified by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006), Bloom (2000) and Sharp (2012), tend to mirror those behaviours identified in more generic literature around building a vision, communicating effectively, managing relationships and managing the task. Perhaps a useful summary comes from Sharp (2012, p9).

- Having a clear vision to improve outcomes for children and families
- Engaging responsively with families
- Using evidence to drive improvements in outcomes
- Using business skills strategically
- Facilitating open communication
- Embracing integrated working

- Motivating and empowering staff
- Being committed to their own learning and development

Sharp (2012) suggests that these behaviours are underpinned by the skills of change management, emotional intelligence traits and distributed leadership. One might comment that other than those behaviours linked directly to children and families which in my interpretation, are *'encouraging reflection and encouraging and facilitating parent and community partnerships'* (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni,2006) and *'being responsive to parents' needs and able to communicate with them'* (Bloom, 2000), there is nothing to distinguish the business literature on leadership behaviour from that of the ECEC field. Conceptually this suggests that a Children's Centre leader may not need any specific experience.

In criticising style theory, Northouse (2010) suggests that it does not link what leaders do with the outcomes of their behaviour. Further criticism of style theory comes from Antonakis et al. (2004) who suggests that the contribution of leaders' behaviour to success is also contingent on contextual factors.

3.3.4. The Context

The situation or social context in which leadership takes place is the next significant lens that was applied. Antonakis et al (2004) suggest that this approach alludes to the idea of the leaders *'consciously or unconsciously trying to reach their optimal performance by being aware of their situation and responding accordingly '* (p169). Writers in the ECEC field are content to provide detail on the context of the early years (Aubrey, 2007, Jones and Pound, 2008, Robbins and Callan 2010) but this focuses generally on the need for the leader to work with a variety of different agencies and in a number of different relationships in order to deliver services.

This exploration of the development of ways of thinking about leadership in the sector has been important to demonstrate how trait, behaviour and situational models have been used to understand leadership. With that understanding, a number of definitions of leadership have been produced. Jackson and Parry (2008) offer us a continuum of definitions ranging from the *'workmanlike and robust'* (p12) view from Stodgill (1974) to a more ethereal view from Peters and Austin (1985).

Stodgill (1974) states that leadership is *'the process of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement'* (p12) whereas at the other end of the continuum, Peter and Austin (1985) say that:

> *Leadership means vision, cheerleading, enthusiasm, love, trust, verve, passion, obsession, consistency, the use of symbols, paying attention as illustrated by the content of one's calendar, out-and-out drama (and the management thereof), creating heroes at all levels, coaching, effectively wandering around, and numerous other things ...Leadership must be present at all levels in the organisation. It depends on a million little things done with obsession, consistency and care, but all of those million little things add up to nothing if the trust, vision and basic belief are not there. (pp 5-6).*

Though these two views range from the rational to the emotive both add to the way in which we might think about leadership.

Elsewhere, Northouse (2013) defines leadership as *'a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal' (p5)*. This is not dissimilar to Stodgill's (1974) original view and is one used as a starting point for research by many writers (e.g. Yukl, 2008, Antonakis, 2004, Rost 1993). Drucker (1996) is widely cited as putting things more succinctly, *'the only definition of a leader is someone who has followers'.*

Recent writers in the early year's literature seem reluctant to provide definitions of leadership. Aubrey (2007) and Robins and Callan (2008) avoid giving a definition preferring to offer examples of the traits and behaviours given by the interviewees in their research. McDowall, Clark and Murray (2012) do not see that providing a generic definition is key to their work, whereas Jones and Pound (2008) see leadership as a subset of management and suggest that:

> *Leadership is concerned with providing a culture in which each individual child's learning and development will flourish and at the same time each individual adult working in the setting will also have opportunities to learn and develop through a process of reflecting on their own practice (p10).*

Lindon and Lindon (2012) in their work follow Drucker's approach.

To recap on the historical approach, it is clear that several elements that are central to our understanding of leadership: traits, behaviours and context have thus been identified. From the

various definitions given in the literature, ideas of process, power (or influence) and goals can also be extrapolated. These elements have significant implications for this study. If we define leadership as a process, it means we need to look at it as something that is not a trait of the leader herself, but rather as something that happens between the leader and the follower and is therefore not necessarily formally designated. Influencing others requires power which can come from many sources, for instance the ability to reward or sanction followers, referent power (followers' identification with the leader), expertise or her position in the hierarchy (French and Raven, 1959). The attainment of shared goals adds an ethical dimension to thinking about leadership because there is a need to work with followers. Rost (1991) suggests that this approach increases the chance of groups working together towards a common good.

A useful way of understanding leadership which incorporates all these aspects of theory so far comes from Grint (2005, 2010) who captures all the elements into four overarching questions which help the process of thinking about leadership:

- Is it where 'leaders' operate that makes them leaders? (Leadership as Position)
- Is it who 'leaders' are that makes them leaders? (Leadership as Person)
- Is it what 'leaders' achieve that makes them leaders? (Leadership as Results)
- Is it how 'leaders' get things done that makes them leaders? (Leadership as Process)

Grint (2005) does not claim that this typology covers everything, but offers these types as a *pragmatic attempt to make sense of the world... not an attempt to carve up the world into 'objective' segments that mirror what we take to be reality'(p4).*

3.4. New Paradigms? New thinking about leadership in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector

In the early year's sector, much of the recent work has focused on models that emphasise the importance of relationships. This approach is seen in many of the early year's leadership texts, for instance Jones and Pound (2008), Robbins and Callan (2008), Moyles (2004), where the focus of accounts of leadership is on pedagogy, emotional literacy, team and community development, multi agency working and leading in times of change. Leeson et al (2012) argue that the models that help to theorise this thinking are relatively new and are transformational in nature. McDowall Clark and Murray (2012) and Briggs and Briggs (2009) also argue for a new paradigm though their stances on what that paradigm might look like only have some elements in common. The two models are explored in what follows.

Briggs and Briggs' (2009) new paradigm involves managerial self awareness, ethical and authentic leadership, community leadership, charismatic leadership and leadership of place. Self awareness is defined in terms of the Johari [2] window used to reveal the *'facade'* where leaders might hide their ineffectiveness.

This could perhaps be defined as an aspect of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2004). Ethical and authentic leadership are mentioned briefly in terms of social responsibility, fairness and well being. Community leadership is defined as delivering services within the local area through partnerships – and developing social capital. Leadership of place implies that geography plays a role in leadership. It is not clear how this differs from already established ideas that leadership is highly context specific.

Though Briggs and Briggs' (2009) paradigm is basically a repackaging of old ideas, they do make two very significant points. Firstly, they say that,that even though we are moving away from the notion of heroic (trait theory) leadership, some of the original underpinning ideas still have significance to our understanding. Secondly they say that:

> *Perhaps the most damning criticism is that the research supporting these new paradigms is that it is men who have studied other men to formulate these approaches, and to compound matters, the research has been predominantly undertaken in white dominated societies (p50).*

While this may be the case in the business world, as the amount of research in the early year's increases, the participants in the studies tend to be female though it does still seem to be mostly located in a white society.

McDowall Clark and Murray's (2012) new paradigm features three aspects, *'catalytic agency, reflective integrity and relational interdependence'* (p41), summarised in Table 3.1. These

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[2] The Johari window is a model developed by Luft and Ingham (1955) which consists of four quadrants, open, facade, unknown and blind spot. The facade represents information that the subject is aware of, but their peers are not.

complex terms reflect a view that constructions of leadership change to fit changing circumstances. In their view, the idea of a hierarchical leader limits our understanding and that by seeing leadership as a process our focus shifts away from formal authority to collaborative action. This is a movement towards seeing leadership as distributed and systemic (see p29) which mirrors current thinking about school leadership.

Catalytic agency is defined as a willingness to take action and an inner recognition that a practitioner can make a difference; *'personal agency becomes catalytic when used to bring about change'* (p33). A natural scientist would struggle with this terminology – catalysts remain unchanged during reactions, therefore denying reflective practice. Reflective integrity suggests that leaders need to reflect on practice to prompt learning and understanding; integrity is seen to be both organisational and individual and ensures alignment and synergy between mission, vision and policy in order to create a shared, ethical purpose. Relational interdependence is summed up as *'the connectivity in (our) actions and interactions – the recognition that, in order to be effective, we need each other'* (p39).

That this approach again seems to package old ideas in new ways can be seen when they break their themes down into attributes and behaviours:

Table 3.1. From McDowall Clark and Murray (2012) pp 46-92.

Catalytic agency	Reflective integrity	Relational interdependence
Passionate care	Value based reflection	Developing a community
Self belief	Consistency and competency	Leading partnerships
Sustaining impetus	Multiple knowledge	Making it happen
Encouraging others	Emotional engagement	Valuing others
	Making a difference	

Leeson et al (2012) cite Northouse (2010) in support of their claim for a new paradigm, once again following the business literature (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). They see this new paradigm as including transformational leadership, distributed leadership and authentic leadership.

Transformational leadership seeks to achieve far reaching goals in establishing shared philosophies, supporting people in their own development and in encouraging self-sacrifice in order to help others. As Covey (1992) says the aims are to

> 'transform' people and organizations in a literal sense – to change them in mind and heart; enlarge vision, insight, and understanding; clarify purposes; make behaviour congruent with beliefs, principles, or values; and bring about changes that are permanent, self-perpetuating, and momentum building.

Northhouse (2010) offers a caution that this type of leadership might be abused. There is an opportunity for influential leaders to manipulate followers into adopting an inappropriate vision. He also raises concerns over whose vision is being followed – this is particularly significant in the current political climate. Hooper and Potter (1997) extend the notion of transformational leadership to identify seven key competences of 'transcendent leaders' those able to engage the emotional support of their followers and thus effectively transcend change. These are defined as;

- Setting direction
- Setting an example
- Communication
- Alignment
- Bringing out the best in people
- Being a change agent
- Providing decision in a crisis and on the ambiguous

Though one can see the fit with thinking about leadership in the early years, it is difficult to be convinced that this is a new paradigm. The competences outlined by Hooper and Potter (1997), and the ideas espoused in building relationships might be seen as a hybrid of behavioural and skill models which, as ever, ignore context. Tichy and Devanna (1986) describe the hybrid nature of transformational leadership as a 'behavioural process capable of being learned' (p viii).

Distributed leadership is the second element indentified by Leeson et al (2012). They suggest that the 'flexibility negotiability and adaptability' offered by a distributed approach to leadership supports thinking about leadership in the sector and it has, at least until recently, been embraced heartily by the education sector (Duignan, 2006) .

Gronn (2002) suggests that this approach emphasises the dispersal of leadership to all levels of the organisation where roles are adopted which are commensurate with peoples' strengths and availability. This therefore supports personal development and fits with generic ideas of early year's leadership. However a clear definition of the concept is hard to pin down. Spillane (2004) who is one of the originators of the idea asks himself; *'What is distributed leadership? The short answer is that it depends; it depends on what one reads and with whom one talks'.(p2)*

Levin (2006), summarising the empirical basis for understanding distributed leadership in schools suggests that the research shows that distribution of responsibility for leadership can take place through deliberate design; through default, when leadership must be assumed for some routine or function; or through crisis. Jones and Pound (2008) suggest that *'ideally, distributed leadership should be the result of conscious and deliberate action by the designated leader'* (p49). McDowall and Clark also recognise the tendency for distributed leadership to be defined as *'something which is given out'* (p29) and suggest that this way of thinking about leadership is too specific to a school culture and therefore not suitable for the ECEC sector.

Youngs (2007) refers to thirty two research reports, generally qualitative case studies, into distributed leadership and suggests that distributed leadership has simply become a way of coping with the increasing pressure of management tasks. He sees the concept as out of step with *'parallel developments in the wider leadership field, where relational forms of leadership are at the forefront of new developments' (p3).* This seems to be in contradiction to Leeson et al's (2012) new paradigm where the distributed leadership concept is seen as contributing to the understanding of relationships.

Leeson et al (2012) also warn that

> the cuts in social spending may lead to an emphasis on a superficial understanding of
> distributed leadership that sees an opportunity for one leader to be responsible for many
> settings leaving poorly positioned staff to manage the best they can without proper
> training, support or systems rather than the development of an effective collaborative
> model' (p 228)

The third, and perhaps the most useful and relevant model in the 'new paradigm', is that of authentic leadership. This has also been referred to by Briggs and Briggs (2009) and encompasses most of the ideas alluded to by McDowall Clark and Murray (2012). It is the

concept of authentic leadership, which will frame the research in this study. This is for a number of reasons. As a model, it encompasses the leader as a person (and therefore has relevance to gender), her followers and the context in which leadership takes place. It also has a methodological link with a narrative approach because it is grounded in the person (Sparrowe, 2005, Shamir and Eilam, 2005). Indeed Gardner et al (2011) suggest that this approach to leadership has allowed for a higher proportion of qualitative studies than has historically been the case in the field. Finally, one of the most impressive characteristics I perceived in all the participants in this study was their strength of commitment and passion for social justice shown in the work they were doing with children and families.

3.4.1. Authentic Leadership

Novicevic et al (2006) suggest that the renewed thinking about authenticity follows the lack of responsible behaviour from leaders in the 'post- Enron era' (p64). Eagly (2005) links it with 9/11 and Hassan and Ahmed (2011) point out links with the crisis in banking. Leeson et al (2012) suggest that it has *'become attractive to those concerned that other models do not effectively support leaders as they attempt to guide their settings and communities through tough, ever changing times'* (p229).

Avolio et al (2005) suggest that the concept of authentic leadership is *'perhaps the oldest, oldest, oldest wine in the traditional leadership bottle...and is such a root construct that transcends other theories and helps to inform them in terms of what is and is not "genuinely" good leadership'* (p xxiii). They go on to assert that authentic leadership can incorporate transformational, charismatic, servant, spiritual or other forms of leadership. However, in contrast to transformational leadership in particular, authentic leadership *'may or may not be charismatic'* (p. 329).

Again, as with other models of leadership, exact definitions vary but all place some emphasis on intrapersonal, developmental and interpersonal perspectives (Northouse, 2010). Gardner et al (2011) give three contemporary definitions; from George and Sims (2007), Walumbwa et al (2008) and Whitehead (2009).

Firstly, George and Sims (2007) suggest that authentic leaders are true to themselves and engender trust from others. Because they are trusted, they are followed and this motivates others. *'As they develop as authentic leaders, they are more concerned about serving others*

than they are about their own success or recognition' (p. xxxi). This reflects some of the ideas of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970) where the argument was made that good leaders focus on the needs of others and value everyone's involvement in community life. Greenleaf (1970) puts emphasis on the unconditional acceptance of others and the removal of social injustice.

Secondly, Walumbwa et al. (2008) define authentic leadership as a pattern of behaviour that focuses on creating a positive ethical climate which leads to greater *'self awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development'* (p94).

And finally, Whitehead (2009) who defines an authentic leader as one who *'(1) is self-aware, humble, always seeking improvement, aware of those being led and looks out for the welfare of others; (2) fosters high degrees of trust by building an ethical and moral framework; and (3) is committed to organizational success within the construct of social values'* (p850).

Of course, there is criticism of authentic leadership as a concept. Booker (2011) suggests that there is no clear definition and in itself, it does not imply moral integrity whereas Northouse (2012) suggests that because the research is in its infancy, there is not as yet enough empirical evidence to give it validity. Northouse also states that the moral component assumed by many is not fully explained. He asks, for instance, how are leader's values related to self- awareness, and again points out the Achilles heel of so many leadership theories, i.e.how this approach links to outcome. He asks how an authentic leader who is disorganised and lacking in technical competence can be an effective leader? (p 223-224).

Gardiner (2011) offers deeper objections; she argues that the theory is an example of privilege arising from an *'intrinsic belief in self worth'* and therefore fails to take into account the *'complexities related to gender and power'* (p99). She also suggests that self understanding might also lead to a case of mistaken identity.

Despite the criticisms, the concept of authentic leadership is a useful model in this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, it describes an approach to leadership which is *'transparent, morally grounded and responsive to the needs and values of others'* (Northouse, 2013 p282). It is a type of leadership that is developed over time, as a lifelong learning process (Luthans and Avolio, 2003) and lastly, because it is shaped by life events that act as 'triggers to growth and greater authenticity' (Northouse, 2013 p270).

3.4.2. Leadership in Multi-Agency Contexts

Though there is little literature on leadership in multi-agency contexts, this is an important area to explore since the ability to lead in such contexts is of huge significance for the leaders in this study. Children's Centres differ from other organisations particularly because, in order to deliver the core offer, they must lead people from other agencies over whom they have no authority or control. Furthermore, leaders may come from any number of professional background themselves, as is evident in this thesis. As Frost and Stein (2009) suggest, leadership in a multi agency context is *'profoundly different from leading a single-profession organisation'*(p316).

What is difficult to ascertain is *how* it is different. Approaches taken to answer the question are tangential, offering instead, views of the challenges faced and ways to solve those challenges. The work of Anning et al (2006) is, I feel, particularly significant since this was used extensively in my work on developing leaders through the NPQICL and captures much of the essence of the complexity of the context. Anning et al (2006) explore these challenges by articulating a number of key professional dilemmas which arise as agencies come together. She identifies four of these dilemmas: 1) Structural - concerned with the management of the day to day; 2) Ideological- concerned with the sharing of knowledge; 3) Procedural - concerning the way in which agencies deliver their services, and 4)Interprofessional - relating to threats to identity.

Other challenges are pointed out by Williams and Sullivan (2010) who, in their study of collaboration between health and social care, found that leaders tended to default to *'self interest and turf protection'* (p7) because working with other agencies was seen to be time consuming and an additional responsibility. Perhaps this is not the case with Sure Start where the intention was always to work with other agencies, but it may illustrate the inter-professional dilemmas highlighted by Anning et al (2006). A point raised by Williams and Sullivan (2012) is that, in contrast to private sector organisations, there is no really robust assessment of the value of entering into collaborative arrangements, and certainly no 'realistic cost / benefit analysis' (p7).

Sharp et al (2012) offer a view of the challenges in terms of the structural management issues, for example maintaining services in the face of cuts, managing staff morale, balancing universal and targeted services but perhaps more importantly, they suggest a key issue is

Managing limitations in the understanding by other agencies of the contribution made by Children's Centres, combined with a perceived low status of early years' professionals (p2).

This is interesting because these limitations of understanding may predispose and even go some way to explaining the potential dilemmas faced by Children's Centre leaders.

Given the challenges, a number of solutions are offered. Following on from distributed leadership, current thinking in the schools literature focuses on systems leadership (see for instance Higham et al, 2009). Sharp et al (2012) suggest that the concept is applicable to the early year's sector. There is an implicit assumption by Sharp et al (2012) that the Children's Centre leader is at the hub of the system. This may be the case in partnerships set up by these leaders; however it is not so in statutory working with other agencies. Furthermore, whilst this model may have some validity within an academy chain, where leaders have authority over the (homogenous) elements within the system, it is difficult to see how this approach tackles any of the dilemmas already introduced.

Other writers, albeit in the business and education fields, introduce the term 'boundary spanners' (e.g. Goldring, 1991; Ernst and Yip, 2009; Ernst and Chrobot-Mason, 2011). This term is used to explain what a leader does in terms of *'bridging between the organisation and its environment'* (Goldring, 1991). In some ways this idea is helpful because it postulates that identity and belonging are the two core conditions leaders need to recognize and manage as they seek to engage disparate groups in shared actions, and overcome the gap between the perceived us and them. This correlates with Anning et al's (2006) interprofessional and ideological dilemmas.

Ernst and Yip (2009) suggest four *tactics* for effective boundary spanning: creating a shared space; activating a reframed, shared and inclusive identity; embedding diverse groups within a larger organizational goal; and 'weaving together....cross cut identities' (p13). The approach is helpful. The concept of shared space refers to a neutral zone where the emphasis is on building relationships which are based on the person rather than their social categories – or in this case, their professional heritage. This is where values can be explored and new language developed. This is in line with some of my own work (Close and Wainwright, 2010) where it was identified that leaders in multi-agency settings need to work with other professional colleagues in order to

surface hidden assumptions about models of practice through the enabling of 'culture conversations' between different professionals.

However, the major problem with the model of boundary spanning comes in trying to reframe boundaries in order to develop a shared identity and embed groups within a larger organisational goal. Ernst and Yip's (2009) work is set largely inside single organisations with the assumption that the 'organization itself and its mission and goals becomes the all inclusive identity group' (p6). This has echoes of transformational leadership discussed earlier but presents difficulties in the Children's Centre field. Once again Anning el al's (2006) dilemmas indicate some of the reasons why this is the case. This model lends itself better to a business approach where organizational goals are easier to define.

Perhaps as a development of the boundary spanning idea, specifically in ECEC settings, Cartmel et al (2013) introduce the 'transdisciplinary professional'. They suggest that *'transdisciplinarity focuses on enquiry rather than disciplines, and uses the inquiry to manage the space between the disciplines'* (p403). They argue that leadership of this type requires a more critical approach where leaders need to look outside their own heritage in order to learn and adapt what is effective from the other disciplines around them. They identify four key skills needed by such leaders, those of respectful relationships, critical thinking and reflection, a strong professional identity and a consideration of multiple perspectives.

This view ties in with the work of Close (2012) who offers a number of ways of seeing the task of educational leaders in a multi-agency setting. Close (2012) defines six leadership functions: system minding, surfacing assumptions, addressing dilemmas, reading the rules, contracting and restoring. Of these six, two are of particular relevance to this work, system minding and reading the rules. Close (2012) suggests that the complexities that arise in multi agency systems require system minders which he defines as small steering groups to make the system 'appreciative'. The role of these groups is to *'guard the project purpose'* (p126) and to *'orchestrate relationships and oversee communication across related structures'* (ibid). The absence of formal power in these groups suggests that they need to invest in *'the complex responsive process of relating'* in order to *'guard the [core] purpose of the centre'* (ibid).

Close's (2012) definition of reading the rules is that it is not enough for leaders to understand the working patterns of other agencies, but they also need to understand the background that drives these patterns, and the amount of freedom they have in working beyond the remit of their

own profession. This necessitates leaders to develop an understanding of unwritten rules pertaining to values and beliefs inherent in organisational culture and sufficient standing to be able to *'commit and negotiate'* (ibid, p131) on behalf of their own organisation.

3.5. Summary

The introduction to this chapter sets out a number of objectives from Cresswell (2007) for a literature review: that it should share results of other studies that are related to the research being undertaken and it should situate the research within the debates existing in the broader literature.

The broader literature has been explored in looking at the background to leadership studies through considering a number of key theories that relate to traits, skills and styles. This suggests that much of the thinking about leadership in the ECEC sector simply mirrors research in other areas. However, in terms of the specific research being undertaken, it explores the current thinking about leadership in the early year's sector by examining new paradigms suggested by key writers in the field.

What has been done in the literature reviewed relates generally to the business and education world. It is only the work of Sharp et al (2012) that relates to Children's Centres, and this paper, though thorough, is a National College paper which I feel is promoting a specific agenda of practice, system leadership and school readiness. What is missing from the literature is a deeper exploration of Children's Centres leaders in terms of what is distinctive about leadership in the children's centre context and how does this compare with other thinking about leadership. Also absent is any exploration of professional and personal biographies of Children's Centre leaders which has been studied at depth in the field of education (e.g. Goodson, 2013; Crawford, 2009).

Despite much of the descriptions of leadership used in early years and educational texts reflecting that used in the literature on authentic leadership, what needs to be tackled is the application of the concept of authentic leadership to the early years sector. This is a powerful concept. I suggest that understanding Children's Centre leadership and perhaps that of early years leadership more generally, could be illuminated by studying the life stories and events that are an essential part of the concept of authenticity.

The relationships between ideas and practice are explored in looking at some of the writing from the 'how to' guides. I think sometimes that there is a distance between ideas and practice, for instance in Close's work (2012), many of the ideas are noteworthy and fascinating, but whether or not practitioners reflect on these ideas in the depth that he does is highly debatable. However, as Lewin (1951, p169) and indeed Close suggests, *'there is nothing as practical as a good theory'*.

The context is well established in the exploration of the intricacies of leading in multi agency settings and the significance of my problem is rationalized in terms of there being no other literature which specifically relates to the field.

The identification of methodologies has not been addressed in detail in this chapter; sufficient to say that the original research has varied between large quantitative studies which have largely self reported on skills and trait models of leadership and work that has been qualitative in nature. Sources have been either peer reviewed journals or academic texts to ensure trustworthiness.

Aubrey et al's (2013) quantitative investigation of early childhood leadership is the most recent text and therefore it perhaps represents the *'state of the art'*. Their work identifies, amongst other things, that there is no single model or approach to leadership in such a 'diverse' sector. They argue that it is important to

> *'Extend and progress the debate about the values and purposes of best practice and choices and priorities concerning the boundaries of EC leadership'* (p26).

This is the intent of the remainder of this thesis.

Chapter Four: Methodology, methods and analysis

In this chapter I will explore and discuss the methodological approach to this study in relation to the aims of the research which are to explore:

- *What is distinctive about leadership in the children's centre context and how does this compare with other thinking about leadership?*
- *How do children's centre leaders' professional and personal biographies influence their understanding of leadership and the development of their leadership capability/ capacity?*
- *What is the approach to leadership in Children's Centres?*

This will be done through explaining and justifying the research design in three stages: Firstly, the philosophical stance behind the chosen methodology and my understanding of the epistemology which informed the study which together provide the research paradigm; secondly, the methodology which dictated my chosen methods and thirdly, the research methods I deemed as appropriate and ethical in addressing the research focus. I then move on to discussing my approach to data analysis and conclude with a discussion of the trustworthiness of my approach.

4.1. Philosophical Stance

Blaikie (2000) uses the term 'logics of enquiry' to define the ways in which theories can be tested and generated in order to make the contribution to knowledge required of a thesis. The implication of this is that the researcher needs to start with a '*close scrutiny of that logic and the philosophical assumptions upon which it is based*' (Stainton-Rogers, 2006, p76). She goes on to suggest that investigating the philosophy of the approach involves '*two main aspects of enquiry, ontology and epistemology*' (p79).

Ontology is the study of the nature of existence, or as Stainton Rogers (2006) states, the nature of what things are and their being in the world... '*what it consists of, what entities operate within it and how they interrelate to each other.*' Bryman (2004) offers further explanation by making a link between entities and actors. He argues about the nature of entities, whether they have a reality which is external to the actors themselves, or whether the reality of entities is built up from the actors' own perceptions and actions. Whilst recognising that there are many views on ontology, writers offer a variety of terms for the ends of spectra to define the various stances

taken and dichotomies presented, e.g. objectivism and constructionism (Bryman, 2012), positivist and constructionist (Stainton-Rogers, 2006), objectivism and subjectivism (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006), positivism and interpretivism (Gray, 2008) and realism and nominalism (Cohen et al, 2011). Each of these dichotomies reflects an approach to distinguishing an emphasis on a world that is permanent and unchanging from one that changes and emerges. As Cohen et al (2011) put it, realism takes the view that objects in the world have an existence which is independent of human perceptions, nominalism assumes that *'the only world we can study is a world of meanings, represented in the signs people use to think and communicate'* (Stainton-Rogers, p79).

Bryman (2012) suggests that ontological assumptions will influence the way in which the research questions are formulated. My research questions focus firmly on the nature and distinctiveness of leadership, and the influence that participants' lives have on that leadership. In Bryman's (2012) terms, an objectivist approach would suggest that individuals are acted on by the cultures and organisations in which they work and the research focus would be on the *'formal properties of the organisation or the beliefs and values of the members of the culture'* (p35). Alternatively, a constructionist approach would focus on the *'active involvement of people in the construction of their reality'* (ibid).

This study takes a constructionist approach, which is supported by Hujala (2004) whose study presented a frame where leadership is perceived as socially constructed, situational and interpretive in nature. Her study findings showed that the context of leadership defines the role through the language used and the culture of the setting. Fairhurst and Grant (2010) suggest that this approach is more likely to endorse an attributional, *'eye-of the- beholder'* view of leadership. This is because what counts as a *'situation'* and what counts as the appropriate *'way of leading in that situation are interpretive and contestable issues, not issues that can be decided by objective criteria'* (Grint, 2000, p3).

Goethals (2004, p273) suggests that constructivist approaches to leadership *'invert the traditional focus upon the objective 'truth' of the leader and/or situation and followers'* being more concerned with how the *'phenomenon we call leadership'* is recognized, the reason behind its perceived importance and why *'certain models of explanation occur at specific points in time and space'*. I adopt this approach with caution because this work recognises that there is an objective reality. I think that leadership exists within the real world despite the difficulties

raised by Selznick (2012) '*Leadership is not a familiar, everyday idea, as readily available to common sense as to social science. It is a slippery phenomenon that eludes them both*' (p22).

Leadership has material consequences. In this context it has an impact on children and families; it works with the physical and as Bryman (2012) notes:

> *It is necessary to appreciate that culture has a reality that that persists and antedates the participation of people and shapes their perspectives, but it is not an inert objective reality that possesses only a sense of constraint: it acts as a point of reference but is always in the process of being formed (p34).*

Whilst ontology identifies the stance taken on ways of being or becoming, epistemology focuses on the problems of knowing. Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) point out that defining one's own epistemological perspective is important for several reasons. Firstly it clarifies and explains the research design, and secondly it helps in the recognition of whether or not a proposed design will work for its research focus. Stainton-Rogers, (p79 in Potter 2006), outlines some questions that we might ask about the nature of knowledge such as '*what can we know, why do we know some things and not others, can knowledge be certain?*'

As with ontology, there are a number of different ways in which epistemologies can be classified: positivist and interpretivist (Bryman 2012), positivist and constructionist (Stainton Rogers 2006), objective and subjective (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008) nominalist and realist (Burrel and Morgan 1979) or realist and constructivist (Dunne et al. 2004).

A positivist epistemology calls for the application of natural science methods in studying the social world. Bryman (2012) suggests implications that this position has for research.

- – Knowledge must be confirmed by the senses
- – The purpose of theory is to generate testable hypotheses
- – Knowledge is gained by gathering facts that provide the basis for laws
- – Research must (and can) be conducted in a way that is value free

In contrast, an interpretivist epistemology highlights knowledge as something produced by people. Stainton-Rogers (2006) states three things about knowledge from an interpretivist perspective: Firstly, knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. This does not mean that the real world does not exist, but that knowledge obtained about it is a representation of the real world influenced by whoever is making that particular claim, what they choose to make a claim

about, how they interpret their observations and what stories they tell others about what they know, Secondly, there is not just one true knowledge (or reality) and there is no way we can get direct knowledge of the real world. Knowledge is made real by the meaning that we make of it. Thirdly, knowledge is a means by which power is exercised. Those who create knowledge gain power.

Grey (2009) suggests a third position, that of subjectivism. From this stance, knowledge is neither there to be discovered or constructed through society, but where *'our own mental activity is the only unquestionable fact of our experience'* (Richardson and Bowden 1983, p552). Knowledge is constructed, but not from the relationships between people and the world outside, but internally from *'within collective unconsciousness, from dreams and from religious beliefs'* (Grey 2009, p18).

This study takes an interpretivist approach since the knowledge gained will inevitably reflect the participants' interpretations which will offer only *'local, historically* contingent' (Gilbert, 2011, p138) meaning. The research questions ask for explanation and understanding through the telling of stories. As Bryman (2012) suggests, in adopting this stance, interpretation happens at more than one level. This thesis will not just 'lay bare' the participants' interpretation of their own world, but will also provide my interpretation of that data.

The study has thus been defined as coming from a constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology.

4.1.1. Qualitative and Quantitative approaches

Next to be considered is the nature of the data that my research will produce. Using Sikes' (2007) qualitative and quantitative divide is a helpful way of explaining my approach to this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest that by the 1960s separate camps emerged based on researchers' assumptions about the nature and purpose of research in the social sciences.

> *Quantitative scholars relegated qualitative research to a subordinate status in the scientific arena. In response, qualitative researchers extolled the humanist virtues of their subjective, interpretive approach to the study of human group life (p2).*

This debate no longer seems to be of such importance. Schwandt (2000), for instance, states that the distinction between the two paradigms is no longer meaningful and Biesta (2010)

argues that '*research in itself can be neither qualitative nor quantitative; only data can properly be said to be qualitative or quantitative*' (p.98). Ercikan and Roth (2006) suggest that this polarization of views limits enquiry and further suggest that instead of focusing on differences researchers should focus on the 'construction of good research questions and conducting of good research' (p.15); this is supported by others (Howe, 1988; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Clearly, addressing different questions requires different methodologies and methods. What is key is choosing the appropriate approach to the study in hand (Bryman, 1992; Mason, 2006; Morgan, 2007; Sikes, 2007).

Bryman (1988) suggests that quantitative research, also described as scientific, positivist and objective, is associated with the production of numerical data which is reliable and consistent. This data reflects the actual event being looked at and discounts the interpretations of the observer. Methods associated with this paradigm include surveys producing quantifiable data, experiments, testing and assessment, structured observations and questionnaires, analysis of previously collected data, and quantitative content analysis (Bryman, 1988; Ercikan and Roth, 2006; Cohen et al, 2007; Denscombe, 2010). Bryman, (1988; 1992), Mason, (2006), Morgan, (2007) and Denscombe, (2010) claim that quantitative researchers consider that their methods replicate those used in the natural sciences and therefore produce data which is quantifiable, reliable and consistent and that their research can test and validate theories that are already constructed.

Similarly, data produced by qualitative research methods can and should be collected using systematic procedures though it is often acknowledged that responses from participants are likely to differ on each occasion and therefore cannot be checked by another researcher. Similarly the data collection cannot be replicated - unlike the quantitative experiment which can be carried out by a number of people at different times, hopefully resulting in the same conclusions (Bryman, 1988; Bryman, 1992; Mason, 2006; Morgan, 2007; Denscombe, 2010).

Northouse (2010) argues that leadership is a complex process and despite the vast amount of writing on the subject, researchers continue to face major challenges in trying to understand its nature. It has been studied from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives and a wide variety of different theoretical approaches (Antonakis et al, 2004, Bush, 2011, Bass, 1990) which have been used to try to explain 'the complexities of the leadership process' (Northouse, 2010 p1).

In the early years sector there have been significantly fewer studies; nevertheless, the field is still described as complex (Aubrey,2007), problematic (Woodrow and Busch,2008), enigmatic (Thornton et al, 2009) and prone to multiple interpretations (Puroila et al, 2002). Avolio and Bass (1995) saw leadership as being embedded in '*nests*' of phenomena: the intrapsychic, the behavioural, the interpersonal, the organizational, and the environmental.

The complexity and uncertainty of the substantive area addressed by my questions makes quantitative investigation inappropriate. My view is that quantitative research on leadership in this context has too many shortcomings for my research questions – it cannot draw links between the multiple phenomena involved (Conger, 1995, Close and Raynor, 2011) to explain events and outcomes, it is poor at measuring interaction (Lantis 1987) and tends to focus on the notion that leadership is 'principally the product of a single individual or a relationship with followers' (Conger, 1998 p109). This is not the case in the early years sector where leadership is likely to be shared (Court, 1994, Kagan and Bowman, 1997) and distributed (Wanignayake, 2000).

Therefore, the interpretive nature of this work inevitably leads to research that is qualitative in nature. This particular choice of approach to studying leadership is reinforced by Bryman (2004) who suggests that qualitative research tends to give a greater focus on the ways in which leaders and styles of leadership have to be, or tend to be, responsive to particular circumstances.

> *Qualitative research offers a greater emphasis on the significance of the sector within which leadership takes place for styles of leadership and what is regarded as more or less effective.....Secondly, qualitative researchers tend to be more sensitive to the implications of particular circumstances for leaders and their* styles of leadership'
>
> (Bryman 2004 p752)

This thesis adopts a qualitative approach because this offers the opportunity for theory to be generated from the data, because the emphasis of the work is on developing an understanding through the interpretations of the participants and because my constructivist ontology implies that my interpretation of leadership comes from the 'interactions between individuals, rather than being 'out there' (Bryman, 2012).

Further motivation for this choice of approach comes from Jones (1995) who argues that qualitative research offers an answer to T.S. Elliot's (1934) question 'Where is the understanding we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?'[3] What qualitative research aims to do is to attempt to understand the meaning of things in the way that those experiencing them (including the researcher) interpret that meaning. In some ways this might be seen as a pursuit of at least knowledge - at most, truth. This therefore means a collection and analysis of the data emphasizes words rather that any kind of quantification.

4.2. Methodology

Having considered my philosophical stance, I come now to consider the specific strategy which will link my methods to my outcomes.

Cresswell (1998) invites us to choose between five tried and trusted different qualitative traditions. He compares: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. My chosen approach is narrative which is the study of individuals and their experiences as told to the researcher, in other words, the story of their lives. Denzin (1989) describes this as the '*studied use and collection of life documents that describe turning point moments in an individual's life*' (p7).

Cresswell (2007) suggests that there are a number of different approaches to narrative research: biographical study, where the researcher records the experiences of another person's life; autobiography, where the research participants record their own data and life history, which portrays a whole life. Bold (2012) classifies narrative according to three themes: autobiographical self-reflection, biographical data and representative constructions (fiction). Biographical data are collected and constructed by the researcher with '*the intention that they be as realistic as possible within the context*' (Bold, 2012, p11). She sees biography as a way of capturing others' experiences which are as true to life as they can be at a particular time and within a particular context.

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[3] T. S. Elliot, The Rock, 1934

The choice to follow a biographical tradition comes from a number of considerations: Firstly, it comes from my own interests, secondly from my values and beliefs and thirdly because I feel that this approach will be the most appropriate in addressing my research questions.

My own interests in the field stem from teaching on a National College of School Leadership (NCSL) programme, the National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL). This is based on helping leaders to reach a set of standards which then offers them a qualification which is intended to be equivalent to the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). The NPQICL was my introduction to thinking about early years' leadership, and during this programme I had the opportunity to work with a number of Children's Centre leaders. My background in schools and business had not prepared me to meet such a professionally diverse group, all of whom were carrying out equivalent roles and the vast majority of whom were women. I was fortunate enough to share some leaders' emerging thinking about Children's Centre leadership through supervising some of them in further Masters level study.

Reading biographies has never been a huge topic of interest for me. The exception was the auto-biography of Richard Feynman which was of particular interest because it served to explain complex thinking about natural science through telling stories. I think this was influential in my thinking that stories were an excellent way to help me learn. As a teenager, I had seen biographies as books to be read by older people (my father in particular) and as something that I would save for retirement. However, with the realization that there is less of my life left than I have already lived, I am struck by Kierkegaard's familiar comment about life being lived forwards and understood backwards and am increasingly interested in the stories that are told about lives and see this as one of the ways in which I might further understand leadership.

In thinking about values, Anderson (1998) says:

> *Values represent the intrinsic beliefs we hold as people, organizations, societies and cultures. Values are held close to our hearts and impact the decisions we make, the way we approach situations, the way we look at the world, and the way we process and reconstruct knowledge. The positivist approach to research has claimed to be value free….The qualitative research community, and anyone involved in human science research, recognize that it is impossible to do value-free research. Values, like politics, are ever present and will impact on the research process. Rather than deny their*

existence, prudent researchers will attempt to understand and make explicit, their
personal values while at the same time, seek to understand the values held by people,
organizations or cultures being researched or supporting the research (p167).

Anderson's (1998) view that value-free or value neutrality is impossible to sustain or even attain, especially when using qualitative research methods, is supported by others (Macdonald, 1993; Carr, 1995; Boyd, 2000). It is important therefore that qualitative researchers make their values visible from the outset.

My own values stem from a 'low church' Anglican upbringing where basic New Testament principles of love, fairness and self sacrifice applied. My father was a lay reader who lived his life and ran the family with extremely strong principles of right and wrong. He also held very strong right wing views which now seem discordant with his Christianity. From him I developed a style of thinking which was critical though animated by a desire to reach a rather black or white conclusion. This was not helped by my educational studies in natural sciences. Whilst at university, my politics changed towards socialism but I still find grey areas difficult. I see taking an interpretivist approach to this research is part of my development. My values are rooted in social justice – in believing that we should have a fair society, where the more vulnerable need more support and that programmes designed to achieve this, such as the early intervention ethos embodied in Children's Centres, are a good thing. On their sitting room wall, my grandparents had framed a credo which I think encapsulates my values and the way in which I try to be:

I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good, therefore, that I can do or any
kindness I can show to any fellow creature let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect
it for I shall not pass this way again. (Unknown)

This set of values and interests led me to thinking about the lives of others and thus to a biographical approach. I feel that this approach is the one that throws most light on the research questions.

Musson (2004) tells us that biographical methodology:

... is firmly rooted in an interpretive framework and specifically in the symbolic
interactionist paradigm which views human beings as living in a world of meaningful

objects – not in an environment of stimuli or self constituted entities. This world is socially produced in that the meanings are fabricated through the process of social interaction' (p34).

My research into peoples' stories will help me to understand the *'personal, social and historical context' (Creswell 2007, p57)* in which they are working.

Fairhurst and Grant (2010) argue that one way to study the field of leadership is through biographical or other discursive approaches. For me, it is the 'eye of the beholder' perspective that I feel will be most useful in my study. Karp and Helgø (2008) suggest that it is the life stories of leaders that provide the context for their experiences *'Over and over, people replay the events, dreams, and personal interactions that are important in their life, attempting to make sense and find their way'* (p885). Shamir and Eilam (2005) suggest that leaders develop their own concept of their leadership through life experiences and *'the way they are organized into life-stories'* (p403) and in constructing their stories they can express and explain themselves and their motivations in a direct way.

Altheide (1994) writes that life history as a narrative research method has had a permanent impact on sociological thought and method:

> *'Biography, with a concern for the way a specific individual perceives and construes the world also moves the sociological interpreter toward the subject's perspective rather that the observer's point of view' (p298).*

Goodson and Sikes (2001) write that if the researcher wants to know 'why, how, what's it like and what does it mean to you' they may be well advised to look at biography. These expressions reflect my questions well about the nature of leadership in Children's Centres and how children's centre leaders' professional and personal biographies influence their understanding of leadership and the development of their leadership capability/ capacity.

4.3. Methods

Within the scope of this study there is not room to explore participants' full life histories – nor do I feel I have the skills to do them justice. However, in order to answer my research questions, I have taken a two part approach where each of the participants was interviewed twice. The first interview was to develop an understanding of the life stories of the participants and how their life

stories have contributed to their becoming leaders, the second took a more structured approach in order to understand their perceptions of the nature of leadership in the Children's Centre setting.

The next stage of the research was then to decide how to go about selecting and inviting participants and then to select the appropriate methods to gather data.

Goodson and Sikes (2001, p24) suggest that there are six main approaches to selecting participants:

- Purposive: where participants need to meet certain criteria.
- Opportunistic : Where participants are met by chance
- Convenience: Where access to participants is easy
- Snowball: Where participants inform the researcher of others who might be happy to participate
- Homogenous: Where participants have a common experience, attribute or characteristic
- Extreme case : Where a participant has attributes which are strikingly different from others in the sample population

I selected a group of participants who were all Phase One Children's Centre leaders within Northtown. This selection raises two potentially problematic issues, firstly the characteristics of the participants themselves, and secondly, that they are all from the same local authority.

The participants were chosen because I wanted to work with people I already knew, or knew of, reasonably well and who had worked with the University on the National Programme for Integrated Centre Leaders. This would ensure that strong relationships/ friendships were already in place. I felt that this would allow for a more immediate establishment of the rapport that is essential for exploring their biographies and for the potentially intimate nature of the conversations to follow. I am aware that this has its in-built difficulties because I am also part of the participants' story (Taylor, 2011). The solution is that the researcher must:

> *Be reflexive and self conscious in terms of positioning, to be both self-aware and researcher self-aware and to acknowledge the intertextuality that is a part of both the data gathering and writing processes (p9).*

My aim is to do this throughout the thesis, I have offered some of my own story and by including my thoughts, I have endeavoured to write in a way which demonstrates a reflective approach to my study.

I anticipated that the group would all be women for two reasons: firstly, of the 50 or so participants on NPQICL, only three were men, none of whom are still working in the sector, and secondly, women's perspectives on leadership have been largely neglected and '*in early childhood, where women dominate the field and generally assume the leadership positions that are available, little research has been undertaken*' (Rodd, 1998 p10). This makes it a purposive sample.

In finding out who would want to be involved, I had an initial conversation with Margaret, the participant who I perhaps know best, who then suggested five of the other participants. Bronwen also invited Hazel to take part without checking with me first. Whilst I could have rejected her, I chose not to, which with hindsight may have led to a degree of disharmony amongst other participants. Though not realizing it at the time, I had stumbled into a group of seven people who were very closely linked and had worked together over a long period of time. This had the impact of my work being discussed between the participants on an informal basis. It also meant that I was working with people from very different professional backgrounds. This was fortuitous since I think I did not originally appreciate the differences in Children Centre 'ownership'.

Details of each participant's pseudonym, their professional background, their anonymised settings and employers at the time at which the study was conducted are set out in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Summary of participants' professional heritage and current employer (2011)			
Participant	Professional Heritage	Current Employer	Centre
Sarah	Social Worker	Children's Charity	Kingswood
Margaret	Teacher	Local Authority	Ashville
Jane	Teacher	Local Authority (School)	Barton
Bronwen	Social Worker	Primary Care Trust	Fulton
Janice	Nurse	Children's Charity	Pavilion
Louise	Nursery Nurse	Local Authority	Castle
Hazel	Nursery Nurse	Community Trust	Bedgrove

Secondly, notwithstanding the convenience of the approach, the fact that the participants all came from the same authority is not without its concerns, but because context is so important in leadership (Antonakis, 2004, Sergiovanni 2000), I wanted to work with participants who carried out their leadership roles in the same context. I felt that this would mean that themes drawn from the data would be affected by similar local social and political influences. As it turned out, this was partly true though their catchment areas had different characteristics.

What the research highlights, though, is a very specific Local Authority context which participants portray as adversarial. Inevitably this has influenced the way in which they lead. Had the research been in a different authority, the data may well have been different and led to different conclusions. Given that the aim of the research is one of exploration and construction, it does not try to provide generalisations about children's centre leadership, merely to provide some insights into the leadership of the seven who were chosen in a specific context.

4.3.1. Ethics and the ethical consent process

According to Denscombe (2010, p331), there is an expectation that social science researchers conduct their research in a way that is ethical, that is to say in a way which

- *protects the interests of participants*
- *ensures that participation is voluntary and based on informed consent*
- *avoids deception and operates with scientific integrity*
- *complies with the laws of the land*

Protecting the interests of the participants, i.e. ensuring that there is no harm to them is of particular concern in narrative research because they are asked to:

> *Share more personal and identity-laden data than in traditional, nomothetic research. As a result, they incur particular kinds of risks. Participants might not always be the best judges of the potential consequences of their participation.*

> (Smythe and Murray 2000 p329)

Wellington et al, (2005), emphasise the importance of sensitivity due to the implications of differences in social power between researchers and researched. Having previous knowledge of, and, in some cases, friendship with participants has its own additional risks. However, Taylor (2011) suggests that a friendship with participants allows for the establishment of more empathetic relationships between the researcher and the observed, but it highlights both the *'usefulness and the dilemmas'* (p4) of that relationship. She quotes Coffey (1999) who says that

> *Friendships can help to clarify the inherent tensions of the fieldwork experience and sharpen our abilities for critical reflection … They do affect the ethnographer's gaze and it is important that that should be so (p47).*

As Taylor (2011) suggests, prior knowledge of the participants has had a significant effect on my perception of them as people and in the way that I have interpreted their stories. Exactly what that effect has been is hard to specify. I believe that the usefulness of the relationship is that there was little difference in terms of social power - if anything I felt that the power lay with the participants given that without their stories I had nothing to work with. I felt that the relationship was also useful in that I hoped that they would present a story to me which was honest and unembellished. In terms of Coffey's (1999) dilemmas, I do not know in what light

they felt I wanted to see them. It may have been that they wanted to present themselves in a positive light given the ongoing relationships between us. On hind-sight, this was an area which might have been discussed further with them, though that discussion would again have had its intrinsic risks.

To counter these risks and ensure their interests were protected, I felt that I needed to be aware of the potential risk of participants sharing too much information and of their potential vulnerabilities. I was prepared to stop the interview if it became appropriate. I was resolute in my belief that each person should be treated with integrity and respect as a person, not as an object or a means to an end. In so doing I aimed to make sure that I listened carefully to what was being said and commented appropriately as part of a conversation between professionals. I made sure that my participants were aware that I felt that my interpretation of their narrative would be carried out with humility. Participants were given transcripts of their interview and offered the opportunity to reflect on what they had said and to decide whether or not this might form part of my interpretation - though I suspect the transcripts were too long for them to do much other than skim through them. I considered allowing participants to see the final version of this report – however I felt that they would too easily be able to identify their peers and thus participant confidentiality would be lost.

In the actuality, I was surprised by how much I was trusted to use the data provided in the way that I saw fit by all the participants. Participants were genuinely interested in sharing their life stories and their thinking, to the point that some said how talking about their lives caused them to reflect on their practice and how they welcomed the opportunity to share their work. Two participants were particularly grateful for the opportunity to talk – something which I found deeply humbling but highlighted to me the fine boundary between a qualitative research interview and a therapeutic personal encounter.

Homak (1991, p7) suggests that in ensuring that participation is voluntary and based on informed consent, the researcher needs to ensure that:

- *all pertinent aspects of what is to occur and what might occur are explained to the participant.*
- *That the participant should be able to comprehend this information.*
- *That the participant is competent to make a rational and mature judgment*
- *That the agreement to participate should be voluntary, free from coercion and undue influence.*

Initial telephone conversations inviting participants to take part in the research took place. After the calls, participants were sent a sheet outlining the proposed research and explaining what would occur. This was necessary to ensure informed consent. A further call was made later to confirm their willingness to participate and for me to answer any questions concerning the process itself. I believe that the onus was on me to use my discretion and sensitivity in inviting people to participate. Participants were assured that their identity would be protected as far as possible in the research report and that all information contained within the data would be anonymous and confidential. All recordings and transcripts were held securely in electronic or paper form.

At the start of each interview I once again re-iterated the point about volunteering and the opportunity to withdraw their data. I felt that clear statements of informed consent ensured ethical propriety and tried to bear in mind Hart and Crawford-Wright's (1999) instruction that:

> *It is possible to enter someone else's world in many ways and for many different reasons. It is important that when we do so, we understand and accept our own motivations, and do everything possible to enhance that world rather than harm it (p213).*

Given the nature of the participants and the significance of their roles, I had no doubt of their ability to comprehend the information presented or their competence in making rational and mature judgments.

I have tried to act with ethical integrity through being as honest and professional as I can be in how I have dealt with participants and their data (Denscombe, 2010). I have acknowledged the contributions of others and have analysed my data in as fair a way as I feel that I could. I am, however, aware that the conclusions from the study are inevitably based on a retrospective analysis and reconstruction of the leaders' personal and professional stories and therefore could be subject to errors of omission and intrusion.

4.3.2. Data Collection

The data that this study draws on derive from 14 interviews with 7 participants, amounting to approximately 28 hours of interview material.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) consider that a one-to one interview is the most common approach to collecting biographical data. The most important feature of interviews is perhaps the richness

of material that they can produce (Janeham, 2000). Through the interview process participants (interviewers and interviewees) can *'discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live'* (Cohen et al., 2007, p.351).

Bold (2012) identifies three types of interview strategies: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. I considered each of these approaches in order to identify the ones that best suited my purpose.

Structured interviews are conducted to obtain answers to direct questions written beforehand by the researcher. This type of interview is *'like a questionnaire which is administered face-to-face'* (Denscombe, 2010, p.174). When conducting structured interviews researchers use one set of questions with all interviewees, often offering a choice of answers to closed questions, thus enabling more straightforward comparative data analysis (Fontana and Frey, 2005; Silverman, 2006) which lends itself to the collection of quantitative data (Denscombe, 2010).

Researchers using semi-structured interviews also have a list of issues and questions to be addressed but are more flexible about the order in which they are addressed and more significantly they *'let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher'* (Denscombe, 2010, p.175). It is asserted that researchers need to develop rapport with the interviewees when carrying out semi-structured or unstructured interviews (Seidman, 2006). Of course it would be extremely difficult to conduct an interview if the interviewee did not feel at ease with the interviewer, and, as discussed by Denscombe (2010), the identity of the interviewer can affect what is said by the interviewee.

In unstructured interviews the researcher introduces a theme or topic and then lets the interviewee talk freely around their ideas. Fontana and Frey (2005) describe the open-ended, in-depth interview as *'the traditional type of unstructured interview'* (p705). The purpose of in-depth interviewing is to understand the lived experience of others and the meaning they make of their experiences (Seidman, 2006). Denscombe (2010) asserts that semi-structured and unstructured interviews are on a *'continuum and, in practice, it is likely that any interview will slide back and forth along the scale'* (p.175)

Seidman (2006) suggests the *'Three Interview Series'* (p16) to be used for in-depth interviews: 1) focused life history, 2) details of their experience, 3) reflection on the meaning. He states

that an acceptable length of time that each of these interviews should last is 90 minutes, as an hour is too short a time and two hours can seem too long.

Whatever length of interview is planned, it is important that this is stated to the interviewee before the interview takes place (Janeham, 2000; Seidman, 2006; Silverman, 2006). In-depth interviews are used as a method of data collection in life history research (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Plummer, 2001). Life historians recognise that *'lives are not hermetically compartmentalized'* because all parts of our lives, personal and professional, overlap and affect each other (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p2). In-depth interviews provide a holistic view of interviewees, and their unstructured character enables interviewers to get a broader perspective than can be gained from a highly structured interview.

Seidman (2006) claims interviews are the most appropriate method of discovering other people's stories about their lived experiences and can produce data in detail allowing the interviewer and interviewee the opportunity to discuss issues in depth. Denscombe (2010) adds that interviews are a very flexible method of data collection as *'developing lines of enquiry'* can be followed as they occur (Denscombe, 2010, p192) and issues can be clarified as they arise to eliminate any ambiguity.

Conversely, Janeham (2000) questions the validity of interview data as interviewees are sometimes reluctant to tell the whole truth for a variety of reasons including embarrassment and fear. In addition, memories of events and feelings are not always accurate, especially regarding events that took place a long time ago. This is hard to counter, however I felt the strength of the relationship I had with participants mitigated any sense of embarrassment or fear. I cannot know about accuracy or truth relying only on my interpretation of their presentation of the whole truth about past events. Though interviews can be conducted relatively quickly, transcription and analysis are very labour intensive; this needs to be considered before undertaking interviews (Janeham, 2000; Seidman, 2006; Silverman, 2006; Denscombe, 2010).

My data collection took place over two interviews with each participant. I had a two pronged approach developed from the focus on my research questions. These mirrored the first two of Seidman's (2006) three interview series. I felt that the proposed third interview was expecting too much of the participants' time, and that the interviews carried out sufficient space for participants to reflect on meaning. This was supported by making the transcripts available to participants after each of the interviews and inviting their reflections on them

The interview questions are outlined in Appendix One. In the first interview, I took an unstructured, conversational approach where the opening question was to ask participants to tell me about themselves and their personal biographies. Later in the interview I moved on to asking about their career history and how their understanding of the nature of their leadership had developed.

Having carried out some analysis on the first interview, I realized two things, that there were some gaps in life stories and that I needed to be more explicit about leadership in order to be able to address my research aims. This meant that the second interview took on a little more structure. This in turn consisted of two parts – firstly specifically tailored questions to fill gaps in individual biographies, and secondly specific questions about their thinking on leadership which mirrored my learning from the literature review. The specific questions are again outlined in Appendix One.   This approach is adapted from what Scheibelhofer (2005) calls problem centred interviewing. This takes place in three phases, preparation – an intensive phase of reading about the social phenomenon under study, the interview itself and interpretation of the data. The approach basically combines an open narrative with prepared questions in the later stages of the interview:

> *This method tries to bridge the individual constructions of meaning on the one hand and the influence of societal conditions on the other hand (Scheibelhofer, 2005 p 19).*

The interview starts with an opening question that effectively asks for a narration. Rather than intervene through further questions, the researcher's role is to encourage participants to reflect on their own story. Scheibelhofer (2005) suggests that the first phase gives participants most freedom to construct their own experiences. After finishing their response to the initial question, Witzel (2000) suggests that questions can be asked that are linked directly to the narration. This was another reason for having two interviews. Having established a good rapport, I did not want to create a sudden change of atmosphere. Subsequent questions, or in the case of this study, the second interview, focus on themes already prepared, allowing the study to concentrate on *'specific aspects of a certain phenomenon, which might not be tackled by interview partners in a classic narrative interview setting'* (Scheibelhofer, 2005, p 22).

The advantages of this approach are that participants are able to structure their own experiences without needing to prepare in advance. Additionally, as a researcher, I went into

the second interview in a far more informed way re-reading the initial transcripts in depth before that interview.

Scheibelhofer (2005) recognizes limitations to the approach. She explains the demands put on the interviewer in having to change styles during the interview. I felt this was mitigated by having separate interviews. The problem then arrives on how to interpret the data given different methods of collection, in particular linking the findings from the narrative part with those from the prepared questions.

4.4. Data Analysis

Each interview was audio-recorded and the interviews were transcribed. Transcription was outsourced. I considered that the process of transcription could have formed part of the research itself being aware of Tilley's (2003) word of caution that a transcript is not a *'truthful replication of some objective reality'* (p751). This was addressed in a number of ways. The transcriber employed was recommended by the University's research centre (Tilley, 2003), I made reflective notes after each interview and used these when I listened to the recordings again a number of times editing the transcriptions until I was comfortable that they represented the interviews that I had conducted. This was in line with Merrill and West's (2009) approach, which identifies stages that involve close reading and re-reading, making summary notes about each life story and starting to code the transcripts, and the approach of Cresswell (2007) who suggests that writing notes on transcripts helps in the process of exploring the data.

I felt challenged when it came to the analysis of my data. I was conscious that I needed to make the most of my data and to be able to present participants' views in a coherent way (Hunter, 2010). Cresswell (2007) suggests that because qualitative research is largely intuitive, data analysis may well *'fall back on insight, intuition and impression'* (p150). To counter this, there is an implied need to apply a rigorous approach to that analysis.

Reissman (2008) suggests three possible ways of analyzing interview transcriptions; structural analysis, dialogic analysis and thematic analysis. Structural analysis looks at how participants use speech to construct themselves and their stories (Reissman, 2008). It investigates the nature of language itself focusing on units of discourse such as stanzas and clauses within speech. I felt that this approach was too detailed for this study. I was not so concerned with *how* participants said things, rather in *what* was being said. Dialogic analysis focuses not so much on

what the participants said, or how they said it, but on the construction of stories through the involvement of the researcher. Reissman (2008) suggests that the outcome of this approach is a story where the interpretation is left to the reader. Though I felt that this would be an interesting journey to follow, it would not help me sufficiently to provide some form of answer to the research questions posed.

I thus chose a thematic approach to the analysis of my data where the emphasis is on what was said by the participants. Bold (2012) suggests that this is the most effective route to take when the researcher has a clear focus and interview questions clearly lead participants into providing the information that is being sought. Thematic analysis is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as *'identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data'* (p79). Its purpose is to organize and describe data in a degree of detail. Themes relate the data to the research question. My approach then followed the three stage approach of Merrill and West (2009), *'noticing relevant phenomena, collecting examples of those phenomena and analyzing those phenomena in order to find patterns'* (p132).

Firstly, I read through the biographical interview transcripts in detail and produced a short summary vignette of each of my participants; these are given in the following brief chapter on their lives. The continued reading and re-reading allowed me to notice relevant phenomena. I made notes on a separate sheet of what I saw as relevant headings. Each transcript was read in turn and new themes were added and existing themes combined to give a more accurate description. Using highlighter pens, I then went back to my scripts in order to collect examples of those phenomena. I then used a spread sheet to create a rather large table of attributable quotes against those themes. This approach allowed me to see emerging patterns and it also highlighted gaps in stories that allowed the shaping of the second interview.

The transcripts from the second interview were treated in the same way. Once again, themes were identified. Subsequently, the themes from the two interviews were combined which meant the discarding of previous topics and the development of new ones until, through a lengthy iterative process, the themes that follow in Chapter Six were identified.

I considered using a computer programme to support the analysis and to this end I attended a training course in NVivo. I initially felt that this might have allowed for a more sophisticated level of data management and interrogation (Lewins, 2008). On the training programme I found that learning to become even a competent user would take me too long. Others point out concerns

about such an approach, for instance Lewins (2008) suggests that the software may take more time to use than not to use, but more importantly, St John and Johnson (2000) have concerns that the use of such packages may lead to rigidity in coding and may distract the researcher from the real work of analysing the real depth and meaning of the data. Some examples of the approach taken to data analysis are presented in Appendix Two.

4.5. Validity and Reliability?

Though rooted in a positivist perspective, validity and reliability are two factors that should be considered in research (Patton, 2001). Reliability generally refers to the idea that the results of a study can be reproduced using the same methodology and validity to the truthful nature of the results, i.e. were the means of measurement accurate and did they measure what was intended (Golafshani, 2003).

Clearly, these terms do not work in this study where 'measurement' is an irrelevant term and the narratives presented are likely to be presented differently to another interviewer without the unique relationships that exist between me and my participants. The stories presented are open to interpretation and they cannot be judged to portray a single truth. The identification of themes and analysis will also be different; however, the modest scope of the study did not intend generalisation or replicability. It was simply an exploration but it could not ignore Lincoln and Guba's (1985) question, '*How can an inquirer persuade his or her audience that the research findings are worth paying attention to?*' (p290). In answer, Golafshani (2003) suggests that the quality of a study needs therefore to be judged by its *'paradigms own terms'* (p601).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the essential criteria for quality in qualitative paradigms are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. They argue that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Shenton (2004) offers a number of suggestions as to how credibility might be established. Amongst these are the adoption of research methods well established both in qualitative investigation and in general, the development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organizations before the first data collection dialogues take place; tactics to help ensure honesty in informants when contributing data; iterative questioning and the examination of previous research findings. Johnson (1997) suggests that if trustworthiness can be maximized or tested, then a more '*credible and defensible result*' (p. 283) may lead to generalizability – or in Guba's (1981) terms, the second factor, transferability.

Graneheim and Lundman (2004) give some general help in this area, suggesting that transferability can be facilitated through giving a 'rich *and vigorous presentation of the findings together with appropriate quotations'* (p110). This feels too simplistic – since even if this is done, the data generated from my project will inevitably be specific to a small number of people in a small number of settings. It would be wrong to claim that these would therefore be applicable in a wider context. Erlandson et al (1993) believe that even conventional generalizability is never possible since all observations are defined by the specific contexts in which they occur. Denscombe (2007), however, suggests that although each case may be unique, it is also an example within a broader group and, as a result, the prospect of transferability should not be immediately rejected. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that it is up to the reader of the research to make the transfer – however in order for the reader to make that transfer, the researcher must ensure that sufficient contextual information is given. Shenstone (2004) suggests that this contextual information can be made clear through being specific about the approach taken, in particular about numbers of participants involved and the methods used to collect the data.

The third criterion to be addressed is that of dependability. In a positivist context, this would be referred to as reliability. Reliability is about ensuring that the research can be duplicated with the same methods and participants. In qualitative work, this is problematic because the data given by the participants in response to questions may well change (Marshall and Rossman 1999). There are a number of factors that could influence this, for example the relationship between the participant and the researcher or simply the mood of the participant at the time. In order to address this issue, Shenton (2004) suggests that researchers need to view their research as a '*prototype*' and to be very clear on providing detailed descriptions of the processes used in the report. He suggests that the work should include sections on the research design and its implementation, describing what was planned and executed on a strategic level; the operational detail of data gathering, addressing the minutiae of what was done in the field and a reflective appraisal of the project, evaluating the effectiveness of the process of the enquiry undertaken (p72).

The fourth criterion is that of confirmability – the study needs to be able to confirm that the data presented is the '*the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher'* (Shenton, 2004 p 72). Miles and Huberman (1994) consider that a key criterion for confirmability is the extent to which the researcher can admit their own position in the research. A detailed methodological description should enable

the reader to '*determine how far the data and constructs emerging from it may be accepted*' (Shenton, 2004 p72). Table 4.2., below (adapted from Shenton, 2004) demonstrates how this study responds to these points.

4.6. Summary

This chapter has outlined the philosophical stance behind the study. It has shown the researcher's philosophical stance as one of constructionism leading to a qualitative, interpretevist paradigm. The methodology deemed appropriate to the study is narrative with a specific focus on biography. Methods used are initial narrative interviews supported by a semi structured interview framework to form an adaptation of problem centred interviewing. The ethics of this approach have been explored. The thematic approach to data analysis has been explained and a discussion on the trustworthiness of the study has been offered.

The next chapter will introduce the participants and give a brief account of their personal and professional biographies.

Table 4.2. Provisions made to address Guba's (1981) four criteria for trustworthiness

Quality Criterion	Possible provision to be made by the researcher	Provision made in the study
Credibility	Adoption of appropriate, well recognised research methods	Well recognised methods have been adopted
	Development of early familiarity with culture of participating organisations	The researcher has spent much time with participants and in their settings
	Tactics to help ensure honesty in informants	Rapport was clearly established with participants
	Iterative questioning in data collection dialogues	The second interview allowed participants to re-examine their thinking about leadership
	Examination of previous research to frame findings	Relevant previous research forms part of the literature review
Transferability	Rich and vigorous presentation of the findings together with appropriate quotations	Findings are presented richly and supported by appropriate quotations
	Provision of background data to establish context of study	A background chapter establishes the context and detail of the study
Dependability	In-depth methodological description to allow study to be repeated	An in depth methodological description is provided in this chapter
Confirmability	Admission of researcher's beliefs and assumptions	The researchers beliefs and assumptions form an integral part of the report
	In-depth methodological description to allow integrity of research results to be scrutinised	An in depth methodological description is provided in this chapter

Chapter Five: Brief lives of the participants

This brief chapter serves to introduce the participants and gives a brief outline of their personal and professional biographies. Through these biographies, it is hoped to present a picture of who the participants are, their personal stories and a brief account of their professional heritages. The chapter then outlines how they have got to their current position and something of the nature of the setting in which they work.

5.1. Sarah

Sarah was born in Northtown to a white mother and Yemeni father, who she never met. Her biological father died when she was five and she was brought up by her mother and stepfather in what she describes as a white working class family. The family were without a stable home, until Sarah was eight, living with various friends and relatives and with Sarah attending a variety of schools. Though her stepfather worked, she says that money was always tight. Her older brother lived with her maternal grandmother and it wasn't until Sarah was 10 that they all moved together into one house.

She '*occasionally*' attended secondary school in Northtown, became pregnant at 15 so left and went to a school specifically for pregnant teens. At 17 she had another child and describes her life as '*a bit chaotic...without any education*'. At that point, her relationship with the children's father broke down and she felt that she wanted more for her children than what she could offer them on benefits. She got a role working in a community crèche programme for one day a week. Marriage led to the birth of another child. She took on a temporary post as 'residential social worker' in a children's residential home while her husband was at university. She liked the title of 'social worker'. She was offered a permanent role in the children's home, but asked for redeployment into the role of a social work assistant. The opportunity arose to take a social work course which was a two year programme resulting in qualification as a social worker.

Her practice focus was on disability – she noticed that most of her clients were white British and felt that there were clearly groups in her area that were not receiving the appropriate support. This led to her first step into management - Social services were asked to give out money under section 17 (Children Act 1989) and a team was set up to manage this. Sarah became project

manager and '*managed all the services underneath which were housing and Local Authority, which in some sense were multi-disciplinary already*'.

She was headhunted by a charity that worked with asylum seekers. She describes having had '*housing officers and managers on the team, I had social workers; I had advisors and the challenges of applying for funding*'. The charity provided services for 26 local authorities and Sarah was responsible for a turnover of £2.5m.

Though the local authority were keen to have Sarah back as a social worker, she successfully applied for a Sure Start local programme manager role in Fulton working for a children's charity and has stayed with them in a role that has steadily increased in size and responsibility.

5.2. Margaret

Margaret was less forthcoming about her personal biography. She was born in the north of the country. Her father moved from the south leaving his family behind. He worked as a foreman in the woollen mills until he was made redundant. Margaret saw this as a difficult time with her mother having to support the family. Her father eventually became a postman, and latterly a school caretaker until retirement. Her mother was a teacher who came to the profession later in life when Margaret was 10.

Margaret says that she always wanted to teach – she spent a lot of time babysitting for her siblings and by the time she was 15, she had regular jobs looking after children and going on holiday with them. This was instrumental in seeing teaching as a natural career. She didn't get the A level grades needed to study English for a degree as originally intended and therefore applied to a local teacher training college. She says that:

'*I'd often thought I might end up in teaching because of what my mum did. My mum was a very passionate teacher. She'd always wanted to teach*'.

Margaret's first role was as a reception teacher in an infant school where she stayed for two years. This was followed by a promotion into the nursery class at another primary school where she also gained responsibility points for nursery liaison / community liaison. She then took maternity leave and wanted to return to a job share. This was not granted by the school's head so Margaret moved to a different primary school. She was advised of a temporary vacancy for a

teacher in charge at one of the units in Moulton (a newly developed Northtown suburb), so she moved into the nursery there for a full term.

This was a very different way of working which Margaret enjoyed but when the secondment was over she went back full time to yet another school as teacher in charge of the nursery. This lasted for 18 months when she applied for a teacher in charge post back at one of the two units in Moulton. Her application was successful, but rather than joining the nursery as planned, she was asked to cover the maternity leave of one of the co-ordinators. This was a promotion and eventually became a permanent role where Margaret stayed for 16 years.

Margaret was forced to move on when the setting closed but it was around this time that the Children's Centre movement was starting up. The local authority (her employers) invited her to take on one of the Children's Centre co-ordinator posts and this remains her current role leading four local authority centres.

5.3. Jane

Jane was born in Northtown, where her father was a police officer and her mother was a book keeper. Family life revolved around work and she says that there was not much money around in the family. She described being around family members with a strong work ethic. When she was 4 she spent some time at a nursery school and '*hated it, absolutely*'. '*I remember mum taking me through a churchyard on the way there and me grabbing hold of the headstones and saying 'I'm not going! I'm not going! I'm not going!*'

She describes her interest in learning and teaching developing through being interested in the world around her and by spending time with her younger sister. Her sister attributes her success at school to Jane's teaching ability.

Jane's secondary education was interrupted by a year long illness involving regular stints in hospital. It was while she was there that she met a nursery nurse who had been her babysitter in Jane's early childhood. Jane had considered becoming a nursery nurse herself, but was told: '*look, if your O' Levels work out okay don't think about doing nursery nursing, do teaching.*'

Jane's O' levels were fine and though she attended an interview for a nursery nursing course she decided instead to carry on with A' 'levels becoming Head Girl in the process. At this time she led a lot of activities and assemblies working closely with the school staff and gaining an

insight into what teaching was like. She says that she knew by now that she wanted to work with the very youngest children and was accepted onto a teacher training course at a local college.

Jane did two teaching practices in Nursery and Reception classes in challenging schools and got her first role at a Northtown Primary School. After a year there, Jane started feeling dissatisfied that she had been in schools all her life and moved into the youth service at a time when there were a number of initiatives engaging children with special needs into youth clubs. This introduced her to home visits to encourage parents to allow *what they perceived as very vulnerable children coming to the disco on a Friday night*. She also became involved with special schools because that was where many of her *'clients'* came from.

Though interested in youth work, Jane felt that the youth service was rather vulnerable and so took a role at a primary school but kept in touch with the youth services through summer play schemes.

Jane went back into the early years through becoming involved in setting up a social services day nursery aimed at children in the care of the local authority who were to some extent vulnerable. This was her introduction to working with other agencies because other staff she worked with were from social services, whereas Jane was still employed by the Education department. Shortly after this, Northtown opened six brand new nurseries and Jane got the role of opening one of them. She again became involved in home visiting and attended a lot of training.

After two years, she applied for and got the role of leading the under 5 service in Moulton, working with another co-ordinator (Margaret) and a social worker. This represented a shift in working patterns; the centres were open from 8am to 6pm for 50 weeks a year. She felt that the Moulton Townships were way ahead of their time – multi agency working was the norm and the work was exciting. The flexibility of the role was helpful as she also got married at this time and started her family. She remained there for 20 years until its closure. She came a close second in applying for the Children's centre coordinator role at Ashville (which Margaret got) and about two months later, the retiring head at Barton school asked Jane to apply for the headship. She expresses her mixed feelings from the time but because Barton had been earmarked to become a Children's centre she saw that it had *'lots of potential'*. She has now been there for eight years but has faced some significant challenges particularly around the social diversity of the children and families using her Centre.

5.4. Bronwen

Bronwen was born in Northtown, attended a local primary school then went to a girls' grammar school which became co-educational and comprehensive while she was there. She is the oldest of three, the middle brother being a member of the communist party – who she feels she influenced, and the younger brother who she describes as being wealthy – *'well he just made loads of money. I bet he votes Tory! He's just loaded with houses all over the place'.*

In her third year at secondary school the school went co-educational. Bronwen left school after A' levels and became a cashier in a bank, purely to make money because she didn't know what she wanted to do. She had thought about doing social work because of her sense of social justice but training was not available until the age of 21.

Whilst working at the bank, her political activity and interests developed – she joined the International Marxist Group (where she met her husband to be) and became heavily influenced by feminist literature citing Rosa Luxemburg and Shulasmith Firestone. She wrote for Spare Rib and regularly had her articles published. During this period she also started her family. She then took her social work degree which led to her becoming a qualified social worker. The opportunity to gain a qualification was seen as useful in terms of being able to get a job.

Bronwen found the degree course interesting and it reinforced her political ideology around poverty, deprivation and injustice. Her first role as a social worker was in a neighbouring county where she felt she was put in touch with the reality of that ideology. She gained most satisfaction through helping people to be able to change their own lives. She spoke of her frustration that the capacity to change much was limited , that she felt *'wishy-washy'* in just patching things up where she felt her true belief ought to be that society has to sink into anarchy and suffering before it will really change.

After nine years of being a social worker, she felt that she could do more. Despite her large case load (35 families) she felt she was not making enough difference. She specialized into becoming a children and families social worker and took a role as team manager. From here she moved into a senior service manager role (which she describes as a locality manager) managing 10 work teams under 10 managers. This last job was applied for because she did not want to be managed by any other of the applicants, feeling that she could do a better job than they could.

Reading about the potential of the, then new (2002), Sure Start local programme inspired Bronwen to apply for a programme manager role - she felt it was a risk because of the perceived short term nature of the programmes – but that it was an opportunity to put her 'time and effort where her mouth was'.

Bronwen joined the Fulton Sure Start programme which was run by the Northtown Primary Care Trust (NHS). After four years of working from the caretaker's house at a local school where everything was delivered from one room and her office in a back bedroom her current centre was built and she was heavily involved in the design and delivery of the building project.

In addition to being programme manager at Fulton Sure Start centre, her role currently encompasses the management of Weston (under the local authority) and Easton (PCT) Children's Centres.

5.5. Janice

Janice is originally from the West Midlands. Her father worked in the plastics industry which was expanding at the time. His job moved to the Welsh borders in the seventies where the industry was moving into large industrial estates created on unused land. She is the first child of her father and the second of her mother, having three 3 younger siblings.

She found moving to Wales a tough experience particularly with her '*strong midlands accent which she felt made her stick out like a sore thumb*'. She knew however, from the age of 10, that she wanted to be a nurse saying that she was influenced by watching Doctor Kildare on TV.

Janice did not feel encouraged to be a doctor, however, never feeling clever enough. She failed her 11 plus and went to a girls' secondary modern school on the Welsh borders. She had a great time there '*doing what I wanted to do*'.

 After a year there, she was offered the opportunity to transfer to the local high school but by then she had '*built up a huge hostility to the education system and the high school and absolutely loathed it* '. She recounts that at this time she started to develop a sense of '*class and injustice*' and this made her refuse to join what she saw as a '*status laden system*'.

Janice came out of school with CSEs, went to an FE college to do O' and A' levels and then entered her nursing training. She says that this opened up doors for her and broadened her thinking into areas of sociology which had not previously been considered.

Having qualified, she found the hospital system too restrictive saying that she was not good with rules and regulations. She hated the way that people were treated in hospital but was always interested in their lives:

> *Even as a young woman without any understanding of society or anything I used to think 'Well, why isn't anybody asking them what they're going home to?' or 'Why isn't anybody bothered what their home life's like?' or 'Why is that surgeon not bothered about, you know, whether or not he's going to send this person home and his wife can't cope?' So I was always, always, always interested in people's lives'.*

She took a role as a district nurse focussing principally on care of the elderly but, despite her interest in her patients' lives, she felt that geriatric care was not broad enough and moved into health visiting, enjoying not just the absence of disease, but the complexity involved in looking at family health and wellbeing. Because of the high infant mortality rate in Northtown at the time, her focus was on supporting the health and wellbeing of families and children under five but with an emphasis on using her nursing skills. She loved the work and spent 15 years in the role.

The health visitor role was enjoyable because of the opportunity to help people work with different agencies to meet their needs, but she recognised that despite the potential to signpost her clients to the 90 available agencies, many families would not get beyond the first one. She felt that moving into management would have helped her achieve more; however her move into this role was not to her taste.

A friend suggested that she should apply for a Surestart programme role at the children's charity run Pavilion Children's' Centre. Making the move was not without risk; it meant the loss of a substantial NHS pension, the loss of the *'nurse'* title and the loss of the opportunity to retire at 55. However, at the time, she felt that the benefits outweighed the disadvantages. Janice was excited to be involved with Sure Start feeling that this role would give her a chance to do what she had always wanted to do.

The role started off from an office over a butchers shop – she describes this as being perfect:

> *We were right in the middle of the community squashed all together in this building that health and safety staff, you know, tutted about every time they came, but there was something really right about the building and the optimism, I guess, of the team at the time and there was a huge amount of laughter.*

Subsequently she moved into a new building in the Leyburn community and her role now encompasses much of Sarah's former locality.

5.6. Louise

Louise was born into a very academic and political family in the West Midlands. She is the oldest of four children all of whom she describes as high achievers either academically or professionally. Her father was a widely published university professor and her mother was also well known as an artist and author in the field of horticulture. She says that learning has always been a big part of family life.

She left school at 16 having got good O'levels but she did not enjoy school describing her school as *'very Tory'*. Her father's work depended on funding which would only come from a Labour government. She says that *'all these people at school were spouting Tory propaganda and stuff and I didn't want to be a part of it and I didn't feel all these I fitted in.'*

At 16, Louise left school, becoming a *'bit of a rebellious punk'* and decided to become a nursery nurse mainly to get away from school and because friends from the year above her were being paid for the training. This influenced her decision. She trained at a college in the West Midlands where she was made nursery nurse of the year because of a really outstanding pass. She recognises her own academic abilities; she simply did not enjoy the type of education that her school had provided.

On completion of her training, she got a job at the Lighthouse Nursery Centre in a West Midlands City[4]. This was in a very multicultural area and she worked with people from Health, Education and a team of nursery nurses looking after babies from 6 weeks to children of school age. She says she does not remember much about other agencies involved, to her it was simply childcare.

After about two years there, the family moved to London and Louise moved with them. She became a nursery nurse with a charity in Notting Hill which at the time was a deprived area. She describes how working with drug users and people with other issues made her gradually more socially aware. Working with a teacher in the setting challenged her way of thinking about day care and made her really start to think about the work she was doing with children and families. Though she enjoyed the work, she quickly became bored, feeling that she was capable of doing more, and when her parents moved again, she decided to go back to the West Midlands.

Her next role in a parent's advisory centre involved supporting children with special needs and their parents who came in weekly to spend half a day with a teacher, physiotherapist, occupational therapist and nursery nurse. She describes this as a *'real multi-agency team to help to promote learning and help the children to achieve.'* This was another *'learning curve'* because previously she had not met children with disabilities or worked with children in the presence of the family. She was made redundant after 6 months and went on the dole. She describes this period as having helped her to understand loneliness and to empathise with others. During this period, she met and married her husband.

She says that she was never out of work for long and carried out a number of roles running a latch key project for the Manpower Services Commission for a year, looking after children in a community centre, giving them breakfast, walking them to school and collecting them at the end of the day. This developed into a role looking after a playgroup and supervising a diverse team from Manpower Services with a mix of qualifications, ages and races. She says that she found this mixture very interesting.

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[4] The Lighthouse Centre (not its true name) was one of the first combined social services and education resourced centres, it was run by someone who, at the time, was one of the key players in the sector.

After this, she took on a role as a senior nursery officer in a day nursery, which she found to be a horrendous experience because of the lack of quality and thinking about improvement that met her. The nursery did however run a parenting course which Louise eventually took over.

After taking maternity leave for her first child, she came back to work, but left three months later to have a second daughter. Having two children at home took Louise into a childminding role but she soon gave this up to develop a community playgroup in a school where the head teacher helped Louise to develop her thinking through discussing '*new ideas, high standards and early year's principles*'.

Her husband got a place at university to train as a teacher and Louise got a job working for a children's charity in a Northtown Family Centre (which is now under Janice's remit). She then moved to a role as a volunteer co-ordinator with the Young Mothers Support Service with the Northtown council. She set up and organised a volunteer project which supported young mothers, many of whom were care leavers, so they would go out to work. This role finished after two years and she then moved to Ashville as a senior nursery officer for five months, moving to become a deputy manager at Barton where she stayed for two years. After this, she moved to become acting manager of Castle Children's Centre which had just received early excellence centre funding - though she describes the ambiguity in understanding what this actually meant at the time. At Castle, she managed a team of nursery officers, a family support worker, health visitors and for the first time, a teacher. At this stage she did a Masters degree – as she says '*I'm always up for a bit of training*'.

She describes herself as being a key member of the team that brought Surestart to Fulton – recruiting Bronwen and Sarah in the process. She then got a role as the health and outreach team leader at Castle. The next role was as project lead for coordinating two other Centres with another two coming on board later on. When her husband had some serious health problems, she decided to take on a Children's Centre manager role where she now has a leadership position with responsibility for four Local authority centres.

5.7. Hazel

Hazel was born in one of Northtown's neighbouring towns. Her father was a sales rep largely working with the RAF and her mother was a legal secretary. Her parents had a strong work ethic and were devoted to their children. She is the youngest of three, with two sisters, one of

whom is a medical secretary, following her mother, and Hazel herself, says that she is in sales, like her father. She describes her role in the family as the negotiator between one quiet sister and the other gifted but rebellious one. The family were all involved in a community garden cooperative, running garden shows. On Sundays they sold gardening products from an old garage.

Hazel loved school and loved learning, but she says that she liked fun a little bit more. Her secondary school attendance was irregular – her older sister was at Music College and Hazel preferred to spend time with her and her sister's contemporaries.

She says that she has always been interested in children, suggesting that this interest came from being the youngest child, from doing a work placement with children and from having a large extended family where there were always children around her. She says though she didn't know what else to do, but the NNEB (National Nursery Examination Board) Diploma offered a qualification and with it came the opportunity to travel. She also thought that '*nannying sounded quite exotic*'. When at a careers talk at secondary school, she said she wanted to be a nursery nurse, hairdressing was suggested as an alternative but Hazel held her ground.

Having achieved the NNEB, Hazel decided to go to the United States. However, in the meantime, she met her future husband and her sights changed to London wanting to stay in the same country as him. Her first nannying job came through The Lady magazine and she moved to London, looking after three children and weekending in Margate with the family. She then moved to work for another family again with three children. This family paid for her to undertake Montessori training '*so that she would have something to do in the daytime'*.

After this, she decided that she wanted to move back to Northtown to be with her partner – she looked at continuing with the nannying, however she felt that this was no longer sufficiently challenging. '*I wanted to work with children obviously still and I wanted to make a difference. The big difference was I wanted to do things differently and make a difference to people's lives'*. She initially looked to the education sector but felt that this did not pay enough or offer enough of an opportunity to make a difference. She thought that the teacher teaches and the nursery nurse washes the paints.

She got a job in a Local Authority social services run day nursery because, unlike schools, she felt that these were about the whole child. She says that this experience was hugely influential

in her thinking – her work in London had been with privileged families, back in Northtown she came face to face with families in very different circumstances. At the time, she became interested in a new provision on the Bedgrove estate where education and childcare would be working together. She also took on the role of Union Rep because her nursery was shutting and she felt that the staff had no voice in being transferred to the new project.

She took some time off to have her family and then went to work as a seasonal crèche worker providing childcare for a local college. A setting inspector informed her of tutoring roles being advertised at another college – she applied and was successful in getting a part time role which eventually became full time and she gave up the crèche work. Whilst at college, she completed her adult teaching certificate and later a distance learning degree in early childhood sponsored by the college. During this time, she taught on the CACHE (Council for Awards in Care, Health and Education), BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) and NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) programmes.

Whilst lecturing at the college, the Sure Start initiative was announced. Hazel describes this as being everything she believed in:

> When it was first announced Sure Start was nursery nursing personified really. It was care, health and education. 'Integral provision' – that's how they announced it. I heard it…. I can remember it. You know when people go… 'Oh, do you know where you were when Kennedy got killed?' I know where I was when they announced Sure Start because I was in the car and I turned the radio up and I thought 'Oh, my god! This is it! This is the chance for everybody to prove it shouldn't just be in silos. It should all be working together,' and that was it, I knew at that point.

She applied for a Sure Start Programme Manager in her home town but was unsuccessful. The role went to a social worker which she sees as unsurprising given that the SSLP she applied to was run by social services. She met the manager at interview and was invited to apply for the deputy's role which she got and spent three years in a local programme run by Social services.

During this time, Hazel worked with Pen Green on their PEICL (Parents Engaged in Children's Learning) programme. This required getting a multi agency group together which she did in conjunction with Northtown Sure Start staff. She was hugely influenced by this and states that she wanted to roll it out as widely as possible.

A role came up at the Bedgrove programme which was a joint venture between a local community trust and the local authority and this is where she remains today as Children's Centre manager for two Centres, both of which are run by a community trust.

5.8. Summary

This chapter has briefly outlined the lives of the participants. It has described some of their childhood experiences which they saw as important to their development as leaders. It has highlighted some elements of the journeys participants have made to reach their current roles and presented background information which is important in understanding the data presented in the following chapter.

Chapter Six: Themes presented in the data

This chapter presents a thematised view of the data from the interviews conducted. The two interviews each have a separate focus, one biographical and the other with a specific leadership focus. However, the themes emerging from the interviews present a degree of overlap. Consequently, the data is presented as a single set of themes. The information presented needs to be considered in the light of the previous chapter, which offered a brief summary of participants' life stories, and in the context of Chapter Two which outlined some of the background to Sure Start and the policy environment in which the participants perform their leadership roles.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the selected method of data analysis aims to organise and describe the data that is presented, but as Boyatzis (1998 in Braun and Clarke, 2006) states, it is inevitable that it also interprets various aspects of the topic. The amount of data presented to support each theme varies. There are also different numbers of sub themes supporting each area. As Braun and Clarke (2006) argue, a theme is not necessarily determined by the space it occupies in the data but by the contribution it makes to answer the research question. Inevitably, the definition of a theme is in the power and judgement of the researcher and the themes presented will reflect that judgement. From the data, six themes and 19 sub-themes were identified. See Table 6.1.

The first theme is the Children's Centre context. This considers the participants' explanations and interpretations of the context in which Children's Centres operate and where they carry out their leadership roles. The second theme considers the significance for participants of leadership work with other agencies. The third theme looks at participants' approaches to leadership, focusing particularly on their perceptions of their skills and interest in building relationships. The fourth theme covers the desire of participants to make a difference to the lives of children and families with whom they work and have worked through their leadership of their settings. The fifth theme explores the personal and professional experiences which have shaped participants' views on leadership. Finally, I present data on who the participants are as leaders. This looks at their awareness of themselves and their leadership and demonstrates their reflective practice.

Table 6.1. Themes and sub-themes identified from the data

Theme	Sub themes
6.1. The Children's Centre Context:	The organisation of local provision
	Evaluating centre performance
	Knowledge is embedded in the community
	Children's Centres are not understood
	The special characteristics of Children's Centres
6.2. Multi-agency working:	Early career work with other agencies
	Difficulties of multi-agency work
6.3. Approaches to leadership:	Understanding staff and relationships
	Working with other agencies today
	Leadership style
	High expectations
6.4. Making a difference:	Improving the lives of others
	Being a rebel
6.5. Becoming a centre leader:	Influential childhood experiences
	Mentors, sponsors and role-models
	Professional heritage
6.6. Who they are as leaders:	Straightforward and honest
	The role of gender
	Are we really leaders?

In the text that follows, each theme is outlined and supported by representative quotes chosen from participants.

6.1. The Children's Centre context

We know, from Chapter Three, that context in leadership is of great significance and substantial information on the context has also been given in Chapter Two from policy and theoretical perspectives. Though there are some similarities, '*insider*' views offer a different perspective to that of policy. Sub-themes have emerged from the interview data relating to the participants' interpretation of context: the influence of the Local Authority in terms of how local provision is organised and how centres' success is measured, the participants' view that the knowledge needed to determine the core purpose for the setting lies within the community, and the general lack of understanding of the purpose and function of Children's Centres amongst wider society. The final sub-theme presents Children's Centres as liberating environments for leaders which allow a great degree of freedom and flexibility in the way in which participants exercise their leadership.

6.1.1. The organisation of local provision

The formal relationship between Children's Centres and Local Authorities (LAs) was presented in Chapter Two. In summary, the management of Children's Centres may be carried out by a variety of agencies; in this study we see a community organisation, a national charity, an NHS trust and the LA itself involved as lead bodies, although all Centres are funded by central government through the LA. Ultimately, the LA is responsible for the Children's Centres in its area (Ofsted, 2013). This sub theme explores the particular influence and impact of the Local Authority which has oversight of this diverse set of settings and the leaders who run them.

The shared view of participants was that leadership relationships between the Centres and the LA seemed to be hugely adversarial with those problems going back a long way. Louise, who runs a Local Authority Centre, suggests that relationships have not been good from the start:

> *I don't think the partnerships were set up properly. There was always that competitive feeling between the Sure Start local programme and the Local Authority that meant that actually never the twain shall meet.*

Janice offers something in the nature of an explanation for the origin of this discord. She notes that the Local Authority did not bid for SSLP funding when it was initially made available and consequently SSLPs received more money than the Neighbourhood Nurseries and other early

years provision. Northtown LA chose not to integrate neighbourhood nurseries into SSLPs (as was the case in some other Authorities) and consequently, Neighbourhood Nurseries and other providers felt that there was a lack of fairness in funding decisions.

Jane also suggests that there has been a longstanding antagonistic relationship with the Local Authority, a view with which Janice concurs, suggesting that the LA *'hate us'* (the successful Children's Centres) which she evidences in explaining how the authority have chosen not to involve Children's Centres in the Northtown's current 0-19 Children and Young People's Plan. She puts this down to jealousy:

> *I'm absolutely gob-smacked that they've not wanted to use us in any way really. It's almost like, we.... perhaps the most successful programmes – and none of them are Local Authority...are being kept at arms' length.*

The metaphor of physical distance is striking here, emphasising the problems in the relationship.

Janice implies an absence of joined up working in the authority. She thinks that the work of Children's Centres should be located sitting clearly within the Northtown's 0-19 strategy with LA leaders having a clear idea of the role of the centres and their relationships with other organisations. She says about the current situation:

> *You have a little bit of service delivery here. You have a bit of service delivery there. None of it is really joined up.*

In the development of children's services within this LA, the introduction of Multi Agency Teams (MATs) teams has added to the complexity. As we saw in Chapter Two, these have the responsibility for providing 'seamless and safe support to children and young people, giving them help at an earlier stage, rather than entering crisis services at a late stage', and are made up from a variety of professionals from education, health and social work (Northtown City Council, 2011).

Participants explained that they saw a real lack of clarity over the differing responsibilities between the MAT teams and Children's Centres; for instance, at the basic level, Children's Centres were set up to look after 0-5 year olds; MATs in Northtown have a remit for 0-19 year olds. Therefore responsibilities overlap.

All participants had something critical to say about the MAT teams. Janice praised them for their work with families where children are over 5 but criticised them for interfering with the work of the Children's Centres and for the impact that the competition for resources has on Children's Centre funding. Janice says:

> They need to leave us to get on with it...We can do the whole package in a Children's Centre of the nought to fives, they ought to just fund that properly so we can do it all. I mean there was a stupid MAT meeting the other week where they said 'We need to know how many families with nought to fives are being seen by the MAT team or how many we've not been able to see.' I said ' why don't you use that data to say this is how much more resource the Children's Centre needs instead of using it to say this is how many families you've not been able to see?'

Bronwen also pointed out a confused relationship between Children's Centre settings and MAT teams. Even when MAT workers are linked to a particular Children's Centre, they do not put their data onto the centre data base and neither do they register families. She suggests that the MAT teams do not see themselves as part of a cohesive service provision.

Bronwen suggests that the MAT teams are in the ascendancy in terms of current LA policy and that social workers may be introduced into the teams[5] . This was ironic as this was something that was desired by Sure Start but which never really happened in the development of Children's Centres. Bronwen also suggests that MAT teams will be asked to monitor Children's Centre contracts so that, for instance, approval for outreach workers' engagement with families would have to come through the MAT team. Bronwen feels that this would not work for the Centres or the community, only for MATs because of the lack of knowledge of the locality amongst the MAT teams. Sarah is more pragmatic, she feels that she would like to work more closely with MATs and have workers in the centre because she believes that everyone is working towards the same goals. The difficulty for her is that she sees the main focus of the teams is on five to nineteen year olds which comes at the expense of earlier intervention:

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[5] This has happened to the extent of including social workers (prevention and intervention) into the teams

I can't take on all cases but nobody... [from a MAT team] *...has ever registered a child here. Nobody's ever brought a family here. So they're not focusing on under-fives and they're not focusing on Children's Centres.*

Hazel sees the MAT issue as a big problem which is politically motivated from within the Council. She sees MAT as a duplication of existing services in some cases. She states that that where there was an original Sure Start programme, the MAT teams cover 5-19 because the Children's Centre can deal with the 0-5; however, where there was no original Sure Start provision, the MAT teams have responsibility for the whole age range despite the presence of Children's Centres in the locality. She puts this down to the lack of understanding of the work of Centres:

I went to the MAT team meeting a couple of weeks ago and out of the five people that were there, three of them didn't know what Children's Centres did. You can't be linking into a centre if you don't know what they do.

Hazel comes across as more pragmatic than other participants saying that she does not mind who she works with, citing MAT, the PCT, the children's charity and local organisations, as long as the community gets what it needs. However, she does get annoyed with the way in which the MAT teams present themselves to the Local Authority; she says they have used data from Children's Centres to make themselves look good. Last year, she says:

We got all the kind of paraphernalia about what they've achieved; they use Children's Centres' figures because it makes it look really good. So suddenly we are part of MAT, but then when it's the workers and the recruitment, then they don't want us to actually oversee them.

In this theme we see language used which seems to highlight a struggle for power and control over the provision of services. Other examples appear throughout the text. Hazel also sees that the introduction of these teams has added to the silo mentality in the authority with separate management of MAT and children centres. She gives an example of confusion and duplication.

A Government funded initiative called Minding the Baby[6] which is delivered by the NSPCC has a target audience of first time mothers under 25 who have complex needs. Hazel suggests that these workers could have been based in the Children's Centres, but instead they are working independently. She suggests that this means that effectively:

> *MAT, NSPCC and Children's Centres are fighting over the same client. Why duplicate that service? Why not give it to the people that know where it needs to be? So I'm not saying give it to this trust. Give it to the Local Authority if you need to or give it to the NSPCC let's say, but somebody up here at strategic level needs to say 'This is a brilliant idea. You're going to be able to give lots of people lots of attention, but we'll base you in a Children's Centre or we'll link you to a Children's Centre because actually that's where the midwifery services and the family support is.' It's not rocket science, is it really?*

This sub theme highlights what participants see as the strained nature of their and their Centres' relationships with the Local Authority and a sense that there is a lack of joined up thinking in how the authority carries out its responsibility for 0-19 provision in the city. The view from participants seems to be that MAT teams duplicate some of the work done by the centres and the Authority is seen as having missed the opportunity for synergy through either being situated within the reach areas of the Centres or having a clear remit to do what the Centres cannot do. Their formation seems to have exacerbated the problematic nature of the relationship between participants and the LA. The perception that MAT teams are in the ascendency perhaps reinforces the idea that Children's Centres are not well liked by the local authority. Hazel also questions the timing of the introduction of the MAT teams pointing out that Northtown seems to be centralising services at a time when the Government are devolving responsibility to local communities.

Hazel sums up the key leadership issues in terms of the organisation of local provision by highlighting the power struggles between Centre leaders and the LA, generally represented through the MAT teams. This struggle, together with the number of different initiatives involved in the sector, possibly leads to a lack of effectiveness:

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[6]http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/resourcesforprofessionals/underones/minding_the_baby_wda85606.html

Last accessed August 2013

There's a power struggle for who's in charge. I don't want Children's Centres to be in charge. I just want to be included and mainstreamed. I don't mind who holds the power as long as people get the right deal.

6.1.2. Evaluating Centre performance

Within the theme of Children's Centre Context, the second sub-theme focuses on participants' views of the performance measures placed on them as leaders. Ofsted and the Local Authority establish systems of measurement drawing on national indicators. Children's Centre leaders have an *'annual conversation'* with the Local Authority in which targets are set. Participants do not respond well to this. Bronwen suggests that having had woolly targets in the past, the authority now takes Ofsted targets and applies them to the Centres based on the Self Evaluation Form (SEF). She says that the LA is becoming more prescriptive about what Centre leaders have to deliver and the monitoring is becoming more oppressive, indicating issues around autonomy and control.

As far as the Local Authority's concerned, if it's not monitored, if it's not recorded, we ain't done it. So we don't have a choice. We've had the discussion, but there is no debate.

The measure of achievement most referred to was the need to get families registered in the Centres. Margaret recognised the importance of this, pointing out that '*you cannot look at the rest of the service delivery until you've got people to deliver a service to and know where they are'*.

Centres need to achieve a target of '*50%* (of engaging with families in the reach area) *to not be inadequate'* (Margaret) but this is seen as difficult by some staff since they are not used to quantitative measures being applied to their work . Again Margaret puts it succinctly:

People have been shocked when I've said to them 'If we don't at least register, never mind reach at least 60% it doesn't matter how brilliant our services are, we're inadequate'.

Only Hazel and Sarah specifically mentioned any of the national indicators, NI 072[7] for Hazel and NI 072 and NI 092[8] for Sarah, but these were not dwelt on at any length. Sarah and Hazel also cite the pressure imposed by having to meet Free Early Learning (FEL) targets, set by the government through which all 3 and 4-year-olds in England are entitled to 15 hours of free early education each week for 38 weeks of the year.

All participants argue that it is Ofsted, with its school-based approach to assessment and inspection (including a SEF for each setting), that is the key driver in the measurement of effectiveness of the settings undertaken through the auspices of the Local Authority. On the positive side, despite Ofsted's *'obsession with data'*, Janice says that inspections have been helpful in making her setting more focussed. She says that the original Sure Start did not provide value for money and that Centres were not set appropriate or meaningful targets:

> *We were given a set of sort of key performance indicators that you couldn't measure. I couldn't measure my contribution to those great big grand schema things, so we sort of bumbled along having a nice time...we were certainly engaging with some very, very challenging families, but the outcome focus wasn't there.*

Louise feels that Ofsted have been useful in picking up the need for an emphasis on taking people from her reach area forward into training and employment and she has been successful in setting up a work club with the support of a voluntary agency in response.

In contrast, Bronwen has a mainly negative view of quantitative measurement and points out the current *'woolliness of the core purpose'* and changing success criteria from Ofsted. She also points out the confusion which exists within Ofsted's own remit:

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[7]NI 072 - Achievement of at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage with at least 6 in each of the scales in Personal, Social and Emotional Development and Communication, Language and Literacy. (*DCSF data last accessed August 2013*)

[8]NI 092 - Narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest (source as above)

One of the things that you're supposed to do is you have a catchment area and you're supposed to register all the children between nought to five and their families with that Children's Centre. There's your baseline, but the inspectors have applied a different measure. ..It's either the total number of children in that area and they give you a percentage for that, or it's the percentage of the ones you have registered.

Louise makes similar points about registration and reach. She explains their importance but does not feel that they should be the main driver behind her work. She feels that this is what is being demanded by the Local Authority and they are doing it through '*waving the big Ofsted stick*'. She explains that when she goes to LA meetings she feels that everything is about Ofsted, leaving her '*distraught, angry and stressed*'. She suggests that this is because Ofsted are still assessing them as SSLPs with massive resources available. In fact, last year, budgets were cut by 15% and participants feel they are being asked to deliver the same as they have always done but with diminishing resources.

Participants have responded to this by, Bronwen says, '*working smarter*'. Sarah also highlights this issue; she says that people have to do more, because things are becoming more complex but she says that she doesn't feel that Centres are necessarily achieving more. Bronwen also suggests that Centre leaders are getting '*cannier*' with how they use the money that is not allocated to staff and buildings. She worries that if the cuts continue the centre will not be able to deliver their core offer. Whether it is as a result of the cuts or to do with participants' personalities, '*wheeling and dealing*' (Janice) has become an essential part of the way the participants do business. Bartering is a part of the day-to-day world and participants give evidence of exchanging services with other organisations in order to meet their core offer.

The ability to understand and produce numerical data is seen as absolutely vital to all participants in their roles. This is because of the necessity of using data to demonstrate that they are meeting expectations, and because it allows them to see where work needs to be focused. The availability of data had previously been an issue for all the participants with different agencies being reluctant to share data; however, participants see that this situation is improving and at the time of the second interviews, the new Children's Centre profile had become available. This was produced jointly by the Public Health Intelligence team, NHS Northtown, and the Performance and Analysis Service of the Council's Children's Portfolio. This profile lets Children's Centre leaders look at a substantial number of indicators under the

headings of Population, Ethnicity, Deprivation, as well those from the Every Child Matters initiative.

In addition to the profiles, there is a computer system which captures data about registration and the nature of the family and the benefits that each family is taking. For Jane, in her school setting, data was seen as just as significant as for other settings. She explains that she can unpick data about individual children and link this with those parents that struggled to bring children to nursery, such as asylum seekers, or families in refuges. The emphasis on quantitative data does, however, lead to some concerns. For instance, Louise is concerned that the performance of her Children's Centre is being measured purely numerically. Though she is interested in numerical data and welcomes E-start, she explains that it is of little use without the understanding of the community. She feels as though the emphasis on numerical data is:

> ... just not everything, the be all and end all, I think we've got the balance wrong and I think that it should be about quality of the service and how we're doing things.

Sarah backs this up saying that she can see what the data is telling her, but this is not the whole story. She gives an example from the Slovak community:

> What that data doesn't tell me is that I've got a community here that is below that poverty line because they're not entitled to them benefits, that actually they're earning less than somebody would on benefits. No data's going to tell me that because the data will only tell me those that are claiming benefits. It doesn't tell me about the people that actually fall through holes in the nets but are still part of our community.

Bronwen bemoans the time taken by the authority to set up the data base but welcomes the profile now available because it supports her planning. Margaret's Management Board uses data and statistics to advise on where they think the priorities ought to be. These come from the statistics that are generated city-wide as well as the outcome of the objective setting annual conversation with the LA. Janice uses the data as the basis for an annual away day where the Centre's priorities are identified; a very significant part of her leadership role is to collect as much data as she can and make sense of it so she can present it to her team and then to other partners in a meaningful way so everybody can understand what their contribution is to the Centre's work.

This section suggests that though participants welcome the setting of clear targets and objectives, the targets being set are tangential to what they see as the important work of the setting. This again points out the difficult relationship with the Local Authority which is seen as creating a context of threat and oppression. As Louise puts it, using a metaphor of conflict to describe her feelings, *'I would rather be on the ground than at central team meetings because I don't like being 'beaten with a stick'.*

Participants see that an understanding of numerical data is fundamental to the leadership role in helping to interpret and define the objectives of the setting. After all, this is how their work is evaluated. However, they suggest that numbers do not stand alone; as managers they need knowledge of the community for them to make sense of their work and sometimes important aspects of their communities are not adequately represented in quantitative data. This is an important issue in its own right and forms the next part of this theme.

6.1.3. Knowledge is embedded in the community

The necessary closeness to the community in which they are based forms another aspect of the context in which Centres operate. As explained in Chapter Two, the whole ethos of Children's Centres is about working in the community, and this is where the context is particular to Children's Centres. The knowledge needed to deliver effective services is embedded in the community, not in the Centres' strategy itself. This implies, therefore, the need for the staff in the setting to understand the community in which they work in terms of understanding *'What's the community saying to you about what it needs?'* (Bronwen). Margaret speaks of the absolute necessity of knowing the area and the community but raises the difficulty that so much of that knowledge is just inside people's heads. People in the community also need to know what they can get from the centre which means the centre must effectively publicise what it does.

Participants feel that they need to build on the freedom to support the community in the most useful ways that they can offer. Janice describes a successful bonfire party which the community wanted. She saw this as being outside the core offer of the centre but as providing a service for parents and shows ways in which the social capacity of the area is being developed.

Sarah also says that the difference that Centres can make comes from local knowledge and that things work best where staff know the community. Hazel suggests *'if you've got local knowledge*

you can help local parents much better than if you have not'. One obvious example is the different languages spoken in the communities:

> *If I'm trying to relate to you and I can't even speak your language and I can't even pronounce your name right, what kind of confidence level is that going to impart?*

Jane says of her reach area that it is very diverse and as a result there are few who know it very well:

> *What I would say is I think we've got a broad understanding of the different issues that affect our community but I don't spend enough time out there to say I know the community well… Probably if we had more community knowledge there might be other things that we could do that'd be a bit more creative.*

Learning about the community and unlocking the knowledge it holds presents a number of challenges for leaders. It takes time, but engagement with the community, building trust and demonstrating how it can be supported it is a key measure of success for participants. Not having the resources to do this is problematic.

6.1.4. Children's Centres are not understood

This section explores participants' shared perception that there is a lack of understanding amongst the local community, the wider area and nationally about what Children's Centres are and what they do.

Sarah says that parents still see Centres as nurseries, despite the fact that she provides antenatal clinics and parents can see health visitors there. Others feel that schools (presumably meaning school leadership) do not want to understand what Children's Centres are for or what they do. Louise sees schools as focussing their efforts towards children in school whereas her Centre focuses on families in the context of the wider community. She was invited to become a community governor of a local school. She declined but offered to support their community partnerships and involve parents in the Children's Centre groups; she says that her letter was not even acknowledged. The lack of understanding is not seen as being restricted to schools. Margaret suggests that other professionals are only just beginning to see the usefulness of Children's Centres. Of interest, particularly in the current economic climate, is the example she gives of a credit union formed by a volunteer group which started off with an informal

conversation between Margaret and a client of the Centre and led to Margaret setting up a 'task and finish group' to establish a union in the locality. It was only the chance conversation that led to the community's understanding of what the centre could do.

Bronwen sees the lack of understanding of purpose from a much more political perspective and laments that centres are not linked with a wider political or policy agenda:

> *If they (centres) were valued and seen as something that could be a hub in a community and were located in natural neighbourhoods and were doing what they were supposed to be doing, it wouldn't matter quite so much that some of the services were being parachuted in as long as you've got that core team that were the face of the Children's Centre. But you don't even get that. You just get an increasing list of demands about you will deliver this, you will deliver that.*

This emphasises what Bronwen sees as a national lack of understanding of the role of Centres and illustrates how this lack of understanding leads to a less than effective use of resources.

Jane's role is particularly interesting because though she is Head of a Centre, she is also the Head Teacher of the nursery school and gets no additional funding or salary for the Children's Centre role. She is concerned for the future because she wonders if the Head Teacher's role will cease to contain any element of the Children's Centre leadership role because all the resources will be tied up in teaching and school business. She worries that there will no longer be any outreach or other activities such as family learning or partnerships with parents. The resources she has used have come from the school and the Early Year's team but it took her personal interest to make it work. Jane wonders whether this lack of understanding from the parents and the community means that in future the focus of her particular centre would just be on the activities of the school.

The participants' perspective is that it is not only schools that do not understand the role of Centres. This also applies to other professionals. One of the participants said that someone from the NHS had described Children's Centres as the *'face painting wing of the emergency services'* because they could only make cosmetic change.

This section has shown some of the difficulties that Children's Centre leaders perceive in working in a context where what they do, and the purpose of what they do, is not understood by the community or other professionals with whom they need to work closely.

6.1.5. The special characteristics of Children's Centres

In trying to define the context of their settings, participants made comparisons with other organisations, including those they had worked in previously. From their accounts of the contexts in which they work, it might seem that the environment is harsh and unwelcoming. Despite the problems faced, however, there is a sense that the context is very different from that of participants' original professions in many positive ways.

Prevalent amongst accounts of difference is the sense of freedom that participants felt initially when they took on their leadership roles. In leaving a health environment for Sure Start, Janice found a '*shedding of that professional stranglehold of 'you can't do that because…''*. As with Bronwen, she found that the Sure Start Local Programme offered the freedom to explore what needed to be done and decide her own ways of doing it.

Liberation from previously restrictive environments seems to be particularly important in comparing their current roles to previous ones. Janice particularly expressed this in recounting her experience of joining the children's charity Sure Start setting:

> *How you work they leave more or less up to you. They give you a set of values and ethics, a set of standards and policies, but then they don't constrain you, whereas Health I think were a lot more feeling that they'd got to say 'You can't do it that way' because that kept them as an organisation safe. It was like 'Hey, I'm free!'*

This sense of freedom is echoed by Hazel who joined the organization because she wanted to be where '*things come from the bottom up. They don't come from the top down and they're not imposed*'.

As a result of this '*freedom*', participants give examples of how they get things done through '*wheeling and dealing*' both as part of the freedom offered but also as a creative response to the financial cuts being made:

We do a massive amount of wheeling and dealing; if you wheeled and dealed in statutory services they'd be absolutely horrified. We wheel and deal mainly with other people in the community (Janice).

Participants give many examples of this sort of '*wheeling and dealing*'. Margaret for instance talks about swapping office space for receptionist support for her setting. Sarah talks about bartering being part of her world and having to work out what can be offered as a setting in order to get the things that are needed by the community. Jane talks about being creative with her resources, using school admin time and photocopying resources to support the outreach work of the centre. Her problem is a lack of people in her reach area to barter with. Louise describes not having any money and draws attention to the way in which this differs from schools that are self-contained. She uses the idea of building good relationships in the community in order to establish a position from which she can establish partnerships with voluntary organisations, for example, to offer mutual support for achieving her aims as a leader.

Another key difference cited is the lack of hierarchy in Children's Centres compared with other organisations. Bronwen suggests that one of the things learned from the NPQICL course was the importance of a flattened hierarchy. Margaret also talks of having a flattened hierarchy; she introduces the term '*distributed leadership*' and expresses surprise when her team introduce her as their boss.

Participants also emphasise the advantages of the Children's Centres' lack of authority over other agencies in being able to support children and families. Bronwen suggested that social care settings worked to a deficit model where '*you're always picking up the pieces when it's too late. You can do something remedial and you can pull it back, but it's so much easier and it's so much more productive to actually pick up really early*'. She sees that Children's Centre do this by having a direct impact on families however slight:

...if you can do something that just offers a slightly different opportunity or opens another door or crack in a window even that makes a difference to that person and then that has an effect on them, their children and their family, then that's what enthuses me.

She suggests that Sure Start Local Programmes offered a more 'unified purpose' and despite the unspecific targets, there has been the opportunity to create a vision in discussion and consensus with the staff team and the community.

Sarah says that the shift from a clinical view of the child in health services to a more holistic approach in Sure Start has been beneficial. She says that initially health visitors found it hard to assess parenting skills but with support from the Centre this is changing. An initial cultural difference with Sure Start was that originally they had money which gave them greater autonomy and more power. This meant that she got access to more senior people in other organisations. Interestingly she says that in working with senior health managers she could not understand why these senior people, who agreed strategically with the Sure Start aims, would not just tell their teams to get on with supporting the centres.

Jane however took a different approach and suggested that the context of leadership in a Children's Centre only differs from other organisations in that an understanding of the core business needs to be *'much deeper'*. Otherwise she says:

> *… it isn't (different)…Well, I suppose it does need a greater understanding of what your core business is, but I think if it's about getting the best out of whatever organisation it is, whether it's a school, a Children's Centre, a shoe shop or whatever. It is about have you got a quality… what's your mission? Who are your customers? What are you trying to achieve? What workforce have you got? What resources have you got? How best can you use them to be able to deliver whatever it is that hopefully is going to work?*

In making comparisons with other organisations, participants feel on the whole that Children's Centres offer a more liberating and entrepreneurial working environment than other agencies and they see the leadership of centres as being less hierarchical. This seems to contrast with an increasingly limited sense of power and autonomy in relationships with Ofsted and the Local Authority. One might also suggest that the Children's Centre model works with a credit rather than a deficit model in working with vulnerable families, looking to support rather than mend.

6.1.6. Summary

To summarise this theme of context, the participants see themselves as working in a difficult and changing environment beleaguered by multiple pressures, many of which are seen as coming from the Local Authority, and its response to national pressures. Participants see that a particularly negative impact on their work has arisen through the formation of Multi Agency Teams with unclear boundaries between the work of these teams and the participants' settings. They see that the targets and measures put on settings come from Ofsted and that they as

managers require skill in the interpretation of numerical data in order to be able to meet these targets. These targets are often at odds with what participants see as the real purpose of their work which is based on the needs of the community but not always reflected in national targets. They suggest that the identification of those needs requires a deep knowledge and understanding of the community. A particular challenge for Centre leaders is the lack of understanding of the role of Children's Centres prevalent amongst the professionals with whom they need to engage in order to deliver services. That said, participants make favourable comparisons with the organisational contexts of other professions and find their roles to be liberating and flexible. The impression left, however, is that this experience of relative freedom is changing because the environment is becoming more prescriptive.

6.2. Multi-agency working

This theme concerns the significance of working with other agencies (mainly from health, education, social services and the private and voluntary sector) in order to be able to deliver the core offer. Specifically, this means working with other people who are likely to have different professional backgrounds from those of the participants. This theme is divided into two subthemes, firstly, early career work with other agencies and secondly, the difficulties presented by multi-agency working. Prior to their current roles, all the participants had varying degrees of engagement with professionals from different agencies other than their own. They also talked about the excitement and passion generated by the opportunity of being able to work in this way. For many of them, this was the motivation behind wanting to work with Sure Start. Participants seem to be committed to the view that the best way to support children and families is through agencies working together, though they did express some of the difficulties involved.

6.2.1. Early career work with other agencies

All of the participants had experienced some form of either working with other agencies or working in non-traditional settings before taking on their roles as Centre leaders. This section explores some of those experiences.

Louise has perhaps the strongest thread of involvement in multi-agency working, and this spans her career which began with her first professional role as a nursery nurse in a poor, multi-cultural area of the West Midlands. Here, she worked with teachers and health visitors focussing on children in their early years in one of the first combined social services and education resourced centres.

Later, she worked with youth workers and had to recruit counsellors to support the young people who used the Youth Development Trust service. She was involved in meetings with Children and Adult Mental Health Services (CAHMS) and psychologists. She explained that she found this difficult initially because she was being asked to share with others what her project did. However, she felt that this enabled her to gain a greater perspective on the process of working with children, families and the various supporting agencies involved. She describes herself as being passionate about working in this way.

The multi-agency theme continued in her move to a Parents Advisory Centre where parents and their children with special needs came once a week to spend half a day with teachers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and nursery nurses. She saw this as 'a *really multi-agency team to help to promote learning and help the children to achieve'*. From this, her move into Castle Young Children's Centre (an Early Excellence Centre) offered the first opportunity of leading a multi-agency team. She was asked to develop partnership working with education and health where she managed a team of nursery officers and teachers.

The excitement she gets from the experience of educationally focussed early years staff and social workers working together to support families comes across very clearly:

> *We had the community teachers who worked with the toddler groups and the playgroups in the area. I was working with social workers and going to see families in situations where actually this was make or break – literally either the family stayed together or the children would be removed. So it was brilliant and the parents were fab and, you know, the parents were getting qualifications and going to uni and talking to students and it was really, really buzzing and I got the post full-time permanent while I was there, so I was able to really build on that.*

Participants' interest in working with other agencies did not always come through experience of working in a specifically multi-agency environment. At one stage in her life, Hazel's union activities brought her into contact with the then Director of Social Services. He was setting up a new venture in a district of Northtown which sought to get education services and childcare providers working together. Clearly the idea of agencies working together was on her mind. When it was first announced, she saw that the Sure Start movement embodied all the principles of nursery nursing that she believed in. Her enthusiasm during our interview was very plain. Hazel implies that the nursery nursing background is the natural lead in to multi-agency working. She saw that her background had enabled her to '*approach it from the social, emotional element'.*

Two of the participants in this study come from a teaching background – though Margaret's is perhaps different from a traditional teaching pattern. One of her first roles was as a teacher co-ordinator in a setting which was jointly run by education and social services. She describes this as being a useful background to her current work:

We worked very closely with other professionals such as health visitors – not particularly at that point midwives. I'm going back about 20 years and I guess if you think about it now it was almost like an early embryonic Children's Centre.

Jane's teaching background also led her to working in a non-traditional school setting. Jane was involved in the opening and running of a day nursery which was part of a primary school where there was both a teacher and a nursery nurse in each classroom. This nursery was particularly aimed at more vulnerable children but was seen as an *'early attempt to do a bit of multi- agency working ',* but not something that the head of the school knew anything about. The result of this was that Jane was given a lot of autonomy. Jane saw this as an opportunity to understand more about how agencies work together and she spent time:

... Understanding a bit more about what Social services day nurseries did and what was different and what was the same, a bit of multi-agency working I suppose because they all worked for Social Care whereas we worked for Education.

The opportunity arose for her to work in another new initiative leading the Moulton under-five services in conjunction with another co-ordinator (Margaret) and a Social Worker. The interview panel consisted of *'Social services, the heads of the onsite schools and people in the education department, people from the community and what have you'*. The number of agencies involved emphasises the seriousness with which the Local Authority at the time sought to achieve a multi-agency approach.

Again, she shows her eagerness for the opportunity to work in a way that she felt made the most difference to children and families:

It was a bit of a trail-blazer in the fact that it was a joint project with Social services. There was a child minding team on board, lots of multi-agency working. You couldn't not apply for it. It was just absolutely fantastic. They made a great decision in terms of looking for two people to run it because we were open 50 weeks a year 8 till 6.

This role occupied the next 20 years of her career and she left only because the Moulton provision was closing and would not be replaced by a Children's Centre. Clearly her enthusiasm for multi-agency working continued as she applied (unsuccessfully) for a job as a Children's Centre coordinator which seemed to her the natural way of maintaining the same kind of work.

(This was the position that Margaret now has). She took the headship of Barton school, not as a return to teaching, which might have been a traditional career trajectory, but because but it was going to become a Children's Centre:

> So that was my icing on the cake if you like. I thought 'Actually, although it's got this massively important and long history, we're entering into a new phase here – Children's Centre 2005 just as I'm appointed'. We've got potential to do lots of new stuff.

In contrast to Jane's excited approach, Janice presents a more rational account of her search for breadth in her work which she saw as only attainable through working with other agencies. Her first professional roles in nursing and subsequently district nursing were uncomfortable because of her feeling rule-bound. She moved into community care with the elderly, but again found it too restrictive. She therefore moved into health visiting. She describes how, at the time, there was a high infant mortality rate in Northtown so her focus became much more on:

> Supporting the health and wellbeing of families and children under five but using very much your nursing skills. I just loved it because I found it very complex, you know, looking at family health and wellbeing. It was much more than just the absence of disease.

The word 'love' perhaps demonstrates that she is equally passionate about this kind of working. Her health background focussed on wellbeing purely in clinical terms, whereas moving to health visiting led to her recognition of the need for agencies to work together in order to meet wider family needs. She recalls being proud of her knowledge of the 90 different agencies to which she could signpost a family, but was struck with the realisation that 'families who were struggling wouldn't get beyond perhaps the first main agency because it was all just too much'. She, again, was excited about Sure Start and its potential; she says she was encouraged by colleagues to apply for a Sure Start management role because 'it'll be right up your street'.

Coming from a social work perspective, Sarah's encounter with multi-agency working came quite early in her career. Her practice focussed on disabilities. She was conscious that most of the service users were white British but she needed to cover the whole of a service area which meant that she had to visit different community centres. This led to her taking on a greater number of cases of asylum seekers and their relatives and making a formal move within Social services to the Children and Families central team and a different service area. Because she

had developed a reputation for being supportive, people still came to see her despite the change in role and as a result of this she says:

> *I did some work with housing and then I managed the asylum team which in some sense were multi-disciplinary already. I was a project manager and had housing officers and managers on the team, I had Social Workers and I had advisors.*

Bronwen's social work background had followed a more traditional path. As a social worker she specialized in working with children and families but after some 20 years, having worked up to the position of area manager managing 10 social work teams, she describes having read about the potential of Sure Start and its way of working. She saw Sure Start as a way of being able to put into practice the things that she had been frustrated with in social work such as having to put children into foster care rather than being able to work with others to keep the family together.

> *...what I'd been saying for 20 years is that this (social work intervention) is too late. When a family comes to us with a child that's nine and 'We don't want him. He's not coming back. He's a little bastard' and they turn up and leave a child. You were then looking at age nine at that child being in foster care and probably foster placement afterwards.*

She felt social work was politically influenced; at one stage there was an emphasis on putting children into care as soon as problems were identified, this was followed by a shift towards trying to keep children at home as long as the parenting was 'good enough'. '*After Baby P and the Climbie report, the emphasis swung back to taking children into care as soon as possible'.* Bronwen felt that multi-agency working allowed for earlier intervention with a family because there would be an earlier, greater awareness of possible issues.

The two areas where participants' comments show most commonality are that they have all had experience of or interest in working with other agencies before joining Sure Start, and that they have a passion for the Sure Start approach having made a conscious decision to join SSLPs. Their leadership seems to draw on, and be nourished by this experience.

6.2.2. Difficulties of multi-agency work

This section looks at some of the shared difficulties experienced by the participants as they work with other agencies.

One of the issues presented by Sarah is that over time more families are in more difficulty and that their needs have become more complex. This has implications for leaders' abilities to resource their work:

> If a midwife's getting a more complex case and she's having to do more work on that and refer that to more organisations, that takes up more of her time. There's less organisations out there to refer people to … We've got less resources so we're not running as much. I haven't got enough staff to send them out to deal with everything. … At some point something's got to give, hasn't it?

Control over the work of other organisations does not always come under the remit of the participants. Margaret speaks of a number of different bodies who are delivering various bits of work for her, but which are not contractually bound to report to her. Louise currently manages the childcare manager and the breastfeeding support workers but she feels that, though she has responsibility to deliver services in her settings, it is difficult because 'what happens strategically centrally and what is led centrally by some of the managers isn't the way I would necessarily deliver it on the ground'.

Louise highlights perhaps more serious issues for her leadership role with a family support worker who is employed by a church team. Louise has responsibility for safeguarding in her reach area but she worries because she has no line management over the project:

> We've got a family support project in one of my areas. [She]… isn't particularly well trained, she's isolated, she's not working as a member of a team other than a church team and I think that's really dangerous. We're working in an area where about half the children are living in poverty and the church haven't made any referrals to Social services because they don't want to damage the relationship that they have with their families.

Not only does this make her vulnerable as a leader, it also shows the danger of complex networks of services where service providers may not be accountable to anybody with the appropriate expertise. Other issues arise for participants in looking at reach and registration. Sarah suggests that a lack of coordinated work with partners is one of the reasons for settings not being able to reach their targets:

I think strategically this city's missing a trick because when we're talking about reach, if you're a health visitor, you are part of a Children's Centre area. A Children's Centre is not about this building; it's about the services that are delivered to under fives in that area and it's about the co-ordination of that and if everybody had the same system and put it on, you would be reaching 100% and 100% would be registered and those that are most needy would get the services and I think we're not there yet.

Louise expresses the difficulties caused because different agencies have different priorities and targets. In this instance, she too talks about health visitors:

I have difficulty managing some of the breastfeeding support workers because they want to meet the lovely mums and carry on meeting the lovely mums and whilst they're meeting the targets by meeting the lovely mums, that's fine, but I'm saying to them 'If you carry on working just with the lovely mums, then there's going to come a point where we plateau and we're not actually making a difference.' Their argument will be that 'We are making a difference though because that mum would have given up at such and such if it hadn't been for me.'

This highlights that, though the participant sees the health visitor as doing her job, she feels that it is not really meeting the needs of the Children's Centre setting in terms of meeting targets for reaching new families.

Janice's frustration with the '*bureaucracy*' involved in working with other agencies shows in an example of trying to get information from health colleagues. She explains that she needs to know who all the looked after children are in her area. This data is freely available in one of her centres, whereas, in another setting, because Janice is '*not employed by the PCT*', this information is not given to her: '*That to me is absolutely ridiculous and prevents me from delivering the expected services under the 0-19 umbrella*'.

This section has identified particular difficulties in multi-agency working which some participants see as being concerned with the increasing complexity of families' needs and therefore the need to work with more agencies to meet those needs. Participants believe that problems arise because they have responsibility for meeting targets, but no formal control over those who deliver those services. Consequently there is also concern over the quality of the services delivered by other agencies; one issue is mentioned with a voluntary organisation but there are

several mentions of leaders' difficulties in relation to different and less inclusive ways of working by health.

6.2.3. Summary

The theme of multi-agency working illustrates a major part of the work of participants who necessarily need to work with other agencies to deliver the core offer. Though it is not without difficulty, participants have worked hard to develop their own understanding of the complexities of other agencies and to explain their own roles and the remit of Children's Centres to other professionals. Working with other agencies has been part of the early career experiences of all participants and this seems to have prepared them for their current roles. They sought out these roles because they felt they offered the opportunity for them to really make a difference to families and children. This forms the focus of the next theme.

6.3. Approaches to leadership

The third theme derives from participants' approaches to leadership through their skills and interests in building relationships. Firstly participants feel the need to *'really understand'* people and personalities, particularly those of their staff in order to manage them; secondly, they need to build relationships with other agencies in order to be able to meet the needs of the community; and finally, it is the relationships they build with others that seem to determine the leadership style of the participants.

6.3.1. Understanding staff and relationships

The data illustrate that participants really want to understand people. They also look to understand the personalities of those that they work with, stressing the importance of social and relational skills. Some of them state that understanding personalities is important in being able to lead others, with Hazel in particular using personality inventories to inform her leadership role. Margaret is convinced that her understanding of personality plays an important part of her leadership and she makes frequent mention of it:

> *My belief is that you've got to have structures and everybody needs to know what you're supposed to do, but actually if you haven't got the right personalities in the job you can forget it.*

She was pleased to have been able to recruit from scratch at the Children's Centre where she could *'unpick their beliefs to get staff who were committed to our way of working'.*

Louise reinforces Margaret's approach:

> *When we recruited to Moulton I didn't recruit in my own image. You want people who've got the same ethos and who want what's the best, but you want different skills and different personalities because that's what children need and what families need.*

This perhaps highlights two different approaches to the understanding of personality. Margaret seems to think that people in her team need to have the 'right personality' to belong (a recruitment - selection approach), whereas Louise sees being a leader as identifying the right range of personalities to make the team work.

Janice takes the idea of relationships further and uses the model of a family to explore her leadership. She saw herself as a parent figure when she first joined Sure Start, though decided after a while that this was not necessarily helpful:

> We did see ourselves as a family with me in the parent role. Then as the leadership team have developed our leadership competencies we thought 'that's not necessarily the right position to be in in terms of enabling the team to move on and develop themselves and be responsible for their own actions.'

Continuing the family themes, she uses a transactional analysis model to explain how that now she tries to:

> ...stay adult/adult where I can, but the team often would like me to be in parent mode and I try not to be. But they do... I think since I did my NPQICL I was able to identify where I needed to develop and so over the last two years it's been better because I've been able to be more authoritative because that was a bit of my style that was missing really.

This is particularly important for Janice because there are often real family relationships in settings:

> I was very aware that when we were dealing with issues in the workplace we'd have workers that were also service users or had been service users and now they're a worker but they're visiting a cousin and actually on a Saturday they're going to that parent's kid's birthday party who's on their case list.

So the understanding of relationships is paramount for Janice. She also makes clear that things have moved away from the team as a family and that she can no longer be the parent; however, that role has passed on to her 'daughter' Rachel.

Margaret describes the importance of building relationships with staff:

> One of the big things that I think makes the difference and helps me to be successful is the bit about relationships, building those different teams. Whether you actually direct their work in any way or just that you make those links.

Yet she also describes this as one of the hardest parts of her role because of the complexity of the partnerships she needs to establish. Jane sees this as a challenge too and looks at ways of building relationships to '*influence forward movement*'. Louise talks about building relationships in terms of making things happen but she also identifies some of the inherent difficulties. She says that leading a setting could be taken as an administrative task but that it needs to be approached in a way that recognizes that:

> *The people are what makes it happen… and I think it's that relationship with the people that makes things particularly difficult because if it was just an administrative task I could go through it and I could tick the boxes, but actually I care about the people I work with. I want them to enjoy their work, I want them to achieve in their work and that means input and it means dealing with emotional stuff and that takes up a lot of time.*

There are numerous examples given of how participants' teams members have developed and changed as a result of this focus on relationships. Bronwen describes her joy in having staff leaving her who have embraced the Sure Start approach:

> *I think the things that have given me greatest pleasure really are people who've left… who just in conversation talk about something that's happening in the new place they work and they go 'Yeah, but that's not right, is it? That's not very Sure Start-y,' and they've kind of embedded that ethos.*

Hazel describes success in developing aspirations in her staff recruited from the reach area, and changing their values. She illustrates this by describing the daughter of one of her support workers as being the first from that family to go to university. She also described how many of her staff who were born and brought up in the setting's catchment area have moved house because they want to be in a '*better area where for instance people do not swear as a matter of course*'.

Louise describes how having good relationships with staff has helped her to develop their sense of social justice:

> *I've always had really, strong working relationships with staff I've worked with and we've negotiated and worked as a team and planned together and had an on-going*

conversation about things. We just keep fighting and fighting and fighting and the staff team would feel a similar sense of social justice to me.

And Jane spends a lot of time with staff with staff asking:

'What do you think about that?' or 'What about this?' and getting a bit of a view from people. And I do try and encourage staff to take a bit of a step back and look at, you know, what the children are doing.

Again this illustrates the ways in which participants' relationships are developed but staff are encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions.

Bronwen talks about the importance of relationships in a slightly different way; for her the key aspect is about trust and respect rather than management and she sees herself taking a 'hands off' approach to relationships:

...how I lead is I trust people to do what they say they're going to do and I expect them to do it and actually it's very much a hands-off process... If they're not doing it, that's when I start scrutinising. If you don't trust people to do what they know they should be doing you're micro managing all the time and you're fire fighting.

Hazel takes her interest in people to a more theoretical level, citing her use of the Enneagram[9] as an essential part of her understanding of others:

I use it with staff because it helps them learn about perception... it gets people talking and understanding where their partners might be coming from and that's life changing.

She continues:

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[9]A personality test based on numerology and invented by Gurdjiif and Ichazo during a mystic trance

Source: 'A Brief Report On The Origins Of The Enneagram', Draft from the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Doctrine and Pastoral Practices, 10 October 2000, corrected 23 October 2001http://www.natcath.org/NCR_Online/documents/ennea2.htm

I'm interested in the staff as people, not as employees. I'm just nosy. I'm fascinated by people and I like to know why they do what they do and I like difference.

Despite the comment about being nosy, Hazel presents herself as taking the Enneagram very seriously which reinforces how much emphasis she places on understanding people.

This focus on relationships indicates a way of working with staff that is about their development, not about performativity, and characterises the approach that setting leaders take in thinking about leadership. The relationships they form seem to be based on trust and encouraging team members to develop a sense of what's right so that they gain autonomy. It mirrors the approach that Centres seem to take in working with their client families. The analogy is helpful. The role of centres is to help families to help themselves and, in Janice's case in particular, the leaders role with regards to their staff, as with that of a parent towards their children, is to support and encourage them to grow and develop independence.

6.3.2. Working with other agencies today

In their work as Children's Centre leaders, participants are required to work with other agencies and this section explores how their leadership role enables them to lead others from other professions in order to deliver services.

In Sarah's accounts of her leadership she works with other agencies through helping them develop their understanding of what Children's Centres are about:

I think it's been about changing culturally the professions of others, their hearts and minds about Children's Centres. I'd done multi-agency before because I'd worked with housing and with health so, but I don't think I fully understood the complexities about people's culture, which I feel I understand a bit more now, professional culture and the differences within that. I think for me it's been really satisfying as a leader to see that change

Promoting relationships with other agencies is built on an understanding of the complexities of professional cultures. Sarah sees one of her key successes as bringing in midwife support to the setting. As a result of this there are now no antenatal clinics in the GP surgeries; all that work is now done in the centre. This is important since it means contact is made with the

families before the child is born. Had the clinics been in the surgeries, this might not have happened. Janice also emphasises the importance of those relationships:

> *We did very, very well (in Ofsted reports) because we have got coherent, multi-agency services in, but when I unpick that it's because of the effort that I've put in as centre manager to make that happen because I firmly believe it has to be a multi-agency partnership. It can't be done any other way; you can't be precious about it.*

Since the first interview, Margaret has taken on the management of an additional two centres and gives the example of the importance of engaging with health visitors in order to get families registered and completed forms returned to setting; however, without good relationships and understanding of the work of Children's Centres, the health visitors would argue that is not their role. Participants seem to suggest that there is generally a tendency for professionals to pull away back into single agency working, perhaps particularly in relation to health staff. However, there are exceptions. The success attained through building good relationships with health visitors is illustrated by Jane who says that she is often in contact and they run breast feeding and baby massage courses at her centre.

There are other examples of successful working with other agencies, Sarah talks about successful working with a school's Slovak teaching assistant and the community TB nurse:

> *...we've sent workers out on the streets in partnership with the Slovak teaching assistant from the school to get people registered and encourage them to come in... We also know that we've had a couple of families that have had TB; we know that all the conditions are there for TB. So we've had the TB nurse in, we've had all staff trained on TB, but we've also done a TB screening session not just for that community, but we've targeted that community and that's been really successful.*

This not only illustrates participants' perceptions of the need for agencies to work together, but also highlights again the issues with targets identified earlier because participants believe that they can identify needs within a community that do not necessarily appear in statistics elsewhere.

This section shows participants' views of the importance of building strong relationships with other agencies in order to deliver the core offer. This is seen as a two way process. The setting

leaders feel that they need to understand the complex cultures of other agencies and they need to be able to communicate the role of the centres to secure the commitment of other professionals in meeting the needs of their community.

6.3.3. Leadership style

The third aspect of building relationships is illustrated in the leadership style adopted by participants. Some mention of this has been made under other headings – firmness and fairness and expecting much from staff for example. This section adds to this by exploring how participants see their own styles.

There is, as with other themes, a great deal of similarity in the leaders' approaches in that they all see that the relationships they build are central to their work. Leadership for Sarah is about bringing people together; she describes her style as '*networking and not getting people's backs up*'. Important for her is the idea of '*winning hearts and minds*', not in any woolly sense, though, ultimately she is not scared of making decisions and being accountable for them. '*Coordination*' and '*pulling things together*' are words used by Bronwen to describe her leadership style – she is also happy to share information with her team, but also recognises that the '*buck stops with her*'. Jane again talks about '*inclusivity, embracing the skills we've got, recognising what we need to deliver and then looking at how we can do it with the resources that we've got*'.

Hazel talks about having to know her team well so that she can tailor her style to meet the needs of particular staff members. She describes herself as democratic except for in situations of crisis when she has to be autocratic. Janice also feel she also needs to understand staff as individuals and has carried out a lot of team development work using profiles to help her understand what makes people tick.

Margaret talks about an informal style; she explains how her staff see her direction setting as offering advice which she doesn't mind as long as things happen. In common with her colleagues though, she will make the necessary hard decisions. None of the participants have a problem with being challenged unless it is about their own fundamental principles; the impression emerges of the solidity in the belief that they must do their best for children and families. Perhaps this is the unchallengeable principle that undergirds their work; however, they are open to challenges and other ideas on how this might best be achieved. Consultation and nurturing are driving principles behind all the participants' thinking about leadership.

Louise feels that the increase in pressure for outcomes and decrease in resources is leading her to become more directive. This causes her some personal concern because of the challenge to her way of working:

> *I'm now having to be more directive and I'm less popular as a result, or I feel as if I'm less popular as a result and that doesn't sit easily with me because I'm a great believer in people enjoying their work and doing it because it's the right thing to do.*

However, being directive does play a part in leadership. Janice, for example, has made a conscious decision to become more authoritative:

> *When I did look at my leadership style using the Goleman stuff I was slightly anxious. I was way too collaborative ... and affiliative, but not authoritative enough. I'd always hated authority and I think I felt I could get by with the democratic, affiliative, building people, but actually they really do need to see the person who's leading in an authoritative way. So I made an absolute conscious decision that that authoritative bit needed to come in a little bit more to drive performance and I've been pleasantly surprised because it's counter-intuitive to how I like to work.*

Leadership style is something that they claim to think carefully about and explain that they are prepared to adapt according to the situation. They do not hesitate to be authoritative when necessary but not being liked as a result is sometimes an uncomfortable experience for all of them. The overriding aim of their leadership seems to be to meet external targets. The data suggests that a tension between wanting to meet targets in order to preserve the existence of the centres and wanting to build successful relationships is emerging in their role and this is something that they are not altogether happy about.

6.3.4. High expectations

Having high expectations of themselves and their colleagues is another sub-theme running through participants' thinking about leadership which again they seem to view as coming from their original professional backgrounds. They present the culture in the settings where they lead as one of support and encouragement – but one where they are not afraid to discipline should it be necessary.

Janice says that

I do have expectations and I can be quite forceful at getting those expectations and sometimes I have to check myself because it's not always right to expect everybody to work at your level… to work at the pace or to have the same work ethic you have.

Work ethic and expectations is an area that is also picked up by Margaret:

And also because I've got quite high standards… We make a joke out of it and that's how we cope with it here, but I have been guilty once or twice of giving people a job and then re-doing it. I do it very sensitively I think, but nevertheless they know I've done it and they indulge me a little bit, which I suppose if I didn't have the relationships that could cause me problems.

The high expectations are supported by clarity and straightforwardness in the way that participants talk about their leadership. The idea of firmness coupled with fairness and a direct approach is mooted frequently and will be considered in more detail later in this chapter. Perhaps this comes about because of the supportive nature of the setting and the idea that everyone should be treated equally but does not come without the idea that occasionally discipline is necessary. The participants see the need to create explicit boundaries.

6.3.5. Summary

This theme has identified the importance that participants attach to understanding people and building relationships as part of their leadership approach. Relationships with staff are often based on an understanding of personality, sometimes using theoretical perspectives to support this understanding, and on what participants explain as a genuine liking for and interest in others. The interest in building relationships extends into their communities where they see that good relationships are key in engaging families with the services offered. The nature of the relationships with staff has a keen influence on leadership style. Participants argue that they aim to adapt their styles to suit the context but are finding that a more directive style is required in the current climate. This does not always sit well with them and tension between a preferred and required leadership style is evident for all.

6.4. Making a difference

The third theme to be explored is the desire expressed by all the participants to make a difference to the lives of the vulnerable children and families with whom they work. As referred to above, they do this through having high expectations of those who work for them, often seeing transference of their own work ethic into the work of others. They all suggest that change is brought about through challenging expected norms; hence this theme is divided into the subthemes of improving the lives of others, being a rebel and having high expectations of those who work with them

6.4.1. Improving the lives of others

Participants see that a priority of their roles is to improve the lives of the children and families, and this desire is expressed in many ways. These approaches range from Bronwen's largely Marxist driven radical philosophy and Sarah's BME perspective on racial justice to other less politically motivated ways. Their concepts of social justice, though not made explicit (other than by Bronwen and Sarah), drive much of the leadership behaviour and thinking of the leaders in this study. For instance, in her role working with people with disabilities, Sarah notes that service users are mostly white British. For her this is not satisfactory because she feels services should be available more widely and so she became involved with asylum seekers and taking on their cases. She noted that the high profile work for Social services was in child protection, which is where she might have achieved more career recognition, yet she still continued to work with her asylum seeker clients because she felt that it was important and would make a difference to their lives.

She explained that making a difference was one of the reasons she applied for her current role. Leyburn was seen as a failing programme which she wanted to turn round. She saw that working for a charity would provide her with the leeway to try new things and she describes building a toy library and funding family support workers as a result of the surplus generated from the programme.

Bronwen felt that her choice to study social work at university put her in touch with the reality of poverty. She saw her vocation as working with those in difficult circumstances – not for her to change their lives directly, but to give people the wherewithal to do it for themselves. Bronwen says that after nine years of social work she questioned the difference she was making;

however, she feels that Sure Start provided her with the opportunity to make earlier interventions and therefore a bigger difference to needy children and families.

Not everyone is so passionate in the way they discuss the theme of making a difference. Louise also sees the job as highly political and describes herself as opinionated but shy, not one to air her political views in public, preferring to focus on areas where she can really have an impact. For instance, she describes her reaction to unfairness as she was working as a nursery nurse: she talked about a waiting list for the setting and asked her line manager if she could set up a playgroup:

> *What's happening to those children while they're waiting? It doesn't seem right to me to turn away families who've got health visitors' letters of support,' we needed to be helping them in some way.*

This was part of her striving to change things not only for her clients but also for herself. She says that she could see potential for doing something better and wanted to see if that potential could be delivered. This is reflected in her current role where she says that she will never say that things are satisfactory as they are:

> *That's the kind of attitude that I take into other centres. They're not good enough. People who work in them are lovely, but they haven't got the drive. They're not reaching out to the families that need them, so that's my job now – to help those centres to develop and reach out to those families.*

Jane's desire to make a difference is more subtly presented. She clearly challenged the system in her primary teaching days by changing the early year's curriculum through introducing more play and by fighting hard for resources which had previously been unavailable to the children in the setting. She sees it as important to take risks, but only in a calculated way. The biggest opportunity for her came with her current role as head of a combined nursery school and Children's Centre. Though she says that she could have taken a role as head of a primary school, she felt the role at Barton had more potential for her to change lives. She explains that:

> *This is going to be different! 24 different languages, families from all over the world, the social diversity, everything that our children and families bring each day – families and*

children who have everything, families and children who have nothing. Those from a
very low starting point, a very high starting point and the whole spectrum in between.

She uses this story as an illustration of her real desire to make a difference to the lives of others.

Other participants also saw themselves as wanting to make a difference but through others, seeing Sure Start as an opportunity to help people to help themselves. From an early age, Hazel knew she wanted to change things on behalf of others:

I knew what should happen for people. You know, like I've kind of always been a bit of
an advocate for other people because I never felt I needed anybody to be my advocate.

In her first job as a nursery nurse she chose to work with a family in Kent because she felt that she would be able to do more in terms of supporting the children's' development. In changing from the nannying work to a more conventional role as a nursery nurse, she describes a potential career in education as *'pointless'* because she felt it would not make enough difference to people's lives. She saw implementation of the parenting course (PEICL) that she had studied and rolled out in Northtown as *'the big thing that will make a difference'*. She felt attracted to working in areas of social disadvantage because she felt that parents in these areas may well have the desire to make a difference to their own lives but may not necessarily have the skills to be able to do it.

Likewise, Janice sees her role as helping other people to make a difference in their own social situations. Working in the current environment allows her to do that and she welcomes the challenge of bringing together:

...lots of different philosophical approaches to working with families to give them a real
sense of what they're doing and why and what difference are they making.

She says that this derives from her health visiting days where she points out that she had the opportunity to direct families to about 90 different agencies – the realisation that they would struggle to get past the first one made her think that things needed to be better and that by moving to Sure Start, she could do something about it. Part of wanting to make a difference is seen in her hatred of barriers which prevent people achieving their potential. She says that she will challenge policy and opinion until she is absolutely convinced of the right answer.

Margaret is very explicit that her leadership role is entirely about being able to have an impact on what happens: *'taking people along with you so that it's more than just a tokenistic 'yeah, well we're doing that,' but 'we're doing that and actually people agree with it'*. She says that her interest in working in a Children's Centre comes from her belief that she is making a difference. Though she is also frustrated by bureaucracy, she says that she and her children centre leader colleagues are in it for more than just the pay cheque *'because if that wasn't the case a lot of us would have got out of it a lot earlier I think'*.

Their commitment to social change and the ideology of early intervention could be summed up by the notion of 'making a difference' which participants frequently referred to in the interviews. They saw their leadership roles as a strategic way of achieving this, working with colleagues and other professionals to implement this vision.

6.4.2. Being a rebel

Each of the participants in one way or another, presents being a rebel as an intrinsic part of their role of Children's Centre leader. The focus of that rebellion is generally around the achievement of social justice. This rebellious streak has been evident in the participants' stories of their growing up.

Sarah's view was that her rebellious streak started when she was at school age. She felt that society expected her to fail educationally. Attendance at school was not seen as important in her family and indeed she raises questions about her mother's parenting style. The experience of her own childhood triggered the understanding that it wasn't enough to bring up two children on benefits so Sarah felt that she had to rebel against expectations and do something which provided more than simply living on benefits would do. She reports that taking on her current role was seen by colleagues as a 'poisoned chalice' because Sure Start was new and potentially less secure than Social Work. She describes this view as spurring her on to carry out the role.

Bronwen describes herself as a *'rogue and stroppy'*; the stroppiness she sees as coming from the 'Welshness' of her mother, and the roguish nature coming from early rebellion against her parents. She describes them as being very liberal in many ways, challenging injustice, but suspecting that *'they voted Tory all their lives'*. This suggests that she learned about rebellion and challenging social justice from her family. However, reading played a big part in developing

what she describes as her feminist stance and her approach seems to be more about making a difference for her clients rather than being a rebel for its own sake. It was this wanting to make a difference that led her into social work.

Jane's rebellious behaviour, as she presents it, appears to have been of a more gentle nature. She describes an instance as a child where she had problems with being identified as a *'chicken'*. She explains how children were grouped at her nursery school, as *'chickens, rainbows and fairies'*. On the way to school one day she grabbed hold of the headstones in the churchyard saying she was not going. She remembers:

> *'...the apron that they made me wear with this chicken on and you had a flannel with a chicken on and a little coat-peg with a chicken on and I desperately didn't want to be a chicken. I would have given anything to have been a rainbow or a fairy or anything. I just didn't want to be a chicken!*

Being very clear about what she did not want seems important for Jane because it was a way in which she described rebellion as being part of her childhood.

Another example of her rebellious attitude relates to the experience of having her principles challenged. On teaching practice, the school custom at the end of the Friday was for the children to have a sweet and to say a prayer. Jane was not convinced that the prayer was appropriate and in fact she struggled with the expectation. Though she delivered the sweet and the prayer as was expected, she said that she made it clear to her tutor that *'the sweets and the praying are delivered on behalf of the school and it's nothing to do with me.'* This indicates her outspoken rejection of the school's values and behavioural norms with which she clearly disagreed.

Janice describes a lifelong rejection of authority, starting with a school system that she hated because she felt intimidated by some of the *'rougher'* students. She failed the 11 plus exam and at the same time moved from an inner city West Midlands school to a Welsh secondary modern school. Whilst there, her potential was recognised and she was invited to move to the grammar school but for Janice it was too late and she refused to move:

By then I'd built up a huge hostility to the education system and the high school and absolutely loathed it. I was starting to get a sense of class and injustice I remember thinking 'Well, if you didn't think I was clever enough to go there in the first place, then...'

Margaret's rebellion is slightly more subtle and more about challenging expectations around working patterns. In our interview she recalled a recent conversation with a member of her staff where she had been told, as a leader, that she was:

...willing to put myself out there and I don't stick rigidly to the rules; so I will do things on a Saturday morning and I'll do things in my own time and I'll bend whatever rules I need to bend.

Hazel started her challenging behaviour by missing school so that she could spend time with her sister, who she describes as the real rebel. She saw the NNEB qualification as an escape from the routine of her then life and one that would offer her the opportunity to travel. However, she was told that her grades would not be good enough because she was not attending college or committed to her study. She recalls that her reaction was to respond that she would get the grades – *'Well I will because you've just told me I won't, so now I will'*. This shows her reaction to being told what she can or cannot do.

Louise paints a picture of herself as having been a *'naughty rebellious girl who was a bit of a punk'* – she reinforces this with an account of her 50th birthday party where her daughters printed pictures of her in her punk days and made an invitation with a Sex Pistols[10] theme. She says that the school she attended was very *'Tory'* and she didn't want to be part of it, feeling that she did not fit in. She did not follow her brother into university, deciding to become a *'nursery nurse mostly because I wanted to get out of school and I wanted to go to college'*.

In varying degrees, rebellion seems to have stemmed from a variety of principles; social justice, wanting to make a difference and a refusal to accept things which they did not feel were right. Participants show a desire to exercise agency in relation to their own lives. They describe themselves as having strong personal values which they seem ready to stand by. The views

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[10]A popular anarchic beat combo from the late 1970s

portrayed are about a sense of fairness with a recognition that their values may need to be fought over.

6.4.3. Summary

Making a difference is a key part of the work of setting leaders. Though they fight for social justice, they see that their role is to develop social capacity in others so that they can look after themselves. In doing this, they present themselves as being ideologically driven, behaving in maverick ways where necessary, but this does not diminish their firmness and fairness in setting high expectations for others to follow.

6.5. Influences on leadership

This theme explores the personal and professional experiences which have shaped participants' views on leadership. It looks at three underpinning ideas: experiences from childhood; the support and encouragement received from others in their thinking about careers and career choices; and finally at how learning from their professional heritage has influenced the way in which they approach their current roles.

6.5.1. Influential childhood experiences

The idea that participants' own childhood experience has had some influence on their thinking about leadership and their views on their qualities as leaders was evident in the narratives of some, but not all, of the participants. There are a number of examples to support this.

Janice's description of her own childhood suggests that she developed a degree of childhood resilience which was further built on in her nursing career, '... *partly through being one of five children and partly to sustain me through the school system which I hated'*.

Sarah sees being controlling as part of her makeup, but not always a useful part of her identity in her current role. She says that as a child she was never a follower but always a leader. As she grew up and had children of her own she talked about this attribute:

> *I think some of that relates to probably having children quite young and being on my own and having to have control, and having to sort everything out for myself from quite a young age that I'm probably used to doing that 'taking over' role. For me it's hard because I think I can be quite controlling.*

She feels though that she has had to learn that she cannot control everything:

> *The family support bit I feel like I know like the back of my hand. The other stuff I do, I don't know enough about it all. I don't feel I'm specialised enough in an area and I've had to learn to let that go. I've had to learn that actually I'm never going to be specialist in an area. I have to accept that other people are that.*

As a result she has had to learn to delegate work and to trust others.

Hazel's childhood led her to seeing leadership as supporting and being an advocate for those 'weaker' than herself:

> Denise and Annette, my sisters – Denise was quiet, so she sometimes needed a bit of support and Annette was flaky, so she needed sometimes… kind of she was looked at differently, so I suppose I was the glue that kind of held it all together.

Aspects of participants' childhoods, for example Hazel's advocacy for others and Janice's resilience go some way to shaping early thinking about their leadership approach but this is more significant to some than others and not always positive. In Sarah's case, her early thinking about leadership had to be undone.

6.5.2. Mentors, sponsors and role-models

Participants' journeys into leadership have not been made alone. In the first interview they all spoke of the significant impact that others have had on inspiring them in their careers. This has been in a number of ways – as sponsors, mentors or role models both as career influencers and as influencers on their leadership approaches. Though this was not the focus of an explicit question, it was a frequent topic of conversation.

Margaret in particular says that she has had good mentors throughout her career. In her time as a primary teacher she worked with a head teacher who had a reputation for being successful and describes how she realised that she 'didn't learn anything when you were at teaching college, but this is really now what it's all about'. She gives a particular example of a respected early year's adviser [11] who informed Margaret of the vacancy at the Moulton and suggested that she should apply because she thought she would be suitable.

Another major influence on her career that she cites specifically is Jane, another of the research participants, who she worked with at Moulton. In turn, Jane has had a number of people who have been particularly influential. A former babysitter visited Jane while she was in hospital and it was her influence that led her to becoming a teacher rather than a nursery nurse. Jane

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[11] A noted author with a national reputation.

seems to be influenced by people who encourage her to 'get up and go'. She speaks of a fellow probationary teacher during her own training:

> *She had come in late to teaching. She'd been in playgroups forever, been a hairdresser, all sorts of different things. She, worked out of the box, did very revolutionary things. So I was the sort of new girl, she was the old girl but new to teaching and we both sort of came together and it was a great combination. We were a bit sort of Ying and Yang. I was the 'Ooh, let's have a think about this before we do it.' She was the 'Oh! Let's just go and do it'.*

The *'get up and go'* type of influence is evident in Jane's later career. Again, the same adviser was mentioned as one of those people who had that sort of influence. Jane describes her as a trailblazer. As with Margaret, the adviser seemed to be a keen sponsor for Jane, suggesting that she applied for a headship role. Jane says that she did not really want to but she did because '[the adviser] *...said she thought I ought to'.*[12]

Janice says that in her earlier career she was influenced by someone she saw as a very good line manager who helped her:

> *I made a lot of mistakes, and she did a lot of mentoring and helped me unpick my mistakes. So I'd learnt quite a lot from her, she didn't see herself as a leader, but she definitely was. So I started to be able to put those early experiences where things hadn't gone very well and what she'd sort of steered and guided me to thinking 'I want to pay more attention to this now rather than let it sort of happen.'*

Her leadership style was also influenced by a comment from a health visitor colleague:

> *My style was always very, you know, affiliative and I just wanted to tell my staff everything... someone said to me once 'There's a fine line between empowering and dumping,' and I thought 'My God, yeah, that's really true.' So it might feel more comfortable to me just to tell them everything, but there are things that they definitely*

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[12] The senior nature of the adviser's role meant she was able to talent spot and move people in the Early Years provision in Northtown

need to be told at certain stages or when I know. What I've said to them is I'll always tell them direction of travel, but I can't always tell them exactly what's happening at every incremental journey.

She does not speak further about the impact of mentoring or sponsorship until joining Sure Start. Her early career seems to have been a steady progression yet she describes how in order to move out of the safety of a pensioned role and the opportunity to retire at 50, she needed a push. Despite hating the role she had in the Health Service, she was reluctant to move even though she was aware that she may have missed out on the opportunity of joining Sure Start:

It was the last [Northtown] programme and I'd been umming and ahing and I thought 'You know, this is what you've always wanted to do,' and ... well, somebody gave me a push basically and said 'I think this is going to be right up your street.'

Louise's career was steered by influences from the setting in which she worked. She knew that she had leadership potential but taking a leadership role was not something she had thought about in any detail. She describes one of her settings where she worked as a senior nursery officer:

'...the deputy used to sit and smoke all day and there was no drive, no talking about quality and no thinking about improvement'

This was perhaps more of a lesson in how not to do things. She was however inspired by:

...a guy who came and he talked about setting up a parenting course and I got involved with that and we delivered a parenting programme and did relaxation and things. It was really good. It was behaviour management, that's what it was. So that was interesting and it added a bit of interest to the job.

She mentions further influence from a deputy manager at the setting where she ran a volunteer project. She describes how difficult it was to stick to the principles she'd brought with her from NCH to the role in the Local Authority. She says that there was a lot of tension between volunteers and employees. The support workers were focused on the young mums whereas she thought that the main focus should be on doing things with the children and engaging parents that way. Louise and the deputy manager worked a lot together:

he was a great support to me to help me get me through it and you need that because I was sticking to my principles.

Another local authority figure was seen as influential in Louise's understanding of the management of change. Louise describes how she:

...had been a new broom and things were changing significantly... We talked a lot about change all the time – change management, change, you know. So this was really coming.

Thinking about the change that Sure Start potentially brought about seems to have been an important aspect of Louise's thinking about leadership.

In her career journey, Hazel has also *'gravitated towards inspirational leaders'*. She says that the people she most admires are the ones that:

...kind of go 'Right, let's make this work for the people that want to make it work and let's ...use a different tack for the ones that don't want to engage in this way.

She cites the major influence on her thinking about leadership as her tutor on her ILM (Institute of Leadership and Management) course:

... an absolutely marvellous, inspirational guy. 72 year-old. Master Cutler. They told him he wouldn't ever achieve anything and he was absolutely inspirational.

Inspiration for the participants does not only come from individuals. All of the participants are interested in self-development and learning. The NPQICL is mentioned as significant by participants. Other training is mentioned by participants such as Hazel's ILM course, and many of them also read as part of that development process. Some of Bronwen's role models come from her reading. She offers what I would see as a distinctively intellectual approach to her thinking about her work. In her early years she recalls being influenced by the writings of Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) and Shulasmith Firestone (1945-2012), both influential feminist writers. In her later career she mentions Dorling's work on poverty and a variety of government reports, for instance the Black report (1980) on socioeconomic inequality and the Aitchinson report (1998) into inequalities in health. In terms of her learning from other people on a face to face basis, she recalls meeting Naomi Eisenstadt (the first director of Sure Start) who said to her:

...this job is like keeping the spinning plates going all the time and there's never been a point when you're not doing that. They're just different plates.

Janice is also a keen reader. She describes being influenced by reading from Morrison (1954-2010) and by his teaching about supervision and social care on an Action for Children course. This has helped her with the processes of reflection and supervision. She keeps a model of Kolb's learning cycle on her wall to constantly remind her of the need to reflect. She also talks extensively around the importance of supervision, both that which she provides to her team and that which she gets from her regional manager.

The participants demonstrate that they have worked with mentors and influential people who have played roles in their promotion to their current leadership positions and their thinking about leadership. What also emerges are the networks in which many of them are embedded - and they seem also to know each other well and to be connected to the same people. They use each other as a support network; they meet regularly at networking events and as a group seem to have good professional relationships.

6.5.3. Professional heritage

The specific influence of professional background on participants' approaches to leadership was evident in several cases, particularly in that of Sarah as a social worker, Margaret as a teacher and Janice as a nurse in an acute unit. Though there was some evidence of the influence of their earlier careers within their initial specialisms amongst the other participants, the examples given here are the strongest.

Sarah's background as a social worker reinforced for her the importance of both understanding people and being approachable. This is made explicit in her current role as a Children's Centre leader and the connections she makes between the two roles:

People will always come to my door and I don't ever want that to change really and I would hope I'm quite approachable and I think some of that is from my Social Work background about being able to relate to people and being a people person.

Part of Janice's approach as a former nurse is about helping people not to dwell on negative situations, but to learn from events and to move on. In her nursing role she worked with surgeons whose approach was:

> *You're either going to get much worse in 12 hours or you're going to get better – then it's move on to the next patient.*

However, she does so with some reservations in that sometimes she sees this is a strength, at other times not.

> *....sometimes the team has found it hard because I can very quickly move on to what needs to happen next. I think where I've got a bit better is I can look behind me now and look at people floundering, you know, and think 'They need a bit more support.' but I will get irritated if they've not moved on and unfortunately they do know that.*

She felt that her nursing background also helped in her understanding of how people react to negative situations.

In another example, Margaret talked about how her teaching background has led her to think about the sheer amount of time she spends on her leadership role.

> *When I first moved into this I think people were stunned at the hours that I put in, but I think when you're a teacher… I mean despite the fact that everybody sniggers and says you work from 9 till 3, we all know that we don't, so it's always been in my work ethic to work as long as I need to work to get the work done.*

In terms of leadership, what we learn from these three examples is how professional backgrounds contribute something distinctive to the participants' understanding of leadership. From teaching comes the idea of an acceptance of and a commitment to long hours and hard work. Nursing provides the importance of learning from situations without becoming emotionally involved. This prevents any regret or remorse which might stop change. And from social work comes the requisite for a deep understanding of and liking for other people.

This shows that who they are as leaders seems to be linked to their professional heritage which has varying degrees of influence on how they lead or wish to be perceived as leaders. For some it has been difficult to lose the influence of that heritage. For others moving into the Sure Start sector has been a welcome release which links again to the desire for freedom the participants mentioned earlier. Bronwen suggests that a consistent thing about the group of participants is that

We are people who've come from professional backgrounds with its own set culture and its own organisational norms and we've placed ourselves in an environment with very few norms.

Margaret talks of her difficulty in resisting using her teaching background to influence the work of others working on childcare in her setting. She feels that *'technically I shouldn't particularly be doing any of that'*. She wonders whether her manager, who has a health background, would lead in a different way.

As we have seen previously, Hazel does not see nursery nursing as a true profession and wonders whether things would have been different had she taken an alternative career path:

If I'd have had a different background I sometimes think possibly I would be more assertive. I'm very confident. I could stand up and give you a presentation on whatever if I knew about it, but I'm not very assertive. I'm not very good at saying no and so it's almost like I'm just a nursery nurse. It's still impacting and I didn't realise.

Louise, also a nursery nurse by background, does not share the same doubts as Hazel about the influence of her professional heritage. She says that it did shape her – but more significant for her was her wanting to *'keep on moving, looking for the next step and taking my sense of social justice with me'.*

Sarah uses her social work background as a way of explaining to her staff the contribution that social workers make to the running of the Centre. She has used this background to negotiate placements for her team with social workers so that they can learn what actually happens in Social services in order to change the view that *"social workers don't do 'owt"*

Jane suggests that one of the reasons why professional heritage has played such an influential role in how participants lead centres is that there was no blueprint for the role since when they moved into leadership of Children's Centres, nobody had done the job before; there was no-one to learn from. She says:

There were no rules and so you inevitably bring your own professional and personal ways to running it and you go into those professions because fundamentally that's where your passion is.

6.5.4. Summary

Clearly professional heritage exerts a powerful influence (as one would expect) on how participants think about leadership and, in some cases, practice in their settings. But, in taking on Children's Centre leadership participants were forced to reflect on their heritage, particularly since there was no blueprint and, initially, no training or mentorship. In crafting their new roles they saw continuities and discontinuities. As Bronwen put it:

> I think it's what you're exposed to, isn't it? It's either your personal experience or your observation of what's happening around you; and I think part of that is being able to see outside that narrow tunnel of your own personal Journey and actually being able to see wider than that.

It does seem as though the leadership appropriate for a specific professional context cannot be transferred successfully to the Children's Centre context.

6.6. Who they are as leaders

This final section presents something of the participants in terms of how their personal/private lives inflect their leadership and how the different influences are woven together. In some ways it covers those important areas that are missed in earlier themes; it captures their awareness of themselves and their leadership and demonstrates their reflective practice. It is impossible not to comment on the fact that they are women and work in a world where most of their contacts are also women. A consideration of what participants say about gender therefore forms part of this theme. The final subtheme explores some of the questions they ask themselves about whether or not they really are leaders.

6.6.1. Straightforward and honest

Within the group there is a great sense of self-awareness. The participants all portray themselves in a way that suggests there is no side, or guile in the way in which they work. I have no evidence to doubt them but clearly I am listening to their, perhaps carefully, crafted performances of themselves. This is reflected on in Chapter Eight.

Perhaps in working with families and children both now and in previous roles, there is no reason for dishonesty; therefore there is no need to be other than genuine in the way they present themselves to the world. Reflection both formal, sometimes using theory, and informal plays a key part in the development of their own self-knowledge. Their reflection allows them to describe themselves and their leadership in various ways. We have seen an earlier example from Janice when she described her conscious decision to become more authoritative. As we saw, Kolb's reflective cycle is an embedded part of her daily life and reflective supervision is her method of performance management. This is also true with Sarah who sees supervision as a time for reflection. In her daily routine she makes a point of finding time to talk with staff to get them to think about what's happening in the centre. She says that people should always be reflecting and she emphasises this by saying:

> I don't think I'm always great at reflection. I do think I reflect a lot more now than what I ever used to. It's time I think. I don't think people are allowed any more time for reflection, so actually my reflection might be in the car, it might be when I'm in bed, it might be when I'm in the shower, but I do try to reflect on things.

Jane says that she is reflecting all the time and encourages this in her staff as well:

> ...at the end of the day, you know, when I lay in the bath sort of thinking about how the day's gone and what we've achieved and things, I'm always thinking about 'Well, how did that go?' and 'Was there a better way of doing that?' I spend a lot of time saying to staff, 'What do you think about that?' and getting a bit of a view from people. And I do try and encourage staff to take a bit of a step back and look at, you know, what the children are doing.

Clearly the fact that they are being asked questions in an interview strongly encourages some degree of reflection. Hazel stated that she reflects more when talking to others and demonstrates how she has learned about herself through this process. She says that she doesn't see herself as a true professional and that nursery nursing does not have the same 'kudos as say teaching, nursing or social work'. Hazel's reflection leads her to say that she does not see herself *as threatening. I didn't see myself as influential or see myself as impacting on people in a great extent'.* However her thinking has led her to be aware of the impact she has on people through what she says and how she says it.

As another attribute, firmness and fairness are mentioned frequently as part of their leadership approach. Janice emphasises this in saying that:

> I'm not somebody who will go round the houses to tell somebody something. I'm probably more of a 'Right, this is how it is. This is where we are… and this is what we want,'

Margaret insists that she will be:

> ...honest with staff about whatever we're doing... I might tell a bit of a white lie from time to time, but on the whole I've said I will be very honest about things. There have been times when I've thought right; it's time to stop pussy footing around. I've been very supportive of the staff, very understanding of where they're coming from, but every so often I think 'Right, I'm not having that,' and I've had to have a word with a couple of members of staff.

Janice expresses very similar sentiments:

I don't like doing it, but I'll do verbal disciplinaries very, very quickly if I think somebody's stepped out of line, but I'll do it in a way that's fair and that they can understand why it's needed to be done really. I have had to do it, but actually the team have actually said that it needed to be done, you know. If you don't do that the team lose definitely respect for you.

She expresses how easy it would be not to be firm and how in the family environment it would be easy to become cosy:

So I have cosy club[13] at the back of my mind and [Rachel] likes that visual model as well, so we both talk about cosy club. I thought this would be easy to do in a Sure Start. When I had that model explained to me (by a consultant) it scared me.

But again the necessity for firmness comes through in her expression of fear of a cosy approach.

Hazel also sees herself as taking a firm but fair approach to leadership which relies on data rather than experience or intuition:

I fully agree with consultation, but not consultation for consultation's sake… It's not a 'Shall we do this?' It's not down to the individual to decide whether or not we do it. It's about saying 'Okay, this is what needs to happen. This is why. How are we going to do it?'…because that's based on evidence.

And Louise emphasises this in saying that:

I don't hold grudges against people. I mean people can do some really evil things to me and I forgive them, which is a bit bizarre really sometimes. Although I'm a very critical person, I guess that comes with the forgiveness kind of thing as well that, you know, I can overlook stuff in a positive way, I try to see the good in people and I've always wanted to make a difference.

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[13] This is perhaps a reference to Margaret Edgington's (2004) Cosy Team model?

As well as being firm and fair, participants expressed the need for clarity, openness and honesty. They are keen to be absolutely clear with their staff about what their role involves and the purpose of the work they are expected to do.

Bronwen suggests that:

> *You need real clarity around what it is that you want to deliver and what you're prepared to risk. Of course all this depends on the core purpose and what they say you need to deliver and if you need to deliver it at all.*

She says that she tries to create a pleasant working environment:

> *'It's the firm but fair thing, I think, is what I try to do, which is be fair, be equitable as much as possible, but people know that there's a point beyond which... then they need to know that they've got somebody who's going to go 'Right, that's not happening,' or 'Right, we're going to do something about that.'*

Janice also expects clarity

> *So I like them all to feel a sense of purpose, a sense of direction, being very clear on their outcomes, why are they doing it and also having a sense that they themselves are valued, they're important, we listen to them, but we will also manage them.*

And openness:

> *.... I guess the openness is in how I expect them to work together. What I've said to them is I'll always tell them direction of travel, but I can't always tell them, you know, exactly what's happening at every incremental Journey.*

Furthermore, being passionate about the role has already been seen in participants wanting to make a difference, but it is re-emphasised here by Bronwen who illustrates her passion in wanting to bring about change:

> *...because it matters, do you know what I mean? If you feel that what you're doing has an effect and actually you can change things and you can bring about some kind of transformational change… the directness of this has enthused me.*

Louise says that passion and being driven are essential components of being able to carry on the work she does. Her passion comes from her desire for social justice. She also talks about resilience, flexibility and being good at partnership working. Janice describes her role as something she is extremely passionate about and thoroughly enjoys. She sees resilience as an important characteristic but mostly she says that Children's Centre leaders have to genuinely like people:

> *I think you have to be, you know, a people person and a fairly astute judge of people. I like to believe that I can quite quickly work out what motivates people, what their needs are in terms of supporting them to work well. I think the work that I've done through my studies around leadership has helped. I am quite intuitive and perceptive so I can spot quite quickly when things aren't right either with the worker or with the family. My kids always accuse me of being a witch! So I think that ability to work with people and an absolute sheer joy of working with people and I'm never fed up of it*

This subtheme indicates a number of attributes that participants see as an essential part of being a Children's Centre leader. These are: being reflective and self-aware, being firm and fair, being open and honest, being clear about the core purpose of the setting and what is expected from staff and lastly being truly passionate about the work that they do.

6.6.2. The role of gender

This subtheme explores the issue of gender. This is included because all the participants are women not because participants argue that gender is particularly relevant to their role. They were in fact more concerned about the personality of the role holder. Whether or not this was because participants had limited experience of working with men, or whether they were truly non- discriminatory is perhaps a question for further exploration elsewhere.

Those with social work backgrounds talked about their previous experience of working in care arguing that caring professions are female dominated. However, for them, the important thing in their leadership role was about the individual's personality rather than their gender.

Jane says that she is aware of leading in an all-female environment and thinks perhaps that she would need to develop and use a different style in a mixed environment, but she has never led one. She wonders whether men can have a different way of moving forward or if they have

different motivators. Furthermore, she thinks that men probably do *'one thing at a time'* rather than having many contemporaneous projects. She does say however that:

> *I don't think there are very many men who would put up with doing what we do. My observations of men in leadership roles within our organisation is that they're there to do a job and... they'll say 'No, I can't do that.' I think as women we are more blurry about taking this approach because we see all the rest of the stuff and we perhaps engage in the emotional stuff more and perhaps that's a different way that we lead teams and we work with teams and with people, but we're not so good at saying no and so we will take on more and more. I'm not sure that that happens in the more male dominated areas of work.*

Jane thinks that she is still fighting sexism to some extent. She feels that women are still being *'done to'*, but feels some pride in knowing that she can multi-task and she will – but she wonders if it's still about having to prove herself. She senses an expectation that she has to do well (in managing four centres) but that this is an impossible task given the dwindling support and resources.

Janice picks up on the lack of emotional involvement from the men in her team, saying that they have not wanted to become involved in the *'listening and talking stuff'*, and that they seemed to prefer a more direct approach to things, not wanting to discuss, but wanting to be told what to do so that they can get on with it. Janice wonders, however, if this too is because of personality rather than gender. She says, as with Margaret, that she adapts her style to suit this kind of personality, rather than gender.

Hazel argues that men have got a totally different perspective (but does not expand on this) from women but again she treats people as equals:

> *I don't value men's opinion more than I would value a woman's opinion, but I value a range of opinions. I like to ask people what they think about things and then draw my own conclusion.*

It also seems as though in this context, men are seen to do men's things, women do women's things and stereotypes still exist. Bronwen describes an experiment in having a woman running a dads' group and finding that dads did not want to attend. Having men as professionals in the

setting does affect the way it is run; however, Bronwen is the only participant who currently has male workers and she described how she had to change the culture of the organisation in terms of changing the nature of conversation in the team room. At one stage, the men were getting embarrassed by the women who were discussing their *'personal issues, relationship issues, biological issues even'* so this was stopped fairly early on. Bronwen sees this as still more about personality than gender. Particularly interesting was her description of a *'tussle'* with a male line manager:

> *He would say things like, you know, 'We can't agree on this,' and I'd go 'No, but do you know, men are from Mars and women are from Venus,' or 'I feel like we're having a domestic'. I find humour really useful for diffusing things.*

The participants, therefore, do not seem to feel that gender plays a significant part in how they lead their Centres, although several talked about gender related issues. Though they suggest that men might lead a centre differently, they see that personality is more significant.

6.6.3. Are we really leaders?

The final sub theme is that of whether or not the participants see themselves as leaders. Some evidence was presented which I think is significant because it points to what I interpret to be self-doubt in the participants.

This came across to some degree in Louise's case, but to a much larger extent with Margaret. Louise says that:

> *I never thought of myself as being (a leader)… I knew I could lead things, but I didn't have that… I mean I had an aspiration to quality and to leadership but on a small scale.*

Margaret recognises that she is in a leadership role and that there is leadership to be done, but does not particularly identify herself as a leader. This was especially the case in her first job as 'teacher in charge'. She did not see this as a leadership role; however she had to manage the tensions between allowing people to freedom to do their own roles, and taking responsibility for their outcomes. Her own humility or self-doubt is prominent.

This is also expressed in her account of her own schooling. She feels that she was successful without finding it to be particularly difficult. When she left, however, she felt that she was no longer as *'clever or bright'* as she had been.

> *I've always been quite self-critical... I'm the kind of person who goes to bed at night and sort of worries about what I've done and what I haven't done and most of the time I worry that I've not done it well enough. There's a little part of me that thinks 'I must be good because I've managed to fool everybody so long,' but always round the corner I think 'Somebody will find me out.' Everybody thinks I'm very confident, you see, and I think that's probably part of being a leader. You recognise that you can't let people see that you don't feel sure about yourself.*

Margaret makes a distinction between herself as a leader and strong leadership. She does things and influences others but does not see herself as *'very direct, very strong, forceful, not afraid to make decision*s' which perhaps are what she associates with traits of leadership.

Some self doubt, a habit of critical reflection and a desire to lead other in a way that allows autonomy for others are the attributes of the role identified in this section.

6.6.4. Summary

This theme has explored some of the ways in which the participants present themselves whilst undertaking a leadership role. Firstly it demonstrates the straightforwardness and honesty with which they present themselves. They seem to have developed a large degree of self-awareness and humility by making reflection and reflective practice a key part of the way in which they do their jobs. They are equally open and honest with their staff ensuring that staff members are clear about what they need to do in order to meet the objectives of the setting. This presentation of humility is particularly pertinent in the self-doubt they expressed in whether or not they see themselves as leaders. They believe that gender is of less significance than the personality of the leader though they suggest that men would be less tolerant of the things they have to do and might do things in a different way.

6.7. Summary

This chapter has identified a number of themes and subthemes which have been identified in the data. The context in which the participants work is difficult and challenging. They are under pressure to deliver more with fewer resources and in a context where much of the competition for those resources comes from the LA through the formation of MAT teams. Boundaries between the work of these teams and the participants' settings are not clear. The targets and measures put on settings come from Ofsted and participants require skill in the interpretation of numerical data in order to be able to meet these targets. These targets are often at odds with what participants see as the real purpose of their work. That purpose derives from the needs of the community and identification of those needs requires a deep knowledge and understanding of individual communities. Centre leaders are not helped by the lack of understanding of the role of Children's Centres which they see as prevalent amongst the professionals with whom they need to engage in order to deliver services. That said, participants make favourable comparisons with the organisational contexts of other professions and find their roles to be liberating and flexible. The impression left, however, is that this is changing because the external environment is becoming more prescriptive.

The theme of multi-agency working inflects the work of participants who need to work closely with other agencies to deliver the core offer. Though it is not without difficulty, participants have worked hard to develop their own understanding of the complexities of other agencies and to explain their own roles and the remit of Children's Centres to other professionals. Working with other agencies has been part of the early career experiences of all participants and this seems to have prepared them for their current roles – indeed they sought out these roles because they felt they offered the opportunity for them to really make a difference to families and children.

Making a difference is thus a key part of the work of setting leaders. Though they fight for social justice, they see that their role is really to develop social capacity in others so that they can look after themselves. In doing this, they present themselves as behaving in maverick ways at times, but this does not diminish their firmness and resolve to set high expectations for others to follow.

Participants attach great significance to building relationships as part of their leadership role. Relationships with staff are often based on an understanding of personality, sometimes using theoretical perspective to support this understanding, and on a genuine liking for and interest in others. The interest in building relationships extends into their communities where they see that

good relationships are paramount in engaging families with the services offered. The nature of the relationships with staff has a keen influence on participants' leadership style which they adapt to suit the context. However, participants seem to be finding that a more directive style is required in the current climate which does not always sit well with them and tension between a natural, more intuitive and required leadership style is evident.

The final theme explored some of the ways in which the participants see themselves as people whilst undertaking a leadership role. It demonstrates the openness with which they present themselves as *'what you see is what you get'*. They seem to have developed a large degree of self-awareness and humility by making reflection and reflective practice a key part of the way in which they do their jobs. They are equally open and honest with their staff ensuring that staff are clear about what they need to do in order to meet the objectives of the setting. This presentation of openness and honesty is particularly pertinent in the self-doubt they expressed in whether or not they see themselves as leaders. They see that gender is of less significance than the personality of the leader though they suggest that men would be less tolerant of the things they have to do.

The next chapter sets out to analyse and discuss the data in the light of the background to Sure Start identified in Chapter Two, and the literature reviewed in Chapter Three.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

This chapter sets out to develop the ideas generated through the interview process and to make connections between the themes presented in Chapter Six and existing research identified in the literature review and the background chapter. It then draws together the research questions and the findings from the research and starts to identify claims to new knowledge. It will identify agreements and disagreements between my data and that found by others and will consider the strengths and weaknesses of alternative interpretations from the literature. The original research questions are as follows:

- *What is distinctive about leadership in the children's centre context and how does this compare with other thinking about leadership?*
- *How do children's centre leaders' professional and personal biographies influence their understanding of leadership and the development of their leadership capability/ capacity?*
- *What is the approach to leadership in Children's Centres?*

The most robust evidence from the findings indicates that these questions can best be addressed through three aspects of children's centre leadership: 1) the unique context in which the participants work, 2) the kinds of people who have chosen and been selected to work in this context and 3) the ways in which they carry out their leadership.

Within context, three dimensions have been identified: the national context; the local context; and the particular pressures brought to bear by the Local Authority and the Children's Centre itself. Of course, this all takes place within a changing political landscape which itself adds considerable complexity. In terms of the types of people leading the centres, I postulate that there are commonalities between the participants' life stories which have contributed to their choosing to work in this particular context.

I also claim that there are similarities in the approaches they take to leading those centres, which is through focussing their attention on relationships, outcomes and creating autonomy, which have enabled them to present themselves as being successful within the field.

7.1. The context of leadership in Children's Centres

A range of literature argues that context is of great significance in leadership (Antonakis, 2004, Sergiovanni 2000) but there seems to be limited work on examining the context of organisations

in a more specific way than *'considering people and initiating structure'* (Belchetz and Leithwood, 2007 p119). The material that does exist around this comes from the business field and looks largely at context in terms of organisational features such as structures and hierarchies. The analysis of how to respond as a leader to different contexts is generally conceived of in terms of models of situational leadership, though again these tend to be about internal rather than external pressures and they suggest how leaders might respond to a particular situation. Examples are Blake and Mouton's managerial grid (1964, 1985) or Hersey and Blanchard's (1977) situational leadership theory.

The relatively limited work that does study the context beyond the organisation itself also tends to come from a business perspective. Examples are Capon (2004) or Porter (2008) who generally use simple tools such as PEST (Political, Economic, Social and Technological) or a 'forces' model to identify external influences on an organisation in order to represent the environment in which it operates. Recognising some of the limitations of her approach, Capon does say that in order to understand the external environment, further examination of other *'components, including competition, competitors, customers and other stakeholders*' needs to take place (p277).

Rashman et al (2009) support this view suggesting that there is only a small amount of academic literature with a leadership focus, that makes explicit the external social, economic and political organizational context or type of organization being studied. This study addresses that criticism and makes a significant contribution to knowledge, particularly given the scarcity of study on the specific operational context of Children's Centres.

7.1.1. Context at a national level

In order to explore the specific context, it is important to start with the national context of Children's Centre leadership. In writing about the New Zealand context, Dalli (2010) suggests that since the 1990s, the ECEC sector has been faced with philosophical and ideological repositioning of the government's focus. This focus is on targeting interventions on vulnerable populations. Though this approach is line with budgetary constraints, it is also consistent with a free market approach and its inherent values of choice, deregulation and a minimalist approach to state intervention.

She posits that this raises questions as to what the professional agenda is – and what actually is the '*critical difference that professionals should or want to make in the current context*' (p70). This suggests that these questions are much more difficult to answer in the current context than they were twenty years previously. This increased problematising of the leadership role in early childhood services mirrors the UK context where there was originally a very well defined core offer. However, over the last two decades this offer has been revised several times so that the current role of Children's Centres is becoming increasingly uncertain.

The implication of this uncertainty is that setting leaders need to have a keen knowledge of what is happening in all aspects of their complex context and to make judgements according to that knowledge. Goffin and Means (2009) emphasise this and suggest that the early year's field is an increasingly politicised area so that the external environment in which leaders operate is highly dependent on socio-political factors.

In this thesis, light is thrown on the specific context, and therefore the position in which the leaders operate, through looking at it from a socio-political perspective. It is political in terms of the influence of government and the consequent organisation of local provision; it is social because the interaction of the agencies involved in running a centre is essential to its success and because the knowledge needed to lead a Centre is embedded in a community where the role of that Centre is often not understood. Participants identify this as an important issue that they face in carrying out their work as leaders.

At a national level, Stuart (Q787, HC 364 vi, 2013) described the core purpose of Children's Centres as '*conflicting and confused*'. In a committee session, he raises a number of questions about that purpose... '*is it primarily to improve outcomes for children or is it more about helping families into work? Is it about reducing child abuse?*' In response, the Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Education and Childcare (Lynn Truss) promised to redefine the core purpose, which as yet does not seem to have happened.

In 2010, the MP for Liverpool Walton, Steve Rotheram (2011) said that '*It is glaringly obvious that the Government do not understand the holistic nature of the Sure Start Children's Centres—their qualitative as well as their quantitative value*'.

Despite the uncertainty of purpose and intervention, the overall effectiveness of the Centres still requires evaluation. This task is given to Ofsted. It is questionable whether this is the appropriate body. Questions have been raised about the expertise within Ofsted to carry out this sort of evaluation (HC570-1) because though *'education and social care are not easy bed mates'* (p12), Children's Centres are obliged to deliver both. This is particularly the case when there is a greater integration of health services into the setting which raises *'some doubt over Ofsted's expertise in being able to assess those services'* (Truss, 2013 Qq 840, 841). A further complexity is added because an *'inspection of a Children's Centre is effectively an inspection of the Local Authority'* (Truss, 2013 Q839).

Appropriateness aside, the lack of clarity of purpose also leads to a lack of clarity of measurable objectives. This in turn leads to potential conflict about the nature of the judgements that are made. There are three key reporting areas for Ofsted: access to services by young children and their families; the quality and impact of practice and services; and the effectiveness of leadership, governance and management (Ofsted, 2013).

The participants suspect that the Centres were still being measured as though they were the original Sure Start Local Programmes, which had significantly greater funding and a much wider remit. For instance there was uncertainty raised by participants over what was being measured in terms of access, whether it was the percentage of children registered in an area or perhaps the percentage of registered children who were accessing the centre's services.

As seen in the data, participants have much to say about Ofsted which indicates the influence that it has on their work. Participants suggest that Children's Centres are not yet prepared for the type of inspection conducted by Ofsted. This is important in that it suggests that they accept that the Centres have to change to fit in with the Ofsted framework. This is not without its own problems because, though the centre leaders might recognise the need to change, they have no remit over how other agencies might respond to these changes. As an example, in one of the centres the health team did not see themselves as part of the setting team and said as much to the inspectors. This contributed to an unsatisfactory rating which one might argue was outside of the leader's remit or influence. The view of the health team does illustrate some of the issues of working with other agencies and highlights the dilemmas of multi-agency working (Anning et al, 2006).

However, the impact is not all negative, Ofsted have been useful in helping participants to develop the goals of the setting, particularly in terms of tightening up the 'woolly' core purpose that has developed. It has also emphasised the importance of numerical data which has enabled a more clearly defined focus on tasks aimed at achieving those goals.

Further pressure put on the Centres comes from the diminishing resources available to them. Waldegrave (2013) estimates that in 2013/14 spending on Children's Centres will fall to a total reduction of 28% from 2010 and prospects for local government funding to 2015 suggest that further significant reductions should be expected. The removal of ring fencing for Sure Start funding has been accompanied by the granting of complete freedom to Local Authorities over how the Early Intervention Grant is managed. Sharon Hodgson MP (Washington and Sunderland West) suggested that as a result of the cuts in funding, children centre leaders are being forced to ' *focus on financial fire-fighting year in, year out rather than being able to concentrate on delivering the* ' *improvements that we all want in Children's Centres'* (c229, Hansard, April 27th 2011). This has meant that Centre leaders have had to change their approach and amend their Centre's offer. How they have adapted their approach will be explored later in this chapter.

This study suggests that the national context in which the participants carry out their leadership work has some specific characteristics. The role and purpose of Children's Centres is uncertain and not widely understood at national level. Despite minimalist state intervention, control is in the hands of local authorities and leaders are held responsible for their work by a body whose expertise in, and effectiveness at, measuring non-education services is questionable. This leadership responsibility is also set in a context of having to deliver an unclear core offer against a background of ever decreasing funding.

7.1.2. Context at a local level

This second account of context focuses on the local level, more specifically on the influence of the local authority. According to the participants, this is where most of the direct political influence originates. As previously noted, funding for the centres comes from the Early Intervention Grant via the Local Authority since the government believes that the most effective use of these monies can be determined locally.

Perhaps unusually in Northtown, the relationships between participants and the Local Authority seem to be largely adversarial. The adversarial nature of the relationship is mentioned frequently with some vehemence in the language used. The physicality of the use of metaphor by the participants is striking; *'arm's length', 'never meeting'* and *'going off in different directions'* and perhaps serves to show the depth of separation participants identify that exists between the authority and settings. One participant talks about the LA's hatred of the Centres, particularly of the original Sure Start Local Programmes that have developed into the Children's Centres that form the basis of this study. Other participants feel astonished by the apparent breakdown in relationships.

The dysfunctional nature of the relationships was also identified by one of the Northtown's councillors who said that *'It's about time the Council worked with local Children's Centres, instead of working against them'*[14] *(Northtown Councillor, 2012).* This perspective is echoed by the view participants have of how elected members are informed by the LA. Hazel suggests that the councillors are:

> *Fed crap by the Local Authority. The Local Authority officers feed them what they want them to know and it is not always 100% true, and nobody (amongst the councillors) knows the questions to ask.*

One can only speculate on the cause of the adversarial nature of the relationship with the authority. It may perhaps relate to some kind of envy in that participants suggest that the more successful programmes are the original Sure Start Local Programmes all of which were run by agencies other than the Local Authority. Participants report that there had always been competition between the Sure Start Local programmes and the Local Authority. If this is the case, the implications are that there are personalities involved at the head of the service, something claimed by one of the participants in an *'off the record'* moment in an interview.

I would also argue that the original hotchpotch of uncoordinated lead bodies led to centres taking different approaches from each other with different sets of visions. The LA perhaps missed an opportunity to offer guidance and inspire a collective city wide vision.

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[14] Northtown Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Children and Young People

In addition to these potential causes of the flawed relationships has been the allocation of the EIG funding to the setting up and implementation of Multi- Agency Teams (MATs). Because the MATs are under more direct control of the Local Authority, one wonders if these are an attempt to make good the earlier errors in the establishment of SSLPs. However, even if this were the case, this may have been at the expense of Children's Centres, both structurally and conceptually.

MATs consist of a variety of professionals from various sectors. The purpose of these teams is to '*provide advice and support for children and families on a range of issues*' (Northtown 0 to19 strategy) through offering services such as

> '*new parenting skills, pregnancy support and advice about feeding new babies, supporting children through school which can help improve the way they behave, helping to improve both children's attendance at school and their performance and signposting to other services within the city (ibid.)*

I would argue that similar mistakes have been made again. In terms of structural difficulties, the role and purpose of the MATs overlaps that of the Children's Centres in a number of ways and there is a lack of clarity over the distinct purposes of each organisation. Participants feel that there is only limited coordination between the two. Data is not generally shared and even in situations where MAT workers are linked to a particular Children's Centre they do not work with the Centre in helping Centre leaders to deliver their expected outcomes - an example given is the registration of children to the Centres. In addition, participants suggest a degree of competition between the two entities, claiming that data from the Centres (rather than the MAT's own data) is used to publicise the success of the MAT teams.

Again speculating the cause, perhaps centre leaders see the MATs as representative of the LA, hence the sense of being at odds with them. An additional perspective, suggested by some participants, is that the MATs have created a new profession within the LA, that of the multi-agency worker, which may have led to some of the dilemmas seen in working with other agencies (Anning et al, 2006). The logical argument would follow that MAT workers have or should become '*transdisciplinary professionals'* (Cartmel et al, 2013) though from the participants' perspective, this does not seem to be happening. Of course, one could also argue that it is up to the Centre leaders to steer the work with the MATs, but without the backing of the LA, this is likely to be a hard task.

A final point in this section, and another indicator of the participants' perspective that the lack of joined up thinking in the authority presents a challenge for their leadership, is that, rather than the government's expected increased integration of health with other agencies, Northtown is seeing a lack of integration. Aside from the MATs, it is health that seems to present the greatest difficulty for the centre leaders even for those who are employed by the PCT.

Participants present a particular view of a local context where the relationships between the authority and the settings are largely dysfunctional, if not antipathetic. This has possibly been caused by original failings in establishing Sure Start Local Programmes (NESS, 2002) and may even be caused by personal feelings of envy by heads of LA services about the success of these programmes when compared to that of Local Authority managed settings. From the participants' perspective, I would argue that they see the setting up of MAT teams as a flawed attempt to redress these failings but without consulting the Children's Centre leaders who possibly had the most appropriate knowledge to support this initiative. Participants feel that, with a defined clarity of purpose, this could have worked but, yet again, they present the Authority as having missed an opportunity to better meet the needs of children and families.

The question as to whether or not this issue is specific to Northtown merits investigation. The nature of relationships on a wider scale is hard to ascertain owing to the absence of research, though it would make a suitable focus for further study. The 2013 Children's Centre Census (4Children, 2013) suggests that nationally, 76% of Children's Centres are being operated by the LA, 18% by a voluntary sector provider and roughly 4% by private sector organisations. Only 1.6% of respondents stated that their Centre was run by a health organisation.[15] In Northtown[16], of the 36 centres, 71% were run by the LA, 14% by a health organisation, 11% by a charity and 6% by a community group so this does not differ greatly from the national picture. When broken down into detail, however, of the contracts for childcare, family support and parental outreach less than half are delivered by the authority. Whether or not this is significant is uncertain. The data was hard to find both for Northtown and other areas. What it does however highlight is the number of   different groups involved in delivering the core offer. There are no examples in the city where the lead body provides all the services to the Centre.

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[15] 4Children, Children's Centres Census 2013

[16] Unpublished data from Northtown City Council

7.1.3. The Centre context

In the context of the setting itself, three issues emerge. Firstly, as we have seen on a national scale, there is the uncertainty about what a setting actually is and does. Participants give examples of such uncertainty at a local level; parents still see them as nurseries despite the fact that health services are available on site and participants suggest that schools do not want to understand the support that can be offered through partnerships with the community. Because the roles of Children's Centres are not understood, they are not valued and therefore unreasonable demands are placed on them and there is inefficiency in the way that services are delivered. There is an element of hope though in that participants see that there is a slow growth in understanding with the suggestion that other professionals are starting to see the benefits of Children's Centres.

It is no surprise then that participants say that their own leadership roles are not as clear as they might be. As Bronwen says, '*though we are all setting managers or co-ordinators, we all have a different and an evolving perception of what our role is about*'. I think that it is *interesting* that although there is as strong shared commitment to social justice (as evidenced in Chapter Six), the leaders *perceive* each other's role to be different. The data challenges this view; this study suggests that those perceptions are, in fact, very similar and clearly oriented around social justice and doing their best to reach the families and children in their areas.

The second distinctive element of the Children's Centre context is the requirement to work with other agencies which was made explicit by all of the participants. The Innovation Unit (2011) described the distinctive nature of centres as due to the '*collaboration and co-operation of different professional groups, and how they bring together services for children and their families in new and radical ways*' (Innovation Unit, 2011, p3).

This raises distinctive issues for Centre leadership. In many ways, the role is strong on ambition, but weak in terms of power. The concerns mentioned by participants are similar to those considered by Anning et al (2006) who write about the wider context of children's services. Anning et al's (2006) model is, in some ways, helpful in exploring the challenges faced by setting leaders. Structural dilemmas, referring to membership of core and peripheral teams, line management around the team, the management of workloads and the location of the team's activities are evident in the data from this study, replicating some of the findings from

Anning et al (2006). Problems emerge in that the leaders in this study are responsible for the delivery of services but not necessarily for the line management of those delivering the service. Activities, such as midwifery are located in the setting but there are yet other activities which take place out of the centre itself but still have to be managed by Centre leaders.

Ideological dilemmas (Anning et al, 2006) refer to the collision between professional and historical cultures. Such collisions appear in differing degrees in the data from this study. Louise mentions her church-sponsored family support worker who is not trained as well as Louise's background and experience dictates that she should be. Louise is nevertheless powerless to intervene since the training of other agencies' staff is not her responsibility. The major ideological collision is of course in the relationship with the Local Authority and the MAT teams which has been discussed above.

Procedural dilemmas, according to Anning et al (2006), are about the day to day *procedural aspects*' (p98) of teams. The two aspects they refer to that have particular relevance to this study are around data and agreements about interventions. In terms of data, there are many examples given, for instance, the difference between the quantitative data expected by Ofsted and the qualitative data that Centre leaders are more comfortable with supplying and sometimes feel are more relevant to their work. Participants also point out that numerical data about families is used differently by the Centres and the MAT teams, and that there is still a reticence from Health in sharing the data which are needed for the centres to do their work. In terms of agreement about interventions, an example given is the work of breast feeding workers who, though doing the job they are asked to do by their employer (Health), are not doing it in a way that supports the targets of the Children's Centres.

Interprofessional dilemmas (Anning et al, 2006) are described as arising during the transition to multi- professional team work. An example was seen earlier in that the health team at one of the settings did not see themselves as part of that setting during an Ofsted inspection.

Though Anning et al's (2006) model is helpful to some extent; it is sometimes difficult to distinguish clearly between the different dilemmas. Possibly, structure derives from procedure and organisations are sometimes organised around processes. Interprofessional dilemmas come from the roots of the ideology prevalent in the profession. Perhaps this is because in the wider setting of children's services differences between professional roles are more obvious.

The underlying question is whether or not we have ever had true integration as originally intended. This would have meant Children's Centres being co-located with other organisations such as GP clinics or job centres. Frost (2011) says that this varied across the country with some services '*almost reaching the aspirations and others falling far short*' (p175). Northtown seems to be at the latter end of this spectrum, whereas centres in adjacent authorities have more imaginatively co-located Children's Centres, for instance with job centres, police stations and the local library or with adult learning services. This original idea seems to have only ever been paid '*lip service*' (at least in Northtown). While there has been a national roll out of Directors of Children's Services, covering education and social care, health has never been integrated at the top level of LAs. Perhaps it is no surprise that it does not happen lower down.

I suggest that there are three major sets of dilemmas faced by leaders in Children's Centres. I borrow two from Anning et al (2006) those of process and ideology, but a third set of dilemmas arises from the increasing complexity of the cases being handled by the settings. This ironically increases the need for integration of services. Though participants do not give specific examples, they refer to the increasing number of complex cases they deal with in terms of children and families with multiple problems, in terms of younger mothers with more complex needs and in terms of having to understand the complexity of an increasingly diverse set of cultures represented in their reach area.

Collaboration and cooperation with other organisations does not apply solely to professional agencies, it is also relevant to other community groups. This is illustrated by a number of examples where offerings have had a specific focus on the needs of the community. Understanding community needs is an important contextual consideration.

The third element of context implied by the data is that participants are able to exercise their leadership in ways that are different from other settings which are perhaps more traditionally associated with education and care. This links with the view given by some participants that Children's Centres are less restrictive and hierarchical than other organisations. This was described as '*shedding of that professional stranglehold'*. For instance, compared with social work, Children's Centres were not seen as working from the deficit models of '*picking up the pieces'* because of their role was preventative, opening up the possibilities of early intervention. From health services, Sarah suggested that there was a shift from a clinical view of the child to a more holistic social approach in Sure Start. Bronwen suggests that Sure Start offered a more

'unified purpose' and despite the wide set of targets, there has been the opportunity to create a vision in discussion and consensus with the staff team and the community.

7.1.4. Summary

The Children's Centre leaders in this study are asked to carry out their roles in a context which is unique, complex and in important ways dysfunctional. It is complex in a number of ways, which starts with the influence on the work of the Centre that comes from central government through Ofsted. This is complicated by the fact that effectively Ofsted are measuring the effectiveness of the Local Authority through the work of the Children's Centres, yet leaders in this study do not feel that they have the support of the Local Authority. It is complex because of the increasing complexity of the needs of the Centre's clients, and it is complex because of the issues associated with multi-agency working.

The dysfunctional nature of the context is perceived to derive from the relationship that the leaders in this study have with the Local Authority. This relationship is presented as being adversarial and competitive rather than supportive and collaborative. The participants' view is that the LA use Ofsted as a stick with which to beat them. However, perhaps the most significant threat to the leaders' ability to deliver the core purpose has been the introduction of the authority's MATs. This raises a number of issues. Funding for these teams has come from the EIG which originally had some money ring fenced for Sure Start Children's Centres. Without ting fencing, funding for MATs has been sustained, seemingly at the expense of Children's Centres which have seen significant cuts in their funding. Secondly, the differentiation of role and purpose between the MATs and the Children's Centres is ambiguous in terms of responsibility for the birth to five age group. Thirdly, I suggest that the MAT workers are becoming a different kind of professional in their own right, exacerbating the already present issues of working with other agencies with different cultures and priorities. Of course, this latter point is merely conjecture. It would be of interest to investigate how much integration has taken place within these teams. Based on participants' views of current attempts at integration in their own context, and given that a number of the MAT leaders originally worked in Children's Centres, I would speculate that though the MATs present a single identity externally, inside the teams, the silo mentality is likely to remain.

Whether the participants could have anticipated the adversarial nature of the context on joining the LA is, I would suggest, highly doubtful since it seems to represent the antithesis of the

original Sure Start intentions. Whether this is a local or a national circumstance is also uncertain. However, there is some evidence from Council debates that Northtown has been particularly ruthless in cutting numbers of Children's Centres, particularly in areas of social and economic deprivation, and in cutting services in remaining Centres. Comparisons with other authorities are not within the scope of this study but again would be of interest for further work.

I now turn from the context to considering the people who lead in the context and look at what they bring into their role. It seems reasonable to ask whether the leaders chose the context but without a full understanding of the distinctive challenges they would face. This will be explored as the study continues.

7.2. The people who lead

Because the context of a Children's Centre is so distinctive, it can be argued that Centres require leaders that have '*new attributes and skills needed to deliver a range of services in multi professional contexts*' (Close and Wainwright 2010 p435). In alternative commentary, Middlewood and Parker (2009) characterise this combination of leadership attributes as '*enthusiast, entrepreneur, politician, maverick and ethical sharer*' (p 47).

Inevitably, discussion on who leaders are harks back to trait and skill theories. Though criticism of trait theory suggests that it ignores context, I argue that in this situation they are specifically linked because of the unique nature of that context. As Briggs and Briggs (2009) point out, even though theory is moving away from the notion of heroic leadership (derived from trait theory), some of the original underpinning ideas still have significance to our understanding.

The participants present themselves as possessing all the expected generic traits of warmth, gentleness, enthusiasm, passion, inspiration, advocacy, caring, love, knowledgeability and assertiveness identified by writers in the ECEC field (Aubrey,2007; Solly, 2003; Osgood, 2004; Dalli, 2005; Moyles ,2004). I suggest though, that there is a harder edge to the participants that has not previously been evidenced in this detail. The adversarial nature of the context and the high stakes nature of inspection against externally imposed targets have perhaps defined a need for a different set of skills than traditionally exemplified in the ECEC sector. This in turn has led to leaders having particularly high expectations of their staff and a much stronger emphasis on getting things done. The warm, nurturing and sympathetic approach which Aubrey (2007) suggests may be a '*distinctive feature of early year's providers and of female workers*'

(p31) was evident when participants were talking with me about their leadership, but I argue that the warmth was secondary to their desire to meet the needs of the families in their reach area.

According to Briggs and Briggs (2009), theory on early year's leadership has moved away from trait theory to new paradigms. A helpful example is that of Leeson et al (2012) which specifies transformational leadership, distributed leadership and authentic leadership as being influential.

Participants presented themselves as showing some of the characteristics of models of transformational leadership. For instance, they saw themselves as acting as role models for their staff, demonstrating strong internal values and providing staff with a clear vision and sense of purpose (Northouse, 2013). One of the participants spoke particularly of winning hearts and minds. This has elements of both transformational and charismatic leadership. If charismatic, it is not messianic because participants come across as modest. This demonstration of humility and levels of self-doubt would be uncharacteristic of messianic leaders. Elements of transformational leadership are also seen in the desire for their staff to succeed and the way in which participants provide a '*supportive climate where they listen carefully to the individual needs of their followers*' (Northouse, 2013, p193).

But other aspects do not fit so well with the model of transformational leadership; Participants describe themselves as having an informal style which is open, honest, fair but also firm. I have summarised this in suggesting that amongst participants, there is straightforwardness and honesty. Margaret talks about how her staff see her approach to setting direction as a process of offering advice. This informal style is perhaps most useful for leaders in terms of working with others who are not line managed by them but this might also be adopted as a style which allows participants to be less bureaucratic towards their own staff. Bryman (2004, 2013) notes that informal leadership is an under researched area, particularly since recent research focus on what he calls '*dispersed*' leadership. This has more latterly been referred to as distributed leadership (Waniganayake et al, 2012; Leeson et al, 2012).

In the settings in this study, I argue strongly that leadership is not distributed. I recognise that this goes against current thinking (e.g. Waniganayake et al, 2012: Leeson et al, 2012), however my argument is based on three ideas. Firstly, I adopt McDowall Clark and Murray's (2012) view that this way of thinking is too specific to a school culture; secondly, despite talking about flattened structures in their settings, participants are absolutely clear that the responsibility and accountability for outcomes resides with them; and thirdly I suggest that the notion of 'heroic

leadership' perhaps applies here pictured in the fight for justice against the 'dark forces' of the MATs. There are a number of other aspects of context that also call for heroic leadership, for example the complexity of the social and economic problems faced by families in the current political context and the high stakes nature of inspection.

The most useful way of presenting some understanding of the people who lead is through the third aspect of Leeson et al's (2012) new paradigm, that of authentic leadership. Whitehead (2009) defines an authentic leader as one who '(*1*) *is self-aware, humble, always seeking improvement, aware of those being led and looks out for the welfare of others; (2) fosters high degrees of trust by building an ethical and moral framework; and (3) is committed to organizational success within the construct of social values'* (p850).

Authentic leadership is described by Bennis and Thomas (2002) as having developed out of struggle where the motivation to lead comes from the need to overcome injustice. Shamir and Eilam (2005) link accounts of leadership development to life stories and echo Bennis and Thomas (2002) in identifying that leadership develops out of struggle and hardship. They also suggest leadership develops through finding a cause.

In the case of the participants, the struggles faced seem to have been against a sense of unfairness, in several cases experienced from early life; the professional strangleholds felt in previous professions; and wanting to work in a context where the vision comes from the bottom up and is not imposed. We have also seen that there is a collective story emerging amongst the group of participants which concerns their current struggle against the Local Authority and Ofsted, perhaps creating an additional justification for the need of individual participants to lead in order to promote a collective purpose.

All the participants seem to have been successful at finding a cause. The choice they made to work for Sure Start local programmes, a choice which they made with passion and enthusiasm is one of the main commonalities of their lives. Hazel in particular compares her experience of hearing about Sure Start with the same depth of feeling expressed at Kennedy's assassination.

Other participants were excited about Sure Start and its potential; Janice, for instance, says she was encouraged by colleagues to apply for a Sure Start management role because '*it'll be right up your street'* and Bronwen saw Sure Start as a way of being able to put into practice the

things that she had been frustrated with in social work such as having to put children into foster care rather than being able to work with others to keep the family together.

In discussing how authentic leaders develop their leadership through learning from experience, Shamir and Eilam (2005) suggest that they present their life stories as a series of learning events. These might include learning from training activities, from mistakes and from role models and these life experiences form the basis of the leaders '*self-knowledge and convictions*' (ibid p405). Whilst it is questionable that only authentic leaders learn from these sorts of experience, the interviews seem to have been used by the participants (perhaps unintentionally) as an opportunity for exactly this sort of reflection. Though I am not an experienced interviewer, this seemed distinctive in that participants did far more than simply answering the questions as they were asked. Clearly their experiences had played a part in shaping the reasons for taking on their current roles and there were a number of similarities in their backgrounds which align with the thinking on authentic leadership.

Participants also present themselves as being interested in self-development and learning. The NPQICL is referred to by participants on a number of occasions. It is interesting to note that it was not seen as significant as it was originally intended to be in developing the '*knowledge, professional qualities and skills of those leading such complex, multi-disciplinary teams and organisations*' (Pilcher, 2009, p105). Other training, such as Hazel's ILM course, is mentioned and reading is seen as a critical part of development for Bronwen, Janice and Louise. Other specific experiential learning relevant to their current roles comes from their early exposure to multi-agency settings. Sarah says how her background in social work taught her about relating to people and being a '*people person*'. Janice's background in nursing has taught her to help others but not dwell on unpleasantness. Louise relates how her professional heritage shaped her and led to her '*looking for the next step and taking my sense of social justice with me*'. She describes how her work with CAMHS allowed her to gain a greater perspective on the process of working with children and families and the other agencies involved in their well being. Role models also play a key part. Margaret in particular said that she was largely influenced by Jane's leadership style. Jane was influenced by her colleague Jean from whom she learned how to do '*revolutionary things*'. Louise learned from poor role models – her experience of a manager of a setting '*who sat and smoked all day*' where there was no discussion of quality or improvement led her to wanting to do things that really mattered.

Janice talks of learning from having support from an influential line manager who helped her think through her mistakes. She speaks of being steered through her thinking about where things had not gone very well in the past so that she could in future *'pay more attention ... rather than let things sort of happen'*.

Shamir and Eilam (2005) talk about life stories being presented in a way that suggests that people in formal leadership positions do not see themselves as leaders – the concept they refer to as non-leaders. They suggest that the stories of non-leaders are less organised than those of others. This has particular resonance in Margaret's story. As noted previously, it was difficult to get her to talk about herself and she specifically introduced the idea that she did not see herself as a leader. She seems to present a balance between thinking that she is good enough because she has held the role for a long time with a feeling that she may one day be found out but stating that she is seen as confident by people around her. It is fascinating that she was happy to reveal this to me, but had to be pushed to talk about her childhood – even so, she says that she does not see herself as a strong leader. Louise also says that she did not see herself as a leader.

This concept of non-leadership comes across in the early years literature specifically in terms of talking about women leaders. For instance, Rodd (2013), Hard (2005) and Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) all discuss how women in the sector do not always see themselves as leaders, or indeed are willing to accept the label despite their obvious effectiveness in their roles. This study challenges this idea. Though participants may present themselves as non-leaders at one level, they do not hesitate to take responsibility for their actions or the effectiveness of their settings and, as suggested previously, they present themselves as both rebels and heroes. It must be considered, however, that the research used by Rodd (2013) and Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) was carried out before NPQICL, and studied a much wider range of early years settings, only a few of which were Children's Centres. The view of reluctance amongst female Children's Centre leaders to accept that they are performing leadership and management roles may now be anachronistic.

How participants tell their life story itself, what they choose to disclose or not, also reflects on their concepts of leadership. From the view of self-development the experiences themselves are not as significant as the meanings put on them. Bennis and Thomas (2002) suggest that authentic leaders create their own legends in the way they create new and improving versions

of themselves. Amongst participants we have seen in the last chapter that there are a number of examples of how they present themselves as improving. For instance, Louise presents herself as becoming more directive as a result of increased pressure on outcomes – however she also suggests that this change does not really match her values. Janice has made a decision to become more authoritative, being worried about establishing a cosy club approach to her leadership. Hazel says that, though she does not see herself as influential, perhaps even as a non-leader, her thinking has led her to be aware of the impact she has on others. Bronwen talks about her questioning the difference she was able to make as a social worker. Other instances concern the presentation of what Bennis and Thomas (2002) call crucibles. These are the experiences and events that '*shape leaders, named after the vessels that alchemists used in their attempts to turn base metals into gold*'. Bennis and Thomas (2002) suggest that these experiences force people into:

> *Deep self-reflection that forced them to question who they were and what mattered to them. It required them to examine their values, question their assumptions, and hone their judgment. And, invariably, they emerged from the crucible stronger and more sure of themselves and their purpose—changed in some fundamental way (p41).*

Sarah talks about bringing midwives into her setting as a pivotal move in consolidating the multi-agency purpose of the setting and about giving her staff placements in social work teams so that they will change what they think about social workers. Bronwen describes how she had to change the culture of the organisation in terms of changing the nature of conversation in the team room so that the men at her centre would feel more included. A cautious suggestion is that the fact that participants volunteered to tell their stories because they are authentic leaders. I am cautious, though because of not knowing the contribution of the interview process.

Shamir and Eilam (2005) also suggest that authentic leadership does not reside only in the leader but requires the authentication of the leader by the followers using life stories as the basis of that authentication. This is not something than can be verified here since the study did not involve any research with participants' teams. However it is possible to infer some authenticity in some of the stories told which involved staff members. Margaret for instance thinks that her staff see her as an equal, judging her leadership to be offering advice rather than the direction setting that Margaret intended it to be. She also expresses surprise when the team introduce her to others as their boss. Louise talks of wanting mutual support from her team to

help her achieve her aims. Janice wants her team to share her sense of purpose and direction, Bronwen wants her passion for bringing about change to be shared.

Using the concept of authentic leadership to explore who the participants are helps in three ways. Firstly, as Avolio and Gardner (2005) argue, though it is a relatively new way of thinking about leadership, it is at the root of other forms of positive leadership. By this they mean leadership that responds, in a post-Enron way, to the challenges that '*public, private and even volunteer organizations are addressing that run the gamut from ethical meltdowns to terrorism*' (p316). They suggest an approach which aims to restore confidence, hope and optimism. An approach which, though founded in the business literature, has relevance for Children's Centre leadership. Secondly, the concept of authentic leadership is in line with current thinking in the field and thirdly, it allows the incorporation of life stories as a way of considering how participants have come to be authentic leaders (Shamir and Eilam, 2005).

Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) suggest that through the stories people tell, '*we know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others*' (p 70). Through the telling of the life story, I suggest that participants said and implied much about their values and principles, about who they are as leaders and what has influenced and shaped their leadership development and behaviours.

The use of an authentic leadership model to examine the data from the study is supported by Avolio and Gardner's (2005) thinking about the many elements that they claim constitute authentic leadership, namely positive psychological capital, self-awareness, self- regulation, leadership processes, follower development, organizational context and sustained performance beyond expectations. This is a huge list that tries to capture a huge field and as a result has the potential to be generic but it is distinctive from models of transformational leadership because it incorporates an understanding of the participants':

> *...deep sense of self, knowing where they stand on important issues, values and beliefs. With that base they stay their course and convey to others, oftentimes through actions, not just words, what they represent in terms of principles, values and ethics.*

> (Avolio and Gardner, 2005, p320)

Avolio and Gardner (2005) describe positive psychological capital as confidence, optimism, hope and resilience. These traits are clearly demonstrated by the participants through their belief in the Sure Start way of working and their showing no hesitation in their belief about what they are doing or why they are doing it. They show a positive moral perspective in that they see their whole role as being about making a difference to the families and children in their reach areas to help them achieve social justice. Though they fight for social justice, they see that their role is really to develop social capacity in others so that they can look after themselves.

At the heart of the model of authentic leadership is the idea that leaders' self-awareness is the starting point for interpreting what constitutes authentic leadership. My interpretation is that the participants all portray themselves in a way that suggests there is no side, or guile in the way in which they work. In working with families and children there is seldom reason for dishonesty; therefore there is no need to be other than genuine in the way they present themselves to the world, as '*what you see is what you get*'. This awareness has perhaps developed through a great deal of self-reflection which seems characteristic of their roles.

Self-regulation is about the alignment of intention and action, demonstrated through making their '*authentic selves*' (p325) transparent to followers. Transparency is again a key feature of the data, participants present themselves as what you see is what you get – again a reflection on the need to be absolutely honest and open with their client base.

Again, a link with life stories can be made. People are not necessarily consistent in how they present themselves (Sparrowe, 2005). However consistency is achieved through:

> *Successfully narrating how the self is the same self through the disparate events of one's life so that the unity of character becomes evident. Moreover, because narrative is so well suited for representing the relationships between intentions, choices, and outcomes, it offers an especially effective means for self-regulation (p.x)*

Avolio and Gardner (2005) suggest that a number of leadership processes that influence followers have been proposed which ensure that followers identify with the values of their leaders. They do this through the leader acting as a role model for their staff, modelling the authentic characteristics identified earlier. In this thesis, we see this in two instances – one where the participants themselves have been influenced by others and used them as role models and secondly where the participants act as role models for their own team in their

demonstration of transparency of relationships, balanced processing (fairness) and support of self-determination amongst their staff. The development of followers in terms of their own self-awareness and personal development are also characteristics of authentic leadership. In this thesis there is much evidence of participants developing their followers through supervision. This does not seem to be about a charismatic transformation (though Sarah does talk of winning hearts and minds) but more of a gentle nurturing process:

> I spend a lot of time saying to staff, 'What do you think about that?' and getting a bit of a view from people. And I do try and encourage staff to take a bit of a step back and look at, you know, what the children are doing (Bronwen).

There seems to be a desire that the goals of the participants should be shared and developed with their followers and that this is done in an open and constructive way. Through supervision, participants spend time developing their followers.

The term *organisational context* is used to explore the internal environment where Avolio and Gardner (2005) suggest that there should be equal opportunities for learning and development in order for work to be carried out effectively. They recognise the effect of the changing external context, which is characterised by turbulence and uncertainty, as one that should be challenged and changed by leaders to make it more authentic. This is clearly the case here and the external environment is indeed challenging. Attempts to change it are made by participants; however, one might argue that the constraints are such as to prevent authentic leadership in these settings.

Avolio and Gardner's (2006) final characteristic is of sustained performance beyond expectations, i.e. the organisation's ability to achieve persistently high performance and growth over a long period of time whilst remaining true to genuine and ethical values. This of course raises the questions as to whose expectations are being met or exceeded. In the view of the participants, they do try and achieve their goals despite the pressures they see put on them which detract from their own sense of ethics and morality.

The life story approach has brought forward a number of ideas which highlight the authenticity of the leadership of the participants. Using Whitehead's (2009) definition, self-awareness, humility and looking out for the welfare of others have been demonstrated throughout. Participants' self-awareness has been made explicit through the coherent connections made

between their past experience and their current roles in order to establish their values. Other examples have been given from participants' early lives where rebellious streaks have led to some of them wanting to challenge the status quo – perhaps in order to retain a sense of autonomy - and many examples have been given of where they show care for others.

Shamir and Eilam (2005) refer to *'an obviousness'* that leadership is a natural process. This perhaps refers to the age old perception that some leaders are born. They suggest that a life story might indicate that the leader had the ability and the right to lead based on some aspects of being 'special' from an early age. In the case of the participants, this might be illustrated in Hazel's knowing what she wanted for others and being an advocate for them, Janice's description of the resilience she developed as a child and Sarah's affirmation that when she was a child, she was *'never a follower but always a leader'*.

7.2.1. Summary

This study adds to our understanding of leaders in the early years by considering not only the authenticity of their approach, but by challenging the earlier ideas that there is a reluctance to accept that they are leaders. I think that ideological commitment to social justice; context specific knowledge and authentic leadership are key findings that make an important contribution to our understanding of early years leadership. Early years leadership is not primarily about kindness and nurturing.

In many ways, this challenges earlier work which portrays leading in the early year's sector as a gentle affair such as that reported by the ELEYS (2006) report where leaders are tasked with

> – *Identifying and articulating a collective vision; especially with regard to pedagogy and curriculum.*

> – *Ensuring shared understandings, meanings and goals: building common purposes.*

> – *Effective communication: providing a level of transparency in regard to expectations, practices and processes.*

> – *Encouraging reflection: which acts as an impetus for change and the motivation for on-going learning and development.*

- *Commitment to on-going, professional development: supporting staff to become more critically reflective in their practice.*

- *Monitoring and assessing practice: through collaborative dialogue and action research.*

- *Building a learning community and team culture: establishing a community of learners.*

- *Encouraging and facilitating parent and community partnerships: promoting achievement for all young children.*

(ELEYS, 2006, p26)

Of course these things are important, and are explicit in the participants' stories; however, this study shows that earlier work has largely overlooked the skills needed to make hard economic and political decisions, manage dysfunctional relationships with funding authorities and the toughness that has to be developed in working with some of the most challenging and vulnerable children and families.

The data suggests that the type of people who choose to work in these settings have a number of characteristics in common. They are authentic in their approach - or at least they present themselves in a way that seems to be authentic. They have a strong moral code and a firm belief in social justice; They have experience of multi-agency working and a strong belief that this is the only way in which the most effective work can be done for families; They are keen to challenge the status quo and seem to be at their best when working in an autonomous environment. The nature of the context and the type of person they are combine to influence the way in which they lead. The approach to leadership taken forms the final section of this chapter.

7.3. The approach to leadership within the context:

The data in this study indicates that there are three main elements to consider that arise from participants' descriptions of their approach to leadership in Children's Centres. These focus around the importance of outcomes, the importance of relationships and what I would see as the importance of autonomy.

7.3.1. The importance of outcomes

In the business literature, Grint (2005) asks if it is what leaders achieve that makes them leaders. He argues that without achievement of 'product' (p23) it is difficult to describe people as leaders and this is sometimes seen to be the primary criterion for leadership (Ulrich et al, 1999). Of course, product is not necessarily the same thing as success and it is usually difficult to determine that the outcomes achieved are due to the direct actions of the specific leader (Alvesson and Sveningson, 2003. However there is perhaps some support from writing about school leadership. We know (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003), or at least can strongly claim, (Leithwood et al, 2006), that school leadership is second only to teaching in its impact on pupil achievement.

Perhaps the same applies here, that the leadership given by those with direct contact with children and families is equally relevant. However, as Grint (2005) and Huber and Muijs (2010) argue, we perhaps no longer need to explore whether or not leaders make a difference but how they get things done. Elkington (1999) suggests that leadership outcomes should not just be measured in terms of numbers, but also should include *'environmental quality and social justice'* (in Grint, 2005). He suggests that without this *'triple bottom line'*, results-based approaches are ultimately doomed.

This *'triple bottom line'* approach is particularly important to consider in this study. The overarching concern of the politicians seems to be on quantitative data whereas that of the participants seems to focus around social justice and to some extent environmental quality seen in the improvements to the wellbeing of families and children. However, outcomes, as with everything else in Children's Centres, are open to interpretation by the various interest groups. It is Ofsted, through the Local Authority, which seems to be having the most impact in driving a performance culture measured quantitatively.

The key measures put on leaders are access to services by young children and families, the quality and impact of practice and services and the effectiveness of leadership, governance and management. Inspection was seen by participants in two ways. Firstly, mention was made that Ofsted inspections gave a focus to the setting and were therefore helpful, but generally inspections were seen as threatening, inconsistent and unhelpful. Criticism was made that the

inspections assume two things – one that Children's Centres are still doing the same role as Sure Start Local Programmes, and that the same criteria will fit all centres without recognising that they have more differences than similarities. The participants take the inspections seriously and aim to achieve the required standards. They see that understanding and using numbers is crucial to their work. However, they also seem to see external measures as hurdles which have to be overcome but are largely peripheral to their main work. This understanding of data is not always seen as important by their staff who, as one participant noted, were shocked when targets for reaching a specific number of families were mooted.

For participants, internal, self-designed measures of success seem far more important and revolve completely around the relationships they establish between centre staff, with the community they serve and in their relationships with other agencies. Those successful outcomes are presented through qualitative examples. For instance, setting up a back to work club engaging the services of a voluntary agency; building good relationships with the community so that a refuge can be provided for those escaping domestic violence; running a community bonfire, developing staff; and building relationships with other agencies including bringing midwifery into the setting or building good relationships with health visitors.

One might speculate that participants would also rather have remained as original Sure Start Local Programmes with the inherent freedom over how they choose to be measured; however they recognise what has to be done in order to survive. This echoes the view of Sharp et al (2012) who suggest a balance needs to be found between targeted and universal services. They argue that a reduction in universal provision may undermine targeted provision because targets are identified through the relationships families build with centres as they make use of universal services. This difficult balance confirms the need for leaders to have those relationships with the community and to have knowledge of what is needed by that community.

7.3.2. The importance of relationships

The data suggests that participants see the building of relationships as their key leadership task. The importance of building relationships is supported by much of the early year's leadership literature which sees this as an important characteristic of good leadership (Scrivens, 2002; Bloom, 2000; Jones and Pound, 2008). Youngs (2007) suggests that relational forms of leadership are at the forefront of new thinking about leadership and this approach fits well with the theme identified from the study as honesty and straightforwardness, that is to say involving

transparency in the relationships developed (Walumbwa et al, 2008; Jensen and Luthans, 2006; Ilies et al, 2005).

This focus might be explored through leadership style theory; indeed two of the participants cited Goleman's (2000)[17] work in helping them to think about their own styles. This may have come from their studies on the NPQICL course. As an example, Janice says that she has made a conscious choice to become less '*collaborative and affiliative*' in order to become more '*authoritative*'. She saw this as necessary to stop her from falling into a 'cosy' environment. Hazel also uses theoretical language, describing herself as '*democratic – but autocratic in a crisis*'. Louise talks about becoming more 'directive' in difficult situations.

As Youngs (2007) says, relational forms of leadership provide a useful approach for understanding leadership in this sector. As we have already seen, relationships with staff are characterised by openness and honesty. They are about giving staff a sense of shared purpose and ethos and, in one case, even converting staff to the Sure Start ethos. Rost (1991) suggests that this approach increases the chance of groups working together towards a common good. This seems to be the case here where participants clearly focus on what they believe is important for the children and families in their outreach area. It would be easy to think that the strong relationships with staff might lead to a '*cosy club*', as Janice put it, but this seems to be far from the truth. Children's Centre leaders have high expectations of their teams. If anything, the strength of the relationships means that leaders might get away with a little more than they should in terms of what they ask from their staff. That they get away with these expectations is put down to staff '*indulging*' (Margaret) the participants because of the strength of the personal relationships. In one case, the strength of the relationship is such that a familial example is given where one participant describes the handing over of the operational management of her Centre as her moving into a '*grandparent*' role.

With all participants, the impression emerges of a firm belief that they must do their best for children and families, but that they are open to challenges and other ideas. Consultation and nurturing are driving principles behind all the participants' thinking about leadership. The

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[17] Though participants have cited work from Goleman (2000) which they encountered on the NPQICL programme, it is important to recognize that Goleman's paper was based largely on work by David McClelland (1917-1998).

leadership behaviours identified parallel those identified in the early years sector suggested by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006), namely, encouraging and facilitating parent and community partnerships, being responsive to parents' needs and able to communicate with them (Bloom, 2000), or having a clear vision to improve outcomes for children and families (Sharpe et al, 2012). However I suggest that there are some practices which emerge, perhaps driven by the uniqueness of the context. These differences may be what Sharpe et al (2012) see as using business skills strategically; however I feel this is not quite what was meant by Sharpe et al (ibid), but is an approach that is unique to this particular leadership role. Participants give examples of how they get things done through 'wheeling and dealing'. Though only a few examples are given, this strikes me as an important aspect of the leadership behaviours of the participants which also serves to emphasise the presentation of maverick nature of the way they work as leaders.

> *We do a massive amount of wheeling and dealing; if you 'wheeled and dealed' in*
> *statutory services they'd be absolutely horrified. We wheel and deal mainly with other*
> *people who are in the community (Janice).*

Some other examples are given as we have seen in the previous chapter. Bartering is part of the participants' world, having to work out what can be offered as a setting in order to get the things that are needed by the community. I argue that this is an entrepreneurial necessity not identified by other writers in the early year's field. I suggest that though the motivation to take this approach has increased in times of cutback, it was not originally driven by finance, but by the participants' approach to establishing relationships with the community.

7.3.3. The importance of autonomy

Northouse (2013) suggests that the way in which people lead depends, amongst other things, on the emotional residues of prior experiences. Past experience of multi-agency working in non-traditional settings has led to participants wanting to move away from the silos of their professional heritage to more liberating environments. The data suggests that in joining Sure Start, participants thought that they would be working in an environment free from bureaucracy and constraint. They thought that this would allow them the autonomy to establish their own vision for their settings in keeping with their own values and principles, and indeed this was the case. I would argue that this approach is congruent with the original purpose of Sure Start in supporting families and encouraging them to grow and develop independence.

I argue here, that the desire for autonomy fits rather more with a 'heroic' approach to leadership than with one which involves distribution. Autonomy is, perhaps unsurprisingly, not something mentioned in the early year's literature. It perhaps does not fit with the '*unconscious association of relational skills with femininity and powerlessness*' (Fletcher, 2002 p3) or the warmth and nurture implicit in models of distributed leadership. Fletcher (ibid) points out that the '*the rhetoric may be we don't need another hero, but practising new leadership...is antithetical to how we have been taught to express ourselves at work*'.

Perhaps vulnerable children and families do, in fact, need heroic support.

Being autonomous is a key aspect of the participants' style, with this comes clarity about the need to make and take accountability for hard decisions. Participants and are not afraid to do this, as one participant put it '*the buck stops with me*' (Bronwen).

7.3.4. Summary

In consideration of participants' approach to leadership, this study has identified three main strands, the importance of outcomes, relationships and autonomy. Participants present themselves as being clear that their leadership must produce results. However, there seem to be two sets of outcomes; one set for Ofsted and the Local Authority which focuses on hard numerical data, and the other set which harks back to the original core purpose of the SSLP. These tend to be more qualitative and embedded more firmly in changing people's lives.

Their major approach to being effective leaders is through the building of relationships. They see this as important in all aspects of their roles, relationships with their staff, with other agencies and with the community they serve. Much emphasis is placed on understanding personality in order to do this. What is interesting, however, is that the same emphasis does not seem to be placed on building relationships with the Local Authority. I would speculate that this is perhaps unrecoverable for reasons outlined in the postscript.

I suggest that the participants' clear need for autonomy is somewhat in contrast to what would be expected in an early years setting. Their approach to leadership requires freedom to act in a way that allows them to adhere to the values and principles that they have built up through their life's experience. They joined Sure Start believing that this was an environment which suited their approach and firmly hold on to the essence of its original core offer.

7.4. Summary

This chapter has presented a discussion of the findings making connections between the themes identified in the previous chapter and the research discussed in the literature review and the background chapter. It has identified agreements and disagreements between my data and that found by others and considered the strengths and weaknesses of alternative interpretations from the literature.

The chapter has identified the uniqueness of the context in which participants work. This context has been examined from three perspectives. Two of these are out of the control of the setting, i.e. the national and local contexts, while the third is internal to the setting itself.

The picture presented of the national context is that it is financially constrained and highly political in nature. The original intent of multi-agency working now seems to be in decline under the Coalition Government. This is well illustrated with the immediate abolition, on its election, of the Department for Children, Families and Schools and its replacement by the Department for Education, emphasising education rather than care. This in many ways has served to sweep away the foundations of the Sure Start agenda and this has been exacerbated by a perceived uncertainty of the role and remit of the Centres, and watering down of the core offer.

From the local context, these leaders are working with (or in this case, against) an adversarial local authority which participants see as threatening and unhelpful. I argue that participants are placed in a position where they are competing for resources against the authority's own Multi Agency Teams, which again have an unclear remit.

In their immediate context, the work with other agencies and groups over which they have no authority creates a particular set of issues. These are not simply other professions, but also voluntary and community groups. Participants argue that the clients they work with have increasingly complex needs which require a greater degree of integrated working than is perhaps possible for them to deliver.

In terms of the people who lead the Centres, the chapter illustrates a number of commonalities in participants' life stories which have led to them choosing to work in this context. The values of social justice developed in their earlier lives and the way in which they have presented themselves through the data portrays them as effective leaders showing the characteristics of nurture and warmth that the ECEC leadership literature would lead us to expect. However, the

deeper understanding of their life stories leads me to propose a model of authentic leadership to help interpret who they are.

Their approach to leadership reflects this picture in that they see leadership being done fundamentally through relationships. This fits with new models of distributed leadership and authenticity; however, more gentle models are challenged in two ways. Firstly, participants are passionate that their work should have results. These are seen in two ways, quantifiable results that serve to placate their political masters, and results they see as more relevant that are qualitative stories about how they have changed lives. Secondly, participants show a need for autonomy in what they do and the way in which they do it. They chose to work for Sure Start because it offered them this kind of environment and show a sense of toughness and heroism in not shirking from the responsibility that autonomy entails.

In the next and final chapter, I will reflect back on the research questions and the findings from the research and make explicit the knowledge claims arising from this study. I will also offer my reflections on the study together with an account of the limitations of the research. I will close with a postscript on the world of the Children's Centre and the participants' stories.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions

This final chapter of the thesis draws together the research questions and the findings from the research and makes explicit the knowledge claims arising from this study. It offers my reflections on the study and describes its limitations together with some suggestions for further research identified through these limitations. The thesis will close with a postscript on the world of the Children's Centre and, for the purpose of this study, a close to the participants' stories.

The research questions that the thesis has addressed are as follows:

- _What is distinctive about leadership in the children's centre context and how does this compare with other thinking about leadership?_
- _How do Children's Centre leaders' professional and personal biographies influence their understanding of leadership and the development of their leadership capability/ capacity?_
- _What is the approach to leadership in Children's Centres?_

The most robust evidence from the findings indicates that these questions are best addressed through the three key areas of debate identified in the previous chapter.

8.1. The distinctive nature of leadership in the Children's Centre context

To understand the distinctive nature of leadership, it is important to understand the context in which leaders operate. The Children's Centre environment is influenced by many things. Firstly by a government that admits that the purpose of the Centres is unclear and means different things to different people. These purposes range from being merely a childcare provider to an important source for the tackling of poverty and inequality. Although control of, and responsibility for, the centres has been devolved to Local Authorities, monitoring is carried out centrally through Ofsted. This has added complications, since as the LA has statutory responsibility for the services offered to vulnerable children and families, an Ofsted inspection of a Children's Centre is effectively an inspection of the Local Authority. Arguments have been put forward that, being based in education, Ofsted has neither the capability nor the expertise to make such a judgement.

Secondly, as a result of the devolved budget, the context is largely set by the Local Authority which now has complete control of the funding for the centres. This has led to significant cuts in budget and a subsequent inability to deliver the original core offer of the settings. What is

particularly significant in this case is the perceived adversarial relationship between the leaders in this study and the Local Authority. This has been exacerbated by the re allocation of the EIG to MAT teams, further confusing the actual role and remit of the centre.

Thirdly, the context requires the involvement with other agencies, both professional and voluntary, in the delivery of services. Centre leaders need to manage and co-ordinate this work without any direct authority and therefore face a number of dilemmas associated with multi-agency working.

These three aspects combine to create a context that is unique and not addressed elsewhere in the literature.

The leaders in this study joined Sure Start at a time when it was new, extremely well-funded and when the idea of integrated working was in vogue because it had been decided that this was the most appropriate way to tackle vulnerability amongst children and families. Participants brought with them experience of working in non-traditional settings and a strong set of values and principles about what was needed to bring about social change. I argue that what is distinctive about their leadership is the authenticity they brought to the role. However, this does not present a complete picture.

Previous literature on early childhood leaders describes them with a set of traditional female characteristics notably those that associate with child caring roles. Though these characteristics are present in the participants, and reflect current ideas about newer approaches to the study of leadership, I think that this study identifies a robustness and resilient approach of leading by example, in which leaders maintain their principles and stand up for their cause against this adversity; a position which is more in line with a heroic view of leadership. For me, then, the distinctive nature of the leadership presented by the participants is not one of distribution, but one of authenticity and heroism.

8.2. The influence of life stories

The life stories of the participants have been highly significant in developing participants understanding and practice of leadership. Participants have not revealed a great deal about their childhood, but from what there is emerges a desire for fairness and a sense of what is right or wrong which I interpret as later developing into a sense of social justice. They seem to have developed a genuine interest in politics so that their values and principles are thought through.

They have generally had the influence of mentors and role models in determining what they have set out to do. These others have provided them with the impetus to take on leadership roles. They all demonstrate an early rebellious streak which has developed into the desire to make a difference to the lives of others.

All of them have followed paths into caring professions; However, they have concluded that agencies acting on their own could not deliver the support which they saw as needed to make the differences they had identified to the lives of vulnerable children and families. They all sought to work in an environment where this was possible. Their history of working in non-traditional environments where embryonic multi-agency working was taking place prepared them for the arrival of Sure Start. This was an initiative which was a natural progression into more integrated working which also offered the opportunity for autonomy. This was such a perfect match with their ambitions that it was embraced with excitement and eagerness.

8.3. The approach to leadership in Children's Centres

In this study, three main ways of approaching leadership have been identified. There is a very clear focus on outcomes; participants have no doubt that their work has to achieve results. As has previously been shown, there are issues with what those outcomes should be, but participants clearly try to remain true to their own values, delivering results in terms of improving the lives of their community. They do this through building relationships as espoused in some of the ideas about new paradigms. This is perhaps because the fundamental nature of their work is about building trust with the families in their reach area so this is possibly an inherent skill. It is essential that these relationships are formed with a number of entities that support their work. Whilst this is carried out successfully with those other agencies, it does not seem as though they have been as skilful in developing links with the Local Authority. I speculate that the origins of this enmity lie in the Local Authority's failure to co-ordinate the original SSLP bidding process, thus it goes back a long way, and I suspect is not rectifiable. Key to their approach is the need for autonomy. I think this happens on a number of levels; being autonomous in the desire to establish their own vision for what the Centre should be and do; wanting to develop independence in their own staff, and wanting to be independent in the way that they do things. The freedom from the rules of their original professions has given them the opportunity to barter and do deals with the community which serve both to integrate themselves into the ways in which communities work and to be able to deliver their services effectively. I wonder if it also serves to support their naturally rebellious natures.

8.4. Knowledge claims

This thesis offers, from a participants' perspective, some new light on the context in which they operate and the role that they carry out. It highlights the difficulties in establishing the nature of that context through identifying the lack of a clear understanding of the role and purpose of Children's Centres at community and government levels. Perhaps there are lessons to be learned about the way in which interventions are set up nationally when implemented locally.

The thesis points out that, in the Local Authority in this study, the situation is hindered by the introduction of other multi-agency teams with an overlapping purpose. It reiterates others' views of the difficulties of working with other agencies though offers some further insights into leadership in multi-agency contexts. It suggests that the present government is moving away from supporting integrated working in the joined up ways that Sure Start had the potential to provide. This has led to leaders of these Centres having to have the appropriate background, desire and skills to be able to do this, developed through reflecting on their personal and professional life journeys. Whilst other work on leadership speaks frequently of the need to set a vision, this is usually for the staff and within a well established context, not for a wider community.

The life story approach has given me insights into research, and when this is placed against rich contextual detail, brings an important generative method to light. This is the only study that looks at the life stories of Children's Centre Leaders. From it, I claim that understanding participants' lives has demonstrated the importance of two particular aspects which I feel contributes to their ability to lead in this context. Firstly the sense of social justice they have developed throughout their lives, and secondly that they have all had previous experience in non-traditional professional backgrounds where they have taken roles which necessitated working with other agencies. I wonder if these have provided a rehearsal space for their future leadership roles.

The most significant claim I want to make, however, is that these leaders have demonstrated, through the telling of their life stories, a real sense of authenticity. Though this has been recognised as what would be expected in early year's leadership, it is not something previously studied in any depth. Despite the movement away from ideas of heroic leadership, I feel that I have identified leaders who have become heroic in their struggle to deliver services in the face of increasingly complex work and increasingly hostile contexts. The argument with new

paradigms is that they have been developed by men studying men. Perhaps this research with women identifies that the heroism, once recognised as a masculine trait, has turned into a much more authentic heroism in the leadership delivered by female participants. This kind of authentic leadership offers a model for leadership elsewhere in the early years sector.

8.4. Limitations of this study

No research is without limitations. This study has faced a number of them. What is particularly important is the impact of these limitations on the trustworthiness of the findings and on my ability to answer the research questions. The quality of findings has been purely based on my interpretation of the data presented to me by the participants. Whilst I think I have done this in a rigorous way, and offered it to participants for verification, they have not been persuaded to review their data in detail. Whilst this implies that they trust me to represent them accurately, I have no way of knowing that this is actually the case. This of course influences the use of my data in answering the research questions.

My own role in this has again been a limitation. It was so difficult to bracket how impressed I was with the kindness shown to me by the participants, and with their honesty, that I wonder if I developed a real admiration for them and their work. There is perhaps a danger that they presented themselves to me in a very positive light and as a result I developed some form of sub-conscious hero worship, hence my adoption of the term in the conclusions. This is perhaps an extreme perspective. I feel that I know them and myself well enough to appreciate what they do and that they are rather more authentic than I have just suggested.

It must be emphasised that this is a study of a particular set of leaders in a particular local authority but there were still limitations with the sampling process. Had I interviewed participants from a purely Local Authority background, I am not sure that a similar picture would have been painted; however what was important to me was the lives of the participants under study. These participants co-incidentally present themselves as the most successful leaders in the Authority. Whilst I think that the life story approach has been the most appropriate since it has identified the influence of personal and professional backgrounds on leadership, I am not sure that it has been as prevalent throughout the study as it might have been. A simple account of background may have been equally useful, but would lack richness and the establishment of a deeper rapport.

Further limitations come from the timing of this research, which was largely unavoidable. Interviews were carried out in 2011 and 2012 before any significant restructure had taken place in Northtown, even though the forthcoming storm was brewing. A third set of interviews would have given more information and clarity on current leadership approaches in Children's Centres and claims to knowledge might therefore have been more current and of more relevance for future centre leaders.

8.5. Recommendations for further research

This study inevitably focuses on the past. Since this research took place there has been significant change both locally and nationally. I would recommend a number of areas for further research.

Firstly, it would be interesting to gain the perspectives of participants now on how the changes to early years provision in Northtown have been implemented. Questions might be asked as to whether the new order requires a new set of leadership skills and is current theory around distribution and collaboration helpful. What is the current position on multi-agency working and how do leaders in current settings get their work done?

Secondly, I think that it would be interesting to carry out similar research into the lives and stories of other Centre leaders who are responsible for the delivery of services in the restructured provision in Northtown. This could be combined with a study of the MATs to examine whether they feel the same way about the overlap of roles and the challenges of working with Children's Centres, though it may be too late for this kind of work.

For me, however, the most interesting research would be in other Local Authorities to explore the origins of their Children's Centres and the relationship that the leaders of these settings have with the local authority – this was one of the most surprising and concerning themes identified in this work. Whether or not the situation is unique warrants further investigation. The adversarial context identified in this study seems wasteful of time, energy and resources.

8.6. Reflections

When I started on my doctoral journey in 2006, I was unprepared for the depth and nature of the challenge ahead. I remember that on being interviewed for a place I presented a very positivistic view of the world and explained that my Master's thesis had been a very angry piece of work

with an implicit message that it was just wrong for the university I worked for at the time to work with companies whose main role was the production of armaments, ranging all the way from bullets to fighter aircraft.

Moving back into the education sector, with its more moral underpinnings and less well-defined purpose, calmed me down and made me want to seek understanding rather than explanation.

I have not found this easy. It has taken too long, coincidentally helped with three months off sick when my data analysis was carried out. I enjoyed the data collection rather more than the analysis, and was forever conscious that I was putting my own interpretation on the data. However objective one tries to be, I felt my loyalties lay completely with the participants, but then that was all the data I had, and the research is clearly about their lives and perspectives. I know there is much that could have been improved with this study, as highlighted in the section on limitations. However, I feel it stands as a historical record of the excitement of leading in such a challenging and important environment. I think it also portrays leadership in Children's Centres in a way that challenges ideas of distributed leadership and new paradigms.

Through this, sometimes arduous, process I have learned much about writing which has helped me enormously in my supervision of other students. I hope that I can model the supervision that I have received which, though appropriately critical, has been kind, caring and supportive throughout.

Writing a thesis has given me the motivation to read more and in more depth and as a result I think I can ask better questions of the work with which I engage. Finally, I am calmer and more content with seeking understanding rather than looking for cause.

8.7. Postscript

There is a sadness that comes to mind in writing up this work which started some four years ago in 2010. In that time, we have seen the number of vulnerable families and children in poverty increase (Reed, 2012). At the same time, Northtown, like many other authorities, has seen the number of Children's Centres reduced despite the knowledge that Children's Centres are one of the most effective ways of meeting the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people (AfC, 2010).

I feel that the participants were the appropriate leaders for their era. However, the changes made to funding and control have led to a loss of freedom and opportunity for entrepreneurship. The loss of emphasis on integrated working takes away some of the challenges and excitement of the role which perhaps now invites a different kind of leadership. The current nature of the context has made the work much harder and led to participants having to adapt and work in different ways, perhaps to the point of stretching their sense of morality and purpose too far.

In the past year, the participant's lives have all changed significantly. Bronwen has been made redundant. Sarah and Janice had to compete for the same role as their reach areas were amalgamated. Sarah returned to social work. Janice accepted the role but was then made redundant. Shortly afterwards, very sadly, her husband died. She has recently set up a private nursery. Margaret has taken early retirement as her centre was closed. Louise has now been promoted and manages a much wider remit of three of the new Children's Centre hubs. Jane has retired. The only participant who remains relatively untouched is Hazel. Her setting was the one which was originally set up as a community group and the strength of the community so far has ensured that the Centre remains relatively unscathed.

Perhaps the authenticity and heroism of the leaders belonged to the heyday of the Sure Start movement, but is no longer wanted or seen as relevant. I wonder if the tactical/ operational approach seen in the participants has been replaced by a need to be more strategic. I think that only Bronwen and Janice had that capacity at the time – but this is merely conjecture. We know that multi- agency working is now consigned away from the mainstream to the 'oppositional' (Frost, in Brock, 2011). What was significant about the new paradigms of authenticity and transformation have been relegated to theory.

Northtown has changed. The remit of the MATs is now to work with children over five. Schools are keen to take two year olds because of the funding that they bring with them. The one strand of hope is that there are signs that health services are wanting to 're'-integrate. However, what remains of Northtown's Children's Centres, I feel, is a shadow of the original intentions of Sure Start and the heroes and their stories relegated to the past. As L.P. Hartley put it, 'the *past is a foreign country, they do things differently there*'.

Jonathan Wainwright, 2014.

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List of Tables

Glossary

A selected list of abbreviations used in this study:

ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care	A generic term for provision for children in their early years
EEC	Early Excellence Centre	Introduced in December 1997 and funded until March 2006, Early Excellence Centres were intended to develop models of good practice in integrating early education and childcare for under-fives in existing provision, supported by adult education and training, parenting support, health and other community services.
EIG	Early Intervention Grant	The Early Intervention Grant (EIG) replaced a number of centrally directed grants to support services for children, young people and families. The grant is not ring-fenced, allowing greater flexibility and freedom at local level, to respond to local needs, drive reform and promote early intervention more effectively.
FEL	Free Early Learning	All 3 and 4-year-olds in England are entitled to 570 hours of free early education or childcare a year. This is often taken as 15 hours each week for 38 weeks of the year. Some 2-year-olds are also eligible.
NNI	Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative	The Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative was launched in 2001 to provide high quality childcare in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods of England, to help parents into employment, reduce child poverty and boost children's development
PVI	Private, Voluntary and Independent (sector)	Organisations from the non-maintained sector – often community or church groups in this context

Appendix One: Interview Schedule

Interview One: (Summer 2010)

Please can you tell me about your life and the journey you have taken to get you to your current role?

Interview Two: (Summer 2011)

1. In the first interview, we were talking about....and I wanted just to recap on that area.

2. How do you define your role as a leader in your CC What part do you think that (your) gender plays in your role as a CC leader? What from your past life has shaped your thinking about leadership and your behaviour as a leader? Has this presented you with any particular (ethical/ moral) dilemmas, and how do you overcome them?

3. What do you feel you have to achieve and what does that achievement look like?

4. How do you get things done – how would you describe your approach/style/ do you have a model for leadership that you pass on to others...what are your particular attributes?

5. What do you see are the specific contextual issues with working in a CC compared with other places where you've led? What are the main challenges you face, how do you overcome them? What, for instance, are the leadership challenges of working with different agencies?

Each interview lasted approximately 2 hours.

Appendix Two: Data Analysis

Table. 1. The first pass at identifying themes from the first interviews:

Theme - Sarah	Theme - Margaret	Theme -Jane	Theme - Bronwen	Theme -Janice	Theme - Louise	Theme- Hazel
Personal Background/ education	Personal Journey	Personal Journey	Professional Background			Personal Background
			Influence of family	Focus on children and Families	Family background	
				Professional skills/ background		
			Gender/Feminism			
		determination				
Ambition		Not putting up with thingd….injustice??		Rules and regulations/ rejection of authority	Politics	
	Mentors					
		fairness				
	Learning				cuts	
		Parental influence/work ethic				Learning

courage	Structure of cc/ nursery nurses/ teacher in cc		Political involvement		Service use	
politics						
Ethnicity				Enjoyment of complexity	Influence of others	Northtown as well
				Change in ways of thinking		
			Personal Philosophy	…Politics		Work ethic
Status		Rebellion?	Injustice			
	Link to data		Surestart			
risk						
	Nature of CC					
Professional Background	Leadership	Challenge/risk				Link to background?
		Importance of family		Surestart	School – personal history	Children
PB- interest in children						
		Individuals influenced her				
				Being given a push/ mentors/ influences		

PB – asylum seekers						And families
			Northtown			rebellion
Serving the community					rebellion	
		Relationships She uses love a lot.	Leadership	Supervision		Confidence
Funding						
				Thinking about leadership		Influence of others
Learning	Leadership and personality	Interests in diversity				
				….link to theory of childhood	learning	
		MA Working				
Surestart				..link to TA		
				..link to Goleman …NPQICL		

Leadership			Doing things that matter	…link to Goleman		
	nebulous					
		New ways of working	Social Work	..families as a metaphor		
			Schools v childrens centres	Families as a metaphor		
	stamina			…loneliness		
	The pressure of work	schools				Leadership as well
					Ma working	
control	Relationships	Northtown – what was happening		…link to Blake and Mouton		
				Organisational Culture		
	Uncertainty					Leadership
	Flexibility					
Nature of the role	Data					
Data				Reflective Practice		
	Making a difference					
Structures						Making a difference

Working for a charity	Reflective Practice					
				Influence of personal background		
	Money/ politics/ Northtown				parents	
					Childcare approaches	
Northtown la	Gender			Different Agencies		
					Gregarious/relations hips	
Perceptions of cc						Parents
					Leadership	
						MA Working
						Stable relationships
						Sure start
					Drive for improvement/ quality	
						Northtown
					Focus of different agencies	Politics/ self/school

					Schools	
					Northtown v other providers	
					Children's centres Link with quality	
					Architects	

Table. 2. An example of how one of the initial themes emerged from the first interviews.

Following the work in table one, a smaller number of themes was identified, one of which was families/children/childcare/relationships. This theme was ultimately dropped in favour of those given in the thesis.

Margaret	page	Jane	page	gf	Janice	page	Louise	page	Hazel	page
Now because I've got a good relationship with one of the local forums I thought "I know, I'll offer them some office space in there and if they want some office space they can answer the door for us." Had a conversation and it was just I suppose serendipity really because I was just running it by one of the members of the forum and she said "Well actually," she said, "We think they're putting our rents up so much we're going to have to get out of this maisonette where we're based now and we're going to be homeless." So she said "I think that's a real goer that." Now we haven't taken it any further yet because we haven't decided who the tender's going to be. The outcome of interviews is still going ahead, so I've put that on hold a little bit other than I've said "Right, so far as I'm concerned it's still a goer. There's going to	10	Yeah and, as I say... And actually Barton and Alfred Street had a very close relationship because they were... Alfred Street was the oldest nursery school and Barton was soon after. Looking back through all the archives now – a great relationship between Barton and Alfred Street. Good professional relationship between the two staff teams as well. So I know there was a great ethos there, but I think, you know, in the life of a 4 year-old at that time it wasn't for me. Yes.	3		No, it's absolutely totally different, but we know the differences and we've talked a little bit about I feel and we've discussed that I've moved into grandparent role and so the team have had to accept [Rochelle's] style, which is very different to mine, and we described it as I sort of set the tone and the expectation of what needs to get done and then [Rochelle] will get on and do the operational stuff, but the team have struggled because our styles are different. But we've discussed, you know, that and they know that and that will form part of our actual discussions with the team if they've got any issues. We will say "Yes, our styles are	13	I wanted to be at home and I felt I needed to be at home and I should be at home, but I found that incredibly isolating. I really, really did. I went to a couple of toddler groups and they were quite clique, very much all the toys in the middle kind of thing, which went against my need to provide paint and water and sand and everything, you know, that the children could learn from... and to be sitting with the children and reading. There was none of that. It was all just get on with it and so I didn't go again and I became a childminder and that was very restricting. I used to love it when the parents came to collect their	9/1o	Because I like people. I like children actually. I thought they were really interesting and because I was the youngest of three I think... I didn't know I could be a teacher. Nobody told me I could have done that. The careers guidance, as I said, was "What do you want to do? Have you thought about hairdressing?" and I think if somebody had said to me at that point "You could teach," then I might have done that	6

be a lot of hurdle jumping to make sure it works because we can't just go in with such a loose arrangement. You know, there's got to be some structure to it, but it looks as if on paper that's going to work." And again if we have some bits of it where it doesn't seem to work, I know we've got the relationship strong enough that we'll be able to say "Alright, that's not working. What can we do instead?" And I think one of the things certainly that we've all got who work in this area is a bit of a can-do attitude. You know, we tend to think "Alright, that's not working. Let's think of a different way of doing it."					different, but this is still the overarching aim of, you know, what we need to…"		children because I could talk to them.		
							Well, I had my own 2 and they were both very young, so I could only have another one at a time because you could only have 3 including your own. But I used to have 2 boys who were at school after school and during holidays and they brought a bit of variety to our life. It was quite lively when they were around and they really loved	10	I think I'm just a sociable person. We mix with lots of children. We got a lot of support. I've got lots of pictures… We were going through the loft the other day. My mum and dad are clearing the loft out and there's lots of parties. I'm a party person. I like to have people round me. I'm interested in the staff as people, not staff as… I don't think they're	7

						coming to our house. We used to run round the garden with hosepipes and things and it was good fun. [*laughter and cross talking*]. I had this picture of childminding a little girl who would come and be with my little girls and we would all do art and craft together and this, that and the other, but they brought a different dimension to it completely. So it's bizarre and I've just contacted their mum on Facebook and seen some pictures of them now as grown-up men which is, you know, really, really strange. But yeah, so I did childminding. I didn't do it for very long.		employees. I think they're people and I'm just... you could call it nosy or you could call it interested. I'm fascinated by people and I like to know why they do what they do and I like difference. I like people that don't conform.	
Hmmm, with some people. I don't socialise with the staff here particularly. I mean I do go out with them, but I don't count that as socialising and I wouldn't particularly be Facebook friends with them and that sort of thing. Certain staff... Of all the places I've been, the only staff I've really kept in touch with are Moulton townships and even then it's only	20	So when I was looking at options for teacher training I could do it at Totley. More than happy at home, had a great social life and I could drive. I'd passed my test soon after my 17th birthday, had a car, so there wasn't... I didn't have that you know how	7						I think I must have done a placement. We did Trident. I had a Trident placement. I'm presuming because there were quite a lot of children that we kind of... My mum was a member of young wives. I don't even know what that means, but she went off to young wives even when	7

some of those staff like xxx.		some young people want to sort of fly the nest and think… Yeah. I thought "Well actually that suits me fine." So I went down and I went to teacher training college and although I made lots of friends at teacher training college and yeah, I quite enjoyed the experience, I didn't get involved a lot in the social life down there because I already had my social life and a lot of my friends… [*cross talking*]… and all my friends at that stage were either working or my very best friend, xxx, was studying physiotherapy in Northtown. So, you know, she was at uni doing that so, you know, that was fine and suited me until I came out.					she was older and so we all kind of did trips together. So there were always kids around.	
I think there have always been uncertainties. I think the uncertainties just seem to change	5	Two. xxx is 23 and xxx's 20 and I just had a 6 month maternity leave	14			so I knew all the people who were leading in the bid and everything and I bid and everything and I	21	Yeah, but I'm thinking I must have been the youngest, so I don't know	8

from season to season and you kind of just roll with them and some of them are on-going – like the finances are always going to be an issue. But I like the flexibility of it, I like the challenge and I suppose really if you think about what gets you out of bed in the morning, those ought to be the words that you ought to be saying really.	with both of them, but because I could work flexibly because obviously although I'd got teacher's terms and conditions I could work different times throughout the year; I could have summer school holidays off if I wanted, but I didn't have to. My husband's got quite flexible work as well, so we sort of, you know, did a lot.... And my mum and dad and my Auntie and Uncle, who haven't got children – they're my mum's sister and my dad's brother; two brothers married two sisters – we're a very close sort of family and they helped looked after xx and xx and so did my mum and dad and xx had flexible working and so did I outside the school holidays and it just all sort of, you know, worked out. And this is the irony – you're going to really laugh at this – xx, who I'd worked with all the time, left to have her daughter 2 years			was the Early Years rep in the area planning team and we brought them into the area and I can remember there were people who said "They can't do it in that area,"	who the other kids were. I don't know. I don't know where it came from. I just know that I liked people. We had a really good family. Like my mum and dad have really strong family friends, so their friends were Auntie, do you know what I mean? Like Auntie xxx, Uncle xxx, Auntie xxx and Uncle xx they had kids, so they were... I didn't have any cousins, so they were our extended family. xxx my husband, has got loads of cousins, but we didn't have loads of cousins. So there were always children around and I think I just thought "Oh, I'll just be a nursery nurse. There's n'owt else to do. I don't really know what I want to do." So... And it was quite elitist I suppose. Like at that time, you know, College you had to be selected. It was a bit like, you know, [xxxx] and then for our area it was College. So you had to be selected. You know, you didn't just get your O Levels and go. It was like you had to go through a

		before I had xx and she registered as a childminder and she used to have xx for me a few days a week. So you can tell in terms of that relationship, you know, it went on. She's just taken retirement now from... When Moulton looked as though it was coming to a close she applied for a job working for the Inclusion Service running the Northtown Early Years language centre up at xx working with children with specific language difficulties and she just flew. That was a totally new challenge for her and she just was absolutely fantastic doing that and she's just taken retirement. She got the retirement offer that the Local Authority were offering, but she's been doing some work with our staff here on meeting the needs of children with specific language impairments because we've got some children like that. So she's been working with						two-day induction process. So you had to go for group... You know, you had to have group conversations with people, you had to have individual interviews, you had to meet the tutors, you had to... You know, basically it was equivalent to being assessed for uni in a way because at that point the NNEB was... If you got the NNEB, you know, you could do what you wanted.	

		the teacher who she works with, and they have staff meetings and things like that. So it's been one of those professional relationships. Me and xx again are very different. You know, she's very says what she thinks, doesn't wrap it up, but we have a lot of professional and sort of personal respect for each other.								
Hmm, I think you do. Hmmm, I think you do. We've got a new outreach site being built. It's come on the back of the sufficiency project. So we know there aren't enough 3 to 5 free entitlement places and we've said all along people won't come down here and we need to be up in xx and a bit more in xx So they combined the two and they've built – well it's just about finished now – a nursery with community rooms attached to it which we get first call on. So when we'd sort of set all that up and I'm thinking "Right, well who's going to be the receptionist up there? Do I work	9	Yeah, we've worked together for a while, but very different. You know, I've never worked with anybody who's like me and I don't think that would be probably a good thing to do. I think that working with people who are very different to you and working within teams where you've got very different... You know, when we recruited to Moulton we certainly didn't... You know, I didn't recruit in my own, you know. You want	15						Oh, it was lovely, but again family. So I moved from one family to another family. So the family – we went out together and obviously when they chose me they wanted somebody that could be part of the family. So I was engaged to look after xx, who was the youngest, but then there was xxand xx. So I had to get them to school and then I used to look after xx and we had some right fun. It was great, loved it, and then I'd get tea ready. So I was a	12

up there or do I still work down here? How is that practically going to work?" And I know that whoever gets the tender I'm going to have to sit down and work out an operational agreement with them and that's fine and one of the big things for the interview process that we've been going through is making sure that we get the right people in that job who are up for that sort of working and who are not, you know, "If it doesn't work it's because the council haven't done this and that's a problem and how are you going to sort it out?" but that we actually have got a meaningful relationship, which might well be about, you know, conflict resolution for example, which I'm under no illusions is not going to happen. But to go back to the receptionist thing – I know there's an office in there and I know that our receptionist can't do it and I know they're not going to give us any other money to do it, so I'm thinking "How are we going to have ever face meeting all those people that we're going to be attracting in to all the groups that we're going to be running in those two rooms?" – because we'll move a lot of things that already happen down here

people who've got the same ethos and who want what's the best, but you want different skills and different personalities because that's what children need and what families need. Yeah.

				nanny – that's what they called me – and I didn't have to do housework,	

up there.				
Well apart from the finance, yeah. I think for me at the minute it's getting the information you need to do the job. I mean we're all expecting OFSTED shortly, so I need statistics about where all those children are and that's a fairly basic one and other... 16.37	6			
It is, yes. When I was first here obviously the children who actually walk through this door I can tell you all sorts. I know exactly what numbers they are, what other services they're accessing, but obviously they're that much in our reach area. So xxx and I devised a spreadsheet and we also worked with the health visitors to... Not a spreadsheet – a database and a registration form that we worked with the health visitors to get into the centre. And then the system that you're talking about I think is E-Start.	7			

	Well, there were discussions to get that inputted by the Health Authority and for a long, long time it couldn't be done because there were all the data sharing and information sharing protocols, but they finally agreed that and we've actually got E Start on our system now, but the children just aren't going on them. So at the moment we're running 2 systems. We're running our original database which I estimate has got on it at the moment about 700 children…	7						
	To a certain extent, yes, but it's not very… as rigorous as I would like it to be and the frustrating thing is I know what it needs to do, but I can't get it to do it or I can't get the information to help me to do the job that I need to do	7						
	Hmm. If you pare it back to the database, creating that database was fairly significant for us because it allowed us to do so much. And alright, it's got its limitations, but other than people who've adapted our database and the ones that were the initial local programmes who've got their systems anyway, but none of the new children's centres can	7/8						

do what we can do and I find that quite interesting. And we've also got xxx who's the… You see, that's another interesting thing. She's got a dual role because the children's centre teacher role has never been very clearly defined in Northtown and I know we've had conversations about this before. So xx is our on paper children's centre teacher, but she's also the community assembly area's consultant.						

Table. 3. Gaps in stories that were explored in the second interview following the themes identified at that point.

	S	M	Jane	B	Janice	L	H
Leadership			�				
MA working	▓						
Personal Journey		▓					
Families/ Children/relationships	▓			▓			
Surestart and Children's Centres		▓	▓				
Sheffield					▓		
Mentors	▓			▓			
Making a difference					▓		
Gender/ethnicity/ politics		▓	▓		▓	▓	▓
Professional Background		▓	▓			▓	▓

Table. 4. The first pass at identifying themes from the second interviews.

Interview Question	Bronwen	Janice	Sarah	Margaret	Jane	Louise	Hazel
How do you define your role as a leader in your CC What part do you think that (your) gender plays in your role as a CC leader? What from your past life has shaped your thinking about leadership and your behaviour as a leader? Has this presented you with any particular (ethical/ moral) dilemmas, and how do you overcome them?	Gender	Different with men Role or gender?	Personality not gender	Role not gender	Different with men, never led in mixed environment	Men are different	Role?
	How I was managed – professional heritage	X	X	Letting go of prof. heritage	X, not really letting go	X	Not let go
	It matters				X	X	X
	Firm but fair		X		Will consult, but makes decisions	x	
	Openness		X	X	X Approachable	X	x
	Honesty		X	X	X	X	x
	Competitive	Finding ways around things				fighting	
	Personal Strength	Rebellion, being bossy, determination		I'm not strong, others are	Doing the right things	Personal conviction, drive	Not strong, lack of belief in own profession
		Knowing yourself, changing yourself	Self awareness, reflective practice	Humility, how others see you	Not as much time in analysis or reflections as needed – constant feedback from staff		Not enough time for reflection
		Personal history, like working with people				Personal history	
	Challenging the status quo, social justice	X		X	X	X	X
			Winning hearts and minds, sensitivity	x			

				Strategic	Not strategic		
HOW How do you get things done – how would you describe your approach/style/ do you have a model for leadership that you pass on to others…what are your particular attributes?	Capacity building		Empowering staff, supervision	Volunteers	Volunteers	Volunteers- but they do not understand complexity	Social capacity, also as an objective
	Knowing what's going on People tell you a lot			X			People telling you stuff
	Enthusiasm				Passion	Passion	passion
	Personality	X	X	X		X	X
			Opportunities for learning/ reflection				
	Loyalty						
	Use of resources	Wheeling and dealing, maximising resources	Networks – brevity and clarity, wheeling and dealing	Limited resources, networks	Minimsl resources, networks but a problem who to network with	Diminishing networks	Networks, relationships
	Use of data	X	X, but data is not the whole story, problems with collecting data	Not the whole story		X	X but not the whole story
	m-a environment	X	X schools, TB nurse		X	X	x
	Sure Start – few norms, etos	Co-location Has Sure Start run its course?	Sure Start freedom Money CCs are different	Money- how it used to be	Sure Start freedom	X	Original freedom
	X	X	X	X	Understanding core purpose	People do not understand CCs still	People don't understand Centres
	Coordination		X	Being organized		X	X
	Risk taking		Being accountable	Bending rules			
What do you feel you have to achieve and what does that achievement look	Personal Success	X	Midwives, building relationships	building relationships	building relationships	X – doing things for the client group	X
	External	Outcomes for	National targets,	Targets for	Diminishing core		

like?	measures	families, VFM	building communities	registration, core offer diminishing	offer		
	Ofsted	x	x	x	X	X big stick	x
WHERE What do you see are the specific contextual issues with working in a CC compared with other places where you've led? What are the main challenges you face, how do you overcome them? What, for instance, are the leadership challenges of working with different agencies?	Complexity		More complex families	More and more complex	X	Frustration	x
	Politics	Performativity				Becoming more political More people will die	Highly political
	Different from other professions	X	X	Health visitors x	X schools and hierarchy		
	Community embedded, knowing the community	People don't lie to us Local influence	Community embedded	Knowledge of the community – on ground visibility	Problems of not knowing the community very well		
	Northtown	Belief in process, not leadership	X	LA problems	LA treat schools differently	LA problems	LA problems