

Challenging or creative? Impatient or curious? Disposition discourse in the early years

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Challenging or creative? Impatient or curious?
Disposition discourse in the early years

Sarah Rawding

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of Sheffield Hallam University for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

December 2018

Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.
4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.
5. The word count of the thesis is 69,279

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Abstract

Two-year olds are inherently curious about the world around them and in the absence of prior knowledge are creative in the ways they respond to new experiences. Dispositions such as creativity and curiosity can influence motivations for learning and development which in our rapidly changing society are invaluable for lifelong learning and workplace success. Although the subject of learning dispositions has gained research interest more recently, the significance of curiosity and creativity as key dispositions to very early learning and development has not been explored in relation to practice for this age range, despite the rapid growth and development taking place at this time and the obvious value of embedding positive early learning habits. It is here that this research makes a unique contribution.

An interpretivist approach was taken for this research in order to generate an in-depth insider perspective. Semi-structured interviews were used to gain an insight into early years practitioner knowledge and understanding of curiosity and creativity as dispositions, to explore the ways in which they support the learning and development of two-year olds and to investigate their perspectives on the role and function of early childhood education and care.

Thematic analysis was used to identify discourses that influence and frame the focus of early years practice. Initial analysis indicated a lack of awareness of dispositions and revealed strong themes around preparing young children for school in terms of academic skills and positive behaviours. To investigate influences on practice further, practitioner observations of children were analysed, and this documentary analysis was extended to include the Statutory and non-statutory practitioner guidance which both frames and influences early years practice in England.

This research revealed discourses with a focus on *becoming* which reflects the ways that children's learning and development is currently portrayed within the early years. Behaviours associated with dispositions such as curiosity and creativity tend to be discouraged and inhibited resulting in these necessary dispositions for lifelong learning being weakened rather than strengthened. This practice reflects the values and beliefs which frame the wider outcomes orientated education system in England.

Through extending the discourses available to practitioners we can support them to develop agency through reflective practice which would in turn offer possibilities for children's learning and development to be interpreted in more diverse ways. This would enable practitioners to adjust the focus of their practice to support the valuable process of learning and to promote dispositions which will ultimately enable children to reach their potential and become lifelong learners.

This research offers a unique contribution to knowledge in the exploration of disposition discourse and practice and focuses on the little examined field of dispositions in relation to very young children and the practitioners who work with them. Models of practice have been developed to identify the ways in which practice may be enhanced providing a useful framework to support practitioners to reflect on practice.

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Abbreviations used in this thesis

CEL Characteristics of Effective Learning

CWDC Children's Workforce Development Council

ELLI Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory

EPPE Effective Pre-school Education

EYFS Early Years Foundation Stage

EYPS Early Years Professional Status

EYTS Early Years Teacher Status

EYE Early Years Educator

FdA Foundation Degree

HEA Higher Education Academy

QTS Qualified Teacher Status

SHU Sheffield Hallam University

1. Introduction

The focus of this thesis was to explore practitioner knowledge, understanding and practice around of the concept of learning disposition in early years with a focus specifically on creativity and curiosity in two-year olds.

In this chapter I provide the background and context to the research, considering some of the key factors unique to this project. Firstly, I consider the concept of lifelong learning and the debate around soft skills and dispositions, this links on to a discussion of the concept of 'Learning Power' as central to lifelong learning. Next I explore the prevalence of research with very young children in the early years before considering the strong evidence highlighting the importance of the Foundation years. I then justify the rationale behind a disposition approach for two-year olds. I conclude this chapter with a reflection on my positionality and share some of the factors which have guided me in this choice of research focus. Finally, I outline my research questions before ending with a brief overview of each chapter in this thesis.

To begin this chapter, I felt it necessary to start with the following quote from Donaldson, Grieve and Pratt (1983:1) whose perspective regarding the importance of early childhood mirrors my own and explains why I feel a focus on promoting learning dispositions in two-year olds is necessary.

Early childhood is

...a period of momentous significance for all people growing up in [our] culture... By the time this period is over, children will have formed conceptions of themselves as social beings, as thinkers, and as language users, and they will have reached certain important decisions about their own abilities and their own worth.

1.1 What is the issue? Lifelong learning

Rather than being limited to the formal school years, it is important to consider that education and learning is a lifelong process. Lingard (2013:115) locates education centrally in “pedagogies of learning across the life span” and Claxton and Lucas (2009:7) propose that lifelong learning is both “inevitable and necessary” and which has positive outcomes for individuals, communities and the economy (Field, 2009). The importance of Lifelong learning is revealed in the policy emphasis within England and has been the focus of some recent influential reports which reveal how barriers to lifelong learning may be overcome (Hyde and Philippon, 2014) in order to promote social mobility (Cable, 2012). This focus indicates that lifelong learning can have a positive impact upon the poverty rates which continue to rise within the UK (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017). Lifelong learning has particular relevance to this research as the earliest years lay its foundations (Mathers, Eisenstadt, Sylva, Soukakou and Ereky-Stevens, 2014).

A recent report, the Future of Skills and Lifelong Learning (Government Office for Science, 2017) emphasises the economic benefits of lifelong learning but focuses on factors to enhance literacy, numeracy and work readiness. There is a noticeable oversight of the personal benefits of lifelong learning or the soft skills and dispositions lifelong learning both requires and reinforces in individuals. This is despite research (Leggett, 2017, Claxton and Lucas, 2009, Bertram and Pascal, 2002), which reveals the importance of the social processes integral to the development of a positive lifelong learning journey. These social processes include factors such as learning identity, the development of learning power, generating knowledge, applying learning and sustaining learning relationships (Deakin-Crick, Huang, Shafi and Goldspink, 2015).

Further support for this perspective comes from Hayslip (2014) who maintains that the antecedents, including the characteristics of successful lifelong learners must be understood for a lifelong learning approach to be successful and therefore proposes a focus on empowering individuals to be independent learners. This is supported by Claxton and Lucas's (2009) suggestion that dispositions, habits and beliefs underpin a positive and open-minded attitude to learning. Considering the specific skills required for lifelong learning, Goleman (1996) identified several key ingredients including motivation, persistence, empathy and the ability to control impulse. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 1994) identify social competence, critical, creative and independent thinking and problem-solving skills as key life skills, in addition, Bronfenbrenner (1979) maintained that dispositions to think, persistence, to give and contribute ideas and opinions and to work collaboratively are essential for lifelong learning and finally, and perhaps most relevant to this research Jarman (2008:31) suggested that "when children are encouraged to think creatively by following their own lines of enquiry, making new connections and solving problems they are developing the skills for lifelong learning."

It is clear from the focus of literature and policy that a range of skills, beliefs, approaches and attitudes have been linked to lifelong learning, however key questions remain as to which are most important for learning and whether it is possible to promote the development of these.

Dispositions or habits for learning have been termed in the literature as 'soft skills' and research indicates that these can have a direct impact on workplace success (Kechagias, 2011). Heckman and Kautz (2013) use the term 'soft skills' to refer to essential personality traits needed for success in learning and Kyollen (2013) argues

that soft skills such as motivation may be more important than cognitive skills in determining success in education and the workplace.

The development of soft skills, even during higher education can have a direct impact on workplace success (Kechagias, 2011) as graduates may develop the necessary knowledge and skills but not the wider capabilities necessary (Holt, Sawicki, & Sloan, 2010). Gallivan, Truex, and Kvasny (2004) identify six soft skills necessary for participation in learning and educational and workplace success, self-motivation and creativity being two of these which are specifically relevant to this research. In a review on mainly American literature on cognitive and non-cognitive skills, Heckman and Kautz (2013) identify a number of 'character skills' (which can be linked to soft skills), including curiosity (again, relevant to this research) which they maintain are important for meaningful life outcomes. They justify the use of the word skill to describe these capacities by their premise that skills are enabling capacities to function and can be shaped and developed. Skills are vital in the promotion of economic productivity and social well-being and provide agency for people to shape their present and future lives. Heckman and Kautz (2013) go on to argue that the early years are essential for boosting these skills which can be developed through guidance and instruction thus making interventions in the early years fundamental. They justify the need for early interventions in their claim that "Investment in character skills in the early years has a higher economic return than investment in the later years because it builds the base for subsequent investment" (p85).

This provides evidence for a need to shift the focus within the English education system generally and specifically within the early years. Back in 2013, Kyllonen made the rather bold statement that "the 21st century is becoming the era in which we recognise the importance of soft skills, the role education plays in developing those

skills, and the way they evolve throughout the life cycle” (p22). However, I argue that soft or character skills remain neglected in education (and policy as mentioned above). One of the reasons for this could be that they are hard to quantify and therefore do not fit in with an education system focused on standardised testing (Ang, 2014). The definition, measurement and instruction of soft or character skills raises critical issues for research, education and policy (Gibb, 2014) therefore it is important to acknowledge research highlighting the need for a revised focus on how we define educational success within education and the consequences of this for both young and old learners.

The recent focus on employability within Higher Education institutions provides further weight to the need to focus on the skills and dispositions necessary for success. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) refers to employability as a “mix of personal qualities and beliefs, understandings, skilful practices and the ability to reflect productively on experience” (Tibby, 2015:13) which prepares graduates for a constantly changing workforce. The HEA recommends that higher education institutions should embed employability into courses, providing opportunities for graduates to develop the knowledge, skills, experiences, behaviours, attributes and attitudes essential for workplace success. In my workplace, at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) the recent focus on employability has resulted in the requirement for ‘graduate attributes’ to be embedded into course delivery and interestingly for this research the three key graduate attributes selected by SHU are confidence, resilience and creativity. Course teams select three other attributes which are significant to their discipline and one of the options is ‘Curiosity’. It is becoming clear that creativity and curiosity are increasingly valued within education, have significance for learning throughout the lifespan and so it can be concluded that efforts within the early years

to embed these habits/attributes/dispositions early can result in positive outcomes upon learners throughout their lifelong learning journey.

Considering the importance of the underpinning soft skills, character skills, dispositions or positive habits towards learning it is apparent that the educational focus must change to develop ways that they can be identified, and support can be put in place to develop and nurture them. Claxton (2018) suggests that a shift in focus from traditional knowledge acquisition is required throughout the lifespan and this shift should begin in the early years and Hatch (2010) proposes a new way of thinking about teaching and learning within the early years suggesting a focus should be made on learning rather than on development.

Hatch (2010) regards assumptions that development precedes learning based on classical child development theory such as Piaget as outdated. This debate will be discussed in further detail in Chapter two. Hatch makes it clear that he does not associate learning with standardised testing as characterised by current educational practice, but that children should be taught how to learn, meaning that the aim of early childhood education and care should be to teach for learning. Hatch's perspective on the value of learning shares similarities to Laevers (2017) process orientated system which will also be explored later.

The importance of the process of learning is not a new concept, twenty years ago, Burgoyne (1998) stated that 'learning to learn' is the ultimate skill for the 21st century, however, in practice, this ultimate skill remains one which receives little focus and attention.

To conclude this section, to promote a lifelong learning approach, a focus must be made on the development of our very youngest learners, for if they can develop

positive, transferrable and enduring approaches to learning, these skills and capabilities will enable them to learn throughout life, beyond the formal education programme of childhood as “attitudes of mind are as important for life (and college) success as grades” (Claxton, 2018:47). However, “the key question at this point is what kinds of education and learning experience are appropriate for a world where surprise and unaccustomed levels of change will likely become major features of our lives” (Sterling, 2010: 521).

My belief is that the answer to this key question is to instil and embed motivations and dispositions for learning such curiosity and creativity which will enable young learners to approach new experiences in enthusiastic, confident and flexible ways providing them with the dispositions to cope with change, challenge and adversity in a positive way.

1.2 Learning power

A concept linked to ‘lifelong learning’ is learning power. This has been defined as a combination of dispositions, values and attitudes towards learning (Deakin-Crick, Broadfoot and Claxton 2004) and is a term associated with Claxton (2007) who uses it to explain the approach taken to building individual’s capacity to learn. Claxton associates four dispositions with learning power which he termed the four R’s. These are resilience, resourcefulness, reflectiveness and reciprocity. He also identifies a range of sub-categories or capacities; absorption in learning, being able to revise learning, making links and imitating and demonstrating perseverance. Claxton maintains that the development of positive learning dispositions is an essential ingredient of ‘learning power’ which will determine whether skills that have been learnt

are applied. For this to take place, a climate where enfranchisement and entitlement should be extended and strengthened rather than being undermined, undervalued or ignored.

Traditional outcome and assessment-based approaches assume that the role of education is to simply top children up with knowledge. Carr and Claxton (2004) call this the 'content curriculum,' it is the subject focus of learning. They contrast this with a 'learning curriculum' which focuses on making children ready, willing and able to engage with learning. Claxton (2018) makes an important distinction between different levels of learning. On the top, surface learning relates to knowledge and understanding, the accumulation of facts, the content and subject knowledge. Below this is a level of skill and expertise necessary to apply the surface level knowledge and at the deepest level are the attitudes and habits that influence the process of learning. A transfer in focus to acknowledge the different levels of learning will require a shift, with adults supporting children in the ways in which they learn (learning curriculum) rather than what they learn (content curriculum), with more emphasis on the process rather than the outcome.

Two key factors integral to learning power are that individuals need to know when to apply their skills and need to be inclined to use them. They also need to be empowered because although internal factors (dispositions, attitudes, skills, knowledge and capacities) are important, for them to be utilised and applied, external factors such as opportunity and encouragement are also key. The role of the adult is particularly relevant here because if children develop positive dispositions which are promoted and supported by adults then they will be in a stronger position, having more learning power to be able to learn the content of curriculums. This raises prominent issues

around both the role of adults and the nature of the education system and its focus but also raises issues about how learning power can be measured and quantified.

As a pedagogical tool used internationally with success, the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory identifies seven dimensions of learning power (curiosity, resilience, learning relationships, changing and learning, strategic awareness, meaning making and creativity) which enable people to be effective lifelong learners (Deakin-Crick et al, 2004). This tool has been used within schools to promote characteristics such as curiosity, creativity and resilience in children (Ofsted, 2011) although it must be acknowledged that learning power has generally focussed on school aged children and adults demonstrated in the statement from Claxton (2018: 45) that “attitudes and habits shaped at school have a powerful impact on students long term success in life. They are the most important residues of those long years of study.”

Despite the lack of emphasis on the early years, some of the principles behind the concept remain relevant to younger children and it makes sense that we should focus on developing learning power from the earliest age. This is particularly relevant considering the speed and level of learning and development that takes place within the early years and the importance of early shaped habits and attitudes on long term success. The rationale for considering the learning and development of children through a wider lens to incorporate dispositions is enhanced further by the recognition that

by investing early and well in our children’s development we increase the rate of return later in life, and in so doing improve not only the lives of individuals but of societies as well (Leisman, Mualem & Khayat Mughrabi, 2015:93).

The quote above justifies my decision to explore the dispositions of two-year old’s in this research because if foundations can be laid at this early age for effective learning

they may have a positive impact on learning throughout compulsory schooling and beyond. For this to be successful, adults working with children will need support to shift their focus towards the process of learning, the 'how' rather than the 'what' or 'how much' (Claxton, 2007) as their role is central in supporting and promoting the development of positive dispositions and this is why the research focusses on the perspective of those working with two-year olds.

1.3 Research with very young children

Traditionally, research within early years has focussed on studying children aged three and above with a notable absence of literature on the under threes (Mathers, Sylva, Eisenstadt, Soukakou and Ereky-Stevens, 2014) and gaps in research focussing on practice and provision for babies and toddlers (David, Goouch, Powell and Abbott, 2003). O'Sullivan and Chambers (2014) point out that there is limited research around quality of pedagogy and learning environments for two-year olds and refer to this age group as the poor relations, often lumped into the broad category of 'under threes.' This absence of research has led to gaps in knowledge and understanding around what constitutes quality provision for children under the age of three (Georgeson et al, 2014). There are many reasons for this but Duhn (2015) suggests that philosophical inquiry has avoided exploring toddlers as subjects due to their lack of human linguistic ability and rationality and maintains that "with few exceptions the infant remains largely invisible as a subject in her own right" (p 924). Despite this, Duhn maintains that it is important to search 'creatively for possible futures' (p923), to find lines of flight through considering the present (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). A shift in focus is needed to identify two-year olds as meaning makers in their own right (Engdahl, 2011) who are

“perceptive, expressive, body subjects of intentional motion and meaningful action” (Løkken, 2009: 36).

To overcome the issue of treating infants as objects there have been attempts to seek more participatory research methods, for example in the Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2011) but methodological challenges remain because interpretations are influenced by adults knowledge and understanding and the influence of concepts and theoretical models focussed on infants and toddlers. These approaches also imply that infants perspectives are objective entities (Bradley, Sumison, Stratigos and Elwick, 2012) which itself is a contentious issue.

A further factor focuses around adult expectations of younger children. Research (Loizou, 2005) has revealed that some behaviours that toddlers demonstrate in their approaches to learning and development may violate the expectations of adults who may underestimate the amount of learning and development taking place through movement and action resulting from their drive to explore (Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kuhl, 1999). A paper commissioned by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (2013) explored elements of quality provision for two-year olds and maintains that at this age children are developing key attitudes and aptitudes for learning and the approach necessary to work with this age range is specialised with subtle differences to the approach used with pre-school children.

It can be concluded that one of the challenges of research with very young children is that findings remain dependent on interpreting their perspectives through the lens of adults, this is discussed in further detail in the Methodology chapter. In this research, rather than a study involving two-year olds as participants, it is the perspective of adults that is explored to investigate dispositions of learning for this age group. The

rationale behind this is that early years practitioners have a great degree of control over the experiences of children in their care. Their values, attitudes and knowledge of how children learn is pivotal and affects the way children are supported in their learning and development, the opportunities that are available to them and most importantly I feel for this study, the expectations they have around children's potential.

Looking beyond research findings, even within the early years profession, work with babies and toddlers can be devalued in practice (McDowall-Clark and Bayliss, 2012) with perceptions that practitioners working with younger infants are "the lowest of the low" (Powell and Goouch, 2012:120) with higher qualified early years practitioners tending to work with older, pre-school children. In their study to evaluate the impact of the graduate leader fund, Mathers et al (2011) revealed that Early Years Professionals (EYP's) rarely worked with babies and toddlers suggesting perhaps that EYP's with their graduate level of training were better placed in positions where they could improve the outcomes for older children within the early years. Even in countries such as Norway and Sweden where a more child led pedagogical approach prevails, it is reported that structural factors result in very young children being marginalised "both in the public debate and in preschool" (Alvestad et al, 2014:682). A further issue which has an impact upon the status of the early years profession is the boundary between education and care (Manning-Morton, 2006). Care is an essential element of early years practice but valued less than education, and it could be argued that work with younger children has more of a focus on care.

Despite the wider lack of focus on very young children in research, literature and policy on children under three within the early years (Powell and Goouch, 2012), Sumison and Harrison (2014: 316) suggest that "infant and toddler play is proving a rich and fertile seam within the broader research literature into young children's play more

generally” and Page, Clare and Nutbrown (2013) are optimistic that babies and toddlers now have a firm place in the agenda of governments with policy considering issues related to the quality of provision leading to renewed interest. Murray (2015) adds that multidisciplinary research which informs the academic field of early childhood has resulted in an increase in policy, investment and regulation of early childhood pedagogy making it more worthwhile in this research to investigate issues which concern the youngest children whose perspectives may be overlooked in early childhood research. This research focusses on the toddler age range in an attempt to redress the balance of early childhood research and reveal the perspectives of practitioners who work with some of our youngest children in early years settings.

1.4 The Foundation years

Historically, there is a perception that although ‘development’ is obvious and undeniable in very young children, babies and toddlers do not ‘learn’ until they reach school age. As mentioned previously, Hatch (2010) refers to the impact of Piagetian theory that development precedes learning on views of early children’s development and learning, and proposes that this belief underpins the perception that the early years are reduced in value to be a preparatory stage of life which enable children to be ready for learning at compulsory school age (Murray, 2015). This is underpinned by the perception that play is not a valued activity, demonstrated by views that babies, toddlers and young children ‘simply’ spend their time playing and that practice in the early years is downgraded to less valuable caring roles as indicated previously, for example changing nappies and wiping noses (Nutbrown, 2012).

Infants and toddlers have historically been defined as vulnerable (Sumison et al, 2009), passive and weak (Rinaldi, 2013) and early childhood education struggles with misinformed perceptions that valuable formal learning, with a focus on numeracy and literacy (Ang, 2014) only takes place once children have acquired the language and verbal skills to communicate (Knight, 2016) and the social and behavioural skills to sit and listen (Watkins and Noble, 2013).

The societal lack of value placed on the early years is reinforced and validated by the low status of the early years workforce which is generally characterised by low pay and poor terms and conditions particularly in comparison to the workforce of the formal education system (Cumming, 2016). These perceptions are contested through research and practice with young children whereby it is quite evident that in the first five years children's learning and development is phenomenal. It is well documented that the most radical physical changes occur in the first three years of life (Mathers et al, 2014) with this sensitive period having the potential to impact on later life in many significant ways highlighting the importance of "getting it right from birth" (Mathers et al, 2014:37).

Murray (2015:1715) cites the United Nations Children's fund (2012) to strengthen her proposal that because early childhood is such a critical period for life outcomes, the pedagogical approach is crucial for development and learning both "now and in the future." This supports perspectives discussed earlier highlighting the importance of the early years for lifelong learning and also provides a further rationale for the focus on this age group in this research.

Evidence from neuroscience has demonstrated the rapid process of brain development which takes place within the very earliest years of life. Neural

connections take place twice as fast during the first two years as they do in adulthood (Stiles and Jernigan, 2010) with the brain growing rapidly in size (Knickmeyer et al, 2008) resulting in early experiences laying foundations for later development (Finegan, 2016). Research from neuroscience has strengthened the debate, providing scientific evidence (often perceived as higher in validity and reliability) and worthy of influencing policy demonstrated in the statement from UNICEF (2001:14) more than fifteen years ago that

... before many adults even realize what is happening, the brain cells of a new infant proliferate, synapses crackle and the patterns of a lifetime are established...Choices made, and actions taken on behalf of children during this critical period affect not only how a child develops but also how a country progresses.

A further 'scientific' justification for a focus on the earliest years of life is that brain capacity for change decreases with age (Leisman, 2011) with early experiences and life events having an impact on the architecture of the brain and the foundations for later learning (Leisman et al, 2015). It can be assumed then that if we support our youngest children to develop the underpinning motivations or dispositions to learn they will be equipped with positive habits to support them in their later learning and development when brains have a reduced capacity to change.

The significance of the early years has been reflected in a number of reports over recent years, supporting Page, Clare and Nutbrown's (2013) prediction that younger children are now increasingly becoming part of the agenda. The 'Building Great Britons report' (Lavis, 2015) emphasised the importance of the first two years of life in developing socially and emotionally capable children. It made recommendations for a range of agencies to promote a robust primary prevention approach based on the premise that

human capital is a growth mechanism for most countries, the foundation of which is set during the early years. By not investing wisely during these phases, not only are economies getting back a lower return on their investment, they are missing out on the most crucial stage of investment. This inaction or inefficient investment strategy may lead to long term costs for countries in terms of stagnant or lowered economic growth (Britto: 2012: 26).

The perspective that “the quality of a child’s early experience is vital for their future success” (Ofsted: 2014: 4) and that high quality pre-school experiences are associated with success in later education (Reynolds, Temple and Robertson, 2001), employment and productivity in adulthood (Brooks-Gunn, Rouse and McLanahan, 2007) is not new and research has highlighted for some time how high quality early years experiences have a positive impact on children’s development, particularly, children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 2004). Early introduction to pre-school education can improve cognitive and social outcomes (LaValle and Smith, 2009) with quality of childcare being a vital element of success (Ramey and Ramey, 2004). Again, returning to scientific evidence, research shows that responsive adults and positive relationships are two factors which strengthen brain development (National Scientific Council for the Developing Child, 2008) indicating again that adults have a central role to play in this learning and development.

A report published by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission highlights a range of necessary social and emotional skills for young children including motivation and resilience which underpin positive outcomes in adult life (Goodman, Joshi, Nasim and Tyler, 2015) giving support to the importance of soft skills or character skills discussed previously. This and the Building Great Britons (Lavis, 2015) report stipulate clear implications for policy with a focus on the importance of the early years and for effective social and emotional development. This was also reflected in the review of

the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) where Tickell (2011) pointed out that “a strong start in the early years increases the probability of positive outcomes in later life; a weak foundation significantly increases the risk of later difficulties” (HM Government, 2010, cited in Tickell, 2011:8) and in her independent review of early education and childcare qualifications, Nutbrown (2012) maintained that early experiences have a lasting impact on development, interactions and outcomes. Nutbrown points out that “the evidence tells us that if these experiences are positive, if children experience high quality early education and care, this can have a lasting, positive impact on educational outcomes and more” (p12).

Goodman et al (2015) and Heckman (2011) identify life skills such as perseverance and motivation as critical to effective learners and suggests that the early years are critical in the formation of these skills advising that “investing early allows us to shape the future; investing later chains us to fixing the missed opportunities of the past” (Heckman, 2011:36). Britto, Engle and Super (2013) regard the investment of governments in Early Childhood Education and Care as being driven economically for the well-being of nations indicating an international acceptance of the value of effective early years provision and the economic, social and educational benefits of this. However, as will be discussed later, this acceptance remains to have a strong impact upon resources and provision in the early years. This is demonstrated by the general lack of funding for early years education, highlighted by Britto (2012: 25)

Although the return on investment for early childhood and pre-primary programmes is higher than for any other human capital development programme, governments, on average, invest less than 5 per cent of total public spending on education during the pre-primary years.

In conclusion, despite the evidence regarding the significance and implications of the earliest years this stage of life continues to be ignored as a strategic priority despite the evidence from neuroscience and economics indicating the importance of investing in the first three years (Yanez, 2013).

1.5 Towards a disposition approach for two-year olds

The focus of research around identifying and measuring learning dispositions has traditionally been fixed on adults and older children and materials such as the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) already mentioned briefly (Deakin-Crick et al, 2004) have been developed as self-assessment tools which provide learners with an opportunity to reflect on their learning (Deakin-Crick and Yu, 2008). Learning dispositions have rarely been a focus for research or tools used directly in practice for younger children even though the development of competencies is integral to school readiness (Britto, 2012). In 2013, Cheung and Leung revealed a lack of research around teachers beliefs of creative pedagogy within early childhood education so it is encouraging to acknowledge that more recently, in a comprehensive literature review of teacher perspectives on creativity (Mullet, Willerson, Lamb and Kettler, 2016) a range of studies focussing on creativity were highlighted across the broad field of education. In addition, a study recently published by Leggett (2017) explored the role of practitioners in supporting creativity in pre-school children. These studies demonstrate an increased interest in the area of dispositions, specifically in creativity within the early years.

Earlier I mentioned the social processes Deakin-Crick et al (2015) regard as integral to life-long learning. This research focuses on two of these aspects; the development

of early learning identity and the relationships with practitioners which can enhance and limit learning power with the view that social and emotional competence and well-being of children is enhanced by a balance of instruction techniques (Ashdown and Bernard, 2012). In addition, personal characteristics and professional skills have an impact on effective child-practitioner relationships (Poulou, 2017) and it is this perspective that underpins the rationale of this research to investigate the role of the adult in identifying and promoting dispositions to learn. The child-practitioner relationship is key as is the approach taken to practice within the profession of the early years.

Research findings suggest that the environment and the interactions between children and adults can have a lasting impact on a child's dispositions (Bertram and Pascal, 2002) and practitioners have a key role in supporting children to develop positive learning dispositions because these affect the nature of engagement with learning opportunities (Buckingham Shum & Deakin-Crick, 2012). This highlights the importance of positive dispositions as fundamental to further learning. My perspective mirrors that of Katz (1985) who maintains that that quality early experiences with sensitive, responsive, knowledgeable and reflective adults can support children to develop positive learning dispositions which will increase their chances of becoming effective life-long learners and masters of their own knowledge. A revised focus to include the promotion of dispositions at an early age may have a positive impact on later learning as these are, arguably, a contributing factor (alongside personal and social factors) to the success and positive experience of education of children.

Dispositions have been likened to habits in the literature (Nelsen, 2015, Carr, 1997) with the terms disposition and habit being used in a homogenous way by Dewey (1988) in his influential writing. Habits have been defined as repeated behaviours

performed automatically (Neal, Wood, Labrecque and Lally, 2012) and psychological dispositions to repeat past behaviour (Wood and Neal, 2009). The common phrase 'force of habit' indicates the power habits can have on behaviour and we know that habits can be formed early and may become embedded in behaviour. Nemec, Swarbrick and Merlo (2015) explored habits in relation to wellness in adults and maintain that the establishment of good habits as well as the elimination of bad habits is a difficult process, further supporting the rationale behind the early promotion and embedding of positive habits of learning to prevent negative habits of learning from have a lasting adverse effect. The academic debate as to whether these habits or dispositions are driven by internal or external factors; whether they are an integral part of an individuals' personality or whether they can be learnt is ongoing (Nelsen, 2015) and although elements of this debate are considered in this research, the answers lay beyond the scope of this study.

1.6 Positionality

I am an academic who works in an English higher education institution within the Education, Childhood and Inclusion department with early years practitioners studying for their Foundation degree (FdA) in Early Years. My practice is underpinned by my philosophy that if we enhance practitioner knowledge and understanding of effective pedagogy and if we support practitioners to develop the confidence and skills in reflective practice to enhance provision based on research around effective practice this will ultimately improve outcomes for young children. This will enable children to develop a firm grounding and positive approach to learning when they begin the process of formal schooling.

In the nine years I have worked in higher education I have witnessed many occasions where practitioners develop their knowledge of concepts and almost 'in a light bulb moment' understand the ways in which they can support children's learning and development further. A perfect example of this is when literature and research around schema is introduced (Brierley and Nutbrown, 2016, Nutbrown, 2015, Featherstone, 2008, Athey, 2007). Although some students arrive on the FdA with knowledge of young children's schemas, many do not, and most have heard of the concept but do not have the knowledge or confidence to support children's development through schemas. It is a privilege to support them on their learning journey to extend this knowledge. Many practitioners return to their settings and share their new knowledge and understanding with fellow practitioners and with parents and carers extending and distributing it further.

As a concept, schema has been traditionally associated with the theory of Piaget (1952) who used the term to explain mental representations which form the building blocks of cognition. The term in this context is not easily translated from a theoretical construct into practice but with the publication of work such as Athey (2007), Nutbrown (2015) and Atherton and Nutbrown (2016) the concept of schema became more accessible and visible in practice. This work resulted in the development of clear examples of behaviours where children are demonstrating particular schemas such as the transportation and rotation schemas frequently observed in children's play (Featherstone, 2008). Knowledge of schemas enhances practitioners understanding of the value of this type of learning for young children and provides a new lens to view behaviours in a positive rather than negative way in addition to enabling them to make links between theory, research and practice. This then opens new and exciting approaches to understand and support children's development.

Ultimately the accessible work on schema's enabled practitioners to understand a complex discourse, difficult to apply to practice. Taking the work on schema as an example of success, this research focuses on exploring practitioner understanding of learning dispositions with the premise that gaps in knowledge and understanding and linking theory and practice can be filled if done in an appropriate, relevant and sensitive way.

As a facilitator of knowledge, I often work with students who lack intrinsic motivation and curiosity to learn, whose resilience to deal with setbacks is limited and who lack the confidence to be creative in their approaches to deal with problems. Generally, these students struggle the most with academic work at university. In contrast, those students who have strong dispositions to learn and are positive, resilient and reflective tend to find studying more rewarding, both personally and academically. This indicates to me that that dispositions for learning are both necessary and valuable throughout the lifespan, having an ongoing impact on approaches to learning. I outlined earlier how positive dispositions are essential for individuals to become lifelong learners and considering how habits or dispositions can be formed at an early age it further reinforces the rationale to focus on developing these in our youngest children.

It is my hope that by extending knowledge and understanding and promoting recognition of learning dispositions this may become valued and embedded in practice. The aim of this research was to explore the discourse of disposition, identify challenges to this and to consider the possibility that practitioners can be given tools in the form of accessible discourse enabling them to have the confidence in their own knowledge and understanding to observe, value and promote dispositions such as creativity and curiosity within early years settings whilst demonstrating curious and creative approaches of their own.

In a previous role I was the manager of a relatively large private nursery. I also held the position of Early Years Professional (EYP) and took responsibility for supporting practitioners within the setting to develop their knowledge, skills and practices and confidence. My approach to leadership was 'shared' and 'collaborative' as this enabled effective practice to be the "product of the endeavours of an interconnected group of individuals" (Rodd, 2006:16) and provided practitioners with a level of agency in their own practice, giving them confidence in their own skills, knowledge and experience.

As an EYP trained in the process of review and reflection, the natural and logical approach to this research was to engage in action research (Mac Naughton and Hughes, 2009) as this enables the researcher to engage in a reflective cycle, a spiral (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988) to review practice, implement change and evaluate its impact. I strongly believe that, the value of research is truly evident in the ways it can improve practice and agree with Lingard (2013) who refers to educational research as that which is progressive and conducted to improve policy and professional practice, "educational policy research of any type ought to have at the broadest level a desire to make things better in education...to improve education policy, including conceptualisation and enactment" (Lingard, 2013:116).

Action research an ideal approach for practitioner led research, such as that which my students engage in when reviewing practice at their setting but works best when the research is conducted by individuals embedded with a setting. As an outsider to the settings where I conducted this research I did not feel I was established enough with their practices to engage in action research in a useful and appropriate way and therefore opted to conduct a theoretical research study with the aim of generating knowledge that I can share with practitioners and it is within this context in which I hope to contribute. My aim in this research is to merge the pedagogical and researchly

dispositions (Lingard and Renishaw, 2010) associated with practitioner researchers (pedagogical dispositions) and educational researchers (researchly dispositions) to “provide a better conceptual understanding of the broad issue” (Orland, 2009:117) whilst providing an original contribution to knowledge in my focus on aspects of effective practice that are currently lacking in research evidence within the earliest years.

1.7 Amelia and Charlie: Dispositions in action

My interest in dispositions can be traced back to reflections on my own children’s learning. Although only eighteen months apart in age, my two children could not be more different in the ways that they learn and more importantly the ways in which they approach learning. As very small children, my oldest child, Amelia was highly resilient, strategic, focussed and enthusiastic with an extremely strong internal motivation to learn and develop independently. My youngest child, Charlie was highly curious and creative, incredibly inquisitive as to how things are put together and taken apart; how they work, asking questions, investigating and approaching problems in a very creative and unique way (demonstrating highly schematic behaviours), although not always approaching learning in a conventional manner. Amelia’s more formal approach and style of learning fit better with the expectations of her early years setting whereas Charlie’s inherent creativity and curiosity were discouraged more than promoted.

Now in their teen years, Amelia continues to learn in a very formal way fitting in well with the demands and expectations of the outcome orientated National Curriculum (DfE, 2014) and Charlie’s creative, curious and highly reflective approach is often interpreted as disruptive and challenging in a very structured secondary school

classroom environment. Looking beyond formal schooling we know that creativity is considered an asset in the workplace (and Higher Education) and as a driver for knowledge, and curiosity is one of the keys to lifelong learning. It will be interesting to see which direction these very clear early proclivities take them both.

1.8 Specific focus on creativity and curiosity

The aim of this research is to investigate the discourse of dispositions in work with two-year olds, to explore practitioner knowledge and understanding of disposition, their role in children's learning and development and consider whether dispositions are considered in practice. Two specific dispositions, creativity and curiosity, highlighted in the literature as key to young children's learning and development were selected as a specific focus. Initially, a third disposition, resilience was considered for this research. However, resilience is fraught with issues around definition as many 'sub' (Mayr and Ulich, 2009) dispositions such as persistence, curiosity and autonomy are embedded and displayed in a resilient approach. It is my view that a resilient approach would be influenced by (amongst other things) an individual's ability to be creative and their capacity and confidence to be curious and this led me to focus solely on the two dispositions of creativity and curiosity as underpinning dispositions. The rationale behind this choice will now be explained in further detail.

The literature discussed in the next chapter overwhelmingly suggests that curiosity and creativity are integral to the learning and development of very young children. 'Children are born with a strong predisposition and powerful motivation to learn' (NCTL, 2013:6), they demonstrate high levels of curiosity (NCTL, 2013) which is evident from birth (Engel, 2011), wired for learning (Page, Clare and Nutbrown, 2013).

Creativity has been associated with novel approaches to solving problems (Bateson and Martin, 2013) through trial and error (NCTL, 2013). Clearly very young children have an inherent interest and inquisitiveness in the world around them and in the absence of prior experience will approach problems with a creative and novel approach. In addition, creativity and curiosity are integral to the promotion of positive approaches to learning (Wall, Litjens and Taguma, 2015) and academic success (Von Strumm, Hell and Charmorro-Pramuzic, 2011). Both dispositions are inherent features (highlighted in italics) in the following statement from Wood and Hedges (2016: 339) outlining the developmental needs of young children;

children need time to *ponder*, digest, embody, ruminate, *wonder*, *check out*, and *play with their ideas and theories*, *validate* these with others (peers and adults), *make connections*, and *address misconceptions, gaps, and inconsistencies*. Children *experiment* and *try things out*, through dialogue, co-construction, and sometimes misconstruction. In their seemingly random meanderings of intellectual *inquiry*, children grasp fragments of ideas that then become connected to more coherent wholes, eventually to become understood in curricular terms as subject or disciplinary knowledge.

While engaging in this research I have been mindful of the perspective that evidence from research with children under three has important implications for effective practice at all levels of education and it could even be argued that in some areas a bottom up approach whereby early years takes the lead would be desirable (Rayna and Laevers, 2011). Some of the factors considered in this research around extending discourses of disposition have implications across the education system and a consideration of how to promote a curious and creative approach is certainly at the forefront of my practice with adult learners in a university setting as well as a key element of the SHU employability plan. As outlined previous, dispositions are central to learner engagement and therefore play a central role in future learning (Buckingham

Shum and Deakin Crick, 2012). McGillivray, Murayama and Castel (2015) found that curiosity aids recall in memory in adults and reflective practitioners need to be curious and willing (Moss, 2003) further providing a rationale for this to be considered a significant disposition. A curious approach to learning in adults may be demonstrated through asking questions, having a desire to find out and by investigating issues. Creativity is demonstrated by considering new ideas and possibilities and approaching issues and problems from a range of perspectives. It is suggested that curiosity and creativity are both factors found in a reflective approach (Paige-Smith and Craft, 2009) which is at the heart of the Foundation degree in Early Years that I lead at Sheffield Hallam University. Critical reflection is a skill embedded and promoted at degree level study with “knowledge and critical understanding” being a QAA requirement for achievement of a level five qualification (QAA, 2014:23). “Knowledge of methods alone will not suffice, there must be the desire, the will to employ them. This desire is an affair of personal disposition” (Dewey, 1933: 30).

In practice this means that my role is not confined to conveying knowledge but to support students to develop the tools to engage in reflection through being curious and creative. For practitioners to apply their growing knowledge and understanding to practice in their settings (to ultimately improve outcomes for children) they must have a thirst (curiosity) for understanding and the confidence to consider the relevance of different perspectives and approaches, contemplating different ways of approaching issues and problems (creativity).

The literature indicates that “young people’s creative abilities are most likely to be developed in an atmosphere in which the teacher’s creative abilities are properly engaged” (NACCCE, 1999: 90) and similarly “if we are to teach children to expand on their intrinsic curiosity and make it a centrepiece of educational achievement, we will

need to change the way we prepare teachers as well” (Engel, 2011: 643). This strengthens my rationale to focus on the perspectives of practitioners around this subject area to explore the ways in which they value creativity and curiosity in their practice.

1.9 Focus of the study and the participants

Participants in this study were seven early years practitioners working in two private day nurseries in the North of Sheffield with children between the ages of two and five. Because of the nature of dispositions as a concept and as practitioners are central in directing the nature and approach to provision it was deemed appropriate to explore practice through the lens of adults as this would provide an insight into the experiences of two-year olds within settings.

1.10 Research questions

This research aimed to address a number of questions. Firstly, it was important to investigate the ways in which learning dispositions were valued and promoted within early years settings and this framed the questions asked in the first round of interviews. In response to the data collected a second round of interviews was conducted to explore the initial themes that emerged in more detail. The focus of the research questions changed here to examine the behaviours, skills and attributes promoted and discouraged within early years practice, to discover practitioner perspectives on the role of early years in preparing children for school, to consider the ways that policy affects attitudes and approaches and finally, and central to this thesis, to reveal the ways in which discourse affects practice.

1.11 Structure and organisation of the thesis

The thesis begins with a split literature review which critically explores key research, policy and theoretical perspectives relevant to the subject of learning dispositions. Both parts of the literature review have been organised into themes which have arisen from the literature. In part one, literature on the focus of this study around motivations for learning and dispositions is considered and in part two I reflect on literature around views of childhood and learning and the ways in which these impact on policy and practice within the early years. Following on is the Methodology section where I outline and justify my methodological approach, explain the way in which the pilot study influenced the direction of my research and critically evaluate the methods I selected to obtain data. I then provide a detailed overview of the key ethical considerations I have made throughout. This chapter concludes with a section outlining the approach

taken to analyse the data. A short findings section summarises the key themes that emerged from my data analysis and a rationale for how the final chapters have been organised and arranged.

The final chapters are structured around common themes which emerged from the research and provide a space for me to link my findings back to the existing research and literature. The first of these, chapter six; Where is creativity and curiosity in early years practice? considers the absence of these dispositions in policy and practice. I then move on in chapter seven; Negative Dispositions to explore the evidence which indicated that practitioners regard some dispositional behaviours in a negative way which may result in these dispositions being discouraged in practice. Next is chapter eight, where I explore evidence that developmental psychology, as a dominant discourse acts as a constraint to practice within early years and reduces the agency of both children and adults. Finally, chapter nine brings us back to the issue of school readiness and considers the challenge of discourses which focus on learning and development as a product rather than a process.

In the last chapter I conclude this research, reflect on the extent to which I have answered the initial research questions, highlight my original contribution to knowledge, consider the strengths and limitations of this research and make recommendations for practice based on my findings and my reflections.

A review of the literature

The following two chapters include a detailed review of literature considered relevant to this research. Literature related to the early years reflecting international perspectives has been used as part of the critical evaluation, as have studies focussed on participants from an older age range in the absence of specific studies involving two-year olds. The inclusion of this literature has enabled wider reflection and generated a rich understanding around the area of disposition in learning. I have also reflected on literature gained from a range of disciplines including Psychology and Sociology because the complexity of the issue of dispositions within education requires 'interdisciplinary understanding' (Orland, 2009) and early years as a profession crosses professional boundaries of care and education (Manning-Morton, 2006). It is important to consider a range of disciplines including sociology, philosophy, anthropology and health to look beyond child development as

no one body of knowledge can make finalised claims about the complex nature of quality without considering its conceptual situatedness, and that multiple scientific bodies of knowledge each play an important role in explaining it (Dalli et al, 2011: 2).

Search terms began broadly with language around learning disposition, creativity and curiosity and early years. This was widened to incorporate literature related to Early Childhood and Early Childhood Education and Care. This moved to a search of literature around specific concepts covered in this research such as agency, becoming, developmentalism and school readiness as well as discourse. Searches were narrowed to include age relevant terms such as infant, toddler, two-year old although literature related to older children remained relevant. I searched a range of

databases including the British Educational Index and Educational Research Abstracts Online. I also used the SHU library gateway, Google Scholar and search options from Sage and Taylor and Francis, narrowing searches to include recent literature from the past five years. Initially my literature review included a focus on social and emotional development of very young children as this is significant to practice for two year old's, however, as the direction of the research moved towards learning and development I made the decision to take this focus out of the review although it is acknowledged that social and emotional development is fundamental to practice with infants. International sources have been invaluable for this study as these offer the opportunity for reflections on practice following curriculums which have a different focus to the EYFS. Literature specifically from Australia, New Zealand and Denmark were particularly relevant.

Literature from a range of sources includes practice-based texts as these provide a valuable source of information which is available and accessible to practitioners working in the field. It was regarded as appropriate to use these texts as they reveal the kinds of information practitioners may access to reflect on practice and more specifically provide evidence of the ways that academic discourse and theoretical perspectives can be translated into working practice (schema).

In part one of the literature review I begin with a consideration of motivations as a significant factor in children's learning and development. Next, literature is considered which aims to define and explain what learning dispositions are before I move on to consider which dispositions are key for early development. The next section considers how dispositions can impact upon development before I address some of the challenges associated with defining and measuring dispositions. The next sections outline the literature regarding two specific dispositions focussed on in this study:

creativity and curiosity. Within each of these I include a section exploring the ways in which these dispositions can be measured and the challenges of this. Finally, I explain how dispositions can be viewed in a negative way and then move onto a section considering the wider implications and limits of a disposition approach within the education system in England. I end this chapter with a conclusion drawing together some of the key points made in this part of the literature review.

Part two of the literature review focuses on children and early years practice more broadly with the education system in England in an attempt to identify some of the explanations for a lack of focus on dispositions. I begin with a section exploring the pedagogical approaches which dominate the ways in which children's learning and development is currently viewed, I then consider the impact of key theoretical perspectives on pedagogical approach. This links to a section exploring the agency of very young children before I move on to consider the importance of play as a medium through which very young children learn. I then go on to discuss literature around the role of adults in supporting development and learning which moves more specifically to a section linking back to the first part of the review to consider the adult role in supporting dispositions. A section exploring the impact of policy on practice in early years includes a critical reflection on some of the factors which affect current approaches to practice. Finally, I consider the concept of school readiness and explore the ways this both frames and constrains practice in the early years.

A final concluding section draws together the key points raised in both the literature review sections to identify key themes emerging from research and literature which have a significant impact on a disposition approach.

2. Literature review: Part one

2.1 Motivations for learning

Approaches to learning, in particular, the motivation to learn is regarded as one of the key affective skills required for success in education (Ommundsen, 2003, Goleman, 1996). Engagement in the learning process has been associated with achievement and positive educational outcomes (Marks, 2000, Taylor & Nelms, 2006) and motivation to learn is identified as an intrinsic and integral of part of both children's development (Hauser-Cram, 1996) and development and learning throughout the lifespan (Kyllonen, 2013).

Laevers (2005:8) regarded involvement, a related concept as essential for learning and developed a "process orientated child monitoring system" for children from pre-school to higher education. With clear similarities to the learning power approach (Claxton, 2018), for Laevers, the focus of education and learning should be on the process of learning rather than the context or the outcome. Laevers maintains that learning should have a positive effect on the development of transferrable core competencies of children rather than being superficial in nature (Laevers, 2005). Laevers claimed that the process of learning should include supporting children's well-being and involvement, as children who have high levels of well-being and involvement will engage in deep level learning.

Research has shown that higher quality learning outcomes are associated with deep level learning (Craik and Tulving, 1975, Craik and Lockhart, 1972) where individuals grasp and relate meanings and gain full and deep understanding of knowledge. This contrasts with surface learning which is characterised by the simple recall or

memorising of information. The concepts of deep and surface learning have been investigated in depth in research around learning in higher education (Beattie, Collins & McInnes, 2010) but less so within the early years although deep level learning has been explained in a number of ways, for example in Tina Bruce's (1991) concept of 'wallowing' and Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) concept of 'flow' which are used to explain children being absorbed in activities and situations. The distinction between deep and surface level learning was introduced in chapter one in the outline of Claxton's concept of learning power whereby Claxton maintained that the attitudes and habits which affect the process of learning are found at the deepest level of learning.

The satisfaction or motivation from involvement comes from the exploratory drive or natural intrinsic curiosity of the child (Bruner, 1974). This perspective has been supported by research which has shown that when children have a high level of involvement and direction they are more likely to be interested, motivated and show enthusiasm for learning (Bishop, 2006) and supports Bruner's (1974:406) perspective that learning should be a task of discovery so that children will develop tendencies to engage in activities and be rewarded by the process of discovery and self-reward. Runco (2005) suggests that children who are motivated may persist at solving problems and argues that creative potential is only fulfilled when an individual is motivated. In addition, only when individuals have the motivation to apply their skills can creative solutions be found. This has implications not just within the early years, as according to Laevers (2005) lifelong learning can be reinforced by strengthening the exploratory drive (tendencies to be curious and creative) and enhancing an individual's intrinsic motivation. Amabile (1987:224) defines intrinsic motivation as "the motivation to work on something primarily for its own sake, because it is enjoyable, satisfying, challenging, or otherwise captivating." In contrast, extrinsic motivators refer

to external rewards, “the motivation to work on something primarily because it is a means to an end.” The distinction between these types of motivation raise important questions about the role of adults in motivating children’s dispositions such as creativity and will be discussed further later in this chapter.

It is argued that even very young children should ‘learn to learn’ through the development of mastery motivation (Dweck and Leggett, 1988) which is an internal drive to achieve a skill or goal in the absence of an external reinforcement (Kielty and Freund, 2004). Although it is not within the remit of this research to explore the concept of mastery motivation in depth, it is appropriate to discuss the research of Józsa and Caplovitz Barrett (2018) who found that mastery motivation was a valuable but often ignored factor influencing school readiness and that this motivation is undermined where an emphasis is made on external rewards as often found within our current education system (Józsa and Morgan, 2014).

The literature indicates the importance of children being willing to “engage in learning activities,” that they are “ready and eager to learn” and that they are interested in learning (Britto, 2012:9) as well as having positive “attitudes to learning” which include persistence, creativity and curiosity. Some of these factors can be identified within the Early Years Foundation Stage (Early Education, 2012) in the Characteristics of Effective Learning. This is significant as an effective early years curriculum should encourage the motivation to master skill and should “provide a wide range of experiences, opportunities, resources and contexts that will provoke, stimulate and support children’s innate intellectual dispositions” (Katz, 2015: 2).

Internal motivations are often displayed in young children in their drive to explore, play and experiment are made visible through their curiosity and creativity which provide

internal rather external recognition for success. It makes sense therefore that young children should be supported to develop those dispositions/drives/motivations which enable them to be reinforced by the learning process itself because these motivations for learning, self-efficacy, confidence, levels of interest and goal orientation underpin cognitive skills (Whitbread and Bingham, 2011). To develop this motivation, children need opportunities to understand that various strategies such as persistence, initiation, enjoyment of trying and choice making must be used to be successful and adults and the environment will play a key role in this. "Through noting patterns of children's inquiries, teachers might pay closer attention to children's curiosity and the inherent motivation to learn that accompanies this" (Hedges and Cooper, 2016: 318).

The adult therefore plays a significant role in promoting the 'involvement' of children and this role may be regarded as more important than space, materials or activities (Laevers, 2005). Adults can support the well-being and involvement of children in several ways including addressing the behaviour and social experiences in a way sensitive to the needs of the child, the provision of stimulating interventions, the promotion of opportunities for autonomy and promoting involvement through following children's interests (Laevers, 2007). Children's interests are significant here because they are a powerful intrinsic motivator for learning (Drummond, 1993, DFE, 2014) and motivation is a key characteristic of involvement (Davis, Peters and White, 2012). For very young children these interests are demonstrated and extended through play as this is the medium through which children 'wallow' in their learning, demonstrating imagination, creativity and innovation (Bruce, 1991).

It would appear from the literature that underlying motivations and attitudes towards learning are clearly linked to positive dispositions. However, the range of perspectives

have raised questions around how we define and locate dispositions. Are they distinct entities or are they motivations as proposed by Sadler (2002)? The challenge of defining disposition will now be explored in more detail.

2.2 What are learning dispositions?

Learning dispositions have been defined in a variety of ways in the academic literature. According to Carr (1997:2) they are “habits of mind that dispose the learner to interpret, edit and respond to experiences in characteristic ways,” they are “predispositions to draw upon modes of response to situations and problems that arise within specific contexts” (Nelsen, 2015:87). Dispositions refer to the probability or likelihood of engaging in a certain behaviour (Bartussek, 1972). They are the “proclivities that lead us in one direction rather than another within the freedom of action that we have” (Perkins, 1995: 275). Resnick suggests that instead of regarding disposition as a “biological or inherited trait....it is more akin to a habit of thought, one that can be learned and therefore taught” (1987:4). This is an interesting definition as it suggests that dispositions are fluid and variable rather than fixed and unchanging. This implies that the education system and practitioners who work in it have a key role in supporting children to develop dispositions. For a disposition approach to be taken in supporting young children’s learning and development, this perspective is key.

The definitions above already highlight a key issue in the study of disposition; even in the few statements above, the terms habit, proclivity, predisposition and probability of something are all used to relate to the same concept. Although using different words all these definitions imply that disposition relates to a way of being or a way of acting.

The term 'habit' is one which emerges frequently in the literature around disposition and one used by Lilian Katz who has written widely on this area and has promoted the importance of dispositions for learning throughout her career. Katz (1993b:16) defines a disposition as "a pattern of behaviour exhibited frequently....in the absence of coercion...constituting a habit of mind under some conscious and voluntary control...intentional and orientated to broad goals."

Carr and Claxton (2002) make a distinction between the interrelated concepts of dispositions which make someone ready and willing to learn and capabilities which are the skills and abilities required for learning. Perkins, Jay and Tishman (1993) also link capability to disposition but according to Carr and Claxton (2002) dispositions should be viewed in a more intellectual way linking thinking and learning dispositions.

2.3 Which dispositions are fundamental in the early years?

Da Ros-Voseles and Fowler-Hawhey (2007) recognise three broad types of dispositions. Those that are inborn such as innate curiosity; social dispositions such as co-operation and intellectual dispositions which include communication and asking questions. Innate curiosity has also been acknowledged by Robinson (2011) as a crucial driving force for learning and McLelland and Morrison (2003) regard pleasure in exploring as key for success. Katz (1985) also identifies curiosity along with resourcefulness, cooperation, persistence, courageousness, and being purposeful and communicative as key dispositions and proposes that children who are reflective, inquisitive, inventive, resourceful, full of wonder and puzzlement will have the key attributes necessary for learning. Curiosity is explicitly identified here but creativity is

also implied in terms such as inventive, resourcefulness and resourceful. Bertram and Pascal (2002) are more explicit in their inclusion of creativity as one of four key dispositions required for effective learning in addition to independence, self-motivation and resilience.

One interesting perspective in the literature is the distinction between positive dispositions and negative dispositions. Katz (1999) recommends that desirable dispositions should be strengthened, and undesirable dispositions such as bossiness discouraged. Da Ros-Voseles and Fowler-Hawhey (2007) also make a distinction between desirable dispositions such as resourcefulness, curiosity, and persistence and undesirable dispositions such as selfishness, impatience, and intolerance. The distinction between desirable and undesirable dispositions and the implications of making such a distinction is a key issue which will be explored throughout this research, particularly considering the age and social and emotional development levels of the children in focus. Specifically, I question the definition and interpretations of specific dispositions and ask whether dispositions characterised as undesirable may perhaps underpin more socially acceptable dispositions if they were directed in a positive way. This issue shall be explored in further detail later in the review.

2.4 The impact of dispositions on development

Returning to previous literature around lifelong learning, early intervention and preparing children, we can assume that “by instilling “the right” dispositions and attitudes in children and young people, there is no need for later corrections” (Spohrer, Stahl and Bowers-Brown, 2017:12). If children can be supported in the early years to develop positive approaches to learning, to have strong dispositions such as creativity,

curiosity and resilience then their ability to apply skills and absorb the subject knowledge Claxton (2018) refers to as surface learning will be enhanced.

It is known that a range of wider experiences such as parenting, early relationships and poverty impact on development, learning and dispositions for learning (Whitbread and Bingham, 2011) but what is the impact of this on the ability of young children to succeed through the education system and beyond? To answer this question, it is important to point out that dispositions are not static and fixed traits, they are incremental (Diez and Murrell, 2010) and environmentally sensitive (Bertram and Pascal, 2002) and can affect the nature of engagement with learning opportunities (Buckingham Shum & Deakin-Crick, 2012). Dispositions therefore influence and can be influenced by experiences and interactions with others indicating that they are acquired (Feiman-Nemser & Schussler, 2010) and can be strengthened or weakened (Katz, 1995). It is the environment and the interactions between children and adults that has a lasting impact on a child's dispositions (Bertram and Pascal, 2002). "It is not what we are born with that counts so much but what we are allowed to do and who we are encouraged to be" (Katz, 1995 cited in Dowling, 2010).

As children learn through modelling (Bandura, 1977), adults should actively make dispositions visible in their own actions as they have a key role in supporting the development of dispositions. Clearly, encouragement and support from others is key and practitioners have a primary role in nurturing dispositions and should support children to secure these positive habits towards learning. This provides strong evidence that positive experiences and promotion of disposition in the early years will have a positive impact on children's learning and development.

Positive dispositions can be strengthened or damaged by the approach to learning used and it is suggested that the curriculum should take account of how desirable dispositions can be strengthened (Katz, 1995) and teaching practices should focus on strengthening the skills associated with dispositions (Katz, 1987). Katz warns that once dispositions are damaged or weakened they are less likely to be recovered. This perspective is supported by evidence which shows that a focus on specific strategies to promote literacy within schools has weakened some children's motivation to read (Katz, 1987, Neuman and Roskos, 2005).

According to Katz, the acquisition of knowledge and skills and dispositions to learn should be mutually inclusive as one is not desirable or useful without the other. Making a distinction between 'academic goals' with a focus on numeracy and literacy and are "discreet elements of disembodied information" and "intellectual goals" which include the quest for understanding, hypothesising, analysing ideas and questioning and the development of these dispositions, Katz (2015:2) warns that dispositions are put at risk from formal instruction and overemphasis on academic goals in the early years, arguing that positive dispositions may suffer when children are exposed to inappropriate curriculums or pedagogy. In her 1995 paper, Katz identified several reasons to justify why dispositions should be integral to early childhood education and proposed that they should be included in evaluation and assessment within the education system. Rather than focussing on performance, assessment tools should be developed to measure dispositions which should be strengthened and supported (Katz and Chard, 2000).

High quality early years experiences may support children to develop positive learning dispositions and become effective learners as social interactions are shaped by dispositions and vice versa. "Self-discovery, self-mastery and self-motivation will all

develop when the child is given the freedom to learn those things” (Blackwell and Pound, 2012: 139) so children should be supported to take control of their learning (Gura, 1996). This links back to the perspective that if children develop positive dispositions to learning they can become masters of their own knowledge (Katz, 1985).

Although dispositions have been substantially researched and measured in older children (Carr and Claxton, 2002), there is a lack of research investigating these dispositions in younger children below three years and it is here that my study aims to contribute by exploring the extent to which dispositions are considered and promoted in early years practice.

Dispositions can be regarded as fundamental to learning and development and should have a key focus in the education of children. We know that dispositions can affect both the approach and the level of engagement children demonstrate with learning opportunities and that adults and the environment play a key role in strengthening dispositions to learn, how though can dispositions, which are so difficult to define be measured and assessed and therefore promoted within education? This will now be explored.

2.5 The challenge of definition and measurement

Despite her support for a disposition approach, Katz (1995) acknowledges the challenges of defining and investigating dispositions as a concept and the issue of measurement raises serious challenges for focussing on dispositions as an assessable and measurable construct within education.

It became clear at the start of this chapter that disposition is an abstract concept (Sadler, 2002) open to interpretation and with no clear or agreed definition. The wide range of definitions of dispositions creates a significant challenge when attempts are made to measure and quantify the concept. It is evident that although a variety of definitions of learning disposition have been proposed, the word disposition itself is imprecise (Carr and Claxton 2002). Sadler (2002) proposes that because the concept of learning dispositions is abstract, this cannot be drawn on or applied in certain situations and proposes that the situation, motivation and enthusiasm for learning, opportunities available and the significance and value placed on learning goals (by the learner) should be given further consideration as a range of variables are essential for learning success. Whilst acknowledging their impact on learning, Sadler warns of interpreting dispositions as achievements when they are so “context-dependent, situational, uncertain and volatile” (Sadler, 2002: 49). He concludes that it is doubtful whether dispositions are stable enough for their assessment to be valid or worthwhile. Adding to this, Blaiklock (2008:84) highlights difficulties in defining the “slippery” nature of dispositions which raises questions as to whether specific dispositions can be defined, measured and assessed. He adds that other important aspects of learning such as knowledge and skills may be neglected when a focus is made on learning dispositions. Furthermore, Coffield (2002) has questioned the importance of ‘lists’ of dispositions which have been created within academic literature (as seen in the section above ‘which dispositions are key’) and expresses reservations as to how these dispositions have been selected as key in learning. An additional critique comes from Daniels (2013:312) who points out that lists of dispositions may prevent practitioners from seeing children as unique in their “learning trajectory” and we need

to remain mindful that children develop at different rates and circumstances and experiences are key determinants of this development.

Returning to the issue of definition, Carr and Claxton (2002: 13) acknowledge that dispositions are “dynamically interwoven,” hard to separate and are culturally, historically and geographically specific. However, despite these challenges, Diez (2006) has explored dispositions in adult learners and maintains that assessment of dispositions can be achieved indirectly through reflection or when they ‘leak out’ in action (Diez 2006). If this approach is taken, practitioners have a significant role in observing and interpreting behaviour which indicates that a disposition is being displayed and this along with all observations should be conducted under the premise that all children are unique (DFE, 2017).

In response to issues raised with definitions of disposition, Carr and Claxton maintain that workable methods for the assessment of dispositions is a necessity if dispositions are to be accepted as a legitimate and feasible educational aim (2002). Here, Carr and Claxton imply that with detailed consideration, dispositions may be quantifiable and measurable to become workable concepts within education. Indeed, there has been some success in the development of tools to measure and assess dispositions. The Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) was developed as a self-assessment tool to measure learning dispositions and provide learners with an opportunity to reflect on these (Deakin-Crick, et al, 2004) whilst creating a valuable “language with which to talk about the personal qualities which are necessary for learning” (Deakin-Crick & Yu, 2008: 390). This ‘language’ of disposition is integral to this research. The inventory identified seven scales relating to dispositions for learning; changing and learning, critical curiosity, meaning making, dependence and fragility, creativity, learning relationships and strategic awareness. These are embedded within historical, cultural,

personal and social contexts. ELLI has been used widely within education and in an evaluation by Deakin-Crick and Yu (2008) the scales were found to have reliability, stability and internal consistency. However, the evaluation also acknowledged issues around interpretation of the concepts and ambiguities around overlap between the scales, giving support to Sadler (2002) and Blaiklock's (2008) critique.

Carr and Claxton (2002) identify observation and self-reflection as two ways to assess dispositions and cite several experiments or tests which have been used in assessment. They question the validity of these tests and in response developed a Learning Dispositions Grid for teachers to use to assess what they see as three key dispositions through observing and evidencing resilience, playfulness and reciprocity. However, Katz (2002) criticises the grid highlighting the misleading nature of the three key dispositions which imply that all learning is desirable. Katz highlights instances when children have positive dispositions such as persistence and playfulness which lead to less positive outcomes such as bullying and stealing and asks whether these can these still be classed as positive learning dispositions and again raises the question of whether we can determine a line between positive and negative dispositions.

An additional challenge when considering learning dispositions for very young children is that they are likely to be unaware that learning and development (as defined by adults) is taking place through their play and their goals at this very young age are not likely to be defined by motivations linked explicitly to educational success (although other external goals such as rewards and positive reinforcement from practitioners may be influential). This reinforces the necessity when exploring disposition with such young learners to consider the roles of practitioners and their perspectives.

A range of issues around the definition and assessment of dispositions have been raised throughout this chapter, however, Feiman-Nemser and Schussler (2010) point out that it is not the assessment of dispositions per se that is important but the ways in which they are used as tools in development. This perspective indicates that a specific measuring instrument may not be necessary for practitioners to promote dispositions in young children, but what they do need is the knowledge, skills and confidence to support children to learn in ways which encourage their curiosity and creativity. Feiman-Nemser and Schussler (2010) conclude that it is the process of conceptualising dispositions that is as important as the end product (indicating the crucial role of practitioners). They propose that a three-stage process should be taken whereby disposition as a term is defined initially, then specific dispositions should be identified and finally the rationale for the selection of these dispositions should be justified. In terms of practitioner knowledge and understanding of disposition and use of this in practice, the first two steps are key; definition and identification as practitioners become confident in their interpretations, pedagogies and ideas through dialogue (Kilderry, Nolan and Scott, 2017). This perspective fits with Athey's (2007, 153) observation that despite the impact the work on schema has had on practice within early years, "schemas can only be illustrated and described rather than measured." These perspectives indicate the importance of extending knowledge of disposition and widening the discourses around disposition.

I conclude here that disposition is not an easy concept to define and measure, although a measuring tool for dispositions is not necessarily required (Feiman-Nemser and Schussler, 2010) but instead, as with the schema work, the promotion of disposition as a workable concept would enable practitioners the language or discourse to interpret behaviours and actions through a different lens.

I will now explore literature around specific dispositions particularly relevant to younger children focusing on creativity and curiosity as these dispositions have been identified as key in the promotion of positive approaches to learning (Wall et al, 2015).

2.6 Creativity

Creative behaviour is what orients humans toward future possibilities, given that intelligence and creativity are necessary tools for children to participate in a technologically advanced era (Leggett, 2017:845).

Creativity is defined in many ways within literature and the term is often associated with craft or arts activities (Prentice, 2000) for when creativity is associated with imagination and expression this can lead to a limited “arts-based view” (Mullet et al, 2016, Davies, Howe, Fasciato and Rogers, 2004). This has serious implications as dispositions associated with creativity such as imagination are regarded as peripheral to education, found in the arts whereas science, literacy and maths are subjects associated with the “proper work of educating” (Egan, 2005, xii).

For the purpose of this study I will focus on the perspective that creativity is a capacity linked to learning and development in a wider sense, “a capacity of human intelligence rather than a subject or event” (Prentice, 2000: 150). Guilford (1950) maintained that divergent thinking and flexibility are traits commonly associated with creativity and according to Vygotsky (2004: 10-11) each stage of development is characterised by a characteristic form of creativity.

Creativity is present, in actuality, not only when great historical works are born but also whenever a person imagines, combines, alters, and creates something new, no matter how small a drop in the bucket this new thing appears compared to the works of geniuses.

One theme of Vygotsky outlined above is that creativity is demonstrated when a novel behaviour or idea is demonstrated (Bateson and Martin, 2013). The creation of something new is also apparent in Sternberg's (2003: 325) definition. He views creativity as "thinking that is novel and that produces ideas that are of value and involves a variety of processes including redefining problems, analysing ideas, taking sensible risks, tolerating ambiguity and allowing mistakes."

Tolerating risks is also identified in creativity by Meadows' (2006) definition in addition to choosing challenge, valuing apprehension, enjoying complexity and confronting uncertainty. Craft, Cremin, Burnard and Chappell (2007) studied the link between creativity and 'possibility thinking' and concluded that creativity is an imaginative, experimental and innovative process where the child is immersed in activities often demonstrating self-determination and risk taking. We can see from all these definitions that creativity can include some form of challenge and risk, seeking novelty, being flexible and exploring possibilities.

However, as with the general concept of disposition, it is not possible to simply identify common factors in definitions and Simonton (2017) proposes that despite growing interest and research, the field of creativity has not progressed in terms of a common definition since the 1970's. According to many perspectives, a number of sub-dispositions allow creativity to take place, highlighted by Russ (2003) who identifies three elements which contribute to an individual's creativity. These are personality traits such as curiosity or motivation, emotional processes such as pleasure and involvement and cognitive abilities such as sensitivity to problems. This distinction raises issues for this research as some of the elements suggested by Russ are in fact dispositions, referred to by Russ as combinations of attributes suggesting that dispositions cannot be viewed independently but rather co-exist and influence and are

influenced by each other. Linking back to the literature on motivation, Runco (2005) suggested that creative potential is linked to motivations, further adding to the complexity of the term and raising issues about the definition of such a complex term with multiple meanings (Fryer, 1996, Prentice, 2000).

In a review of the literature, Runco and Jaeger (2012) acknowledge the challenges of providing a definition of creativity and conclude that two elements of originality and effectiveness tend to be consistent. This supports Sharp's (2004) view that creativity as a term is difficult to define and hotly debated but that creative processes commonly consist of imagination, originality, productivity, problem solving and the ability to create something of value. A further complexity to the debate is that in Western society, novelty as an aspect of creativity is valued (Lan and Kaufman, 2012) whereas appropriateness is valued more in collective societies such as China (Niu, 2012). This raises important cultural implications around how dispositions are valued.

Laevers (2005:2) regards creativity as a disposition to produce "unique ideas' relevant to problems, to explore issues from different perspectives in a flexible way and to take risks. This risk taking is key as 'new ideas can mean a threat to the existing order". This definition is particularly relevant for this study as it implies a challenging aspect relating to conflict. An example of a 'threat to the existing order' may be children behaving in creative ways which do not conform to those expected, promoted by or encouraged in early years settings. In addition, Gino and Ariely (2012) ask the question whether creativity is always a positive disposition, identifying a link between creativity and dishonesty and the tendency to act in a self-directing manner. They point out that creative people may identify creative 'loopholes' which enable them to solve problems and concluded from their research that "creativity helps individuals solve

difficult tasks across many domains, but creative sparks may lead individuals to take unethical routes when searching for solutions to problems and tasks” (p454).

It is clear that creative people may deviate from accepted norms (Vadera, Pratt and Mishra, 2013) as non-conformity is another trait found in creative individuals who often explore concepts and ideas which stray from the norm (Whitmore, 1980). This has serious implications for education as teachers show negative attitudes towards those who resist conformity (Kim, 2008) seeing them as interfering and disruptive (Scott, 1999).

Naturally, teachers seem to gravitate to students that are easier to handle, respectful, not disruptive, follow along in class, accept their teaching unquestioningly, etc. This may lead to rigid classrooms that discourage new and unique ideas and demand obedience, rote memorization, and conformity. Ultimately, this combination can stifle creativity and lead to underachievement of highly creativity individuals (Kim, 2008: 236).

This may be a problem for those who are creative as it creates a barrier, a ‘creative handicap’ (Gowan, Khatena and Torrence, 1979). Traditional school environments with their constraining structure and rules and regulations based on conformity not only hinder opportunities to be creative and self-expressive (Kim, 2008) but troublesome and disruptive behaviour is actively discouraged by teachers. This is an interesting perspective to consider here because according to research (Meador, 1992) creativity declines in children as they enter formal education although “some [creative adults] insisted on ‘being creative’ almost despite their educational experiences” (Sharp, 2004:9). This raises the question of whether creativity naturally declines because of the maturation process or whether it is something which is discouraged by formal education and brings us on to question the role of the adult who some consider as key in promoting creativity in children (Sharp, 2004).

Zhang, Chan, Zhong and Yu (2016: 1267) consider the “dark side of creativity” and propose that creativity may have negative effects in that it can lead to social alienation, particularly within the Chinese culture where conformity is highly valued. Certain characteristics such as rebelliousness, being self-centred, sensitivity, arrogance and being daring which may be associated with creativity are often classed as undesirable (Chan and Chan, 1999). Literature suggests that highly creative individuals in the workplace may create unpredictability which may lead to negative consequences such as social alienation (Zhang et al, 2016, Janssen, 2004) therefore the generation of creative ideas can result in high mental and psychological costs (Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman and Runco, 2010). Herewith, we have a dilemma in that children’s creativity should be nourished within the limitations and boundaries of what is considered acceptable behaviour, but the classification of acceptable behaviour should be considered using a reflective approach in order to identify elements of the hidden curriculum which promote the educational objectives of an institution (Haralambos and Holburn, 1991). The impact of the hidden curriculum will be explored further later in this chapter.

This dual interpretation of creativity links back to the previous discussion around what is classed as positive and negative in terms of disposition and demonstrates that the terms are very much open to interpretation which indicates further a need to extend an accessible discourse around the term. I will return to the issue of negative dispositions later in this chapter.

2.7 Measuring creativity

Because of the inherent complications around the definition of creativity as a concept it is challenging to identify and measure. A range of approaches have been introduced but no specific format has been accepted universally. Traditional approaches to measure creativity have used psychometric testing (Burnard, Cremin and Craft, 2007) which have proved a challenge when working with young children. In contrast to this approach, Robson (2014) used the Analysing Children's Creative Thinking (ACCT) Framework (Fumoto, Robson, Greenfield and Hargreaves, 2012) where observations were used to categorise indicators of creativity into three sections based on literature from Sternberg (2003), Claxton (1999), Craft (2003) and Meadows (2006). The three broad categories of exploration/engagement, persistence and involvement/enjoyment are broken down further into several sub-skills which are defined along with examples of behaviours. A challenge of this is that the sub skills themselves are dispositions therefore the observational approach has drawbacks in that creativity is inferred by the observer, making this approach biased. Nevertheless, it has been a valuable research tool providing rich data of children's behaviour in context (Robson, 2014) and could provide a starting point for the development of a discourse around creativity relevant to early years practice.

2.8 Curiosity

Curiosity is the most superficial of all the affections, it changes its object perpetually, it has an appetite which is very sharp, but very easily satisfied and it has always an appearance of giddiness, restlessness and anxiety (Burke, 1958: 31).

Children are born to be curious. Babies have innate curious tendencies and an “inbuilt drive to discover” (Page, Clare and Nutbrown, 2013:31) showing preferences through gaze at only a few hours old (Gopnik et al, 1999a). This inbuilt curiosity is demonstrated at each age as children develop increasing control over their bodies and are drawn to new and novel experiences. Curiosity is intrinsic to children’s development and unfolds through social interactions and within a social context (Engel, 2011). It is one of the driving forces behind the rapid early development of young children (Robinson, 2008) and can act as both a cause and effect of effective learning. Children are driven by their innate curiosity which motivates them to seek new and interesting experiences, leaning in to get a “closer look” (Shonstrom, 2016: 150) enabling deep level learning which in turn motivates further curiosity and new encounters.

Curiosity is defined as “an intense motivation toward exploration of novelty” (Chak, 2002: 77) an expression of eagerness to learn (Hedges, 2014) and the motivation to acquire information (Pluck and Johnson, 2011). As Robinson (2008) points out above, it is one of the driving forces for learning. Throughout the literature, links between curiosity, motivation and attention have been made. We know that supporting children to develop internal motivations to learn is desirable as these internal motivations are stronger and more effective than external rewards. The exploratory drive or natural intrinsic curiosity provides children with satisfaction from learning where they can reach a sense of ‘flow’ which is central to discovery and learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). This means children are more likely to be interested, motivated and enthusiastic. Deakin-Crick (2007) distinguish between curious learners who have a desire to find things out and show deep learning strategies, and passive learners who are less likely to actively engage and explore. We know that deep level learners are more engaged, have higher levels of involvement (Laevers, 2005) and are more likely

to acquire and retain knowledge and information than surface level learners. Therefore, curiosity can be regarded as an essential disposition for success in education and Friedman (2007) goes so far as to say that curiosity and the motivation to learn are more important than intelligence.

In an extensive review of literature of psychological models of curiosity, Lowenstein (1994) compared historical perspectives and summarised that the focus over the last half century has ranged from attempts to identify underlying causes and situational determinants in the 1960's to questions around defining and measuring curiosity in the 1970's. He highlighted early religious and philosophical perspectives such as Hume and St Augustine who mused about curiosity and noted that curiosity over time has fluctuated as a positive virtue, a motivation which underpins knowledge and intelligence, or a negative vice characterised by impulsive or nosy behaviour (as seen in the tales of Eve, Pandora and Ulysses). Curiosity is currently regarded as a socially desirable attribute; according to Voss and Keller (1983: 122) "exploratory behaviour is a major determinant for the development of intelligence." This supports earlier perspectives that

the importance of curiosity to thought and memory are so extensive that the absence...would jeopardize intellectual development no less than the destruction of brain tissue...there is no human competence which can be achieved in the absence of a sustaining interest (Tomkins, 1962: 347).

A range of theories focussed on the causes of curiosity were covered in Lowenstein's review locating it as trait or state (Naylor, 1981, Maw and Maw, 1964), a drive (Freud, 1915, Berlyne, 1954a) and a motivation (White, 1959). Lowenstein concluded that curiosity is a critical motivation on human behaviour and offered a new account where curiosity was interpreted as a "form of cognitively induced deprivation that arises from

the perception of a gap in knowledge or understanding” (1994: 74). This interpretation links back to the innate nature of curiosity explained earlier and indicates that as a disposition this is something inherent in very young children as their experiences of the world are new and novel.

Like creativity, curiosity has been defined in many ways in the literature and as with other dispositions there are inherent issues around the lack of an operational definition of curiosity (Jirout and Klahr, 2012). As a concept it remains hotly debated within the literature. After considering the range of perspectives found in literature, my view is that curiosity is a motivation, a natural tendency to make sense of the world (Hebb, 1955) and the motive to resolve uncertainty (Kagan, 1972). This perspective fits with the ideas of Maw and Maw (1964) who defined curiosity as occurring where a child positively reacts to new aspects of the environment through behaviour, exhibits a need to know, seeks new experiences and shows persistence in exploration.

Curiosity clearly has a key role in learning as this along with exploration demonstrates “eagerness to know” and can be a strong motivation for learning and the “acquisition of knowledge” (Chak, 2007: 142). However, as with other dispositions it is often given less focus and importance. The value of curiosity must be emphasised if it is to be viewed within education as an essential disposition with equal importance to essay writing or geometry and for this to be translated into practice it must be highlighted in policy (Engel, 2011). This perspective is not new. Back in the 1970’s, Minuchin (1971) pointed out that if active exploration is integral to learning in the early years it is essential to explore the ways in which early years pedagogy reinforces and maintains this. Furthermore, links have been made between curiosity and children’s interest in the learning process reinforcing the need for curriculums to have an appropriate balance between adult and child led play as interests enable children to work as co-

constructors alongside teachers to inquire and explore in participative ways (Hedges and Cooper, 2016).

Research (Engel, 2009) has shown as with creativity, curiosity declines within formal schooling. Children are born scientists, continually testing hypotheses and conclusions to discover the world around them but this natural ability reduces as children grow (Parvanno, 1990). It remains unclear whether this is a result of a natural decline in curiosity of school aged children or whether the nature of the curriculum and education system is responsible for the decline (Engelhard and Monsaas, 1988). Engel (2009) found low rates of curiosity in any of the classrooms he researched and concluded that curiosity is influenced by the social context and adults. Engel and Labella (2011) maintain that teachers own behaviours have a powerful effect on a child's disposition to explore and that teachers rarely treat curiosity as a top priority, demonstrating a preference for mastery learning rather than inquiry and valuing product not process. From some perspectives it is the education system itself which serves as a 'killer of curiosity' (Shonstrom, 2016) both for children and adults, as research has revealed that practitioner curiosity can be inhibited by external factors such as inspection frameworks (Hanson and Appleby, 2015). This has serious implications considering the key role of curiosity in learning, and we can conclude that developing ways to promote curiosity in young children is essential as curiosity is a significant contributor to academic achievement (Shah, Weeks, Richards and Kaciroti, 2018).

As explained above, as with other dispositions, the definition of curiosity remains an issue and in the absence of a specific definition and measuring tool for curiosity it remains difficult to assess how curiosity develops in children the impact of it on

learning or to evaluate how successful interventions are (Jirout and Klahr, 2012). The issue of measuring curiosity will now be explored.

2.9 Measuring curiosity

Various attempts have been made to develop tools to measure curiosity with varying success. Curiosity measured in adults is often made with self-report tools such as the Curiosity and Exploration inventory (Kashdan, Rose and Fincham, 2004), however as curiosity is regarded as socially desirable (Lowenstein, 1994), the reliability of these measures is questioned. Narrative observations of children's behavioural responses to new situations were used by Minuchin (1971) to develop a measuring tool of curiosity for young children. Data was correlated with teacher's perspectives and it was concluded that this was a reliable measure. Although, as with creativity, no one tool, or approach has been accepted for this purpose. As outlined previously, Carr and Claxton (2002) are confident that dispositions can be quantified, measurable and workable and that this is necessary for dispositions to become legitimate and feasible within education. The Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) discussed previously has been used with some success (Deakin-Crick et al, 2004) although this success is open to interpretation.

In the absence of specific tools to measure creativity and curiosity, it can be concluded that it is necessary to develop and promote accessible language to talk about dispositions (Deakin-Crick and Yu, 2008) and this proposal is central to this research, as language has the power and ability to construct social realities and the 'stories' people are told and tell influence and shape individuals (Bruner, 2006).

For stories define the range of canonical characters, the settings in which they operate, the actions that are permissible and comprehensible. And thereby they provide, so to speak, a map of possible roles and of possible worlds in which action, thought and self-definition are permissible or desirable (Bruner, 1986:66).

2.10 Negative dispositions

An interesting theme which repeatedly arises within the literature is the distinction between positive and negative dispositions. To recap, it was suggested previously that “teachers can help diminish undesirable dispositions, such as selfishness, impatience, and intolerance” (Da Ros-Voseles & Fowler-Haughey, 2007:2) and desirable dispositions should be encouraged, and undesirable dispositions weakened and discouraged (Katz, 1987).

In stark contrast to these perspectives, a recent study (Spengler et al, 2015) questioned whether positive attitudes within education were necessary for success and found a clear correlation between students who were rule breakers and defiant of authority and later career success. This supports previous research that students who lacked agreeableness later were higher earners (Judge, Livingstone and Hurst, 2012).

Watkins and Noble (2013) introduced the notion of bodily control for children which refers to the perspective that they should be self-disciplined and able to focus on a specific task. They point out that ‘stillness, quiet and obedience’ should not always be seen as positive whilst movement and noise be viewed as negative. Clearly, a natural desire to be curious and creative is at odds with the perspective that children should learn by being still, quiet and obedient. Ayres (2005) points out that proprioception (the body in relation to space) is critical in the learning and development of very young children who need opportunities to practice and demonstrate physical skills such as

running, jumping, climbing, touching etc so need spaces to explore and have freedom (NCTL, 2013). Early knowledge acquisition is gained through powerful and formative explorations highlighted by Engel (2011) where he describes the tireless way in which toddlers explore the world around them using their senses and growing physical control. He maintains that the aim of these explorative behaviours is for toddlers to gain information about the world around them (Engel 2011).

When infants reach toddler age an increase in agency is demonstrated, or at least attempted (Dietz, Jennings and Abrew, 2005) evidenced by an increased drive for independence during their second year. Agency has been defined as the capacity to impose choices on social worlds within a social structure (Seidmann, 2004) and can be linked to both the positive concepts of self-assertion (Dietz et al, 2005) and independence and the negative concept of non-compliance (Kuczynski, Kochanska, Radke-Yarrow and Girnius-Brown, 1987) demonstrating the diverse ways in which behaviour can be interpreted with clear implications for whether behaviours and therefore dispositions are promoted or discouraged within the early years. As outlined earlier, Shonstrom (2016: 157) explains perfectly how a disposition may be regarded in a negative way in his statement that “being wildly curious sets us free, at last from a society which compels us to obey.” Although adults obviously have a key role in addressing behaviour, this should be done in sensitive ways whilst promoting opportunities for autonomy and involvement (Laevers, 2007) but this may pose a challenge in practice in very prescriptive curriculum approaches.

These perspectives raise important questions about the traits and dispositions that truly link to success in life and how success is measured and interpreted and on a larger scale –the actual purpose of the education system which shall now be discussed in the context of dispositions.

2.11 Dispositions and the education system

Although the evidence seems to suggest that the development of positive dispositions for learning has advantages for individuals, Coffield (2002) questions the wider sociological implications of learning dispositions and cites Bruner's (1996) perspective that education exists within a culture which is defined by power, distinctions and rewards. One of the aims of the education system is to strengthen the physique, character and reasoning of children (Aries, 1962), however, according to Bourdieu and Saint-Martin (1974:32) the education system is "one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage."

From this perspective, the education system serves to maintain social inequalities by promoting 'culture capital' which is controlled by the higher social classes. Culture capital includes values, skills, styles, ideas and knowledge and for Bourdieu (1984) successful individuals learn competence in valued ways of doing things which reproduce the class relations of power.

Watkins and Noble (2013) maintain that instead of seeing dispositions as psychological processes they need to be viewed within the cultural and social world and should be defined as "specific capabilities and forms of educational capital that emerge from specific practices" (p7). From this perspective, dispositions are "dynamic entities" (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000: 589) derived from learned social practices. This is highlighted in a study by Stirrup, Evans and Davies (2016: 6) of practice in pre-school settings where they found that practitioners focussed on "instructional and regulative rules governing both how to behave and how, when and what to learn." They found that children learned and experienced their place and status, being

labelled by practitioners as “good, odd or difficult.” (p6). Good and able relates to positive attitudes and being able to follow rules and instruction, by listening skills, appropriate behaviour and an interest in academic play. Children were defined as ‘able’ where they needed little intervention or attention from practitioners. A child’s ability to engage and conform with the pedagogical approach within early years settings allows them to develop the predispositions and skills to learn and succeed in education. However,

some children cannot ‘display ‘the right’ forms of disposition for participation in the various forms of play which feature in EYE and so are likely to be defined as lacking ‘ability’ for success in such contexts (Stirrup et al, 2016:10).

The ethos of educational settings implies specific behaviours and attitudes “a mode of being for the subject [child] along with a certain way of acting, a way visible to others£ (Foucault, 2000d:286), again reinforcing the key role practitioners have in promoting and supporting or discouraging and preventing the development of dispositions. In a study of behaviour in an early year’s classroom, MacLure, Jones, Holmes and MacRae, (2012) found that appropriate behaviour is determined by shifting discourse and problem behaviour has been linked to poor impulse control, motivation and concentration, lack of co-operation and lack of emotional literacy, whereas positive behaviours associated with following rules around being sensible, sitting nicely, listening, being quiet, responding when appropriate, sharing, being kind (behaviours which are very much open to interpretation). In addition, some children were defined in terms of their dispositional behaviour, as manipulative and self-centred. The researchers concluded that “in order to be seen as good, children therefore need to pass as the sort of proper child that is fabricated in the texture of classroom interaction and educational discourse” (p465).

This links back to Murray's (2015) perspective discussed in the previous chapter that pedagogical approach can be limited and framed by the ways in which the purpose of early childhood education is viewed. However, with regards to curiosity, if this is to be regarded as a natural and innate drive to explore and investigate, the requirement to be still, to be focussed on adult led activities and to be quiet provides a conflict of practice and results in unrealistic and unhelpful expectations of very young children's development. In addition, a creative approach where children demonstrate novel approaches to situations would not fit with practitioner expectations of 'good' children who listen and follow instructions (Stirrup et al, 2016).

Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) use the term 'theory of practice architectures' to explain how cultural, material, economic, social and political discourses impact on practitioner beliefs and values or 'silent narratives' (Bone, 2008) which frame, constrain and enable effective practice. There are subtle and complex power relations that shape educational institutions (Marshall, 1996) and structure and constrain potential actions within those institutions (Besley, 2015). Zhang et al (2016) highlight the strength of cultural norms and expectations when they proposed the 'dark side of creativity' discussed previously. Practitioner beliefs are revealed by their language, behaviour and expectations which reflect those dominant discourses. Personal beliefs around children's behaviour are influenced by perception and interpretation which affects when, if and how behaviours are interpreted (Bentzen, 2005). Salomon, Sumison, Press and Harrison (2014) maintain that adults push children to behave in certain ways depending on the images they hold of them. This affects the ways in which adults talk, listen and observe children and has implications for the types of behaviours and therefore dispositions which would be promoted or discouraged.

Children's realities are often interpreted in terms of prevailing views around children and childhood influenced by theoretical perspectives and cultural norms. Current discourses around what for example constitutes school readiness may influence practitioner interpretations of behaviours demonstrating dispositions and could result in certain behaviours being discouraged due to their association with negative behaviour. "Educators' motivation to act for the 'good'" can be enabled or constrained by the conditions in which their practices are enacted' (Salomon et al, 2014: 4). Noyes (2004) maintains that dispositions are developed within the context of personal histories and uses Bourdieu's (1984) phrase of 'habitus' to explain how dispositions which have an impact on learning are developed and shaped by early socialisation experiences such as the family unit and early educational settings. Therefore, practitioner-child interactions are inherently subjective in nature and interpretations of children's behaviour guides practice through the observation, assessment and planning cycle central to the Early Years Foundation Stage (DFE, 2017). These interpretations are influenced by "instructional and regulative discourse, as generating and conveying knowledge, competencies and skills and moral codes, imperatives as to what and how the body should be in relation to other bodies" (Stirrup et al, 2016: 4).

In an attempt to apply Foucault's work to educational practices, Millar and Gillies (2013) refer to the education system as a medium of discipline and control where young people are trained and assessed through examination to develop particular types of privileged knowledge and skills similar to the "regimes of truth" identified by Foucault (1980:31).

2.12 Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter it is clear that the concept of dispositions for learning is fraught with challenges in that concrete definitions of disposition are absent. The consequence of this is the lack of a reliable measure with which to identify and measure dispositions. Within our education system, with its focus on assessment and measurement this is a significant issue.

It is clear that to promote lifelong learning a shift in focus is required which enables a stronger focus on the process of learning rather than the outcomes, and inherent in this would be an emphasis on supporting very young children to develop internal motivations to learn. These motivations will be driven by the innate curiosity and creativity of children. These dispositions have been identified as key to learning and development but often behaviours associated with them are interpreted as negative within a framework which promotes school readiness in such a way and within a wider education system which is influenced significantly by a hidden curriculum and which focuses so heavily on outcomes of learning rather than processes. In the next chapter I explore early years provision within England and reveal factors which reinforce these perspectives, and which challenge a disposition approach.

3. Literature Review: Part two

3.1 Early Years pedagogy in England and international perspectives

We know from research (Sylva et al, 2004) that effective early year's pedagogy has a direct influence on children's experience and development within early education. Pedagogy refers to the techniques and strategies used to support children's learning (Ebrahim, 2010) and these pedagogical approaches are influenced by dominant discourses around childhood and learning, influenced by theory and research which provide conceptual frameworks guiding practice and action (MacNaughton, 2003). The REPEY (Researching Effective Pedagogy in Early Years) research (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden and Bell, 2002) was an influential longitudinal study which explored effective pedagogy within the early years. The study found that effective practice was characterised by positive adult child interactions where adults build on child-initiated interests and extend learning through sustained shared thinking.

In practice, pedagogy is heavily influenced by frameworks such as the Early Years Foundation Stage (Wall et al, 2015). The EYFS in England does not explicitly prescribe a particular pedagogical approach but gives a framework in which pedagogy can fall (Wall et al, 2015) and practice within settings is often framed by Development matters (Early Education, 2012) which is non-statutory guidance that lays out typical ranges of development for children from birth to five and gives examples for the role of the adult and the environmental provisions. In the absence of any other specific statutory guidance, Development Matters is an influential document which has a powerful impact on practice and provision. The guidance recommends that practitioners should support children to explore and be curious about objects, events and people, to

support children to take risks with new experiences, learn by trial and error, show persistence and 'bounce back' after difficulties in addition to finding new ways to solve problems. However, it falls short of explicitly encouraging a focus on dispositions.

In contrast to the EYFS, the Te Whāriki curriculum of New Zealand is characterised by a disposition approach to learning (Ministry of Education, 1996). Learning dispositions are identified as outcomes of learning linked to strands of the curriculum and which are assessed through evidence of specific behaviours providing an example of practice where dispositions are defined and assessed. Te Whāriki focuses on supporting motivation and positive learning dispositions (Smith, 2012) with the principle of empowerment being central. It is an emergent curriculum giving practitioners opportunities to identify possibilities for learning (Dalli, 2011). Dispositions such as courage, curiosity and perseverance link directly to the strands of the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996). In her research with practitioners in New Zealand, Cherrington (2016) found that they use the language of Te Whāriki throughout practice, regarding children as confident and competent learners and referring often to dispositions. As outlined previously, language is important as it has the power and ability to construct social realities, stories told and therefore have a strong influence (Bruner, 2006). Because we know how these frameworks inform practice it is evident that the explicit reference to dispositions in Te Whāriki explains to some extent why this is a focus for practice. This is in contrast to the UK where dispositions appear to be a secondary, hidden concern simply implied in policy guidance.

3.2 Perspectives on children's development

The learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are “informed by the best available evidence on how children learn” (DfE, 2017:7) and it is clear to see where the themes and principles of the EYFS have been underpinned by a range of theories which highlight both fixed stages and a ‘discontinuous’ process of development (for example Piaget, 1928, Bowlby, 1969, Erikson, 1950) and ‘continuous’ models emphasising the gradual and incremental ways children develop (for example Bruner, 1961 and Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, guidance around the practitioner role focuses on role modelling positive behaviours which can be linked back to observational learning promoted in social learning theories such as Bandura’s (1977). The EYFS therefore is an excellent example demonstrating where theoretical approaches have been used to underpin and influence policy and guidance.

The Characteristics of Effective learning indicate that children should be given opportunities to ‘play and explore’ and be ‘active’ in their learning. This echoes Piaget’s (1928) notion of active learning and the idea that development takes place through quality interactions with the environment and encompasses some elements of Bruner’s (1961) concept of discovery learning. A quality learning environment, associated with a Piagetian approach is also enforced in one of the four themes of the EYFS, ‘Enabling Environments.’ Another theme, ‘Positive relationships’ emphasises the importance of social interaction with adults who are warm, sensitive and responsive endorsing key elements of Bowlby’s (1969) attachment theory and Erikson’s Psychosocial (1950) development theory. Throughout the Development Matters (Early Education, 2012) guidance, practitioners are encouraged to model,

support, encourage and scaffold children's learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978, Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976).

Development Matters is a core pedagogical framework (Early Education, 2012) arranged by development statements or 'developmental truths' (Wood and Hedges, 2016) based on broad age-related norms and typical or normal development. The guidance does acknowledge there are no 'fixed age boundaries' which is explained by a footer on each page (Early Education, 2012), however the very organisation of this document into chronological age as a primary category encourages a focus on 'typical' and 'expected' progress in practice. The scientific orientation of Developmental Psychology (and indeed Development Matters, Early Education: 2012) reflects a positivist orientation to ages and stages which serve to position children (Wood and Hedges, 2016) despite the fact that "universal codes of explanation, conduct and behaviour, based on empirical evidence, has been a matter of philosophical, legal and economic debate for centuries" (Brooker and Woodhead, 2010:4).

The categorisation of early childhood into age appropriate developmental tasks (Burman, 2008) or achievements reflects cultural, historical and political assumptions and exposes the preoccupation with age categories in society and the "cultural categorisation of the lifespan" (p68). Farquhar and White (2014:824) provide a critique to the theoretical basis of pedagogical approaches in their statement "because of their philosophical oversimplicity, such frameworks set unhelpful parameters for universal distinctions about what constitutes good learning and, by association in the early years context, good pedagogy."

This developmentalist approach where children learn in a mainly sequential manner offers a deficit model of behaviour and development focussing on the limitations of a

passive child's capacity to learn (Penn, 2005) where children "are positioned as assimilating norms and values in a passive manner through observing positive role models and learning through osmosis" (Grieshaber and McArdle, 2014: 107).

Although evidence from neuroscience has drawn welcome attention to the importance of the early years it also serves to reinforce the perspective that children are 'developing,' 'underdeveloped,' 'becoming,' 'adults in the making' and 'incomplete forms' (Castañeda, 2002). Best practice focussing on age related norms demonstrates an emphasis on 'becoming' rather than 'being' and 'belonging,' favouring and promoting dominant ways of knowing, thinking and acting (Ebrahim, 2010). Certainty is assured where children's learning, development and care is limited to well-known discourses around attachment theory and child development (Cheeseman, 2017) however, by reducing certainty and reliance of dominant discourses or ways of knowing, educators open up new possibilities for young children (Degotardi, 2017). It is argued therefore that early childhood education should not be concerned simply with developmentally discrete learners who can be categorised into infant, toddler and pre-school classifications (Farquhar and White, 2014). Cheeseman (2017) looked beyond developmental norms and the discourse that infants are simply emotional beings in her research and revealed the extent to which infants have their own agendas and ideas. She recommends a move away from practice based on accepted wisdom and responsibility as these taken for granted assumptions limit the ways infants are viewed, and therefore limit their capacity and their agency. The theoretical approaches and discourses embedded in the EYFS which promote becoming are a significant factor to explore in this research because the EYFS provides a powerful yet limiting discourse within the early years.

As the concept of discourse is one which is integral to this research it is important to provide a definition. Discourse refers to a “systematically organized sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. A discourse...gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about” (Kress, 1989:7). A related term, narrative, provides a way of describing a discourse, a language in which to define and interpret it. It is important to acknowledge here that narratives, and indeed discourses are not fixed entities. It is also important to acknowledge that narratives are socially constructed and may change as discourse changes within social settings (Gergen, 1997). “What people do in narratives is never by chance, nor is it strictly determined by cause and effect; it is motivated by beliefs, desires, theories, values, or other intentional states” (Bruner, 1996, p. 136). For the purpose of this study the term discourse will be used to explain the ways in which practices and values regarding early childhood education are understood and described in practice, in the literature and in policy and how these are affected by dominant ways of thinking.

Dominant perspectives around how children learn reflect cultural assumptions about the nature of childhood and these discourses of childhood have an overt and internal regulatory function. “Conditions for learning in pre-school are influenced by ideologies and theories that are developed in global ecosystems and that inextricably link together time, culture and society” (Sheridan, Williams, Sandberg and Vuorinen, 2011, p. 416).

It can be concluded that discourse around quality of pre-school provision and teacher competence is affected by culture, context, societal and political intentions. An additional factor which has a significant impact is the histories and experiences of

education of practitioners which influence their values, ideas and practices (Cottle, 2011). This will be explored in further detail in later sections in this chapter.

When discourse around infants and toddlers are focussed on vulnerability rather than capacity (Sumsion et al, 2009) there are serious implications for practice as pedagogical approaches affect the ways in which practitioners interact with children (Salomon, 2011) which has in turn implications for the ways in which they talk, listen and observe (Malaguzzi, 1994). Joseph (2011:20) notes that curriculums are informed by “visions and practice including assumptions about the needs and nature of learners, the role of teachers and instruction, norms about subject matter, learning environments, curriculum planning and evaluation. “

Burman (2008:81) maintains that “definitions of childhood are relational” and these relational terms are mutually dependent and reinforcing. Burman refers to the perspective of the needy and dependent child who requires education because of a lack of knowledge. Within the family unit children require regulating by mothers who train them. This perspective is visible within early childhood pedagogical approaches where young children, regarded as lacking a sense of self, and in the absence of knowledge and understanding require the direction, instruction and teaching of practitioners. When children are perceived as lacking in agency, passive and needy or ‘not yet developed’ there are wide ranging consequences for interactions between adults and children, dispositions to learn and the identity of children (Kilderry, 2015). According to Copple and Bredekamp (2009), developmentalism influences and may restrict interactions with children, social practices, the pedagogical approach taken and the curriculum.

The post-developmental movement portrayed by the views of Nolan and Kilderry (2010) reject the deterministic approach of classical child development theory, viewing children as much more than simple developing beings. From this perspective children are active and capable agents in their learning. Furthermore, it is suggested that children's capacities and engagement with learning should be promoted through an approach which offers more diverse methods, viewing children through lenses not constrained by developmental stages. Kilderry et al (2017) extend this and recommend that practitioners should move beyond superficial knowledge to develop a greater understanding of concepts and discourse through critical reflection of them in practice. However, in practice, the ability of practitioners to extend their knowledge of concepts and discourse is constrained by wider influences.

3.3 Agency

Agency is a key issue within this research for both the children and the practitioners. As a concept increasingly subject to debate in the literature (Stoecklin and Fattore, 2017) agency refers to individual's power and capacity to take control and make decisions. It relates to

events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently. Whatever happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened. Action is a continuous process, a flow, in which the reflexive monitoring which the individual maintains is fundamental to the control of the body that actors ordinarily sustain throughout their day-to-day lives (Giddens, 1984: 9).

The issue of agency of very young children is a emergent theme in current literature and is the focus of studies exploring children's relationships and interactions with adults (Katsiada, Roufidou, Wainwright and Angeli, 2018), has been linked to the

concept of participation (Ghirotto and Mazzoni, 2013) and has been associated with a rights based view tracing back to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) where children's right to agency is expressed in Article 12. This declares that children have the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in matters which affect them, including their education.

The capability approach was developed by Sen (1999) and promotes well-being and agency stating that individuals capabilities should be developed for them to live reasoned lives that are valued and have value. In a study of children's agency during transition periods, Dunlop (2003) found that learning is most effective when dispositions are recognised and a learning to learn approach is taken. Dunlop therefore identifies children's dispositions as central to children's sense of agency

by attending to children's interactions and to classroom discourse we will be better able to understand their mental dispositions, their powers of reasoning in a social context, their social status and social processes and consequently their power to act as agents in their own learning (2003:84).

Infants are active social partners whose contributions are significant (Dalli et al, 2011) and the extent to which this agency is viewed in practice has implications. Cheeseman (2017) uses the term benediction to refer to infants' capacity to demonstrate interest, intent and agenda and indicates that it is clear that toddlers have the potential to demonstrate agency, however, whether they have opportunities to demonstrate this is open to debate as it is affected by a range of factors.

Linking back to the issues raised in the previous section on developmentalism, Adair (2014) applied the capability approach to early childhood education in her promotion of young children's agency. She points out that learning and development is restricted

by narrow curriculums and approaches to teaching and assessment based on taken for granted assumptions. Curriculum goals resulting from outcomes led policy result in adult choices being prioritised rather than children's (Brooker, Blaise and Edwards, 2014). This presents a challenge for early childhood practitioners who, whilst having the responsibility for supporting children's learning and development, measured against fixed standards and norms are also expected to boost children's agency. This links to Burman's (2008) dilemmas of practice which refer to a contradiction between child centred approaches and the wider responsibilities of practice through factors such as ratios.

A range of external factors have an impact upon practitioners autonomy and agency to make autonomous decisions. Curriculum documents such as the EYFS serve as 'regimes of truth' (Fenech and Sumison, 2007), a term used also by Foucault (1980) to explain the ways in which knowledge taken to be the truth is based on discourses which are produced from and reinforce power. Policy can exert power even in the absence of specific guidance as Powell and Gooch (2010) found in their research that practitioners responded unquestioningly to perceived rules which did not actually exist, demonstrating the challenge of guidance which is open to interpretation. The Early Years Foundation Stage yields substantial power over practitioners who, whilst lacking agency of their own will follow the guidance without question, presuming that it reflects and encourages the best possible approach to working within the early years.

Within modernist, rational discourses something that exists in a written form, is independently produced by 'somebody other than' individual practitioners and is universal (national) has the necessary authority to be taken as the truth. This leads to an authoritative version of what constitutes valued early childhood practice and desirable early childhood practitioner identity (Ortlipp, Arthur and Woodrow, 2011: 65).

Duncan (2011) uses the term “agency within restraint” (p4) in his rejection of the view that agency is purposive and conscious. When considering the impact of influential factors within the family unit he argued that decision making is a process of bricolage where choices are made which conserve social energy and reinforce social legitimization. Individuals are

bounded by circumstances and in connection with other people, not only relationally but also institutionally’ and responses are patched together (‘bricolage’) based on ‘styles of thinking, sanctioned social relationships, institutions, the presumptions of particular social groups and places, lived law and social norms (p1).

Although Duncan (2011) focussed on the impact of these factors on the family, they are useful terms to consider how agency is influenced and constrained within the early years profession.

Sheridan, Edwards, Marivn and Knoche (2009) remind us that children’s learning, development and school readiness are influenced heavily by early childhood educators knowledge, skills, and practices. They identify two main objectives of professional development. The first is to advance knowledge, skills, practices and dispositions and the second is to promote a culture of self-regulated ‘professional growth.’ Professional development needs to move beyond an ‘outside in’ (competency) approach to an ‘inside out’, reflective approach for practitioners to develop an ‘ethic of responsibility’ to quality and professional learning and development. In Wall et al’s (2015:4) detailed review of pedagogy in early childhood education and care they define pedagogy as being ‘the “how” of adult and child interaction, “whilst recognising that how children learn and develop at this stage is not just subject to what is intended to be taught, but it is also of particular importance how

it is facilitated.” This links to Hatch’s (2010) concept of teaching for learning discussed in Chapter one.

However, low pay and status have a significant impact on attempts to professionalise the early years workforce, in addition, regulation and inspection emphasise evidencing practice rather than improving it (Cooke and Lawton, 2008) which has serious implications as professionalism requires a highly skilled workforce who can be reflective and make decisions (Moss, 2009). Powell and Gooch (2012) reported that practitioners working with very young children have very few opportunities to engage in dialogue on their practice, limiting opportunities to share their voices and develop in a reflective way. In addition, Hatch’s (2010) suggestion for a focus on teaching for learning requires professionals with the autonomy and power to make decisions. However, “while the spheres of influence that the caregivers cite continue to oppress, a systemic neglect to provide chances to develop critical consciousness compounds Early Years the oppression” (Powell and Gooch, 2012: 123).

Sims and Waniganayake (2015) highlight the ways in which both practitioners and children become compliant within early education. Practitioners are compliant in the ways in which they focus without critique on prescribed quality requirements and children are compliant in that they become receivers of learning experiences. This compliance serves to restrict agency of both parties.

The low status of the early years workforce within England clearly serves to constrain the potential agency of practitioners and leave them feeling powerless (Cooke and Lawton, 2008) and this low status in addition to the content and focus on competencies in training at level two and level three may be factors influencing practitioner confidence and apprehension. Manning-Morton (2006:46) highlights a professional

challenge in that standard training focussed on content along with the impact of personal values and experiences prevents practitioners from engaging “with the darker side of children’s learning and developing, with their distress, their defiance, their dependency and their inherent mess and chaos” (Manning-Morton, 2006:46).

In addition, ‘knowing about’ indicates that there is a common definition of knowledge (Powell and Gooch, 2012) and the consequences of this are considerable considering that adults beliefs about children and learning determine what children learn in the early years (Bruner, 1996). Returning to Duncan’s (2011) elements of bricolage, the wider education system within England acts as an institution which in its focus on assessment values outcomes rather than process. The inherent and pervasive fixation on accountability (Genishi, 1992) which characterises the English education system, from the early years through to higher education has become both a ‘social norm’ and an element of ‘lived law’ and the assumption that the early years is simply a pathway towards real learning at school age reflects societal presumptions of children under the age of five. Duncan’s (2011) focus on the position of woman within the family system also raises additional issues around gender divisions characterised within the early years workforce and the wider inequalities faced by women within the workforce highlighted by the gender pay gap (Boffey, 2017, Brynin, 2017) and wider society is acknowledged as a key influence, but it is beyond the scope of this research to address this.

It is clear that a range of factors have an impact on both young children and practitioner agency within early years in England. A revised focus on dispositions, interests, intents and agendas of very young children would be one way to raise the agency of very young children although it is clear that under the current framework, the capacity, and

agency of practitioners to embed a disposition approach is constrained by the ways in which training and the EYFS directs and limits practice.

3.4 Learning through play

The value of play as a medium through which learning and development take place in the early years is now readily acknowledged both in the literature (Brett, 2015, Davies et al, 2013) and in policy (DFE, 2017). Within early years practice, we know that play, learning and social development are interconnected (Trevarthen, 2011). Once more, supported by evidence from neuroscience, it is through play and movement that children explore concepts resulting in the strengthening of brain connections (Gopnik et al, 1999).

Sensory and physical exploration of their environment helps young children to develop perceptual and spatial awareness. Through physical movement, babies and young children gain knowledge of their environments and become oriented. Movement also keeps children healthy, helping them to practise and develop their physical abilities and to gain confidence in them (Mathers et al, 2014: 11).

Despite the evidence, play is often viewed as qualitatively different and inferior to more formal and traditional approaches to learning. The National Curriculum in England (DFE, 2014) has a lack of a notable reference to play as a medium to learn, demonstrating its lack of value within learning and development of children within the English education system. As a play-based curriculum, the EYFS Statutory Framework (DFE, 2017:9) upholds the view that “play is essential for children’s development.” However, the framework also suggests that learning and development should be implemented through ‘planned, purposeful play’ and that learning takes place through both child-initiated and adult led play with effective practice

incorporating a balance between goal directed teaching and playing and learning (Pramling Samuelsson and Pramling, 2014). This is reinforced in language around 'playful learning' and 'adult led play' (Papatheodourou and Potts, 2016). Pramling Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008) use the term 'playing-learning child' to demonstrate how these factors interrelate but again the use of this term may serve to reduce the value of play in learning. indicating that play in its own right is not sufficient.

Mathers et al (2014) highlight the importance of playful interactions as opposed to formal activities. These playful interactions require opportunities for children to take a lead in their play and Williams et al (2014) contrast play based programmes with ones where children are expected to work with content such as maths, language and literacy. From this perspective and considering the content of the 'Specific' areas of learning within the EYFS, it raises questions as to whether it can be regarded as a play-based curriculum at all. The EYFS proposes a dual focus of play and the curriculum (Wood and Hedges, 2016) although the relation between play and learning and the function of play is seldom made explicit in early years practice and the extent to which play, and learning are integrated remain a consequence of practitioners pedagogical approaches, values and beliefs and interpretations resulting in inconsistencies and tensions in practice. The tacit approach of curriculum guidance has been identified as an issue for effective practice within this research and will be discussed in further detail. Instead of highlighting play and learning as opposites, Samuelsson (2008) proposes a pedagogy which draws on the similarities between play and learning highlighting creativity as an essential aspect of each, and this importance of creativity in the learning process provides my first rationale for a focus on dispositions within the research.

3.5 The role of the adult in supporting children's learning

Adults have a vital role in young children's learning and development. The current guidance is that young children learn best with a good balance of unstructured, child-initiated play with the support of adults, focussed learning with adult guidance through to structured, adult directed learning with a skilful adult (DCSF, 2009). One perspective in the literature is that children are born without a sense of self which develops over time through interactions with others (Evangelou, Sylva & Kyriacou, 2009). This perspective, although contested as a classically deficit view of early childhood framed by adult interpretation (Burman, 2008), does serve to highlight the vital role adults can play in shaping children not only in cognitive but also social and emotional development. It points to a holistic view of development with aspects such as emotional and cognitive development being interrelated and closely connected (Denham, Bassett and Zinsser, 2012). From this perspective, adults will have a key role in the development, promotion and maintenance of positive dispositions for learning in addition to a more formal role in supporting formal learning as "teachers or learning facilitators can have a direct influence on the context of learning; they can scaffold the processes of knowledge structuring and increasing awareness of learning power" (Sterling, 2009: 131).

The interactive process of learning is explicit within the EYFS in the theme of positive relationships whereby sensitive and responsive adults are acknowledged as key to young children's learning and development (Early Education, 2012). This perspective is underpinned by a range of theoretical perspectives around the role of the adult in children's learning which will now be explored in more detail.

According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development, children are active agents in their learning and in the construction of knowledge for "what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do herself tomorrow" (Vygotsky, 1978: 87). Vygotsky identified a key role for significant others in the learning process which he maintained develops within a social and cultural context. Learning is facilitated in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) where children are supported, both explicitly and implicitly (Rogoff, 1990) to think at a slightly higher cognitive level building on previous competencies. Vygotsky (1978) proposed that mental activities appear as intermental capacities between people initially and then become within the child as intramental capacities. According to this perspective, children internalise knowledge and experience after first experiencing it through interaction. Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) extended this idea and introduced the term 'scaffolding' to explain the interaction and support given by adults to children in their facilitation of knowledge. The level of support given is gradually reduced as children become more competent. Bruner (1966) also viewed children as active agents in their development, as constructors of knowledge. He introduced the concept of a spiral curriculum whereby learning is structured so that more simple concepts are taught first and then revisited in increasingly complex ways. Likewise, Rogoff (1990) used the term 'guided participation' where collaboration between an adult and a child enables problem solving and development of knowledge through an intersubjective process; where learning results from and is as a result of social interactions. Hedges (2014) refers to this as a spiral of knowing where children learn through early home and community experiences employing a range of strategies including questioning and observing, developing and testing working theories through social interactions with more knowledgeable others. This is then extended in formal schooling through language

and literature. These perspectives highlight the key role of adults in supporting and promoting early opportunities for children to develop strategies to test out their knowledge and experience and indicate that teachers (and practitioners) are in a position where practices can inspire and support but also ignore and demotivate children.

The potential agency of very young children identified in these constructivist approaches is compounded by the requirements of the adult role in practice which focuses on understanding and observing children's development and learning, supporting them to develop and teach children. "Much of the infant/toddler literature exhorts educators to be the responsible adult who is guided by accepted wisdom and doctrine to know with some certainty the right way to respond" (Cheeseman, 2017: 57). This indicates that learning and development within early years is something 'done to' children rather than through a true collaborative process. This is significant because "the younger the child, or the more taken for granted the system, the less likely small children will be to have any agency, or power to act at all" (Dunlop, 2003: 72).

I have already established that agency is not a concept often associated with very young children and discourses around toddlers lack reference to this (Duhn, 2015). Knight (2016) attributes this in part to toddlers emerging communication skills and the perspective that learning only takes place once children can engage in meaningful verbal exchange. It is important to consider Knight's (2016) warning that the communication gaps between adults and very young children can result in assumptive thinking to form ideas about children which can affect the ways in which adults interact with them.

Children can be subjectively anchored through visions of childhood that emerge from discourses that are positioned as truthful, historic, natural and scientific...the assumptive knowledges and subjectification's that are held...can effectively shroud the ways in which children can be acted upon, simplified, shaped, governed, regulated and manufactured (Knight, 2016: 682-683).

Kilderry (2015) points out that the approach of adults assessing children through observations and planning for their needs is underpinned by a developmentalist model which as revealed earlier, dominates practice in early childhood education. In contrast, a more effective pedagogical approach would be one which promotes co-construction between children and adults (Georgeson et al, 2014). Rather than stressing the differences between adults and children, Ødegaard (2007) highlighted the role of adults as co-constructors or co-narrators negotiating meaning making with children within cultural constraints and this perspective is integral in the pedagogical approaches of Te Whāriki (New Zealand) and Reggio Emilia (Italy) (Wall et al, 2015, Rinaldi, 2013). In their proposal for reflections on a new philosophical approach to consider meanings of childhood and learning, Farquhar and White (2014: 829) "urge teachers to consider their own position as players in a dialogical process of learning that implicates them as much as the learner" and Dalli et al (2011) cite the work of Parker-Rees (2007) who viewed adults as social mirrors suggesting that adults need to understand opportunities for creativity. This also provides support for practitioners to be co-constructors, for if children observe adults demonstrating curious and creative approaches to learning this can be mirrored in their own behaviours.

Levinas (1987) introduced the concept of ethical encounters and suggested that adults should be willing to look for deeper understandings with less certainty about their perceived wisdom to ensure more responsive encounters and deep engagement.

Degotardi (2017) called this 'mind mindedness', which occurs when adults are regarded as partners in the learning process rather than experts and takes place when the agency of children is accepted and promoted. In addition, Manning, Homel and Smith (2010) propose that practitioners should become experts in themselves, considering their own motivations in order to understand and respond appropriately to very young children and to engage in more difficult and less prescribed aspects of learning and development such as dispositions.

3.6 The role of the adult in supporting children's dispositions

We can see from the literature above that adults have a key role in supporting the development and learning of young children although their specific role here is very much open to interpretation. As with learning and development the literature indicates that the role of adults in enhancing dispositions is key (Katz, 1987) as are practitioner's own attitudes to learning (Craft, 1997). We know that children are born with a strong predisposition and powerful motivation to learn (Engel, 2011) but to maximise this, they require adults who understand and engage them in meaningful ways. This is encapsulated perfectly by Gardner (1983) who maintained that it is the responsibility of those around children (both individuals and institutions) to ignite the spark which is inherent inside each child and Olds (1979) who suggested that motivations to interact are intrinsic to children, but it is the 'possibilities of engagement' that will affect the quality of these interactions.

Children within early years education are dependent on the adults around them to create enabling environments and to follow a pedagogical approach which promotes effective learning through interactions and opportunities to learn. Claxton (2018)

recognises that teachers have a key role in cultivating positive attitudes to learning and so it makes sense to presume that practitioners within the early years will also have a role to play here. However, practitioner knowledge and understanding of dispositions will be a key factor influencing whether these are acknowledged, considered and promoted within early years settings.

In terms of specific dispositions, the literature suggests that teachers have a key role in fostering creativity (Diakidoy and Kanari, 1999) highlighted by Bruce (2004) who maintains that adults are pivotal in promoting and supporting possibilities for creativity as these may not develop easily or can be quickly extinguished (Bruce 2004:12). Additionally, if adults tune in to cognitive processes rather than results or outcomes creativity can become more visible (Malaguzzi, 1998). Runco's (2005) statement outlined earlier suggests that adults play a key role in motivating children to reach their creative potential. This raises the question of whether the role of adults should be to nurture and promote the motivation to be creative rather than creativity itself and it must be considered that although adult values and perspectives around creativity are important, they do not alone ensure that a creative approach to learning is offered.

To promote the conditions for creativity in young children, teachers should support and model methods of negotiation and opportunities to explore conflicts. Therefore, when considering approaches to creativity for very young children it is important to focus on the approach and process rather than the outcome. Eisenberger and Shanock (2003) found that creativity is enhanced when creative performance is rewarded but decreases when conventional performance is rewarded. These findings indicate that others have a key role in providing external motivation through rewards. However, this is contradicted by Prabhu, Sutton and Sauser (2008) whose findings support Hennessey and Amabile's (1998) 'intrinsic motivation principle of creativity' that

extrinsic motivation undermines creativity. In a study using the Early Childhood Creativity Questionnaire (ECCQ) to investigate early years teacher's perceptions of creativity in Hong Kong, Cheung and Ching Mok (2012) found that creativity was viewed as a multidimensional concept which included imagination, novelty, product, problem solving, cognitive processes and personal attributes, innovative ideas and self-expression. They found however, that teachers' generally focussed on product rather than process and concluded that there is a need to raise teachers awareness of creativity so that this can be supported in practice with young children.

Both personal characteristics and professional skills are important in an effective child-practitioner relationship according to Poulou (2017) who recommends that practitioner competencies and skills should be a necessary element of teacher training for effective learning environments (Poulou, 2017). Interestingly in a study of dispositions in trainee teachers, Bair (2017) found that creativity was a low ranked disposition with most participants reporting that being challenging, ethical and scholarly were more important than being creative.

The literature suggests that practitioners should be encouraged to be creative in their approach and to embrace change as this is beneficial for children's learning (Fullan, 2001). This is supported further by Winterbottom and Mazzocco (2015) in their study of American early childhood teachers who concluded that a service-learning pedagogical approach where teachers learn by doing and which involves opportunities for teachers to develop self-efficacy and assume responsibility for growth can lead to a more positive approach to learning as opposed to one which is data and assessment driven. In a study of creative teachers, Craft et al (1997) found that self-esteem and self-confidence should be nourished for practitioners to be creative in addition to personal and professional autonomy, the capacity to take risks and the ability to reflect

critically on practice which is viewed as flexible and evolving rather than rigid and static. In contrast, Hess (2006) argues there is no link between teacher dispositions and student learning contradicting other research indicating that practitioners have a key role in the development and support of dispositions both explicitly through instruction and direction and implicitly through modelling and demonstrating positive dispositions in practice. This statement appears to be at odds with the perspective that the expression of a disposition has a social component as it can be influenced by wider factors and circumstances such as the environment and context (Villegas, 2007).

Although a level of creativity is required within the teaching profession to enable teachers to deal flexibly with uncertainty and unforeseen circumstances, the teaching profession does not foster creativity (Woods, 1995). Eckhoff (2011) surveyed trainee teacher perspectives on creativity within early childhood classrooms in the USA and found that participants were generally willing to consider the implications of creativity on children's learning but identified environmental challenges which limit opportunities for children to exhibit creativity and perhaps even more significantly perceived that it is schools which limit these opportunities. Eckhoff concluded that "the relegation of creativity and imaginative thinking to the margins of educational experiences stands in opposition to the promotion of a holistic approach to education" (p252).

Practitioner confidence to make decisions in an autonomous way determines their capacity to judge when to intervene in children's play or whether to stand back and this flexibility is vital for enhancing creativity (Chappell et al, 2008). This supports Fritz (1943) perspective that the ability and choice to effect change is implicit in creative approaches. However, the extent to which practitioners are free and able to provide the learning opportunities necessary for promoting dispositions remains questionable

when they are working towards meeting prescriptive targets found in the form of early learning goals (Early Education, 2012). The focus on instruction and objective assessments can inhibit creative potential (Melillo & Leisman, 2009) as can environmental challenges which limit practitioner agency. These challenges include inspection frameworks such as Ofsted (Hanson and Appleby, 2015) and the focus on assessments and results (Shonstrom, 2016). Leggett (2017: 250) adds that “just providing the structural supports for creativity is not guaranteed to produce creative thinking and behaviour in children.” An additional factor to consider is that creativity is a threat to the nature of existing knowledge (Fritz, 1943) making this something which is discouraged within such a prescriptive education system.

In a study of Swedish practice, it was concluded that practitioners need to understand the how's and why's of teaching (Sheridan et al, 2011). It can be concluded that educational professionals may therefore struggle to find a balance between educational content and approaches to play based learning which can result in a pedagogical challenge in providing creative learning experiences. “While many individual teachers profess a love of igniting the spark of curiosity, they have to work within a system that denigrates teachers personal agency, that places quantitative results before qualitative analysis...competencies over curiosity” (Shonstrom, 2016: 155).

It would seem to make sense that if teachers were creative in their approach and demonstrated curiosity in learning opportunities they would value these dispositions in their learners, providing opportunities for creative thinking and learning experiences to invoke children's curiosity. However as has been raised there are a number of challenges which serve to prevent and hinder these approaches within early years practice and the influence of these wider structural factors will now be explored.

3.7 The impact of early years policy on practice in England

Research (Sylva et al, 2004) around the significance of effective early years experiences underpinned the policy focus of the New Labour government from the mid 1990's to the early 2000's on the early years, which focussed on improving standards of provision and upskilling the early years workforce through the development of a graduate led early years workforce (DFES, 2007). During this period the implementation of the Graduate Leader Fund (DCSF, 2008a) enabled the sector to recruit and train graduates to the workforce in a new leadership role; Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). A role defined by the CWDC (2008) which would “act as change agents to lead the Early Years curriculum from birth to five, improve and shape practice” (Cited in Mathers et al, 2014:12).

Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) was introduced on the premise that a graduate led workforce would improve standards within early years and improve outcomes for children. It was the intention of the New Labour government that each early years' setting should be led by an EYP by 2015 based on recommendations from research such as the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study (Sylva et al, 2004) and the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years REPEY study (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002) which found that children in higher quality early years settings showed better progress and outcomes and one factor contributing to the quality of a setting was staff with higher qualifications.

The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) were responsible for the development and promotion of EYPS and practitioners already working in practice were offered fully local authority funded places on Foundation degrees (FdA) in Early Years as a progression route to EYPS. Settings were encouraged to release

practitioners through financial incentives offered through the Transformation fund and Graduate Leader Fund (GLF) to reimburse cover costs for practitioners on FdA's. In addition, pathways were introduced offering a route into EYPS from graduates with academic backgrounds not related to the early years in order to extend the experience and approach within the early years. Indeed, it was this route, through a Graduate Entry Pathway in 2007 that led me to the career path I now have in the early years.

EYPS was initially a leadership role with a strong focus on developing practitioner knowledge and understanding but also on methods and approaches to review, evaluate and share effective practice with teams and to promote change in a positive way within the early years. EYP's "are well prepared for the challenge of working creatively, demonstrating and leading practice in their workplaces" (CWDC, 2008: 3).

Improvements to provision were enhanced further by the implementation of a new statutory play-based curriculum developed for children from birth to five years; The Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2008). The EYFS saw the alignment of focus for all children under the age of five, indicating that learning and development in the early years is a continuum which requires the same focus from birth right up until children move onto formal education. The Early Years Foundation Stage was regarded by many as a welcome addition to early years education and care when it was introduced. It provided a holistic curriculum expressing that each area of learning and development should have equal emphasis. It acknowledged the importance of development from birth through to five introducing four themes; a unique child, positive relationships, enabling environments and learning and development. Each theme underpinned by principles of effective practice. One of the four underpinning themes explained that children are unique, competent learners who can be 'resilient, capable, confident and self-assured' (DCSF, EYFS principles into practice, 2008). This

definition of a unique child refers explicitly to resilience as a disposition and capability which links back to Carr and Claxton's (2002) distinction between dispositions which make someone ready and willing to learn and capabilities which are the skills and abilities required for learning.

Initially the practice guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2008) recognised six areas of learning; with a specific mention of dispositions within personal, social and emotional development. Revisions to the EYFS (DFE) in 2012 based on the recommendations of the Tickell (2011) review resulted in the six areas of learning being replaced with three prime areas and four specific areas. The prime areas of learning include Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Communication and Language and Physical Development and according to the EYFS, underpin development in specific areas such as literacy and mathematics. Personal, social and emotional development remained classified as a key (prime) area, but the sub-sections were slimmed down, and dispositions were no longer an explicit focus. In addition to the prime and specific areas, three Characteristics of Effective Learning (CEL) were introduced to the EYFS. It is the intention of the EYFS that these characteristics underpin all other areas of learning and focus on children's engagement, motivation and thinking. According to the guidance, these must be supported in children for learning to take place. It is proposed that the characteristics of effective learning, and prime and specific areas of learning are all interconnected and of equal importance (Early Education, 2012). The characteristics of effective learning consist of playing and exploring, active learning and creating and thinking critically and incorporate engagement, motivation and thinking. There are links between the concept of characteristics of effective learning and learning dispositions highlighted by the premise that CEL are central to children's developmental success

to ensure children become “effective and motivated learners” (Early Education, 2012:4).

In addition to the revised Statutory Framework, another non-statutory document was introduced in 2012, Development Matters (Early Education, 2012) is referred to as practice guidance and is organised into development statements based on broad age ranges. The guidance does acknowledge there are no ‘fixed age boundaries, however the very organisation of this document into ages as a primary category encourages a focus on ‘typical’ and ‘expected’ progress in practice. Although not statutory, Development Matters is a key document used in practice within settings to underpin the observation, assessment and planning cycle. It also outlines the ‘early learning goals’ which refer to the behaviours, development levels and progress children should have made by the end of the Foundation stage when children reach the age of 40-60 months.

The revisions to the EYFS in 2012 also saw the introduction of a statutory progress check at two years of age for all children attending early years settings, making this age group fall further under the review and focus of current policy. The aim of the progress check is to provide a summary of development based on children’s progress in the three prime areas of development within the EYFS with a view to identify children who are not progressing in their development and ensure early intervention is provided. In addition, the Early Learning Goals were revised. The Early Learning Goals are a set of statements outlining the developmental standard children should have achieved by the end of the Foundation Stage and teachers in reception classes are required to complete the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (Standards and Testing agency, 2017) to reflect and record this. It is worth noting here that the Statutory Framework was revised again in 2017 although these revisions resulted in no changes

to the areas of development or CEL. It is the latest version that will be referred to throughout this research, unless I am making reference to an aspect of an earlier version of the EYFS which does not appear in later versions. It is worth noting here that through a current consultation, a revised set of Early Learning Goals are being piloted which aim to address gaps in language and vocabulary and reduce the workload of teachers. The evaluation report is to be published in Autumn 2019 (Economic Endowment Foundation, 2018) and it will be interesting to see what direction this takes.

More recent changes to policy aim to address issues and concerns around early development, social mobility and disadvantage based on the premise that “there are strong associations between a child’s social background and their readiness for school” (Ofsted, 2014: 4). The coalition government introduced funded pre-school places for disadvantaged two-year olds from 2013 which was extended further in 2014 (Truss, 2013). However, this was met with the challenge of a lack of capacity in high quality private, voluntary and independent settings (Greene, Joshi, Street, Connor and Soar, 2015). In the More Affordable Childcare (HM Government, 2013) guidance it was proposed that schools would need to become providers of quality early years education to manage the growing number of funded two-year old places. The government response was to make it easier for schools to admit children from the age of two. The provision of free, high quality childcare for disadvantaged two-year olds has received considerable support although the proposal for this to be provided within a school environment is the subject of much debate being described as a ‘nonsensical’ approach with little chance of success (Hawthorne, 2014).

Returning to the issue of professional training for the early years workforce, although research demonstrated the positive impact of EYPS, particularly for children three to

five years (Mathers et al, 2011, Hadfield et al, 2012) and despite the apparent success of the EYPS role there remained stark differences between the status and incentives of early years practitioners and indeed graduate early years practitioners in comparison to their counterparts who work as teachers in schools.

Although EYPS was promoted as a status equivalent to QTS (Qualified Teacher Status), the government fell short of offering a pay scale and terms and conditions meeting this equivalency and as a status awarded by a separate organisation rather than a qualification, EYPS never managed to bridge the gap between graduate leaders in early years and qualified teachers (Roberts-Holmes, 2010). Employers were given financial incentives to increase pay of EYP's through the GLF. I was employed as manager of a private setting and although there were many opportunities for me to enact change and lead practice, the responsibilities of essential management tasks limited my time and capacity to work directly with practitioners, children and parents leading practice. This has implications for the role of graduate leaders as research explained below indicates that EYP's had most impact when working directly with children. In a review of EYPS by Mathers et al (2011), a range of positive outcomes of EYPS were found and settings with a graduate leader holding EYPS showed significant improvements in quality for pre-school children. However, improvements were made mainly in the rooms EYP's worked in rather than setting wide and they focussed on the 3-5 age range. Less positive outcomes were found for younger children "there was little evidence that EYPs improved the quality of provision for younger children (birth to 30 months)" (Mathers et al, 2011: 7) as there were small numbers of EYP's working in baby and toddler rooms. This could be attributed to many factors, not least the fact that EYP's could be employed in a much higher ratio with three to five-year olds, meaning their placement within this age range had financial

benefits for the setting in having to employ less staff. Another factor could be the perspective, even within the profession of early years that babies, and toddlers do not require the same support for learning and input is more valuable with older children who need preparing for school.

In a further attempt to promote the status and align the roles, EYPS was replaced by EYTS (Early Years Teacher Status) and the aspiration that settings should be led by a graduate was abolished in 2013 after Cathy Nutbrown's (2012) review of early years provision and qualifications 'More Great Childcare'. Nutbrown's recommendations were somewhat followed to an extent in that EYP standards were superseded with Early Years Teacher Standards (NCTL, 2013) where the focus was shifted towards practice and away from leadership and the assessment process for EYTS mirrored that used for QTS. It was Nutbrown's vision that the achievement of QTS would raise the professionalism and status of the early years graduate workforce however, in practice, although the training and assessment process were brought in line with QTS, the terms, conditions and status attached to QTS did not translate.

In line with the priorities of the EYFS, the guidance for the Early Years Educator qualification (NCTL, 2013) outlines several competencies that students must demonstrate to gain a level three award of Early Years Educator. Specifically, they must demonstrate how they support and promote early education and development through knowledge and understanding of child development -cognitive, speech and language, literacy, numeracy, physical, emotional, social, neurological and brain development. This broad definition of development covers a range of distinct aspects but not specifically attitudes to learning or dispositions, despite the overarching principle being to support and promote early education and development and the teaching and learning required to be prepared for school. Creativity, curiosity, capacity

to learn, dispositions, attitude to learning and lifelong learning are not terms included within this guidance, instead there appears to be a focus on the what rather than the how, on the content curriculum (Carr and Claxton, 2004) and on the product rather than the process (Laevers, 2005).

The current guidance falls short of meeting the recommendations of the EPPE report (Sylva et al, 2004) and more recent evidence that professional development is vital for enhancing early childhood education and care (Brownlee et al, 2015). The EYFS Statutory Framework acknowledges that “the daily experience of children in early years settings and the overall quality of provision depends on all practitioners having appropriate qualifications, training, skills and knowledge and a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities” (DFE, 2017:21).

However, it goes on to state that “the manager must hold at least a full and relevant level three qualification and at least half of all other staff must hold at least a full and relevant level two qualification” (p21) with no mention that graduate leaders would be desirable let alone a requirement for effective practice.

With regard to international perspectives, in their literature review exploring quality early childhood education for under two-year olds, Dalli et al (2011) made a number of recommendations for effective practice based on findings from across multiple bodies of knowledge maintaining that translational studies which bring together cross disciplinary discoveries provide further evidence for the interplay between nature and nurture and reinforce the necessity to get things right for very young children within the foundation years.

The recommendations made by Dalli et al (2011) reinforce what we have already considered about the considerable period of learning and development during the first

two years and the implications of effective practice. Dalli et al maintain that infants are active social partners whose contributions are significant. Therefore, teaching and learning should be a holistic endeavour. To be effective in their pedagogical approach, practitioners should have the skills and autonomy to critically evaluate and review existing discourses in a reflective way to reveal new understandings through the integration of theory and practice. The recommendations of this review hold particular relevance for this research as they demonstrate the significance of the pedagogical approach and the role and approach of appropriately trained adults in supporting infants learning and development. This is also echoed in a more recent national review (Mathers, Eisenstadt, Sylva, Soukakou and Ereky-Stevens, 2014) which recommended that skilled, capable and knowledgeable practitioners represent one of five keys to quality practice for under threes.

In conclusion, although the intentional aims of EYPS and EYTS were positive and undeniably there were efforts to upskill the workforce and improve standards within early years over the past decade, in reality, the outcomes generally meant that graduate leaders shifted towards better paid roles in children's centres and schools, or in management positions leaving lower paid settings such as private nurseries without a graduate leader in practice. In addition, the evidence showed that more highly qualified staff tend to work mainly with children between three and five (Mathers et al, 2011). This serves to further reinforce the lack of value attributed to the learning and development of babies and toddlers, as does the wider perspective that learning does not begin until formal schooling, enhanced by the low status of the early years profession in comparison to professionals working within education for children over five and adults.

Unfortunately, Nutbrown's (2012:17) statement below remains as accurate in 2018 as it was six years ago.

despite some recent improvements, the early years profession has not broken out of the cycle of low pay and perceived low status relative to other professions. Although the evidence suggests that the best outcomes are achieved by high quality staff, current regulations limit the number of children each member of staff can look after, constraining salary levels.

It is clear that although attempts have been made to professionalise the early years workforce, this has not been embedded across the early years and those working in the sector are constrained by limited training opportunities resulting in pedagogical approaches which do not have reflective practice at their core. In addition, the low status of the profession impacts upon well-being and confidence leading to unquestioning reliance on curriculum guidance such as Development Matters (Early Education, 2012).

As outlined in the introduction to this research, early years practice in England is traditionally a low valued, low status profession characterised by poor levels of pay and very basic working terms and conditions (Cooke and Lawton, 2008) and it is useful here to consider how working with very young children is viewed on a wider scale.

Some appear to think that working with young children means nothing more than changing nappies and wiping noses. This is a misconception of what it is to work with young children and an insult to young children themselves whose needs are as important and complex (if not more so) as those pupils in the later years of schooling (Nutbrown, 2012: 16).

These perspectives prevail despite the consensus that a skilled early years workforce is essential (Sumison et al, 2015, Dalli et al, 2011, Mathers et al, 2011) and we can

acknowledge that efforts to promote the value and status of the early years workforce have been made over the past decade as outlined in the previous section, however, in a review of recent literature on practitioner well-being, Cumming (2016) highlights research that demonstrates how pay and conditions can have an impact on practitioner well-being (Boyd, 2013) in addition to feelings of competency (Royer and Moreau, 2015) with practitioner confidence being affected by perceptions about 'right' ways of thinking and doing (Cumming, 2015). This is affected somewhat by policy, for example, Development Matters supports practitioners to make "best-fit judgements about whether a child is showing typical development for their age, but has prompted concerns about a focus on measuring children rather than on meeting their individual needs" (Mathers et al, 2014: 33).

The literature indicates that quality practice is affected by stability and high turnover is one of the barriers to this and can be related to low pay and status of the early years workforce (Mathers et al, 2011). In addition, practitioner well-being has significant consequences as Ota, Baumgartner and Berghaut (2013) found that practitioner stress linked to lack of training can have an impact on children's engagement indicating that the wider factors resulting from a generally low skilled, low paid workforce therefore have a direct effect upon practitioner confidence and approach.

In addition, Burman (2008) raises the dilemma of practice whereby child centred approaches to practice which emphasise readiness, choice, needs, play and discovery contradict educator's responsibilities for children's learning. She questions how teachers can promote children's interests, meet the needs of each individual child, promote autonomy through individual personal experience when they are responsible for large numbers of children.

In further critique of current training and development for practitioners, for high quality learning experiences, practitioners who work with babies and toddlers require specialist levels of training (Mathers et al, 2011, Dalli, 2011) and particular dispositions to be able to work effectively with two-year olds, who are unique with unique needs (Mathers et al, 2011) which may be different to those needed to work with three and four-year olds (Georgeson et al, 2014). In the current climate of austerity and cuts, additional training is something rarely offered or obtained within the early years sector (Goouch and Powell, 2013) with in-service training being limited to practical issues such as health and safety and safeguarding (Powell and Goouch, 2012). Georgeson et al (2014) acknowledge the value of graduates who have a deeper level of knowledge and understanding, confidence and reflective practice required for effective work with two-year olds and Mathers et al (2011:25) highlight the importance of making links between theory and practice as “theory is of little use without an understanding of how it can be applied pedagogically to supporting children’s development.” The skills, confidence and autonomy to reflect on practice is significant here.

The value of education and training is demonstrated in the Finnish model of Early Childhood Education (ECE) where ECE teachers are trained to graduate level, regarded as pedagogical experts and are granted autonomy to make decisions and choices (Heikka, Halttunen & Waniganayake, 2018). A recent systematic cross-cultural review of studies conducted by Manning, Garvis, Fleming and Wong (2017) reinforced the findings from the EPPE study (Silva et al, 2004) more than a decade later, finding that higher qualifications led to increased quality in Early Childhood Education and Care settings. In spite of these findings early years training still focuses on a competence approach with the assumption that minimum standards are met to be ‘competent.’ According to Georgeson and Campbell-Barr (2015) competence

approaches focus on the demonstration of (assumedly) fixed and universal knowledge and skills. Back in 2006, Manning-Morton (2006) noted that the early years profession values knowledge over skills and little seems to have changed in practice over ten years later.

Lloyd and Jones (2018) reflect on the value of conducting research within their own sector. Although acknowledged that this was a Further Education (FE) setting and not early years, the FE sector is characterised by resource limitations, ongoing policy changes and regulation through inspection, audits and quality assurance. These factors are distinctly similar to those which constrain the early years workforce. Lloyd and Jones found that space to be reflective and critical in such an environment was a challenge and interestingly the research revealed the “autonomy and freedom to think beyond” (Ng and Pemberton 2013; 1530) was not commonly valued within the sector. However, through the development of discourse, participants developed their voices and ultimately this resulted in them becoming specialists and experts. This has implications for the early years sector as it provides evidence of practitioners developing a voice and the agency to be reflective and critical through extending their discourse. This leads back to earlier in this chapter where I explored practitioner agency within early years practice in England.

3.8 School Readiness

Central to contemporary debate within early years is the issue of school readiness and in England there is currently a strong focus on preparing children for school at five years with the academic skills to be able to cope with the adult led pedagogical approach which is inherent in the National Curriculum (DFE, 2014). School readiness

is used as a strategy to “close the learning gap and improve equity in achieving lifelong learning and full developmental potential among young children” (Britto, 2012:4) and evidence suggests that preparation for learning can result in reductions in later anti-social behaviour (Manning et al, 2010) indicating that preparing children for school is both valuable and essential. In a study exploring the links between school readiness and health, Pagani and Fitzpatrick (2014) found that health habits begin in the early years and conclude that school readiness in terms of motivations to learn and resilience can have a positive impact on attitudes and dispositions around healthy behaviour for the future. Although this study has a focus on health, it is interesting to see how factors such as motivations to learn can have more holistic benefits over and above learning and development.

Specifically, how children are prepared is an issue integral to this research. In this section I explore the impact of early years experiences on ‘school readiness’ but first it is important to provide a definition of the term to explain exactly what we mean by school readiness.

Defining school readiness is not straightforward. An Ofsted (2014) survey to explore how early years providers support disadvantaged and vulnerable children to become school ready found a lack of consensus over the meaning of school readiness, and although this publication does not specify a definition this can be inferred through the areas of effective practice around school readiness that it highlights. These include “knowledge and skills’ with a strong focus around communication skills ‘vocabulary, phonological awareness and expressive language” (p9) which underpin literacy which is regarded as a “fundamental part of the agenda and crucial in narrowing the gap between those who do well and those who do not” (p17). Although personal, social and emotional development were mentioned in this report, this was linked back to the

impact that developmental delay in this area may have on communication. Whitbread and Bingham (2011:4) point out that the lack of a clear definition of what is meant by school readiness contributes to the tensions around the term, particularly within early years education. They ask what it is that young children should be prepared for and conclude that the current model of school readiness “delivers children into primary school ready to conform to classroom procedures.” Britto (2012) acknowledges the challenge of defining the term school ready and suggests that that some definitions have shifted from a linear focus on maturity to a more socially constructed perspective around the interaction between children and their culture and environment. He compares approaches between some European countries where a broader definition of readiness is used which prepares children for life beyond the school curriculum and those which focus on academic skills such as numeracy and literacy.

The implications of school readiness are significant. Murray (2015) suggests that the purpose attributed to early childhood education and care can impact on the pedagogical approach taken with serious implications when it is viewed simply as a medium through which children ‘become’ ready for school. Prentice (2000) acknowledges that early learning does provide an important basis for later learning but warns that this relationship ‘is seen mainly in terms of preparing for successive stages of schooling’ (p147). It is often inferred that formal approaches to teaching in the early years are necessary to prepare children to be school ready although Halpern (2013: 8) warns of the consequences of aligning early childhood education with formal school approaches suggesting that the increase in school like instructional practices has negative effects on young children and risks “narrowing and flattening” young children’s learning experiences, describing current conceptions of school readiness as “losing the present to the future” (Halpern, 2013: 11).

In their critique, the Pre-School Learning alliance regard the current approach to school readiness as the 'schoolification' of the early years referring to it as an inappropriately formal and stringent approach which is likely to be detrimental to children's learning and development (Hawthorne, 2014) because schoolification focuses on knowledge transfer and development of pre-academic skills (Doherty, 2007) which can affect the pedagogical approach more suited to our youngest learners.

In a comprehensive literature review, Bertram and Pascal (2014: 22) explore research and policy around the impact of early years education and care and suggest that there are "substantial gaps in school readiness...and these are embedded in the earliest years of life." They propose that both cognitive and non-cognitive skills should be promoted within the early years following a play based pedagogical approach where both formal and informal approaches to learning are promoted by capable, skilled and knowledgeable practitioners and conclude that the aims of early education and care should be for children to be given a sense of their own capacity to become a successful learner.

In a critical approach, Wood and Hedges (2016) propose that a tamed child is school ready. This ability to conform to classroom procedures involves, amongst other aspects Watkins and Noble's (2013) notion of bodily control;

stillness and quiet exemplify a certain type of self-disciplined restraint in which physical and mental energy are focussed upon a specific task, where controls of motor functions are such that fluid movement is possible, disruptions are backgrounded, and elemental actions are autotomized (p61).

From this perspective the concept of school readiness links directly to the preparation of individuals to perform in ways that support the labour market and the capitalist society. It is based on the idea that the ultimate purpose of education is to “weave children into the fabric of society” (Fritz, 1943: 26) and “these plans must be devised to train children from their earliest infancy in good habits of every description ... they must afterwards be rationally educated, and their labour be usefully directed” (Owen, 1813 cited in Brue and Grant, 2007:175).

Harris (1987) draws a similarity between models of child development which suggest children gradually build up skills to become more complex to the value society places on productive labour. This perspective, she claims creates a focus on the development of ultimate skills and capabilities with too much emphasis on progress and not enough on the present child, linking back to the issues around becoming raised previously. Halpern (2013:2) argues that young children are considered “raw human capital to be carefully developed through schooling to meet the demands of a globalized labour force.” Einboden, Rudge and Varcoe (2013) maintain that child development ideology has resulted in a developmental enterprise whereby children are considered either subjects of social value, human capital and investments or as waste. They point out that assessments for school readiness serve as surveillance tools which locate the responsibility for success and failure with the child.

Linking again to the developmentalist approach discussed earlier, Sterling (2010) makes a distinction between the instrumental view of education which stresses prescriptive and deterministic outcomes and products with a focus on content and an intrinsic view where the focus is on the process of education and the development of learner’s abilities and capacities. The instrumental view raises questions about the worthiness of knowledge and who determines and controls this ‘politics of power’

(Parker, 2008) or politically determined formal education (Deakin-Crick et al, 2015). Wood and Hedges (2016:393) warn that a focus on instrumental goals results in the “fine grained qualities and complex and dynamic nuances of children’s learning” being dismissed.

Scholarly habitus has been used to explain those who have developed capacities for sustained scholarly work (Watkins and Noble, 2013). Exploring the current policy position on school readiness, a key aim of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DFE, 2017) is to ensure school readiness through promoting teaching and learning of a broad range of knowledge and skills to provide the correct foundation for progress in school and throughout life. These foundations refer to those capacities defined as essential for progress within school. However, instead of the capacities focussing on dispositions, positive habits, motivations or attitudes to learn, the capacities emphasise academic skills. The EYFS focuses on the content curriculum as opposed to the learning curriculum which enables children to be ready and willing to engage with learning (Carr and Claxton, 2004).

Ang (2014) recommends a shift is made to the active domains of learning but it is clear that policy makers focus on academic skills, particularly around numeracy and literacy, even though educators and academics may focus on positive dispositions to learning, curiosity and independence (McDowall-Clark, 2016). One explanation for this emphasis as opposed to one around disposition could be simply that dispositions are difficult to assess in comparison to knowledge and skills (Georgeson and Campbell-Barr, 2015) in a top down pre-school education system (Ang, 2014) referred to by some as a prep-school (Faulkner & Coates, 2013). However, considering the evidence for soft skills and positive dispositions on lifelong learning, a shift in focus is long overdue.

Clearly the approach taken to school readiness has important implications for how successful the drive to prepare children will be and I will now explore the factors which research indicates underpin readiness.

3.9 What underpins school readiness?

Motivation to learn is regarded as a social-emotional competence factor which contributes to academic success according to DiPerna and Elliott (2002) because motivations lay the foundations for future learning (Carneiro and Heckman, 2003). This perspective is supported by the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years study which showed that children's motivation to engage is key to success with both the learning disposition of the child and the engagement of adults being significant to learning (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002, Pascal and Bertram, 1999). This view is supported by research by the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY, 2013) who found that teachers and childcare professionals rated confidence, curiosity and independence as more important for school readiness than skills around reading and writing. Assertive, pro-social behaviours and social integration can have a positive impact on school readiness (Fabes et al, 1999, Becker and Luthar, 2002). These findings back up the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAYEC, 2009) in their view that school readiness should be viewed flexibly and include all areas of children's development including social competence and attitude to learning. It is clear from the literature that approach to learning (motivation, persistence, flexibility and self-regulation) is a key aspect of school readiness and early experiences can have both positive and negative effects on these (Gestwiki, 2011).

Unfortunately, despite the evidence behind propositions for a broader approach to school readiness, Ang (2014) points out that an over-arching aim of the EYFS (DfE, 2017) is to ‘academically’ prepare children for school and to meet prescribed targets with a focus on literacy and numeracy (Haslip & Gullo, 2017) in a “prescriptive and assessment driven early years climate” (Ang, 2014: 5) and this seems to be at odds with a curriculum which frames itself as child centred and play-based.

Children in the early years are viewed in terms of their productivity for the future, however, this focus on productivity is narrow in its focus on academic attainment with no consideration of how a motivated, confident, curious and creative child would be a valuable asset in the workplace. Ang (2014: 3) calls this “an education system driven by academic targets and attainment where children as young as three are being primed and tested for their academic abilities in preparation for the next stage of schooling”

where it is desirable to introduce formal approaches to teaching (Wood and Hedges, 2016) within the early years to promote readiness, despite the research that highlights how inappropriate this formalised approach is (Engel, 2011). According to Halpern (2013) this highlights the discrepancy between what we know and what we practice and Ang (2014: 193) argues of the urgency to reconceptualise the aims of early years education “what it is for and for whose benefit, in particular with regards to assessment and the curriculum.”

Assessment is regarded as a bridge between teaching and learning (William, 2011) and as an important tool in which to review children’s progress and needs (DFE 2017). However, in a critique of the testing agenda, Ward (2017) suggests that testing demonstrates the government’s desire for data in a push down academic climate

(Copple and Bredekamp, 2009) where assessment has become a political issue (Mons, 2009) and Busby (2018) regards it as an attempt to ensure accountability through information gathering. In addition to this, the powerful influence of accountability and standards (Schiller and Willis, 2008) such as statutory assessments (DfE, 2017), inspection requirements and league tables serve to constrain and limit practice further. Ang (2014) refers to this as a dominant discourse around assessment and the curriculum in early years and Bradbury (2014: 350) warns that “prescribed, idealised notion of what a ‘good learner’ could be operated to exclude some children from positions of educational success.”

In *Bold Beginnings*, a recent review of successful Primary schools, Ofsted (2017) acknowledge that later success is founded on a good early education, they found that success was related to prioritising literacy with a curriculum focus on reading and phonics and to a lesser extent, maths. Play was associated with the development of Personal, Social and Emotional Skills. Interestingly, the report found that over half of the staff misinterpreted the Characteristics of Effective Learning in terms of how these fit into the curriculum, however disappointingly their recommendations focus on literacy, maths, the Early Learning Goals and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, the outcomes of learning as opposed to the process. In contrast to this Ofsted have more recently announced a consultation regarding new inspection categories to move the focus away from outcomes and data to consider quality of the curriculum and education (Richardson, 2018). It will be interesting to note how this consultation will affect the Ofsted categories and whether these will be extended to consider processes of learning or will follow the guidance of *Bold Beginnings* and limit quality assessment to numeracy and literacy.

3.10 Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter it is clear that there are strong influences on the approaches that practitioners take towards learning and development within the early years.

Curriculum guidance is dominated by a developmentalist, assessment driven approach which is complicated by attempts by the EYFS to class itself as a play-based curriculum. As a prescriptive approach it offers little opportunity for practitioners to reflect on learning and development through a lens other than that which is offered. In addition, regulatory frameworks serve to reinforce the expected approaches and act as a deterrent to practice in a more diverse way. The focus on expectations around age and stage serve to limit the agency of very young children and practitioners alike.

Despite the clear evidence of the significant role of early years practitioners in the learning and development of young children, practice is still dominated by a rather top down approach as opposed to an approach of co-construction, most likely due to the extent of the assessment within the early years and requirement to prepare children to meet the early learning goals by the end of the EYFS.

Although attempts have been made over the past decade to improve the quality of early years practice, through training and development of early years practitioners, this has failed to improve the status of the profession and therefore failed to promote the value of the early years for children's longer-term learning and development.

The school readiness agenda both constrains and is constrained by the EYFS and within the current discourses around assessment and monitoring and the focus on outcomes rather than process, school readiness remains to be a force which limits approaches within the early years and despite evidence indicating otherwise the focus

of school readiness remains on preparing children with the behaviours and academic skills required for success within education as opposed to the attitudes and dispositions which would enable young children to learn and develop in a deep and meaningful way.

It is clear that there is considerable work to do if we are to achieve Sterling's (2010: 523) theoretical vision of education whereby

learning is seen as an essentially creative, reflexive and participative process. Knowing is seen as approximate, relational and often provisional, and learning is continual exploration through practice, whereby the meaning, implications and practicalities...continually explored and negotiated. There is a keen sense of emergence (unplanned ideas, outcomes and dynamics arising from the learning situation) and the ability to work with ambiguity and uncertainty. Space, reflective time, experimentation and error are valued to allow creativity, imagination and cooperative learning to flourish.

To conclude this literature review it is clear that motivations for learning are a significant factor for learning, not just in the early years but throughout the lifespan. Dispositions for learning such as creativity and curiosity are a valuable source of motivation. However, a disposition approach is fraught with challenge in an education system focussed on outcomes and achievement and constrained by assessment and measurement.

Inherent in our education system is a focus on promoting appropriate behaviours which will enable young children to learn in a formal way as expected within primary and secondary education, but it is clear that these approaches to learning are not ones necessarily backed by research as the most appropriate and this limited view can result in some dispositional behaviours being interpreted as challenging and negative.

These issues can be traced to the pedagogical approach in England which is dominated by a developmentalist view of children which focusses on the becoming child rather than their being and this serves to hinder both the agency of young children and the agency of practitioners who work within a system which does not promote reflection on practice.

The perceived status of the early years profession further reinforces this lack of agency and challenges practitioners from developing the reflective skills to challenge and question taken for granted norms and perspectives.

A combination of these factors results in school readiness being viewed in a very limited and narrow way which influences practice and ultimately results in dispositions having little or no focus in practice, and instead a focus on academic skills and behaviours viewed as essential for academic success.

4. Methodology and methods

A small-scale interpretivist study was selected as the methodological approach for this research as it was my intention to explore practitioner perspectives, values and beliefs, knowledge and understanding and practice related to the broad concept of learning disposition and specific dispositions of creativity and curiosity in relation to practice with two-year olds. In this chapter I justify my chosen methodological approach, explain who the participants of this research were and how they were selected and discuss key issues which emerged from the pilot study and how these affected the final data collection process. I then critically evaluate the methods I selected to gather data, starting with semi structured interviews, then documentary analysis. I go on to discuss the ethical considerations which influenced the research before finally explaining and justifying the approaches I took to analyse the data.

4.1 Methodological approach

This research falls within the constructivist paradigm as my proposal is that the research process leads me to gain a richer understanding of socially constructed knowledge, meanings and interpretations (File, Mueller, Basler-Wisneski and Stremmel, 2017) which underpin practice within early childhood education. These meanings, interpretations, knowledge and understanding and practices emerge through and reinforce a complex process of influenced by wider social practices, historical context and cultural norms.

An interpretivist study was selected for this research as this approach allows for an intensive, detailed, focussed and in-depth examination (Stewart, 2014) within one or

more specific contexts (Goodrick, 2014, Lichtman, 2013). Interpretivism was selected as a paradigm because this is “characterized by a need to understand the world as it is from a subjective point of view and seeks an explanation within the frame of reference of the participant rather than the objective observer of the action” (Ponelis, 2015:538).

In my choice of methodological approach, I have demonstrated an acquired ‘preference for using research to understand others,’ because central to this research is the intention that I investigate the authenticity of human experience, looking for the “extraordinary features of ordinary life” (Silverman, 2013: 5). From this perspective, individuals have multiple versions of reality and social understandings which are evidenced in socially constructed discourse. Questions about which versions of reality are used, why and the consequence of these on action and interaction are key to this research because the discourse of practitioners reflect the values which determine their actions and practices. As mentioned in the review of literature, the concept of discourse in this study is taken to refer to the ways in which beliefs, values and expectations (silent narratives, Bone, 2008) and prevailing views are influenced by dominant ways of thinking reflected in theory and policy. These discourses are statements which give expression, meaning and structure to how things are talked about (Kress, 1989). They reveal power relations (Marshall, 1996) which influence actions and practice and affect the ways in which adults interact with children (Salomon, Sumison, Press and Harrison, 2014) and the ways that behaviours are interpreted.

To discover and interpret the knowledge, values, perspectives and individual versions of reality which underpin practice around dispositions I needed to “uncover the meaning of the phenomena for those involved” (Merriam, 2009: 5) and this was

achieved by exploring through the individual lenses of participants (Reeves, Mathieu, Ayelet and Hodges, 2008) considered experts in their field (Flyberrg, 2010). Because I was not limited to specific methods of enquiry to collect data (Stewart, 2015) I could select the methods most appropriate to the subject area and the participants involved (Leung, 2015).

My chosen research methods were qualitative in nature to enable me to explore the discourse of practitioners and their intentions, interpretations and meanings in depth and detail and to acquire meaningful data (Smith and Osborne, 2015) for “language does not neutrally describe our world, it actively constructs it in an interaction and the words we use to construct our thoughts and ideas are embedded in social values” (Wiggins and Riley, 2010: 139).

The aim of my research was to develop substantive theory, that which is contextual rather than grand theory which aims to identify universal laws (Gordon-Finlayson, 2010). I aimed to uncover the ideological and cultural (Hussain, Eylas and Naseef, 2013) factors which influence individuals ways of thinking and practicing. This fits in with the broader goals of qualitative research which are to “describe a specific group in detail and explain the patterns that exist; certainly not to discover general laws of human behaviour” (Ward Schofield, 1993: 201). I therefore make no claims to generalise from this research wider than the participants and setting who have taken part. The research does however identify gaps and trends in discourse and practices linked to knowledge, understanding and values which could be explored in future research on a wider scale.

4.1 The setting and participants

The context for this research was in two private day care settings located in adjacent areas in the outskirts of a large city in the North of England, more specifically in rooms where children between the ages of two and three attend. In one setting, children between the ages of two and four were integrated together in one large space whilst the other setting had a designated toddler room for children aged approximately two to three. The settings were selected as I already had professional links with the managers of each. This enabled the gatekeepers (the managers) to gain an understanding of the nature of the research and the aims and provided an opportunity to ensure a level of trust in the research to ensure that the outcomes of the research would be positive and have no adverse effects on children or practitioner's in the setting.

I selected a purposive sample (Silverman, 2013, Kneale and Santy, 1999) also referred to as criterion sampling by Schensul (2012) based on my understanding of the population and the objectives of the research. All practitioners involved in the research were selected as they met the criteria of being early years practitioners working with two-year olds. A large and statistically representative sample was unnecessary as the aims of this research were not to create universal laws or to generalise broadly but to describe 'individual phenomena' (Silverman, 2013: 26). My knowledge and experience of early years practitioners gained through my professional role enabled me to select settings with participants who would have the knowledge and experience of working with two-year olds to enrich the research with their perspectives. Practitioners within the settings had a range of experience and were qualified as practitioners at level three or working towards this.

4.3 Subjectivity and bias

Solid research design is connected to a theoretical framework that justifies the approach (Parker Oliver, 2011). From a scientific, positivist perspective, qualitative approaches are regarded as “merely subjective assertion supported by unscientific method” (Finlay and Ballinger, 2006: 235). However, in response to this I argue that “qualitative research is at its most powerful in exploring things which are every day and taken for granted” (Silverman, 2013:235). I acknowledge that an evaluation of quality is required if findings are to be “utilised in practice” (Noble & Smith, 2015:34) but the evaluation of quality must begin with a detailed investigation into practice which is where this study makes a unique contribution.

This research was conducted on the premise that reality is subjective in nature and knowledge is socially constructed through a process of interaction and interpretation (Myers, 2008). Meanings which arise from social interaction determine actions in an interpretative process (Gordon-Finlayson, 2010). From this perspective there is no single reality, meaning is time and context specific therefore it is essential to explore phenomena (in this case the phenomena of learning dispositions) from the insider perspective (Lapan, Quartaroli and Riemer, 2011). For this research, the perspective of practitioners working with young children is central as it is practitioners at the forefront of practice within early years settings and therefore practitioners who are the experts in practice and owners of ‘intimate knowledge’. This is key because “context-dependent knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity” (Flyberrg, 2010: 223).

Galdas (2017) warns that pressures to demonstrate quantifiable impacts of research results in tendencies for qualitative researchers to attempt to manage bias, despite

this being a concept not aligned with qualitative research (Thorne, Stephens and Truant, 2016). He maintains that trustworthiness and rigor are more relevant concepts to evaluate the unique value of knowledge generated from qualitative research considering its subjective and reflexive nature, therefore rather than being viewed in a negative sense, subjectivity can strengthen the validity of findings (Davies and Spencer, 2010). "All qualitative research is contextual; it occurs within a specific time and place between two or more people" (Dodgson, 2019: 220) and this study has been conducted on the premise that "those carrying out qualitative research are an integral part of the process and final product, and separation from this is neither possible nor desirable. The concern instead should be whether the researcher has been transparent and reflexive" (Galdas, 2017:2).

An inevitable level of subjectivity is inherent in all qualitative approaches and it must be acknowledged that this bias will determine to some extent the behaviours observed and recorded and the interpretations and analysis of these (Henn, Weinstein & Foard, 2009). However, because the research was viewed as a social process with the researcher and researched being interdependent in the research process (Henwood & Pigeon, 1992) subjectivity was unavoidable as "research is not an objective rendering of reality but a form of participation in the phenomenon under study" (Russell and Bohan, 1999:404).

As opposed to being a negative concept, I regard subjectivity in a more positive light as it can enrich the research process as qualitative methods "illuminate the subjective meaning, actions and context of those being researched" (Popay, Rodgers and Williams, 1998: 345). Subjective perspectives are "essential and inevitable, if not treasurable, in qualitative research as they invariably add extra dimensions and colours to enrich the corpus of findings" (Leung, 2015:324). The subjective

interdependence between myself as researcher and the participants as the 'researched' enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of factors associated with dispositions which are deemed relevant and important to practitioners within settings. Indeed, one of the misunderstandings of qualitative research highlighted by Flybergg (2010) is the bias towards verification whereby preconceived notions are confirmed. My research supports Flybergg's view that this is inaccurate because the preconceived notions I had regarding dispositions prior to starting the research, that I would be able to identify the ways in which practitioners support disposition and would be able to develop a useable tool to support practice changed direction considerably based on the data I obtained.

Traditionally, positivist and quantitative evaluations of research tend to focus on issues of reliability, validity and generalisability and qualitative research has been challenged by a lack of universal terminology and criteria for evaluation (Leung, 2015, Noble and Smith, 2015). I was mindful of the CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, 2010) approach to evaluate this research. This tool serves as a checklist featuring questions about the clarity of aims of the research, appropriateness of methodology, research design, recruitment strategy, data collection method, consideration of the relationship between participants and researcher, ethical considerations, rigor of data analysis, clarity of findings and value of the research. These factors are considered throughout this chapter.

Despite this robust approach to evaluation, qualitative research continues to be scrutinised based on quality criteria associated with more quantitative approaches however, because the nature of qualitative research aims to uncover socially constructed meanings, the factors important to evaluating quantitative research are regarded as less significant. It is acknowledged that the reality uncovered in this

research is time and context specific (Lapan et al, 2011), therefore the methods selected to gain data have not been chosen with a view to ensure reliability in terms of replicability of methods used. Instead, I aimed for consistency and trustworthiness (Beck, 2009) by ensuring decisions made regarding methods and analysis were clear and transparent. I acknowledge that research should uncover a valid reflection of participants reality. However, instead of evaluating the research in terms of validity which focuses on whether the findings accurately reflect the phenomenon being researched and assumes that “the phenomenon being investigated possesses ‘reality’ in an undisputed, objective sense” (Finlay, 2006: 320), I opted to focus on truth value in that I represent accurately the perspectives of those being researched. I acknowledge that multiple realities exist (Noble and Smith, 2015) but regard it as essential to gain an “emic perspective” (Schensul, 2012:87), the perspective of the population being studied, from within. According to Leung (2015) validity in qualitative research relates to the extent to which research tools, processes and data are appropriate to the phenomenon being studied. Finally, rather than aiming to generalise the findings to the general population as expected in more quantitative approaches, I focus on the applicability of the research, this refers to the extent to which my findings can be applied to other contexts and settings within early years (Noble and Smith, 2015).

4.4 Reflexivity

Mitchell, Boettcher-Sheard, Duque and Lashewicz (2018) emphasise the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research and highlight the challenge of balancing subjectivity and reflexivity in trustworthy data. To aid the reflexive process, I developed several self-evaluation questions based on the guidance developed by Beck (2009) and

questions raised by Kneale and Santy (1999) to critique qualitative research. These prompts enabled me to reflect on the process of data collection and analysis and ensure my research was sound, authentic, trustworthy (Williams and Morrow, 2009) and credible. Literature (Mitchell et al, 2018, Noble and Smith, 2015) around evaluating research was consulted to gain a range of perspectives from research in early years, broader education and health because by considering wider professional perspectives I was able to fully consider the advantages and limitations of my chosen qualitative approaches. By taking a reflexive stance and reflecting on my own perspective throughout, I ensured that I could achieve a level of truth value to ensure that the perspectives of participants were represented appropriately (Noble & Smith, 2015). Using a variety of data collection tools also promoted the confirmability of my research allowing me to check perspectives across different data, providing a “chain of evidence” (Schensul, 2012:29). Rigor was achieved through triangulation of methods (Denzin, 1978), where data was cross matched to identify themes and through progressive subjectivity (Guba and Lincoln, 1989), whereby the development of concepts, themes or ideas was monitored as a process. Auditability (Payne, 2015) was ensured by following careful steps to analyse the data gathered and leaving a trail of evidence to demonstrate how my thinking progressed and developed. An audit trail was kept through a journal of notes where research activities were recorded, changes in direction of research which provided a rationale for my choices (Birks, 2014).

A range of research methods were selected to investigate dispositions from a variety of perspectives. This multi-method, or triangulation (Denzin, 1978) approach enhanced the credibility, confirmability and persuasiveness of the research (Bryman, 2001). This was important as “the principles of good practice in the conduct of qualitative research and the trustworthiness of the interpretation of information

gathered are both essential to judgements about its quality” (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson, 2002: 731).

I acknowledge that my chosen methods of research are one way of “slicing the cake” (Silverman, 2013: 48) and that other methods could be applied to explore the focus from other perspectives, however, as explained previously, qualitative approaches were selected to ensure rich (Hall, Chai and Albrecht, 2015) and detailed data was obtained as “a qualitative study can, and should, be judged on its ability to draw the reader into the researcher’s discoveries, allowing the reader to see the worlds of others in new and deeper ways” (Finlay 2006: 322). Ultimately the selection of methods was based on the appropriateness of these to the phenomena of dispositions being studied and the participants (Leung, 2015).

4.5 Positionality and self-disclosure

The positionality of the researcher as an insider or outsider and their shared experiences is significant when exploring similarities and differences between them and the participants (Teh and Lek, 2018) as it is assumed that “self-awareness should lead to better social interactions, when developed as an important quality of a researcher” (Collins and Cooper, 2014:89). I took care to ensure my positionality was revealed to participants throughout although I was conscious not to impart my own values and beliefs. Self-disclosure of my previous role working in a private nursery setting enabled me put participants at ease (Fontana and Frey, 2005) as I was conscious that my current role at the university may have set me in a position of power with participants in the setting. According to Grove (2017) there is always an element of power between researcher and researched and it should be acknowledged that this

will have an inevitable impact upon the research, and it is here that reflexive practice and self-awareness is essential.

As reflexivity is a researcher's conscious and deliberate effort to be attuned to one's own reactions to respondents and to the way in which the research account is constructed, it helps identify and explicate potential or actual effect of personal, contextual, and circumstantial aspects on the process and findings of the study and maintain their awareness of themselves as part of the world they study (Berger, 2015, p. 221).

Throughout the data collection I was conscious of my own values and beliefs and in some instances how these differed significantly to those being expressed by the participants. For example, when participants discussed the importance of getting two-year olds to sit and concentrate. As an academic, this does not fit with my professional judgement regarding the most effective way in which to support young children's learning and development. However, I viewed my role in terms of researcher as collator of the perspectives and values of those directly involved in practice. Therefore, it was essential that my own judgements were not revealed as they may have distorted the responses given for "thoughts, values, and self-presentation can yield different social interactions in the field site" (Liong, 2015:61).

4.6 Key issues emerging from the pilot study

A pilot study was carried out in one of the settings prior to data collection to investigate the concept of learning dispositions and to ensure that the language I was using in my research tools was appropriate and relevant to practitioners. The pilot study also helped to focus my research (Frankland and Bloor, 1999) and to refresh my

observational skills. This was a useful way to assess the feasibility of the study, to ensure that the research tools and the focus for the main study were appropriate and relevant and to address instrumentation and bias issues (Polit, Beck and Hungler, 2001, Chenail, 2011) and to meet Leung's (2015) criteria for validity in qualitative research.

The setting was visited on four occasions where I spent time getting to know the routines, to conduct some initial observations of children and to discuss my research informally with practitioners. The opportunity for informal discussion allowed me to explore some of the concepts I planned to investigate and highlighted some of the language difficulties related to the interpretation of key concepts. Schensul (2012) highlights the importance of speaking the language of participants and in this instance as I am from an early years background I had presumed it would be relatively easy to use similar terminology as that used in practice. However, in reality this was quite different. For example, my interpretation of creativity which in this instance was related to the ability to apply unique, imaginative and innovative approaches to experiences and situations (Craft et al, 2007) was very different to that of practitioners. During an informal discussion it emerged that one practitioner's interpretation of creativity was more specifically related to art and craft activities. This has also been identified in literature (Prentice, 2000). This revealed that it was necessary for me to carefully consider the definition and interpretation of key concepts to investigate them further.

Consistency of the language used to discuss or describe the work is of crucial importance, as it informs others that the researcher understands the epistemic linkages supporting the approach being implemented, thus adding to the scientific adequacy of the work (Watson and Girard, 2004: 875).

I developed a semi-structured questionnaire which enabled me to ask open and closed questions around children's dispositions and expected behaviour of two-year olds which was distributed to a group of early years practitioners attending university and working in a wide range of settings. These practitioners were not part of the main study as the intention was to gather a broader range of perspectives. The response rate from the questionnaires was quite low, with only three being returned out of thirty as most of the group worked with older children. Despite this, the feedback from the questionnaire was used to develop and focus the questions for the interviews in the main research without clouding the initial perspectives of the main participants.

Participant observations allow researchers to focus on depth rather than breadth and gain a holistic understanding within a context and data can 'reflect the detail, the subtleties, the complexity and interconnectedness of the social world' (Denscombe, 2014: 206). I was not part of the practice team at either setting I opted to be a non-participant observer (Jarvis, Newman, Holland and George, 2012). This enabled me to be able to stand back from practice and observe in depth. Through careful, detailed and reflective observations of children during their play I aimed to record a valid perspective. The observations served as a tool to listen to children who do not yet have the necessary oral communication and cognitive skills to explain their behaviours. Clark and Moss (2011) maintain that observations can be used as a starting point to listen to children and identifies foundations for skilful listening such as respect, openness, collaboration, patience and imagination. Johansson and White (2011) maintain that by being responsive we can gain an understanding of children's perspectives through a 'pedagogy of listening' (Rinaldi, 2006: 65) and Diez (2006) suggests that dispositions can be observed as they leak out.

The observations took place in the participants' natural setting, in this case the nursery they attend, which allowed observation of natural behaviour (Denscombe, 2014). I acknowledge that my presence as researcher may have had an impact on participants resulting in reactive and representative behaviour and this can in turn have influenced the validity of my observational data (Keenan and Evans, 2010). However, attendance at the setting prior to data collection ensured that children became familiar with me as an adult and therefore reduced the effect my presence may have had on their actions as "hanging out builds trust and trust results in ordinary behaviours in your presence" (Bernard, 1994: 152). Furthermore, as part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DFE, 2017) children within early years settings are used to being observed by practitioners and other professionals so my presence was less likely to have an adverse effect on behaviour.

As mentioned previously, a range of factors can influence the recording of data during observations. Familiarity with the environment and participants and expectations based on past experiences can all lead to selective perception which may cause bias (Denscombe, 2014). The very nature of my chosen focus for this research indicates a biased starting point. Therefore, I was conscious to ensure that the data I obtained would be a true representation of the practice at the setting and not biased by my own perspective or positionality. Because two-year olds are unable to reflect on data and give feedback as to its authenticity I worked closely through discussion with key workers and other practitioners who have more knowledge of the participants to appropriately analyse and interpret the data. To ensure data was valid it was necessary to record detailed descriptions— ensuring observational recordings are detailed and thorough to overcome selective perception (Jarvis et al, 2012). Coding categories are essential to ensure recorded behaviours were valid and reliable (Harris,

2009) and an operational definition of specific observable acts was necessary (Crowley, 2014). This was informed by a range of perspectives around dispositions broadly and specifically creativity and curiosity (Katz, 1993b, Carr and Claxton, 2002).

The observational data I collected was insightful revealing the activities and behaviours which took place during my time in the settings. However, as the observations took place during two periods of free play and circle time which were either completely unstructured and child led, or adult led, I found it a challenge to observe children engaging in play for any length of time. I saw brief examples of curiosity and creativity but did not feel that my observations were detailed sufficiently to analyse as part of this research. I therefore chose to gain consent to analyse some of the observations done in practice as part of the observation, planning and assessment cycle as this gave an insight into the focus of practice. This provides evidence of one of the ways in which my research changed direction based on reflections. Initially I expected to be able to easily observe instances where dispositions were being demonstrated. However, in reality, this was much more difficult, and it became apparent that the activities and routines of the setting would determine opportunities for dispositional behaviour to be observed. Another factor affecting the quality of the observations was my lack of knowledge of individual children. As a visitor to the setting, I did not have the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with children or gain an understanding of their interests, capacities or motivations. When exploring complex constructs of creativity or curiosity this is a challenge. In addition, as explained in the literature review dispositions are difficult to define and measure (Blaklock, 2008, Sadler, 2002) and my initial observations led me to agree with Carr and Claxton (2002) that a workable method for the assessment of dispositions is necessary. Self-assessment tools (Deakin-Crick et al, 2004) would be

inappropriate for the age range focussed on in this study and because during initial discussions with practitioners, it was clear that dispositions was not a concept familiar to practitioners I changed the direction of my research to concentrate on practitioner understanding of the concept. This focus I feel is essential before workable observation or assessment tools can be developed.

One of the methodological challenges of conducting a pilot study is the complexity it adds to the main research if the same participants are involved throughout. Participant perspectives may change based on issues raised at the pilot stage thus reducing the validity of responses. According to Peat et al (2002) pilot study data should not be used with the data from the actual study. However, as this is qualitative research, it is progressive in nature (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001) and I would expect through interaction and dialogue with participants that perspectives (of both researcher and practitioners) may shift and adapt.

Another issue highlighted by the pilot study was the disappointing response from parents and carers to the consent forms. I initially created a detailed consent form with a slip to be returned if parents gave consent for their child to be observed. However, despite parents giving verbal consent to practitioners for the observations to take place, the actual return rate of the slips was limited, with only one out of five being returned despite prompts and reminders from the staff team. Parental nonresponse has been identified as a major barrier to participation rates causing selection bias. This can be attributed to a wide range of practical issues such as busy working parents forgetting to return, not having time to read and return the slip for example as opposed to consent being specifically denied (Hollman & McNamara, 2010).

The response rate proved a challenge when attending the setting to observe children during this period as I was limited to observing one child. This 'ethical dilemma' (Mertens, 2012:19) enabled me to reflect on my approach to gaining consent from parents/carers for the main study and I made the decision to develop opt out, or passive consent (Range, Embry and McLeod, 2001) forms (appendix 4) which gave parents the opportunity to return a slip if they did not give their consent or if they wished to withdraw their child from the study. A study by Spence, White, Adamson and Matthews (2014) found that passive consent led to a higher participation rate and a more representative sample. The opt-out consent forms proved to be more appropriate when conducting research with children of busy working parents and gained a higher response rate in that no parents opted their children out of the research. There are however additional ethical issues which need to be addressed with this approach towards gaining consent and these were considered and addressed before the consent forms were issued and the main data collection took place. One key issue may have been that parents/carers may have felt coerced into the research and felt that could not freely opt out by the action of having to return a slip. However, this issue is also raised by providing slips to parents to give right to withdraw once active consent has been given. I felt justified that this would not be an issue with the parents as they were asked to return slips to the setting rather than myself, thus reducing any power issues associated with myself as researcher.

Another issue is that parents may not have seen or read the information about the research and therefore their children may be part of the research process without their knowledge. In an attempt to redress this issue, I developed a consent poster outlining my research and contact details. This was displayed on the parents notice board, thus increasing opportunities for parents to be aware of the research. In addition, the

manager assured me that practitioners had discussed the research process with parents and carers when the initial consent forms had been chased up and that verbal permission had been given.

The nature of my research meant that I was gathering data using the same unobtrusive methods used daily by practitioners as part of the observation, planning and assessment cycle in the Early Years Foundation Stage (DFE, 2017) therefore there was no risk to the children in terms of harm. Hollman and McNamara (2010: 148) cite the US Code of Federal Regulations which states passive consent is appropriate when “the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.”

In addition, I was also conscious throughout about the importance of gaining assent (Cocks, 2006) of children and being responsive to their behaviour (Skanfors, 2008), this will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter.

4.7 Research Methods

In this section I discuss the chosen methods to collect data for this research. The selection of appropriate research tools followed a reflective process as the research progressed and I was mindful of Leung’s (2015) definition of validity in qualitative research, taking care to ensure the methods chosen would be ones which would maximise opportunities to gain the perspectives of those involved in the research. As discussed in the pilot study, my initial plan for this study was to observe children to identify where and when dispositions were evident during play, however the challenges I encountered with this as well as the insights gained during informal discussion with practitioners resulted in a change of direction and focus for the

research. In some instances, other research methods may have been appropriate and were considered but discounted and my rationale for this is discussed within this section.

4.8 Researching children's perspectives

A range of approaches to research have been identified to gain perspectives of children and beliefs around the capacity and potential of children is a key factor determining choice. Children can be considered the same as adults and therefore the same methods of investigation can be chosen or children can be viewed similarly but with different competencies, so methods are adapted appropriately. Where children are viewed as qualitatively different from adults, ethnographic approaches such as participant observation are used to view the child's world (Punch, 2002a). Although a more participatory method involving children as active agents in the research process (Clark and Moss, 2011, Coad and Evans, 2008) rather than being objects to be studied would be preferable, the nature of this study with very young children whose language skills were in early stages and the complexity of learning dispositions as a concept (Blaklock, 2008, Sadler, 2002) meant that this was not possible. According to Development Matters, speaking skills at 16-26 months relate to infants "beginning to ask simple questions" whereas children at 22-36 months are "beginning to use language to share feelings, experiences and thoughts" (Early Education, 2012:20). As a result, understanding of concepts such as disposition or characteristics of effective learning was not an appropriate area for investigation to explore directly with these children through dialogue.

I acknowledge as an adult researcher I am unable to see the world specifically through a child's eyes and research with pre-verbal infants and toddlers raises challenges around treating these participants as 'objects' because interpretations of behaviours are made within the constraints of personal knowledge and understanding. "Divining the infants perspective assumes such perspectives are objective entities that can be dissected out from the infants' everyday life, collected, analysed and described in words" (Bradley et al, 2012: 142). I was conscious of this challenge throughout the research process but concluded that because practitioners have the responsibility of guiding learning and development within early years settings it would be pertinent to focus this research on their perspectives.

The table below summarises the data collection process and then I follow with a more detailed explanation of each method.

Table 1 Process of data collection

Research method	Participants/focus	Data analysis
Semi structured interviews (see appendix 1 and 2)	Seven early years practitioners from two private nursery settings	Thematic analysis
Semi structured interviews (see appendix 3)	Four early years practitioners from one private nursery setting	Thematic analysis
Documentary analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory Framework for the EYFS • Development Matters in the Early Years • Early Years Teacher Status Standards • Early Years Educator qualification criteria • Nine narrative observations completed by practitioners 	Thematic analysis

4.9 Semi-structured interviews

After initial informal conversations with practitioners and in light of the struggles of observation the path of my research changed direction and I felt it was necessary to explore practitioner perspectives of learning dispositions in more depth to gain their perspectives and views around behaviour and development for this age group. I opted to use semi-structured interviews (Liamputtong, 2010) using a range of open ended and closed questions to gain an insight into participants perspectives (Saldana, 2011). Unstructured interviews are advantageous in that they prevent the focus of the research being directed by preconceived ideas of the researcher (Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick, 2008) although it must be acknowledged that researchers exercise their power in the research process by leading the direction of the questioning in line with research interests (Kvale, 2006). I opted for semi-structured interviews as a combination of qualitative and quantitative questions enabled me to remain focused on the study but allowed themes or frames of reference (Henn et al, 2009) to emerge which were relevant to practitioners. This allowed me to define and diverge (Gill et al, 2008) obtaining responses to appropriate lines of enquiry relevant to my study yet still at the pace of the participants (Silverman, 2013). This reduced the level of bias from my perspective as participants were encouraged to elaborate on their responses and to offer additional, rich information through open questions (Chenail, 2011) and probing where necessary. Open ended questions were developed carefully to avoid ambiguous (Opie and Jarvis, 2012) and leading questions and the intention was that the control of the data gathered would be shared (Henn et al, 2009) so that participants were involved in setting the agenda and the “view from below” could be obtained (Mies, 1993:6).

The focus of the interview questions was to explore practitioner perspectives around behaviours and actions of two-year olds, their understanding and application of the Characteristics of Effective Learning (Early Education, 2012), their understanding of dispositions and also their preferences in approach for further training and support. The interview schedule can be found in appendix 1. I developed a list of possible dispositions (appendix 2) for practitioners to consider which prompted discussion during the interview and asked them to identify the dispositions they might observe or associate with the two-year olds they worked with. This enabled practitioners to elaborate on some dispositions and to clarify the meaning of others which were less familiar to them.

To optimise the quality of the data collected it was essential to develop a rapport with participants to put them at ease and to overcome any perceived power relations. The identity and history of the researcher and the researched influence relationships (Arendell, 1997) as do social attributes such as status, job role, context and setting (Ikonen and Ojala, 2007). Although participants were aware of my job role within early years at the university which initially may have made them wary of my presence, the sharing of my professional experience enabled me to be accepted into the group. This 'self-disclosure' (Fontana and Frey, 2005) is one way to put participants at ease.

I built up a positive and respectful relationship with practitioners throughout the period of observational data collection and throughout the interviews I was conscious of effective communication by being respectful, actively listening and clarifying responses and being reflective throughout (Usher & Jackson, 2014). I ensured that the interviews took place at the setting meaning that participants were comfortable with their surroundings. The interviews were audio recorded to allow for a more thorough transcription and to allow me to fully engage in conversation with the

participants to seek elaboration or probe for clarification where necessary. As recording data collection can be intrusive (Schensul, 2012) permission was sought for this recording when I obtained initial written informed consent, but this was confirmed again verbally (in addition to reassurance of confidentiality and anonymity) at the start of each interview to ensure practitioners remained comfortable with this. I was conscious to ensure that the interviews did not take a lengthy period as practitioners were interviewed during the day and their absence was covered by the manager to ensure that ratios were maintained (DFE, 2017).

Data collection cannot be a neutral process (Dockett, Einarsdottir and Perry, 2009) therefore the interviews within this research were regarded as an opportunity for joint production of knowledge and meaning (Vähäsantanen & Saarinen, 2012). It was important that I was reflexive as a researcher, aware of my own social background, assumptions and positioning (Finlay and Gough, 2003) as this reflexive approach can add validity to findings (Lahman, 2008). This reflexivity was enhanced further where I experienced “sudden inspirations” (Gordon-Finlayson, 2010:165) which enabled me to reflect on the direction and focus of the research. One example of this was during the pilot study where I noted the differences in understanding of key concepts between myself and practitioners and another was during the early stage of initial data analysis where it was evident that some dispositions, viewed by myself as positive may be interpreted in a more negative way in practice.

I considered whether the responses I gained accurately reflected participant's experiences or whether they were simple narratives (Riessman, 2011) or even scripted knowledge (Brinkmann, 2016) where responses are tailored to expectations. My perspective is mirrored by Lapan et al (2011:44) in their statement that “data are constructions of reality, not reality itself.” Although responses may be ‘scripted’ and

reflect pedagogical expectations, this indicates values and expectations around the early years. In addition, by triangulation (Denzin, 1978) of methods and comparing data from interviews, practice observations and documents I aimed to identify patterns in these reality constructions.

Watson and Girard (2004:878) quote the perspective of Kusch (1987) and maintain that meaning is interpreted and understood through the language of the interpreter, therefore “the truth of a word lies in its immediate revealing of its meaning.” Watson and Girard (2004) suggest instead that research should have integrity, it should be honest and whole and participants stories and perspectives should be interpreted through a ‘fusion of horizon’ (Gadamer, 1976). “When the researcher and the participant enter into a conversation, they bring to the “play” their own preunderstandings/prejudices and through fusion of horizons, clarity of meaning is gleaned and understanding occurs” (Watson and Girard, 2004: 877).

I was able to achieve this ‘fusion of horizon’ throughout the interviews by clarifying and confirming the responses participants made and clarifying and elaborating on questions where participants seemed unclear. This enabled effective interactions to take place (Schensul, 2012).

I was aware that I held a position of power in terms of the direction of the questioning in line with my research interest. However, participants also exercised their power by their choice of response (Kvale, 2006) and this is particularly evident in less structured formats (Corbin and Morse, 2003) where participant’s perspectives began to emerge. Interview questions can be a gateway to which a narrative is ‘collectively assembled’ (Silverman, 2013) between both participants and the researcher. “In the very process of offering them [experiences] up for response, [the participant] constructively adds to,

takes away from and transforms the facts and details” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995:117). In this study, the responses made by participants indicated those aspects that they felt were important and relevant to the research.

The first round of interviews raised some interesting, unexpected and repetitive themes that I wanted to explore further, and it was clear that further investigation would be necessary to investigate those themes further. Integral to this research is the premise that “theorising means stopping, pondering and thinking anew” (Charmaz, 2006: 136). As these unforeseen themes were clearly important to practitioners I had an ethical and methodological responsibility to explore these in greater detail. This ensured that multiple realities were revealed (Noble and Smith, 2015) through the interdependence of researcher and participants (Henwood and Pigeon, 1993). Data from the first interviews indicated that power relations were a key factor in understanding the absence of a discourse around dispositions within early years settings, therefore a change in methodological approach was made to a more critical approach to acknowledge the wider social, political (Schensul, O’Connor, Ke and Lee, 2012) and cultural factors which control and influence early years practice. This was reflected also in the secondary data analysis that was conducted.

Initially I considered conducting a focus group (Wilson, 1997) to explore the new themes that emerged. However, due to some staff and child changes in one setting I felt that a focus group may add unnecessary pressure to members of staff who were new to the setting as the dynamics of the new staff team would be in their preliminary stages which is characterised by uncertainty and anxiety (Tuckman and Jensen, 1977). I therefore decided to repeat the method of one to one, open ended interviews using a different schedule of questions. A revised set of consent forms were distributed and collected to ensure that both old and new members of staff understood the

purpose of the research and their rights of involvement. The second round of interviews explored practitioner expectations around appropriate behaviour, their understanding of school readiness and their perception of the ultimate aims of early childhood education and care. The interview schedule can be found in appendix 3. Due to time constraints the second round of interviews only took place in one of the settings.

4.10 Documentary analysis

Although I acknowledged previously that gaining the perspectives of children being researched is vital, the verbal language and communication skills of children under three limit the approaches I could use for data collection. Karlsdóttir and Garðarsdóttir (2010) used children's learning stories to research dispositions and capabilities for learning but found that attempts to involve children at five years in the reflective process was limited.

To add credibility to the research, to further understand the ways in which practitioners consider dispositions and to provide a richer and more valid reflection of children's experiences within the early years, I widened the research focus to analyse practitioner observations which may provide evidence of dispositions. Practitioners observe children as part of a cycle of observation, planning and assessment and observations are shared with parents and used to evidence children's achievement and development towards the Early Learning Goals (DFE, 2017). These formative assessments enable practitioners to "understand their [children's] level of achievement, interests and learning styles" (DFE, 2017:13) and form the basis for planning of future activities and events to support children's learning. Observation

documents are stored in children's personal files and tell a story, a learning journey of the child's time at the setting.

In documentary analysis, written text and visual sources form the source of the primary data as the "information it contains is of value beyond its literal contents. It stands for something and it conveys something that is significant and useful" (Denscombe, 2014: 243).

Clearly the validity of documents selected for analysis need to be authentic, representative, be credible and have meaning (Denscombe, 2014) and this was ensured by using the documents created by practitioners in everyday practice.

Through analysis of practitioner observations, I investigated the extent to which dispositional behaviour was observed and recorded by practitioners. This approach was chosen to enable me to explore aspects of practice which may not be overtly visible or explicit. By analysing practitioner observations, it was envisaged that I would be able to investigate implicit or explicit evidence of dispositions identified by practitioners who had strong relationships with the children.

This "systematic method' to review and evaluate documents" (Bowen, 2009:1) enabled me to corroborate findings from other methods and triangulates (Denzin, 1978) the data from the interviews as the observations provide examples of practice in action. This provided an opportunity to identify patterns in language and discourse used in the setting for "words are more than a reflection of facts but demonstrate an active construction of a particular version of reality" (Wiggins and Riley, 2010:139). This method is not without its limitations as the initial selection of documents and coding through thematic analysis may indicate bias. It is also important to acknowledge as Scott (2006) points out that although content analysis may disclose the internal

meaning of a document, it is only that meaning which would be conveyed to a reader using the same techniques of evaluation as the researcher. In this research the advantages of enhancing credibility, representativeness and meaning outweigh these challenges (Mogalakwe, 2006).

Nine narrative observations completed by practitioners in the setting were provided for analysis. The setting observation template provides a space for practitioners to record qualitative comments on what learning was taking place, to note children's interests and to identify next steps. As part of the observation practitioners are also required to tick the relevant CEL and prime/specific areas of learning met in the observation. The observation template was not consistent as some observations also had a section to record the scale of well-being and involvement.

As explained earlier, the initial interviews identified gaps in practice and understanding related to disposition and it became clear that these were not used explicitly in practice. The second round of interviews also indicated that school readiness and management of behaviour were factors important to practitioners in their work. In response to this I decided to carry out documentary analysis on the curriculum framework which directs early years practice as this, and the practice guidance are the documents which frame and influence practice. A comprehensive documentary analysis of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (DFE, 2017) and the supplementary practice guidance Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (Early Education, 2012) was carried out. This enabled several relevant themes to be identified and coded. Only the age ranges linked to this research project were included in the analysis. This incorporated the age ranges sixteen to twenty-six months and twenty-two to thirty-six months. References (both explicit and implicit) to key concepts related to this study were located and quantified which enabled the identification of emphasis

and gaps within both documents. Because of the fluid nature of discourse, specific words or terms taken to be implied references to curiosity and creativity were also located and summarised in tables.

Although I did not conduct thematic analysis in the same depth and detail as with the EYFS, it is important here to point out that I did reflect on the language used within the guidance for the level three qualification of Early Years Educator (NCTL, 2013) as this provides direction to the content training and assessment for level three practitioners. I felt it was necessary to explore the content of this guidance considering that a level three qualification is the minimum requirement for practitioners to be included in ratios within the EYFS (DFE, 2017). It is pertinent here to point out that this guidance is relatively new and that many of the practitioners involved in the research will have gained other level three early years qualifications including BTEC and NVQ whose focus may vary widely. However, as the qualification framework for level three has been aligned and the Early Years Educator now the statutory qualification I felt it appropriate to consider the content of this.

I also explored the content of the Early Years Teacher Standards (NCTL, 2013) to investigate its focus. By exploring the use of dispositional language in documents which frame the content of training and practice it enabled me to reflect on the value and importance placed on dispositions on a wider scale within early years in England.

4.11 Ethical considerations

A range of ethical issues have been considered throughout this research and ethical approval was granted before the research began from Sheffield Hallam University (SHU, 2017). Co-operation and informed consent from gatekeepers were obtained initially to commence the research (Cree, Kay and Tisdall, 2002). As I already had a professional relationship with the managers of each setting it was important to ensure they understood their position in making an informed choice as to whether it was appropriate to allow the research to take place. The details of the research were discussed informally on several occasions.

I followed a rigorous process to gain voluntary informed consent (BERA, 2018) from parents of children involved in the study as well as practitioners. As explained earlier in this chapter, during the pilot study, it became apparent that gaining consent through the return of a consent slip was a challenge for busy working parents and carers and after detailed discussion with the managers it became clear that verbal consent had been given by all parents, they just simply forgot to return the form. Because of this, I decided to take an opt out method of consent was for the main research. This approach was carefully deliberated considering the importance of voluntary consent free from coercion (ESRC, 2015), however, as parents had given verbal consent to practitioners, the methods of the research did not differ to the approaches used in the setting by practitioners daily, and the children would not be identified in any way I felt the approach was justified. Parents of all two-year olds within the settings were sent a detailed consent letter introducing myself and my research (appendix 4). The letter outlined how I would be observing children during their usual play routine and how I may use anonymised practitioner observations of children from their personal

development files. I clarified the intended benefits of the research and was conscious throughout to use simple language, avoiding early years jargon that parents and carers may not have been familiar with. I explained that I would be available to discuss my research when I was in the setting and provided contact details for parents if they wished to discuss this at other times. Parents were given a deadline for withdrawal. I provided the setting with an information poster (appendix 5) to display on the parents notice board to further enhance their knowledge of the research. One parent returned a slip to opt out of the research.

Specific ethical dilemmas can emerge as research progresses (Liong, 2015). This was demonstrated in this study in the issue of informed consent from parents/carers which raised an ethical challenge requiring additional reflection and review.

According to BERA (2018) voluntary informed and ongoing consent occurs where “participants understand and agree to their participation, and the terms and practicalities of it, without any duress, prior to the research getting underway.” It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that participants understand what is involved in the research. BERA also recommends that informed consent is gained from gatekeepers of settings. For this study, informed consent was sought from the managers of each setting. This was obtained through a meeting to discuss the research aims and plans and through a detailed consent letter (see appendix 4).

Where consent has not been overtly given for participation, it is the researchers responsibility to decide whether this amounts to active refusal of consent and how it may be appropriate to proceed in conjunction with gatekeepers (BERA, 2018). In a study exploring informed consent, Berry et al (2013) revealed that parents who actively opted into research were in a stronger position to give informed consent than those

who selected an opt out approach and Jelsma, Burgess and Henley (2012) warn that researchers cannot assume that non response constitutes implicit consent when opt out consent is utilised. These studies highlight the ethical challenges of opt out approaches. When specifically describing responsibilities around opt out consent, BERA (2018:16) states that “participants’ trust in the wider value of the research beyond the researcher’s personal interests might be gained by including an endorsement from a senior leader within the institution/organisation where research is being carried out.” The managers of both settings provided verbal assurance that parents had been informed and consulted regarding the research and the lack of consent slips was simply related to forgetting to return these, ‘a system related limitation’ (Courser, Shamblen, Lavrakas, Collins and Ditterline, 2009). The professionalism of the setting was trusted in this instance as practitioner knowledge of families and the trust between parents/carers and practitioners assured me that active refusal of consent had not been given. The opt out approach was further justified as the methods of research were considered low risk and non-interventional in that they did not detract from those conducted during normal practice in an early years setting.

Consent forms (appendix 4) were issued to all practitioners outlining the aims of the research, their expected involvement and their right to participate and withdraw (BERA, 2018) as participants should be informed of their rights and the purpose of the research (Bell and Waters, 2014). In line with Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics policy (2017) I considered the principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, integrity, informed consent, confidentiality/anonymity and impartiality. Practitioners were asked for both written and verbal consent to record the interviews. I also followed the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2018) Code of Ethics to include respect,

competence, integrity and responsibility. These considerations will be explained with reference to my research throughout this section.

After practitioners had returned their consent forms I arranged the interviews on a date and time convenient to both the setting and the practitioners. On the day of the interview I introduced myself and asked for verbal permission to audio record the interviews. I outlined the aims of the research and assured practitioners that I was interested in their perspectives and expertise, that they could stop the interview at any point and that they could choose to not answer any questions. I explained that the interviews would be transcribed but that personal details would not be disclosed and that their responses would remain anonymous to protect their privacy (Huang et al, 2014). As explained earlier, recording interviews can be intrusive (Schensul, 2012) so it was essential to ensure practitioners were comfortable with this and had the opportunity to express any concerns.

The identity and history of the researcher can influence relationships (Arendell, 1997) as can social attributes such as status, job role (Ikonen & Ojala, 2007) and context and setting. I briefly outlined the ways in which I made attempts to reduce the effects of perceived power earlier in this chapter and it was intended that the self-disclosure (Fontana and Frey, 2005) of my own early years professional background would make practitioners more relaxed in my presence. The benefits of the research were outlined as I explained I was investigating ways in which children learn and exploring areas of support which may be useful for practitioners in their continuing professional development. As an educator of professionals within early years I feel strongly that I have a responsibility to give “back to those we study the knowledge we have gained from listening to their voices” (Russell and Bohan, 1999: 404). I attempted to shift the

researcher balance of power by explaining my perspective that the practitioner is the expert in practice.

A range of additional ethical issues needed to be addressed due to the research involving very young children as “children are perhaps the least powerful others” (Eder & Fingerson, 2002: 198). Within early years settings, attendance and the presence of the researcher is beyond the control of the child (Skanfors, 2008) and this raises ethical questions about the nature and use of children’s spaces for the purpose of research (Moss and Petrie, 2002). At two years, children are unable to make a distinction between a researcher and other adults in the setting, so it is essential to spend time getting to know the children, the setting and the values and routines to avoid disruption to participants. The extent to which very young children can be involved in decision making about participation in research can be questioned therefore Skanfors (2008) suggests that researchers should employ an ‘ethical radar,’ which enables them to be responsive if children show resistance to participation. He maintains that assent should be a continual process of negotiation between researcher and child where behavioural indications showing children would like to withdraw are noted and acted upon.

Seeking assent requires the researcher to remain constantly vigilant to the responses of the child at all times; it is not something gained at the beginning of the research then put aside. It requires time and constant effort on the part of the researchers, who need to attune themselves to the child’s unique communication (Cocks, 2006: 258–9).

This approach towards ethical awareness (BPS, 2018) was demonstrated in practice in research by Corsaro (2005) who used a ‘reactive role’ when researching with children, waiting for children to interact with him. This is the approach I took, being aware of children’s responses to my presence in the setting and making sure

observations were stopped if children showed signs of distress (Harris, 2009). On one occasion as I observed a boy playing in the water tray I noticed him looking over at me on several occasions. As he was very conscious of my presence I decided to end the observation so that my research did not impact on his play, engagement or his well-being (Laevens, 2017). Cocks (2006) maintains that by obtaining assent, researchers do not have to rely on adult centric attributions associated with informed consent.

Children have the right to be properly researched (Ennew et al, 2009). This links to both the methodology chosen and the way in which children's rights (UNICEF, 1989) are protected throughout the research process. With regards to approach, no research tool is best to gain children's opinions (Davis, 1998) and as discussed previously it is a challenge to gain the perspectives of individuals who are too young to ask and give their opinion. However, "by understanding more about the adults in children lives, researchers hope to generate knowledge that can have a positive impact on both the adults and the children" (File et al, 2017: 120). It was essential throughout to adhere to the BPS (2018) principle of respect to ensure that issues of power were addressed as well as integrity to avoid exploitation although it is pertinent to add here that children's realities may be misinterpreted because of prevailing views around children and childhood (Woodrow and Brennan, 2001). Therefore, within this research, additional ethical considerations around interpretation of data were considered under the premise that ". . . there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lens of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b: 19).

4.12 Data analysis

In this section I explain and provide a rationale for the approach taken to analyse the data and consider some of the challenges of this approach. The rigor of the data analysis approach was considered throughout in line with guidance from the CASP (2010) qualitative research evaluation checklist as outlined previously.

4.13 Thematic analysis

In line with the interpretivist approach taken in this study, data was analysed using thematic analysis. This allowed themes to emerge from the methods in an evolving (Charmaz, 2000) and open-ended process (Groat and Wang, 2002). The approach was also inspired by some elements of grounded theory based on the symbolic interactionist tradition that meaning's which direct behaviour, develop, emerge from and are modified through social action (Blumer, 1969) resulting in the process of data collection and analysis being interactive, and data being constructed jointly between the researcher and participants (Lapan et al, 2011).

It makes sense in the light of the focus of the study and the fluid nature of discourse to uncover practitioner meanings through an interactive approach to research and analysis. Furthermore, because meanings can be modified through interactions the importance of reflection and dialogue in developing approaches and extending knowledge and understanding with practitioners is highlighted.

Early data analysis is beneficial in that it shows where the research is heading, and this provided opportunities to take the research in a direction led by participant responses. In this research, analysis was regarded as a 'pervasive activity' which

should occur throughout the research not simply at the later stages (Silverman, 2013) and again this links back to the interpretivist view that it is data rather than prior knowledge which generates theory which is developed through a process of deductive and inductive reasoning (Schatzman, 1991). As explained in the previous section this ongoing reflection enabled me to consider factors that I had not initially considered as relevant, such as the curriculum framework and the content of practitioner training.

To enhance the confirmability (Mertens, 2015) of my research I ensured that the interpretation of data was based on fact to reduce the impact of my own judgement. This was achieved by thoroughly analysing the data for consistencies as well as irregularities in an open and transparent way by initially exploring data based on broad codes and then looking specifically for themes which emerged throughout the data. This study demonstrated three out of Denzin's (1978) four types of triangulation; I used different sources for my data in terms of participants being adults, children and documents evidencing data triangulation, I used methodological triangulation in the selection of different research methods; observations, semi structured interviews and documentary analysis and I demonstrated theory triangulation by exploring the data with a range of perspectives and theories in mind. It is worth noting here that the study did not meet the criteria of Denzin's fourth type of triangulation; investigator, as the data was collected and analysed by me alone. By making connections between findings from different methods I also ensured the transferability of my data, enhancing the truth value further. As analysis of qualitative data is a subjective process it is essential to provide a clear audit trail of the process (Seers, 2012) keeping a trace between data and the codes. Authenticity was achieved through providing specific examples of participant responses in my analysis, by giving these 'thick descriptions'

by explaining the phenomenon in depth and detail and avoiding superficial explanations (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

My experience of engaging with thematic analysis can be most likened to using a sieve to separate pebbles from sand. I categorised the data a number of times, lifting examples and entering these into tables where I labelled categories to reveal commonalities. Each time I worked through the raw data I was left with the same 'pebbles' which became the codes. Some examples from the data were relevant to more than one code and so there were elements of repetition. The codes were then analysed further enabling me to identify common themes which emerged both within each set of data and between all the sets of data. I acknowledge that as part of this process there would have been a number of themes that could have been considered (the 'sand' may be interpreted by others and through other lenses as pebbles). However, my justification for the final choice of themes focuses around my desire to explain and rationalise the absence of the discourse of disposition within early years practice as it is only through this that I may be able to identify the ways in which disposition discourse can be extended and strengthened so that it becomes a positive influence on practice.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the process of thematic analysis should begin by the researcher becoming immersed in the data as "everyday coding (interpretative practice) should be the object of enquiry" (Silverman, 2013: 51). Terry (2015) calls this 'phase one' where the researcher becomes familiar with the data to reveal commonalities and recurring ideas. These were identified, organised and described (Nowell, Norms, White and Moules, 2017). From the initial investigation of literature around dispositions in the literature review I identified relevant concepts which enabled me to identify initial areas to explore. Individual cases were studied as a starting point

which led to the identification and development of more abstract concepts (Lapan et al, 2011). Silverman (2013: 66) points out that using a “theoretical scheme” to analyse data should be only the first stage of analysis and that it is essential to see how elements link together.

By going to the effort of identifying these pre-existing ideas we allow ourselves to be sensitive to the possibility that emerging concepts might be influenced by them, giving us the opportunity to reflect more carefully and ensure that concepts can be developed independently of these preconceptions (Gordon-Finlayson, 2010: 160).

The emerging concepts and ideas were re-evaluated throughout the process through selective coding (Glaser, 1978, Strauss and Corbin, 1998) starting with initial coding (Terry's, 2015 phase two) based on perspectives identified through literature and then becoming more focussed and selective to create conceptual categories (Lapan et al, 2011) or themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). These codes were identified initially at a semantic level where I noted explicit responses and then later at a latent level where I explored ideas expressed in a more implicit way (Terry, 2015). Initial codes included a focus on specific dispositions which was unsurprising as this was the focus of my questioning. However, at a semantic level it revealed a lack of understanding of disposition as a concept and at a latent level revealed implicit ideas around positive and negative dispositions. Other early codes that were identified included a preoccupation with positive behaviour and preparing children. The identification of these codes enabled me to form categories which then led me to identify themes which, as more abstract concepts reflected my interpretation of these ideas, codes and patterns. “Themes.....describe the data in a form which summarises it, yet retains the richness, depth and context of the original data” (Seers, 2012: 2).

A key theme to emerge was the distinction between behaviours regarded as positive and negative and behaviour management as a key element of early years practice. Further analysis revealed themes around developmentalism and children 'becoming,' school readiness and practitioner and child agency.

For the purposes of analysis, Development Matters (Early Education, 2012) and the Statutory Framework (DFE, 2017) were initially converted into a word document from PDF to allow a straightforward search using Microsoft Word. Within Development Matters, the guidance for children of an age range not considered relevant to this study was removed providing the option to search for specific terms within the relevant age range. The statement at the bottom of each page of Development Matters (Early Education, 2012) as follows

Children develop at their own rates, and in their own ways. The development statements and their order should not be taken as necessary steps for individual children. They should not be used as checklists. The age/stage bands overlap because these are not fixed boundaries but suggest a typical range of development

was also removed in all but one page so the content of this could only be counted once. The analysis of these documents revealed a number of themes which linked back to those found in the interviews and which reinforced the rationale behind the approach to early years that practitioners revealed.

4.14 Analysis of discourse

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, one of the key themes found in the analysis was around discourse therefore it is important to point out that an analysis of discourse was made to identify important aspects of spoken or written language which may hold

clues around the support or suppression of learning dispositions. Discourse in this context relates to words and text and is socially constructed, it is shaped by and shapes the world, language, culture and history and involves values, thoughts, beliefs and knowledge (Gee, 2011). Therefore, an analysis of discourse allowed me to explore “patterns of language across texts as well as the social and cultural context in which the texts occur” (Paltridge, 2012:1). Because power relations were revealed during the initial thematic analysis I felt that it was necessary to search further to uncover the ways in which power issues were evident in the data.

Analysis of discourse enables investigation into what people say, what they mean and how they use language to present a view of the world (Paltridge, 2012) as **discourse** communicates knowledge not only about the intended meaning of the language, but also about those who put forward the **discourse**. Therefore, the way in which **discourse** is written will reflect the way in which the **discourse** is intended to be acted upon (Wild, Silberfeld & Nightingale, 2015: 238).

In the context of this study, exploring discourse is particularly relevant considering the fluid nature of the concept of dispositions and other concepts around children’s learning and development. It was acknowledged in chapter two that learning dispositions are difficult to define within the academic community and it was clear from initial data gathered that learning dispositions as a term is not one commonly used within early years practice, although when prompted, many practitioners did identify behaviour related to dispositions within very young children indicating that knowledge and understanding of these terms may impact on the extent to which they are considered in practice. 'What counts as professional knowledge and professional action is a matter of interpretation, depending on the particular **discourse** and cultural framework used to characterise and evaluate these concepts' (Oberhuemer, 2015:

304). Wild, Silberfeld and Nightingale (2015) explored underlying assumptions and agendas found in early years policy documents following Foucault's (1972) suggestion that political ideology can restrict the ways in which **discourse** is interpreted. They maintained that analysis of text is a valuable way to investigate the relationship between language and society as **discourse** reproduces social and political ideology and this reinforces my rationale to analyse policy documents which influence practice.

By analysing discourse, I was able to unpick the language and meaning of practitioners in both their verbal discourse, via the interview data and their written discourse in the documentary analysis of observations. This enabled me to identify implied disposition discourse which was not explicit in the data. Furthermore, through an analysis of the discourse around dispositions I explored the ways in which dispositional behaviour is demonstrated in discourse, the ways in which dispositions are interpreted as both positive and negative and the implications this has for children's development of positive dispositions as "discourses constitute the subjects including human subjects that they appear to simply describe" (MacFarlane and Lewis, 2004: 56). Discourses around children 'becoming', with a focus on outcomes and future rather than present were identified in addition the discourse of school readiness which seems to be integral to current early years practice.

Initially I considered using discourse analysis to explore the data (Morgan, 2010) as it was clear that power relations were evident in the data. However, I opted to focus on an analysis of discourse as a theme of the data rather than discourse analysis per se. I do need to acknowledge that my approach was influenced by some of the ideas associated with discourse analysis, in particular, the premise that "the aim of post structural analysis is not to establish a final truth but to question the intelligibility of truth/s we have come to take for granted" (Graham, 2011:666).

This guided my approach and provided me with the rationale and justification for my focus. Because of the nature of the study and the themes that emerged it was necessary to “identify statements or articulations within a field of regulation that may function with constitutive effects” (Graham, 2011: 119) as ‘words’ become ‘things’ in a Foucauldian sense. It was therefore important to examine the ways in which knowledge and expertise is validated and reaffirmed through discourses which legitimise bodies of knowledge (Graham, 2011). In terms of this research, the language of the education system, or in early years, specifically, the dominant pedagogical approach and the discourses associated with this serve to regulate and control practice.

As with traditional discourse analysis, one of the challenges of exploring discourse is that meaning is always open to interpretation (Morgan, 2010) making this approach to analysis a highly subjective process. As a researcher new to this approach this was a challenging barrier leading to uncertainty about how to begin the process and whether the factors that I felt were relevant were ones which could be investigated.

The influence of regulatory bodies on discourse (Graham, 2011) provided a clear rationale for the investigation of discourse evident in the EYFS, both in the Statutory Framework (DfE, 2017) and Development Matters (Early Education, 2013). The EYFS is one form of regulation which has constitutive effects within the early years (Graham, 2011). It enables children to be classified in ways which reflect cultural, historical and political norms and expectations of children and childhood. The identification of the discourses (which shape identities, beliefs and actions) embedded in the EYFS enables “knowledge domains” (Graham, 2011:670) which reinforce and are reinforced by the discourses to be identified. These knowledge domains validate the statements

which build a discourse, and this affirms the “perception of the phenomena and the way it is described but also outlines the specific technical expertise required to deal with it” (Graham, 2011: 670). Therefore, the EYFS is both reinforced by and reinforces knowledge domains of children’s development and the discourses of the EYFS which in turn reinforce power relations.

Following suggestions from Mogashoa (2014), I also searched the data for examples of taken for granted and unquestioned assumptions (Wetherall and Potter, 1988) such as the deficit view of child development in addition to noting the absence of information which was particularly necessary in this study to expose practice around disposition which was missing as these can provide an insight into the ways in which discourses are constructed, demonstrated and reinforced. The issue of practitioner agency was also identified through the language used by practitioners in their responses and whether beliefs, knowledge or perspectives were given in a confident or apprehensive manner. It was essential to explore the beliefs and assumptions of practitioners as evidenced in their discourse as assumptions, values and beliefs are likely to direct and constrain future actions and practice.

4.15 Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter, a clear rationale for the selection of an interpretivist study has been given. The limitations of an interpretative study have been acknowledged but justified due to the research investigating phenomena which is open to interpretation and understanding. The research methods were selected to assure that a range of perspectives were gained and analysed and the approach to analysis initially followed a thematic approach but was extended to include analysis of

discourse considering some of the themes around power which emerged from the initial analysis. The research unfolded in unexpected directions, with themes emerging and evolving (Charmaz, 2000). Ethical issues have been considered throughout the research process, analysis of data and in how the data is reflected and discussed through the thesis. It is important I feel to point out here that the decisions I have made throughout this research, around the research questions, the way in which questions were asked and my approach to the analysis of data have been influenced by the values and assumptions I hold around early childhood, development and learning and these values and assumptions have inevitably had an impact on the direction and outcomes of the study (File et al, 2017) for “a researchers philosophical orientation has implications for every decision made in the research process” (Mertens, 2014: 7). Atkins (2013) promotes the importance of research ‘with’ rather than ‘on’ groups of people. Her study followed an ethical and moral obligation to enable the voices of a marginalised group to be heard through a highly reflexive, participative and collaborative approach but it was concluded that despite efforts to distribute the power and control, ultimately this remained in the hands of the researcher. This raises questions regarding the extent to which I empowered participants to reveal their true voices. This issue of validity is inherent in all qualitative research; however, I uphold that because the data was constructed jointly between myself and the participants (Lapan et al, 2011) revealed in instances where the research took unexpected directions. This enabled me to uncover elements of practice which were not envisaged or predicted and leads me to conclude that a satisfactory representation of the values, beliefs and practices of the participants has been made.

in research we enter into relationships with our informants, and those relationships become part of the context that frames the research process. Second, reflexivity refers to the fact that when we study

human beings we cannot stand apart from our own humanity; our vision is unavoidably influenced by the fact that what we see in our informants is often true of ourselves as well (Russell and Bohan, 1999: 404).

5. Findings/initial reflection

It was reassuring to note that all practitioners in the interviews viewed their role as integral to children's learning and development. Practitioners talked about their role to care, nurture and support but also to motivate, provide experiences, opportunities and ask questions. Language around preparing and reinforcing positive behaviour through being role models was used frequently, particularly in terms of social and emotional development of children and an acknowledgement was made in nearly all the interviews of how it was important to consider each child as unique. It was clear that practitioners involved in this study were very knowledgeable about the themes and principles of the EYFS; a unique child, enabling environments, positive relationships and learning and development and that these are integral to their practice.

As explained in the methodology section, the data obtained by my observations although considered valuable in terms of reflection and getting to know the children, practitioners and setting did not provide the depth or richness of data anticipated. This is a result of various issues including my lack of knowledge and familiarity with the children observed and the timing of the observations which took place during the morning during a child led free play session followed by a very adult directed circle time session. During free play it was noted that the two-year olds did not particularly engage for long periods with specific activities and so play which explicitly demonstrated dispositions was not seen. In contrast, circle time was very adult led which also prevented clear dispositional behaviour from being observed. Another factor influencing the observations was the challenge of interpreting and quantifying dispositional behaviour -how for example can we distinguish between a child being inquisitive or curious? Is there a difference? The challenge of definition, interpretation

and measurement of dispositions has previously been raised in the literature and this challenge was evidenced by my own observations.

The table below outlines the key themes which emerged from the analysis of data and highlights where the themes were revealed from the different sources of data. It also details the discourses identified as predominant in practice.

Table 2 Summary of findings

Interviews	Observations	Documentary analysis	Discourse
Lack of knowledge and understanding of dispositions.	Limited reference to dispositions	Lack of reference to dispositions in curriculum or standards documents	Lack discourse disposition
Focus on prime and specific areas of learning rather than characteristics of effective learning	Focus on prime and specific areas of learning opposed to Characteristics of effective learning	More focus on observations and assessment of prime and specific areas of learning opposed to Characteristics of effective learning	Academic skills rather than process of learning
Concentrate on outcomes of learning rather than process	Focus on outcomes of learning rather than process	Focus on outcomes of learning rather than process. Assessment orientated.	Process vs outcome
Development and learning are interpreted in terms of 'becoming.'	-	The structure of the EYFS encourages children's development to be categorised into age appropriate stages.	Becoming
EYEC interpreted in terms of school readiness	-	School readiness a common and underpinning theme in all documents.	School readiness
Practitioners roles are seen in terms of a developmentalist approach, filling children up with knowledge rather than co-constructors.	-	Contradictory focus on assessment and supporting children to achieve goals whilst promoting an active, child led approach to learning based on following children's	Child and practitioner agency

Children are passive in their learning.		interests. EYFS controls and limits autonomy of practitioners.	
Behaviours interpreted in deficit or negative way	-	Emphasis on behaviour control, boundaries and rules in preparation for school	Hidden curriculum Habitus

In the following chapters I discuss my findings in relation to the literature. The chapters have been organised according to the strong themes around discourse and practice which emerged, and I explain the common discourses which influence practice. I begin with a chapter focussed on creativity and curiosity and explain some of the factors which may account for the lack of focus on these dispositions in practice. In the next chapter I consider the evidence for negative dispositions and the narrow ways in which behaviours are interpreted in practice. Following this, I consider the ways in which a developmentalist approach was revealed in the data and explore the impact of this and agency on practice. Finally, I return to the issue of school readiness and the focus of the EYFS and conclude with reflections on the impact of discourse on practice.

6. Where is creativity and curiosity in early years practice?

In this chapter I explore the extent to which curiosity and creativity were found in discussions of practice in the early years, practitioner knowledge and understanding of the terms and the ways in which this knowledge and understanding impacts upon pedagogical approach. Although the focus of the first round of interviews began with a broad emphasis to explore understanding and application in practice of a range of learning dispositions, the literature and research indicates that curiosity and creativity are two specific dispositions integral to positive approaches to learning (Wall et al, 2015) and to the behaviour of very young children (Wood and Hedges, 2016). Without prior knowledge of the ways in which problems can be solved, toddlers will be creative in the ways in which they approach experiences and situations, and curiosity is a key driving force from birth (Engel, 2011) for the development of young children. In light of this, the data was scrutinised for evidence of the ways in which creativity and curiosity may or may not be evident in practice. In this chapter I consider the ways in which two dispositions of creativity and curiosity were acknowledged and used and more significantly, their apparent absence in descriptions and explanations of practice within the early years settings in this study.

Data from the interviews in addition to the documentary analysis and the observations completed by practitioners has been synthesised to identify common themes which emerged in relation to curiosity and creativity. Initially, explicit reference to these terms was analysed and recorded in a grid, although in each source of data there was limited explicit references to these concepts. It became clear that a wider definition of creativity and curiosity would be necessary and that these concepts are often referred

to in practice in a more implicit manner using a range of terms which fit broadly within a creative or curious discourse.

6.1 Creativity

As explained previously, creativity as a concept (as with all learning dispositions) is fraught with challenge around definition (Kaufman and Sternberg, 2010, Blaiklock, 2008, Sadler, 2002) and measurement (Mullet et al, 2016, Runco and Jaeger, 2012) and although some tools have been developed which may be of relevance to the early years (Robson, 2014) none have been embedded in early years practice to define and measure creativity. Elements considered to be key components of creativity have wide variations (Bateson and Martin, 2013, Craft et al, 2007) although there is agreement that practitioners play an essential role in the development of creativity in children (Leggett, 2017) and that their ability to do this is often constrained by wider pressures (Shonstrom, 2016).

Despite the challenges identified in the literature, many of the practitioners in the interviews did identify creativity as a disposition evident in young children with some feeling that it was frequently evident in toddler's play and central to children's exploration and learning (Canning, 2013). This was demonstrated in responses such as 'I think they are [creative] and they are very creative.'

6.2 Creativity and age

It was interesting to note that one theme to emerge from the interviews was the association between creativity and age. One practitioner maintained that 'the younger

two-year olds are, definitely, yes. They have to. They like to play on their own' demonstrating a confident perspective that two-year olds are creative in their play which is viewed as mainly solitary in nature. In contrast, other practitioners felt that creativity would be associated more with older children's play. One practitioner acknowledged that creativity was present in toddlers but questioned the definition of the term highlighting recognition of the dual nature of creativity (Mullet et al, 2016, Prentice, 2000). 'I think they are pretty creative, but it depends what you mean by that sort of creative.' When this was explained in terms of creative thinking and approaches to learning, this participant clarified, as with most other responses that she viewed creativity in a disposition sense as being associated with older children rather than two-year olds. A similar reply was gained from another practitioner who, when asked if toddlers are creative gave the response

'maybe a little bit, but not as much as the older ones. I would say maybe in the older ones, the ones who are ready to go into the classroom you can see that.'

These perspectives support the findings discussed in the literature review which indicated a focus on the 'becoming' of young children which is dominated by a developmentalist approach (Ebrahim, 2010, Castañeda, 2002). This limits practice as the value of creative approaches to learning and development and the ways in which two-year olds demonstrate creativity in the here and now can be overlooked and therefore so will opportunities to extend and strengthen the disposition if creativity is only expected in older children who are ready for school.

6.3 Creativity and play

Research indicates that children demonstrate creativity more frequently in free play as opposed to adult led, structured play (Hoffmann and Russ 2012) although children's creativity can be stifled without an adequate balance between child led and adult led approaches as children need direction to ensure ideas and routine is not repetitive. It is clear that a suitable balance is necessary but the statements 'you are trying to get them to do anything creative and they keep their play quite basic,' and 'two-year olds don't know how to place their ideas in their play' suggest the perception that child led play is basic and uncreative and requires direction from the adult to be worthwhile. This perhaps also indicates the notion that ideas of toddlers are not valued until they are evident in play in a way recognised by practitioners. However, the literature suggests effective practice requires the adult to co-construct (Rinaldi, 2013) the learning process with the child and develop "possibilities of engagement" (Olds, 1979: 91) for "where adults' practice is shaped by children's own creativity of thought, action, talk, and where enable nurturing environments flourish, children can feel unbounded in their learning" (Atherton and Nutbrown: 2013:65).

This perspective was not found in the interview data, in fact, quite the opposite, practitioners discussed their role in terms of teaching, supporting, motivating, preparing, caring, reinforcing. All terms associated with a top-down, adult led approach as opposed to the co-construction of learning experiences despite the fact that

creativity for young children involves cognitive processes that develop through social interactions, play and the imagination. Creative thinking is a transformative activity that leads to new ways of thinking and doing that are novel for the child or useful to children's communities (Leggett, 2012).

The role of the adult with regards to promoting and facilitating creativity will now be explored further.

6.4 The role of the adult in promoting creativity

It is important here to reiterate that creativity can be either stimulated or stifled by the approach of practitioners and the construction of early childhood curriculums (Leggett, 2017) highlighting practitioners' vital role in promoting and enhancing creativity (Sharp, 2004). The significance of interaction with adults for creativity is outlined by Atherton and Nutbrown (2016: 73)

Creativity seems to be about adventure and inventiveness, excitement and poignancy, struggles and accomplishments. It is about enabling and reciprocal relationships and professional adults who infuse their practice with opportunity and a knowing understanding of who and what they observe. It is about children who feel free to share the most intimate matters of personal significance.

Leggett (2017) adds that creativity develops through social interactions, play and imagination and an understanding of creativity as a disposition and the ability to facilitate this in children is essential for creativity to flourish in the early years. Although some understanding of creativity was evident this was not something which was consistent throughout or a strong element of practice within my research.

The importance of the practitioner role was highlighted in the response 'we can help the ones that are not creative. I think if we work with them more they probably will be' and is evidence of one of the themes to emerge in terms of the role of practitioners which was the belief that they should 'teach' two-year olds how to link their ideas to play. Reflecting positively, this reinforces the notion that creativity can be developed

and extended and highlights the key role of practitioners in this process. This practitioner was clearly mindful of her role in fostering creativity through her approach which as explained previously has wide ranging implications considering high quality interactions between practitioners and children lead to more positive outcomes (Wall et al, 2015). This is reassuring as we know that educators hold considerable power to promote strategies (Kim, Cramond and Vantassell-Baska, 2010) and opportunities for creativity to be fostered (Sharp, 2004), however because creativity can be undermined by extrinsic motivation (Hennessey and Amabile, 1987) we must be wary of the ways in which creative approaches are taught to, or more preferably extended in children.

In their study of creativity in teachers, Jeffrey and Craft (2004) found a relationship between teaching creatively and teaching for creativity. They found that teachers with a creative approach followed some of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) (1999) principles for creativity; developing students' creative identity, identifying creative abilities, providing opportunities for creativity and fostering creativity by developing capacities such as curiosity. Learners model themselves on teachers' creative approach meaning that the level of creativity in the teacher is integral to developing creativity in learners. Interestingly, the practitioner role in enhancing creativity was acknowledged in the statement

'I think I try to be as creative as I can just because I know that it affects the children if you are not creative at all. You have got to be as creative as you can whenever you are thinking about planning anything with children.'

This demonstrates that the practitioner was aware that the environment can be a source of creativity, particularly a rich environment (Cheung, 2018) and that by

implementing new and interesting provision children's creativity can become more visible.

Although reassuring that these practitioners acknowledged their role in enhancing creativity, it is also evident that creativity was related specifically to the planning of activities and development of environments and resources, demonstrating that the practitioners show knowledge of the guidance in the EYFS which mentions creativity in terms of enabling environments (Early Education, 2012). This was evident when one practitioner explained that the new outdoor area has encouraged creative play.

'I think with our new outdoor set up we have seen it a little bit more. We have got a washing line and if the washing lines ever fall off we see children trying to tie them back on. I saw a child the other day getting a peg and pegging it together'.

However, the interviews indicate that practitioners were less confident in discussing the ways in which they should 'model the creative process, showing your thinking about the possible ways forward (p7), or consider that 'play is a key opportunity for children to think creatively and flexibly' (p7), as outlined in the Characteristics of Effective Learning (Early Education, 2012) and it is this guidance which stresses the importance of engaging in creative interactions with children. This supports Leggett's (2017) finding of a gap between belief and practice where practitioners do not recognise their role in supporting children's creative potential. In addition, where practitioners in my research did recognise their role in supporting children's creativity, this indicated an adult directed 'taught' approach or one focussed on planning and developing the environment. The responses from practitioners perhaps indicates the perception that their creative input should end once creative activities are designed and developed when in fact it is the creative interactions in addition to a creative

environment which will have more impact (Cheung, 2018). The link between the environment/resources and creativity is not one specifically considered within this research but is certainly an area for future investigation.

Leung (2012) found there was consistency between teacher's beliefs about creative pedagogy and their own creative practices and attributed the gap between beliefs and practice around creativity in practitioners to a lack of understanding of the term creativity suggesting the term 'creative thinking' could be utilised to reinstate it within practice (Leggett, 2017).

Perhaps one of the reasons behind the lack of knowledge and understanding of creativity in practice is related to the lack of emphasis on this on policy and guidance which is the focus of the next section where I explore creativity in relation to the EYFS.

6.5 Creativity and the EYFS

The role of the adult in relation to the promotion of creativity which emerged from the interviews can be linked to the practice guidance used in early years. Documentary analysis of both the Statutory Framework (DfE, 2017) and Development Matters (Early Education, 2012) revealed that reference to creativity as a concept within the Early Years Foundation Stage was surprisingly lacking considering both the importance of this disposition for learning and the influence the EYFS has upon attitudes and practice within the early years. Examples of both explicit and implicit references to creativity were identified within these documents with four explicit references to the terms creativity and creative within Development Matters (Early Education, 2012). It is of interest here to note that these all relate to the adult role under the Positive Relationships and Enabling Environments section rather than to explicit aspects of

children's behaviour which could be encouraged or supported. There are no explicit references to creativity in the Unique Child section which outlines the skills and behaviours practitioners should observe in children, and perhaps the section which practitioners rely most in their assessments of children's progress.

The practice guidance of Development Matters (Early Education, 2012) states that practitioners should "model the creative process, showing your thinking about the possible ways forward" (p7), consider that "play is a key opportunity for children to think creatively and flexibly" (p7), they "should be interested in the children's creative processes and talk to them about what they mean to them" (p45) and they "should accept wholeheartedly children's creations and help them see them as something unique and valuable" (p43). The first two references to creativity can be found in the Characteristics of Effective Learning which should not be a surprise considering one of the Characteristics is 'Creating and thinking critically.' The other two references to creativity are found in the specific area of learning 'Expressive art and design' reinforcing the link between creativity and arts and crafts supporting Leggett's (2017: 847) finding that "creativity is restricted in practice to the arts in curriculum policies, indicating that curriculum documentation in early childhood is misrepresenting creativity."

This also became evident initially in the pilot study where, the dual nature of creativity indicated that this as a term is open to wide interpretation and often the preferred interpretation in practice is of creativity in the arts sense rather than the learning sense. It also arose during the interviews where a practitioner made links between creativity and creating something

'Creative like with building? they use their imagination of what they are making, we have a black tray as you have seen, we have playdough

or shaving foam where they can make marks. With the playdough they can make different things that uses their imagination’.

Interestingly here the practitioner made links to wider learning in numeracy by stating that it helps with learning the colours and counting the numbers. Although reassuring that the response indicated a value attributed to creativity in children’s learning it does not indicate that creativity is valued for its own sake but more in terms of how it can enhance the knowledge and understanding of more formal subjects such as numeracy and literacy. This response also highlighted the use of a term associated with creativity; being imaginative (Sharp, 2004). This term was used elsewhere in the statement that two-year olds

‘are very imaginative even if they can’t really speak, they are doing a lot of actions and they really recreate what they have seen’

and ‘with the playdough they can make different things that uses their imagination.’ It is reassuring that practitioners are obviously using dispositional language such as ‘imaginative’ in their practice although there is not necessarily consistency in the terminology or an acknowledgement that demonstrating imagination is a valuable behaviour in its own right.

Continuing with the theme of language, documentary analysis revealed that implicit references to creativity were used within the EYFS where terms such as ‘explore’, ‘find new ways’, ‘experiment’ and ‘test’ ideas were used. Within the EYFS (Early Education, 2012) in the Characteristic of Effective Learning guidance, practitioners are encouraged to support children to show “a belief that more effort or a different approach can pay off” (p6). In addition, “taking a risk, engaging in new experiences and learning by trial and error” (p6) is one of the elements of creativity identified by

Meadows (2006). “Make decisions how to approach a task and reach a goal,” “talk about strategies and how to do things including problem solving, thinking and learning” (p7) and “trying a new approach” (p6) links to Sternberg (2003) who identified redefining problems, trying something new and allowing for mistakes as key to creativity. “Finding their own ways to represent and develop their own ideas” (p7) is also evident in Laevers (2005) definition of creativity around developing unique ideas and seeing things from different perspectives. All of these examples suggest that elements of creative approaches to learning and development are encouraged within the EYFS albeit not explicitly and this would provide some explanation for Leggett’s (2017) suggestion that practitioners lack an understanding of the term creativity. It may well be because of the ambiguity in the EYFS that creativity does not appear more within the discourse of early years and hence may account for the lack of value attributed to this when practitioners discuss elements of early years practice. Practitioners potential to reflect on the EYFS guidance in a confident and critical way will be discussed in further in the chapter around practitioner agency.

The research of Cheung and Mok into early childhood teacher’s notions of creativity (2012) revealed that it is a multidimensional concept with a variety of conceptualisations. Their research used the Early Childhood Creativity Questionnaire (ECCQ) developed from descriptions of creativity devised by teachers. This outlined a range of concepts related to creativity including being imaginative, innovative, flexible, explorative, adaptable and inventive. Cheung and Mok (2012) concluded that viewing creativity in this multi-faceted way is beneficial as a narrow view results in a failure to facilitate creativity in educational settings. A reframing of the concept may enable practitioners to relate the term specifically to cognitive processes (Leggett, 2017) and this provided me with an insight into developing a model of creative

concepts which could be used by practitioners to extend their conceptualisation of it which is a step towards developing a much-required creative pedagogical approach, as

If creativity is considered as essential in Education Reform, it is crucial for policy makers, teacher educators and school leaders to recognize the important aspects of creativity pedagogy perceived by teachers. Based on the assessment, the information may guide the planning of sensitive and relevant teacher development programmes to actualise the goals of developing creativity and assisting curriculum development in schools (Cheung and Leung, 2013:405).

The discourse of disposition is discussed in further detail in chapter seven but to conclude this section I suggest that attempts to make terminology more accessible will enable practitioners to relate to them easier. The diagram at the end of this chapter indicates some of the terms which could be associated with a creative approach as by extending the language and discourse of practitioners it may enable them to have a more confident approach when considering creativity in learning and may result in a wider range of behaviours being supported and extended in a creative way.

I consider the impact of negative interpretations of dispositions in the next chapter giving further weight to the suggestion that if we can open up the discourse around disposition and if behaviours or dispositions regarded as negative or disruptive could be re-interpreted in terms of how they can enhance learning it offers possibilities of creativity becoming embedded earlier and in a more robust way in practice.

6.6 Curiosity

Despite the overwhelming evidence demonstrating the existence and importance of curiosity within very young children (Engel, 2011, Robinson, 2008) there are only three explicit references to curiosity in Development Matters (Early Education, 2012). Under the Characteristics of Effective Learning, the guidance states that “children should show curiosity about objects, events and people”, practitioners should “model being a thinker, showing you don’t always know, are curious and sometimes puzzled and can think and find out” (p7) and should “notice what arouses a child’s curiosity, looking for signs of deep involvement to identify learning that is intrinsically motivated” (p7) and only one explicit reference to the term in the Statutory Framework (DfE, 2017) found under the areas of learning and development section “three areas are particularly crucial for igniting children’s curiosity and enthusiasm for learning and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive” (p7).

Interestingly from the interview data only one of the practitioners described toddlers as curious without a prompt demonstrated in the response ‘they are definitely very curious all the two-year olds.’ The perspective of this practitioner is supported by literature which maintains that children are curious learners from birth (Engel, 2011) but considering that curiosity is regarded as the “engine of intellectual development” and “possibly the most valuable asset a child brings to her education” (Engel, 2011: 632) it is of concern to note that this is not something practitioners readily recognise or confidently discuss in relation to two-year olds. The lack of reference to curiosity in the interviews does support Engel’s (2011) finding that curiosity is not treated as an educational priority by teachers. In a study with Labella, Engel (2011) found significantly low levels of curiosity within classrooms and attributed this to the focus

within schools around attainment of skills, the pressure of testing and assessment and concluded that education was focussed on mastery rather than enquiry. Although this was a study of older children, as outlined above, the documentary analysis of the Early Years Foundation Stage revealed few explicit references to curiosity, even though children are primed to be curious (Mathers et al, 2014). The lack of focus on curiosity as a key aspect of children's learning within the EYFS may indicate why practitioners do not focus on this in practice. This is of concern to a disposition approach as adult behaviour has a direct influence on children's learning and dispositions, and curiosity should be encouraged, facilitated and guided (Engel, 2011) as children's rights to explore are undermined by restricted learning experiences (Nicolopoulou, 2010) therefore indicating that "if we are to teach children to expand on their intrinsic curiosity and make it a centrepiece of educational achievement, we will need to change the way we prepare teachers as well" (Engel, 2011: 643).

As highlighted previously, problems around defining dispositions is one of the key issues with a disposition approach (Blaklock, 2008, Sadler, 2002). Therefore, related concepts have been considered in this research as I recognise that practitioners may have been acknowledging curiosity in their practice but using different terminology to explain it. One term likened to curiosity is inquisitiveness and four practitioners did identify this as an aspect of toddler's behaviour. One practitioner made links between children's inquisitiveness and asking questions, and another maintained that inquisitiveness was inconsistent depending on the mood of the child. Inquisitiveness was associated in one response with older children with language and the ability to ask questions 'They are when they get older, because they ask more questions, like "What's this? Who's this?' This issue around a developmentalist approach was also

recognised in relation to creativity and will be considered in further detail in the next chapter.

Comparable to the findings on creativity, implicit references to a curious approach were found throughout the Development Matters guidance in all six areas of learning and in the characteristics of effective learning section. The terms identified which relate to curiosity include 'explore', 'notice' and 'investigate'. These were "explores and experiments with a range of media through sensory exploration and using whole body" (p43), "notices and is interested in the effects of making movements which leave marks" (p43), "choose unusual or interesting materials and resources that inspire exploration" (p43), "explores objects by linking together different approaches" (p39) and "encourage young children to explore and imitate sound" (p15). The remaining implicit references were found in the sections focussed on the role of the adult (Positive relationships and Enabling Environments) with the guidance clearly aimed at the adult role in enabling "children to explore by providing a safe base" (p8), "explores new toys and environments" (p10), "recognise the importance of encouraging young children's sense of exploration and risk taking" (p12), "encourage independence as young children explore particular patterns of movement" (p23), "help children use their bodies to explore shape" (p35), "encourage young children to explore puddles, trees and surfaces" (p39), "make use of outdoor areas to give opportunities for investigations of the natural world" (p39) and "support children in exploring the control technology of toys" (p41). Interestingly as was the case for the concept of creativity, only four times was the reference to curiosity found in the section identifying behaviours to observe in children (A Unique Child). This evidence indicates that the EYFS promotes the development of a curious (or investigative/exploratory) approach, albeit in an implicit way in children but places less emphasis on the observation or assessment of this in

practice. The promotion of curiosity though seems to be linked to specific outcomes - exploring the natural world/technology rather than promoting curiosity for its own value.

Manning-Morton (2006:46) argues that practitioners need to develop an “accepting and constructive response” to children’s curiosity and exploration but in order to do this they must reflect on their own personal and professional values and experiences and this requires confidence in reflection skills and confidence to look beyond the limits of the guidance within the EYFS. This issue and the challenges associated with reflection will be discussed in further detail in the chapter on agency.

6.7 Conclusion

It became clear in the review of literature that the definition and interpretation of dispositions, in this instance, creativity and curiosity is fraught with challenge. This research revealed that implicit references to these dispositions were made throughout the interviews and within the EYFS (Early Education, 2012) but they tend to be a secondary focus in practice rather than a primary goal and creativity was mentioned more frequently than curiosity by practitioners. Later chapters explore some of the additional challenges faced by practitioners within the early years and may offer some explanation as to why this is the case. It was reassuring to discover that practitioners do use a range of terms associated with creativity and curiosity in their practice as this lays the foundations to build upon their existing knowledge. My perspective is that by enhancing and extending the discourse of disposition and making definitions of creativity and curiosity more accessible to practitioners we can support those working with our youngest children to become confident in interpreting behaviour and

promoting practice which encourages the very curious and creative manner in which two-year olds best learn and develop. Further work is necessary to develop valuable and useful working definitions and examples of these dispositions that can become a useful tool in practice for children need opportunities to be curious; to ponder, wonder and check out, they also need the freedom to be creative in the ways that they engage with ideas and concepts, play and validate, make connections and experiment by connecting fragments of ideas (Woods and Hedges, 2016).

The diagrams below demonstrate a starting point to this process highlighting the range of terms, both positive and negative which could be associated with a curious and creative approach. The outer circle relates to terms which could be interpreted in a negative way and the middle circle relates to more positive interpretations. These diagrams demonstrate the ways in which language is open to interpretation and if by making links between meddlesome and inquisitive we can expand on practitioner understanding we will be moving in a more positive direction towards a disposition approach. By reframing some of these terms and linking them to a positive central disposition such as creativity and curiosity, practitioners may feel empowered to extend their practice to wider discourses which may result in a wider range of behaviours being interpreted in a way which enables them to enhance and promote creativity and curiosity.

Figure 1 The language of creativity

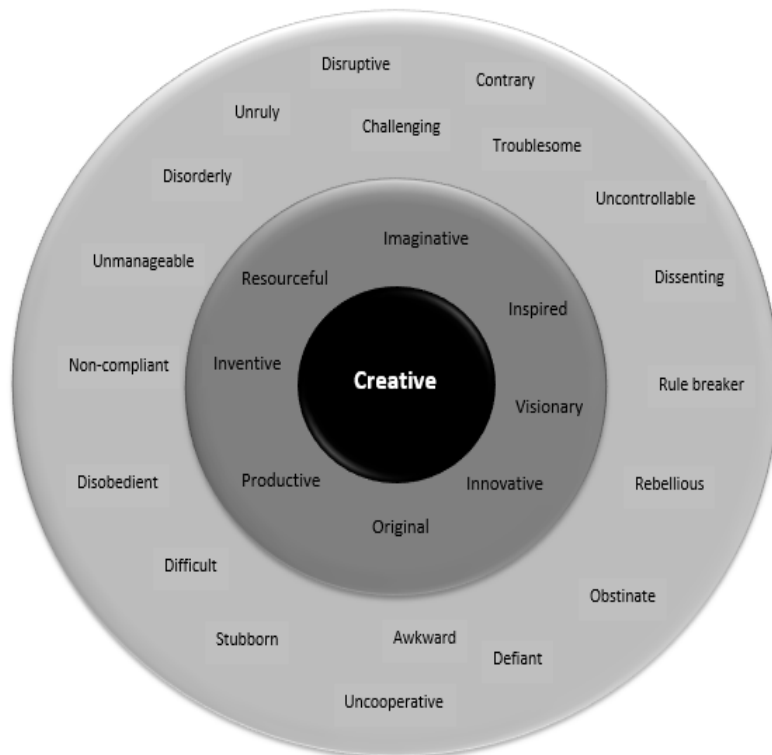
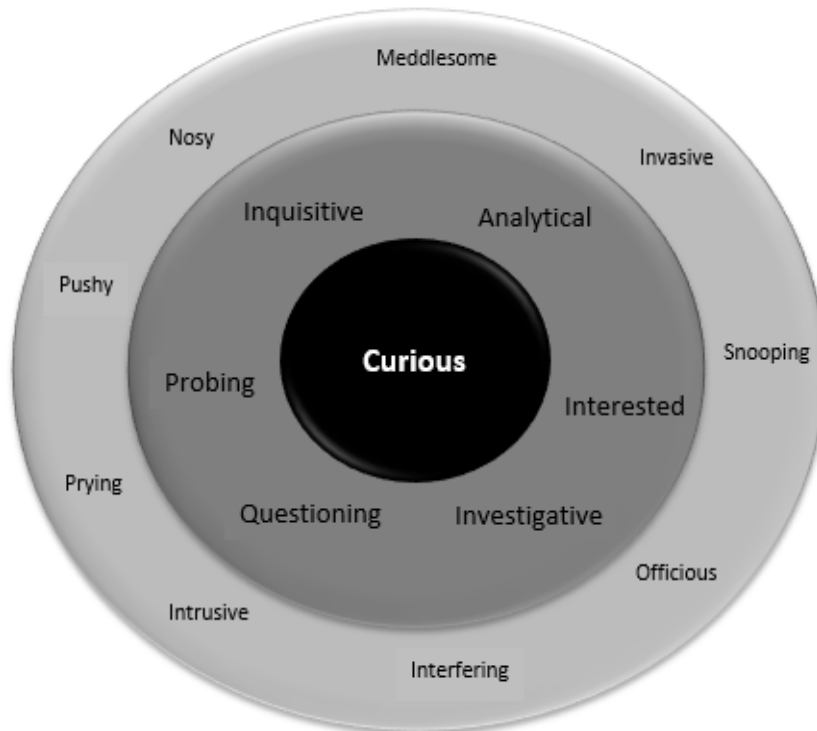


Figure 2 The language of curiosity



7. Negative dispositions

As discussed in the literature review, as a domain, early childhood education and its discourse, governs infants and toddlers framing them within pre-determined characteristics (Foucault, 1994) and dialogue and discourse construct meaning and thinking which are promoted in the stated aims of pedagogy (Ødegaard, 2006). Løkken (2009) suggests that the polarities and paradoxes of pedagogy further serve to constrain the ways in which toddlers behaviour is interpreted as practitioners are both representatives (and enforcers of) social norms in addition to being advocates for infants and toddlers. In the literature review, perspectives around the interpretation of children's behaviour in terms of the wider education system were considered and it was interesting to note from the interviews that many practitioners interpreted, defined and described two-year old's behaviours in unfavourable ways, referring often to aspects of practice which were 'challenging.' Some of these challenging behaviours were ones considered as inappropriate or disruptive for effective learning to take place and these shall now be explored in further detail linking back to the literature.

7.1 Challenging or creative?

As outlined previously, Laevers (2005) suggested a creative approach can be threatening to the existing order and can be interpreted in a negative manner. This can be especially true where there is a strong focus on the management and promotion of positive behaviour and discouraging those behaviours regarded as challenging within the early years. The literature indicates that teachers gravitate towards easier to handle children and demonstrate a preference for conformity and logical thinking. This results in creative approaches clashing with traditional

educational expectations (Kim, 2008) as children who are creative may deviate from accepted norms (Vadera, Pratt and Mishra, 2013). Simonton (2017:13) recognises a conflict between educational practices which are focussed on “filling the brain” with conventionally correct information and creativity which requires originality, utility and surprise.

Despite the value placed on promoting the agency of toddlers in research and literature, in practice agency appears to be less significant. In the interviews, behaviours demonstrating toddler agency were often associated with challenging behaviour. This can be inferred from the statement ‘we’ve got a few here at the minute that are challenging, some days they’ll do things and some days they won’t’. In the absence of any information regarding the preferred behaviours of toddlers, this statement indicates that the challenging characteristic of this behaviour is based on the child not doing something that the practitioner has asked or expected. Research indicates that the tendency to act in a self-directing manner has been associated with creativity (Gino and Ariely, 2012) and in a different context could be explained in terms of assertive action or independence which are regarded as positive traits. The response implies that when children do not do things that are expected of them or demonstrate a lack of expected action then it is classed as challenging behaviour which is undesirable and therefore discouraged. This supports Bradbury’s (2014) finding that children who do not conform to the routines of the setting were regarded as disruptive.

The literature suggests that children who can concentrate are classed as good and able in practice as they engage and conform to the educational expectations of the early years setting (Stirrup et al, 2016) and problem behaviour is often associated with poor concentration (Maclure et al, 2012). Referring back to Watkins and Noble’s

(2013) educational capital of specific practices, a lack of concentration would be a social practice interpreted as challenging.

Reflections on the importance of concentration for learning and two-year olds' abilities to concentrate was a theme which recurred throughout the data and a lack of concentration was seen as a challenge to both practice and learning and development. Some practitioners felt that concentration was key to learning demonstrated by the response that 'If they haven't got that concentration they are not taking anything in, they aren't absorbing anything.' Another practitioner expressed the view that children should become learners who concentrate indicating that concentration is something that is essential for learning and can and should be developed.

'They need to be very socially aware and what to do to be able to learn. They need a lot of concentration as well. I think they need to work on the concentration and the listening and lack of distractions.'

The importance attributed to concentration was also explicitly made in the statement 'two-year old's don't know what they are doing, their concentration is lacking.' This response implies that purpose is affected by concentration and where concentration is perceived to be absent so is any purposeful learning highlighting a general theme to emerge that children are not learning if they aren't concentrating.

The value of concentration is only mentioned once within the Statutory Framework in a section which describes the CEL as characteristics of effective teaching and learning. Within the category of Active Learning it states, "children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements" (DFE, 2017:10).

The importance of listening and preventing distractions can be linked specifically to Development Matters (Early Education, 2012) which states that by limiting noise and

making environments calm and orderly, practitioners can support children to concentrate, demonstrating that these practitioners are following policy guidance in their reflections. Indeed, the practitioner role in relation to concentration is made clear on several occasions in Development Matters where the adult role is explained in terms of helping and noting how children concentrate, praising effort in concentration and to “extend concentration for children who find it difficult to focus their attention on a task” (Early Education, 2012:16). The related term ‘focus’ is used three more times within Development Matters stating that children can maintain focus over a period when they are interested. In addition, another similar emphasis is on children giving their attention, paying attention, increasing attention and shifting attention. With regards to the adult role, they are advised to “explain why it is important to listen when others are speaking” (p15). It becomes clear therefore that combined emphasis on concentration, focus and attention would lead practitioners to gravitate towards promoting these in very young children and this then reflects the methods in which effective learning is believed to take place, expected behaviours and planned approaches.

‘We have got a couple at the minute and their concentration and things is non-existent. Obviously if they don’t have that concentration they are not taking anything in and not absorbing anything.’

It is clear from the responses that concentration, giving their attention and focussing is something practitioners feel children should aspire to and develop towards and frequently they explained their role in encouraging this behaviour, unsurprisingly considering this is quite explicit in the guidance.

Expectations around concentration were frequently linked to concepts and expectations of school readiness, with one practitioner suggesting that ‘further on in

school your grades would suffer if you weren't listening or concentrating.' Focus was linked to behaviours such as sitting down and listening; 'you have got children that just struggle to sit down and struggle to listen and maintain a focus on an activity for more than a minute or so'.

The value of concentration has been identified by Laevers (2005) who proposed that 'levels of involvement' are essential for learning and development. Levels of involvement are mentioned once in Development Matters in the proposal that practitioners should 'notice what arouses a child's curiosity, looking for signs of deep involvement to identify learning that is intrinsically motivated' (Early Education, 2012:7). Involvement occurs when children are intensely engaged in an activity, when they demonstrate extreme concentration, absorption and attention (Laevers, 2017). It is important to point out that Laevers (2017) regards involvement as being associated with fascination and motivation, which arises from the exploratory drive indicating the key role of curiosity and also movement, as explained previously, this links with the concepts of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) and 'wallowing' (Bruce, 1991). Therefore, it raises the question that children referred to during this study may not be demonstrating concentration in activities of no interest to them although they may be concentrating on other areas and in other activities which were not valued in the same way by practitioners.

Atherton and Nutbrown (2016) cite Forman and Fosnot (1982) and remind us that whilst appearing physically passive a child can still be mentally active and conclude that although "children appear still and so their industry may be hidden" (Atherton & Nutbrown, 2016: 74).

We can identify a contradiction in the practice guidance which suggests practitioners should promote active learning as a key characteristic of effective learning because through “active learning children concentrate and keep on trying” (DfE, 2017: 10), in contrast, it suggests a calm and tranquil environment should be promoted as this is integral to concentration. This reinforces Løkken’s (2009: 38) observation that

the children’s frolicking mood of transitory motion may be perceived by day-care staff as a lot of noise, as trouble and even chaos. Seen from a more grown-up perspective, the playful quality of recurrence also may be interpreted as stagnated repetitiveness enhancing boisterousness and, as such, exposed to (adult) devaluation.

Further examples where children’s behaviour was interpreted in a challenging manner is evidenced in the following statements which highlight the ‘Battle of sitting’ which emerged as an interesting theme in the data. This was revealed in statements like ‘if they come to sit down that’s half the battle’ and

‘if you force them to sit down, then they are just going to resent it even more, and it is just going to be an even tougher like, battle to try and get them sitting down next time’.

This ‘battle’ described by the practitioner is a perfect example of the professional dilemma between engaging children in adult directed activities framed by sitting and listening and between enabling children to follow their interests which characterises a key emphasis of the EYFS as outlined in the recommendation that routines should be flexible to enable children to pursue their interests (Early Education, 2012). There are no recommendations around sitting in relation to learning in either the Statutory Framework or Development Matters which raises questions as to why practitioners may believe sitting to be so significant. This may be an example of where cultural norms and expectations about learning have an influence on practice (Zhang et al,

2016) and where silent narratives (Bone, 2008) which frame beliefs give an insight into implicit values and perspectives around how children learn best. It is clear from these responses that perceptions, interpretations and expectations of early years education are shaped by wider social norms and values (Ang, 2014) and that dominant educational discourse associates learning with a seated environment (Kohl and Cook, 2014).

‘if they are sat down you can talk to them a bit easier,’ ‘if they are running about its hard to get that focus to them because they are mucking about.’

‘Some are really quiet and shy; some are really boisterous for two-year olds and don’t sit still’.

These statements can be linked to Watkins and Noble’s (2013) notion of bodily control whereby stillness and quiet demonstrate restraint of motor functions and indicate self-discipline and focus. Stillness and focus seem at odds with the recommendations that ‘children have uninterrupted time to play and explore’ and that practitioners should ‘arrange flexible indoor and outdoor space and resources where children can explore’ (Early Education, 2012:6) demonstrating a contradiction in the policy.

Gopnik et al (1999) point out that very young children have an insatiable drive to explore their bodies and their environment and this may result in these behaviours being interpreted as lacking in concentration where learning is associated with ‘sitting’ as often found with formal learning approaches. When this happens, the significant amount of learning taking place through movement is underestimated and dismissed. Practitioner expectations of children’s ability to succeed (Stirrup et al, 2016) can be affected if they don’t display the ‘right’ behaviours, attitudes and dispositions and the correct mode of being (Foucault, 2000d) expected in early years settings. However, it

is becoming obvious that the 'right behaviours' are very much open to interpretation given a framework with little explicit guidance.

One practitioner associated an expectation of stillness with younger and more inexperienced practitioners in her statement that sometimes they will ask the child to sit still because it is story time, but that child is only two. They are not aware of that because they haven't had experience before.' However, the interviews did take place with practitioners who had a range of experience and this was a common theme to emerge regardless of age or experience. This may be taken as evidence of contrary themes, ideological dilemmas and of the ways in which participants view their own position in relation to their identity (Goodman, 2017).

I suggest that if we open up the interpretation of concentration to include a wider range of behaviours and attitudes, a two-year olds' perceived lack of concentration could be re-interpreted as evidence of curiosity or inquisitiveness, indeed four of the practitioners mentioned inquisitiveness as one of the dispositions demonstrated in two-year olds 'they are really inquisitive.' In addition, if less emphasis was placed on adult led, structured activities and more focus on supporting children's interests and natural curiosity practitioners may find that concentration is not an issue and the effort expended during the 'battle of sitting' could be redirected into co-constructed opportunities to pursue curiosity.

7.2 Stubborn and bossy or autonomous?

Self-regulation can foster the capacities needed for learning such as motivation and persistence (Bierman, Nix, Greenberg, Blair, and Domitrovich, 2008) and self-

regulation and self-competence are a means to foster the motivation, co-operation and focused persistence needed for learning. Self-assertion and non-compliance are identified in two-year old's actions when they resist external demands in pursuit of independent, goal directed behaviour. This is a positive strategy in the development of social skills (Dietz et al, 2005) and in Reggio Emilia, young children are celebrated for being "strong, powerful and competent" (Malaguizzi 1993b:10). However, as explained previously this developing 'mastery' may not be interpreted in a positive way and may be interpreted as 'interfering', 'stubborn' or 'defiant' and therefore could be discouraged rather than promoted. One practitioner in this study felt that toddlers could be 'interfering and stubborn'. Interpreted differently, interfering could be valued as curiosity as a child who is interfering is clearly demonstrating an interest or an inquisitiveness towards something.

Stubbornness was another theme which emerged on several occasions during the research and practitioners identified being stubborn as a key disposition associated with two-year olds, six times in the interviews, interestingly more frequently than curiosity was identified, highlighted implicitly and explicitly in the following statements:

'If a child is not in the right frame of mind to do anything they won't if they're that stubborn.'

'If he's not in the mood to do something he won't do it.'

'We've got quite a few that are challenging at the minute, some days they'll do things and some days they won't'.

The interpretation of behaviours associated with being stubborn is significant here. A child who is regarded as stubborn may be one who makes clear their intentions, interests and preferences and may be demonstrating resistance to engaging in activities that do not meet their interests. Furthermore, in a more radical viewpoint we

can reflect on Spengler et al's (2015) research which outlined the developmental benefits of stubbornness where career success coincided with individuals who were defiant of authority. In support of this, Judge et al (2012) found a lack of agreeableness to be associated with high earnings later in life. These research findings indicate that dispositions regarded as challenging may have advantages for children.

Being stubborn could also indicate growing independence which is promoted in a positive way throughout the EYFS and a capacity that practitioners are encouraged to support. However, this promotion of independence refers more explicitly to becoming independent in personal care as given in the example 'support children's growing independence as they do things for themselves, such as pulling up their pants after toileting' (p26) as opposed to promoting independent thinking, approaches to learning or agency.

As explained in chapter two, agency can be interpreted both positively as self-assertion (Dietz et al, 2005) and negatively as non-compliance (Kuczynski et al, 1987). The findings of this research indicate that agency is often regarded in a negative sense demonstrated when children are defined as stubborn or bossy. Bossiness was mentioned in the statement that, 'a lot of children tend to be bossy with roleplaying, leading the activity and giving each person a role' and

'If they are a bit overly bossy when we are trying to do a group activity they are more focused on bossing than they are focused on learning. It can affect their learning.'

It is explicitly stated here that bossiness can have a detrimental effect upon the learning process although no further explanation was given for this.

The examples of children's behaviours given here could also be interpreted in terms of leadership skills, working in a group and being assertive and confident. Some perspectives on stubbornness imply that no quality learning takes place unless children are following instruction or guidance from practitioners in a structured adult led manner. This contradicts the characteristics of effective learning (DfE, 2017) which suggest children should choose ways to do things and have opportunities to find and explore indicating that children's agency should be supported and promoted.

7.3 Impatient or curious?

Patience is a prime example of a moral code which has become embedded in educational discourse (Stirrup et al, 2016), a cultural norm (Zhang et al, 2016) and a silent narrative (Bone, 2008) which is enforced through discourse and evident in practice through practitioner values, beliefs and expectations. In the interviews, one practitioner made links between waiting, turn taking, being able to listen and communicate and school readiness in the response;

'Learning to wait and take turns is important as well as your concentration because obviously further on in school your grades would suffer with things like if you weren't listening and concentrating.'

Two-year olds were considered impatient in three more instances during the interviews;

'some can be quite impatient; some do have a bit more patience than others.'

'impatient, yes that can be a big one because they are only young and sometimes they don't understand.'

'some of them can be a bit impatient but at the end of the day they are only two, so you have to expect them to not want to wait.'

Impatience here seems to be contrasted with curiosity and there is a perception that patience develops with age. It seems that one of the targets of early years education is to develop children who can wait, and turn take, and this expectation of conformity brings us back to Shonstrom's (2016: 157) perception that "being wildly curious sets us free, at last from a society which compels us to obey." The classification of specific behaviours and attitudes as negative and disruptive is evidence of the hidden curriculum, the "implicit values, behaviours, procedures and norms in educational settings" (Alsubaie, 2015: 125) which justify the framing and refining of specific behaviours. As indicated above, rather than impatience being classified negatively, it could also indicate curiosity, an eagerness to learn, a drive for action and could surely be channelled into a positive learning opportunity.

Another challenging behaviour linked to being impatient is children shouting out and this is discouraged by the rationale of preparing those going to school:

'we try and encourage them if they have got something to say, we always like to hear what they have got to say but it's always an added bonus if they put their hands up and they wait until they have been asked. Especially for the ones who are going to school. We try and encourage, tell them once they are at school that is what the structure there might be like'.

Interestingly, links between waiting and concentration have been identified demonstrating that the promotion of this in children may be positive. Although now dated, Gronau and Waas (1997) found that delayed gratification was associated with social success and positive dispositions such as concentration and coping later in childhood and adolescence (Mischel et al, 1998).

One practitioner acknowledged that disruptive behaviours are not necessarily enduring in her statement that 'It could be just a temporary phase for them to be in where they might come in for a week or two and be like 'right, I am not in the mood to listen, don't want to listen, I would rather just play.' And then other weeks you will get them sat down, listening putting their hands up, shouting out, getting really involved with it. It's a bit of a mix depending on the child itself'. This statement indicates a value judgement that not listening and just playing is undesirable whereas sitting down, listening, putting their hands up and getting involved are desirable behaviours which should be encouraged.

It was interesting to note the extent to which early years practitioners view themselves with regard to behaviour modification and development. When asked about the role of early years education, one response was 'just to get children ready and set for when they go to school and give them their first boundaries, so they can understand rules, understand sharing', another response was to 'give them boundaries' perhaps reflecting cultural norms and expectations (Zhang et al, 2016) about how children should be prepared for school and later learning. This fits with Whitbread and Bingham's (2011) conception that school readiness ensures that children are ready to conform in the classroom and be able to engage in sustained scholarly work (Watkins and Noble, 2013). Within teacher centred approaches which focus on the development of factual knowledge and behaviour such as good manners, control is more important than creativity (Cheung, 2012) and this control is demonstrated where practitioners view their role in terms of promoting boundaries.

It was acknowledged by one practitioner that some of the behaviours associated with older children are unrealistic for younger ones

‘I think sometimes we expect too much from them like when we ask them to come and line up or something like we have to remember they are only two and they can’t stand still for a minute bless them.’

This reinforces the developmentalist deficit view that young children are not quite there yet (Burman, 2008, Castañeda, 2002) but are developing towards demonstrating the kind of behaviours considered as appropriate for school.

In both Development Matters and the Statutory Framework there are frequent references to ‘expected’ behaviours and the ‘management of behaviour’ with a focus on encouraging children to adapt or inhibit their own behaviour according to expectations around what is right. Behaviour is referred to twelve times in Development Matters and eleven times in the Statutory Framework and when considering the absence of references to dispositions it is not surprising that practitioners regard this aspect of their role as significant.

7.4 Conclusion

This research revealed that ‘challenging’ behaviours were associated with children who did not follow instruction or conform to expectations, for example, being stubborn, bossy, not sitting, and lacking in concentration. This raises a dilemma in that a creative approach to exploration and learning may be one which fits the category of challenging due to the nature of creativity including a lack of conformity and deviation from expected behaviours.

The school readiness agenda has resulted in specific behaviours being expected of children by the end of the Foundation stage. Where “well-meaning adults ... claim to

know what constitutes valued knowledge' and their claims are used as a template for young children's 'desired outcomes' (Farquhar and White, 2014: 821).

These expectations focus around a child's ability to behave in a manner regarded as appropriate within a classroom and often focus on the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, for example literacy and numeracy rather than upon enjoyment and motivation for learning. The ability to sit, listen and concentrate is one associated with classroom learning and a teacher led approach which characterises our education system within England. This serves to control, oppress, label and limit young children (Cannella, 2002).

Interpretation of behaviour and a clear understanding and value of the aims and intentions of very young children is significant here because where a child's agency is recognised, valued and promoted, those behaviours which are regarded as challenging, such as being stubborn or bossy may be reinterpreted as assertive or creative and instead of discouraging the behaviours they may be channelled, embraced and strengthened in a positive way, reinforcing and redirecting rather than distinguishing strong dispositions.

The challenge of practice in the early years is that although a child led, play based pedagogy is promoted, the burden of assessments, working towards and evidencing goals and outcomes and the threat of inspection regimes and league tables result in contradictory pressures. In a performance orientated model as characterised in the EYFS, young children are managed and assessed resulting in control over "who does what, when and how" (Neaum, 2016: 248) for "when adults identify outcomes for children, they create a template that young children are required to emulate" (Murray, 2015: 1724).

It is clear that a change in focus is required and a balance where equal importance is attributed to cognitive and social learning as academic skills as this will improve levels of quality and outcomes for children (Williams et al, 2014) in addition to a recognition of the importance of children's agency for their learning and development.

8. Agency and the influence of developmentalism

Theories of child development shape the content and approach of curriculum frameworks (Krieg, 2010) as “the persuasive discourses of child development and school readiness speak to policy-makers and policy interventions” (Wood and Hedges, 2016 :393). As explained previously there are elements from a range of theoretical approaches inherent within the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017) from Froebel’s focus on a child centred approach (Pound, 2005) to Vygotsky’s (1978) emphasis on the social and cultural aspect of learning and the role of others in supporting development. Piaget’s (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969) developmental perspective that children’s thinking progresses in incrementally in more detailed (and valuable) ways as they move through the stages of development can be identified clearly in the structure and content of the practitioner guidance Development Matters (Early Education, 2012) where age and stage related goals are highlighted for each of the prime and specific areas of learning and the characteristics of effective learning. The influence of the stage and age approach was perfectly demonstrated in the response ‘I have got quite a few key children that are in the two-stage.’ This statement is an example of where children are positioned in a positivist way (Wood and Hedges, 2016). Burman (2008) calls this an emergence of knowledge which results in the child being evaluated in deficit terms, she highlights the evidence from neuroscience which reinforces further the suggestion that babies and toddlers are not quite there.

Individual, relational and cultural resources which reflect taken for granted assumptions are used to inform interactions (Stoecklin and Fattore, 2017) which affect the ways in which children’s learning and development is viewed. In terms of the skills and dispositions of two-year olds, practitioners in this research tended to discuss these

in a deficit way, seen in statements like ‘not many of them come with those skills’ and ‘you don’t see many younger two-year olds with friends,’ ‘they don’t have listening skills, or not many of them do,’ and ‘they don’t really share.’ It was also clear that the skills, dispositions and characteristics that two-year olds may demonstrate are evaluated in terms of how they compare to those of older children in the setting ‘some are imaginative, but I would say that’s more when they are approaching three’ and then further in terms of what they are expected to be by the time children reach school age ‘hopefully by the time they are ready for school they should be ready for reaching some of the goals in reception.’ When asked about creativity in two-year olds, one practitioner replied that they are ‘maybe a little bit but not as much as the older ones. I would say maybe in the older ones, the ones who are ready to go in the classroom you can see that.’ This has significant implications as viewing the child as not yet developed affects the nature of adult engagement and interactions with the child (Kilderry, 2015).

Research suggests that it is essential for practitioners to understand the child development needs of two-year olds while not underestimating their abilities. Practitioners require an “understanding of what it is to be two” (Georgeson et al, 2014:25). As explained previously, within some early childhood education curriculums “children are positioned as assimilating norms and values in a passive manner through observing positive role models and learning through ‘osmosis” (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2014: 107).

Rinalidi (2013:15) warns of the consequences of deterministic views of young children as passive or weak as these beliefs about children determine their identity and rights. The Reggio philosophy regards children as “strong, powerful and rich in potential and resources right from the moment of birth,” capable of constructing their own

knowledge; a competent child. This perspective is not reflected in statements such as 'It takes time with their minds to get used to what sharing is' which indicates that toddlers minds are in some way inferior to older children and adults minds. In addition, the comment 'developing their own personality' indicates that young children do not already have a personality in their own right.

8.1 Becoming

Phrases like they are 'only two' or 'just two' occurred frequently in both rounds of the interview as well as comments around the two-year olds being 'only young' or 'too young,' 'not quite there yet,' and 'sort of independent but not quite there.' This type of language indicates that very young children are viewed in terms of their becoming (Ebrahim, 2010). This is emphasised by perspectives of children as 'underdeveloped' or 'developing' as outlined above.

The evaluation of children in terms of their becoming was reinforced by comments around some children being 'behind' and that skills and dispositions are more common 'as they start getting older.' This linear view of development is encapsulated by the comment 'they go from nothing, to like not even being able to pick up a pencil to writing their name' and 'not many of them come with those skills.' This indicates the importance attributed to literacy skills within the early years (Ang, 2014). In addition, the statement 'two-year olds are still [a] baby so being three and then really listening, coming into their own and having their own personality' indicates that children only starting to demonstrate progression or achievement when communication skills become more evident. It also indicates a discourse focussing on vulnerability (Sumsion et al, 2009) rather than capability (Kilderry et al, 2017).

Returning to the issue around language and communication, the response that 'if they don't have communication skills we can't pass on what we are trying to make them learn' indicates that practitioners view communication skills as a necessity which must be in place before further learning can take place. This perspective was also revealed by one practitioner when discussing inquisitiveness when they stated that 'they are when they get older, because they ask more questions, like "What's this? Who's this?'" These responses support Knight's (2016) observation that assumptions are made by practitioners where communication gaps occur which indicate that learning only takes place once meaningful verbal exchange is possible which can have an impact on practice and interaction (Malaguzzi, 1994). Although the literature on sustained shared thinking has had positive implications on interactions with older pre-school children (Siraj-Blatchford, 2007) the extension of children's thinking through dialogue and questioning as found in sustained shared thinking assumes a certain level of language proficiency. In light of this, Degotardi (2017) proposes that 'joint attention' is an approach that can be used with pre-verbal children to engage their learning in a collaborative manner through shared and sustained attention enabling a mutual construction of knowledge.

Observations of individual differences in development were acknowledged by practitioners which demonstrated that their practice is influenced by the EYFS (DfE, 2017) principle of 'A Unique Child.' The Statutory Framework (DfE, 2017) states that "practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development" (p9).

This was evident in statements such as ‘some grow faster than the others and learn skills faster.’ Although it can be considered a strength of practice that individual differences are recognised, this statement indicates some prestige allocated to those children who appear developmentally more advanced than others as they are ‘progressing’ nearer to the ‘goals’ they are ‘working towards.’

Planning for development is based on ongoing formative assessments completed via the observation, assessment and planning cycle (Early Education, 2012). This approach to observation and planning based on assessments of children’s abilities is an example of early childhood education and care approaches being “immersed in developmentalism” (Kilderry, 2015: 118) which informs developmentally appropriate practice and restricts pedagogical approach. One of the themes which emerged from the analysis was that of the role of practitioner to fill children up with knowledge. The practitioner role was explained in terms of ‘next stepping children.’ ‘We encourage them,’ ‘we teach them’ implying that learning and development is a process whereby the child is passive in their learning, only responsive to the adult role which was explained in terms of ‘providing the experience they need to help them gain these skills’ and ‘make them learn.’ Other comments also indicated this such as ‘we know what they can do and what they can’t,’ ‘our knowledge of them,’ ‘making sure they know.’ This can be seen as evidence of Sims and Waniganayake (2015) perspective that children can become compliant in the learning process when they are regarded as receivers of a learning experience rather than an active participant. It was clear and reassuring that practitioners viewed their role as active participants in children’s learning, in addition to acknowledging the important role of partnership with parents in ‘bringing up their child’, but this was a one-sided approach (which will be explained further in the chapter on practitioner agency) rather than as co-constructors of

knowledge as seen in pedagogical approaches such as Reggio (Rinaldi, 2013) even though co-construction of learning between adults and children is a key element of effective pedagogy (Georgeson et al, 2014). It is apparent that practitioners do not see themselves as implicated in a dialogical process of learning as recommended by Farquhar and White (2014).

It appears that the long-term goal within the early years setting is focussed on preparation for school. One practitioner claimed it is nice that children are 'learning those basic skills young and ready to go into school and learn other things there' suggesting that the foundations for learning are set early on and built upon once the child reaches more formal education. A common theme to emerge was the role of practitioners to 'set children up so they can go onto the next stage,' and ultimately 'to get children ready and set for when they go to school,' 'we prep them for school.' This gives weight to Einboden et al's (2013) perspective that children have social value and capital which underpins the school readiness agenda and its rationale on assessment.

One practitioner demonstrated their understanding of the process of learning in their comment that 'they need to know what to do to be able to learn.' This is reassuring for a disposition approach as it indicates practitioners understand their role in supporting the learning process as well as focussing on content and assessing outcomes. Malaguzzi (1998:77) offers the suggestion that "creativity becomes more visible when adults try to be more attentive to the cognitive processes of children than to the results they achieve in various fields of doing and understanding" supporting Laevers (2005) perspective around the importance of the process of learning rather than the product.

The challenge of viewing children in the ways outlined above is that 'Becoming's' (Reynaert and Roose, 2014) hinder agency (Stoecklin and Fattore, 2017). It is

apparent that young children, in particular, infants and toddlers lack agency (Cheeseman, 2017, Adair, 2014, Buzzelli, 2018) where the voices of young children are “silenced under the weight of “adult” psychological, educational and policy constructions of and for them” (Cannella, 2002:162). These perspectives restrict the capacity of early childhood practitioners to support learning appropriate to individual children (Murray, 2015).

8.2 The impact of agency

Agency in this research refers to the power that individuals hold over their own actions and interactions. It is interesting that elements of both toddler and practitioner agency were found to be lacking within the settings I researched. My interviews did not overly focus on power relations but similarly to the research into baby room discourses by Powell and Gooch (2012) influential discourses and power relations emerged from the data as dominant themes. These will now be discussed in relation to literature around toddler and practitioner agency.

8.3 Toddler agency

The extent to which very young children have agency is a question which continues to dominate literature in the early years. Young children, particularly those who are pre-verbal such as babies and toddlers have very little agency or power (Dunlop, 2003) but I argue that by supporting children to learn how to learn with a focus on dispositions this agency or learning power (Claxton, 2007) can be enhanced. In this chapter I

discuss findings from the research which highlight that two-year olds lack agency in current practice and therefore have reduced opportunities to develop learning power.

Choice is affected by the possibilities that are made available and children's agency is influenced by "constraints and opportunities, whether they be accepted, negotiated or resisted" (Stoecklin and Fattore, 2017:61). As explained previously, the capacity to act and impose choice is not something traditionally associated with toddler discourse (Duhn, 2015) and this marginalisation of toddlers can be traced in part to their prelinguistic state. This was reinforced in the interviews in the statement that 'if we can't communicate with them then we can't pass on what we are trying to make them learn' which indicates that any purposeful sense of learning and development cannot take place until children have the verbal skills to communicate. It also indicates the importance of the adult role in making learning happen. This perspective may serve to hinder the agency of toddlers in practice. In contrast to the focus on verbal communication skills in England, the Te Whāriki approach encourages the recognition of communication and language in a broader sense to incorporate non-verbal skills such as sounds, gestures, facial expressions and movements made by infants and toddlers (Lee, Carr, Soutar and Mitchell 2013) and the 'Hundred Languages of children' demonstrate the creative ways or 'languages' in which young children communicate and which underpins the pedagogy of the Reggio Emilia approach (Malaguzzi, 1998). Consideration of the broader ways in which children communicate opens interesting possibilities around how we could interpret and identify dispositions such as creativity and curiosity through a range of action and interactions of pre-verbal children. Although beyond the scope of this research to identify such approaches, this is certainly something which necessitates further reflection and research.

One of the themes which I have already considered in the chapter above was the way in which practitioners view children in the process of learning and development. With regards to the power relations between children and adults, children were often regarded as passive in their learning whereas the practitioner role was seen as more active. This is demonstrated in comments like ‘we next step them,’ ‘get a learning point across to them,’ we are ‘trying to make them learn,’ we ‘make sure they know,’ we ‘teach them how to do it’ and indicates the belief in the adult as expert and the child as apprentice (Hatch, 2010), demonstrated further in responses such as

‘they learn from us quite a lot,’ ‘we have to guide him,’ ‘two-year olds do have ideas, but they don’t really know how to place them into play.

Practitioners demonstrated certainty (Degotardi, 2017) in their expert role with comments like

‘that is where we come and encourage them and teach them how to do it’ and ‘we know what children is what’ ‘I know him better than anybody’ ‘you know your children inside out don’t you’ ‘we know what they can and can’t do.’

These responses indicate that children’s capacities, their agency and their agendas are not at the forefront of practice and this serves to limit opportunities for responsive encounters and deep engagement (Cheeseman, 2017). One practitioner referred to two-year olds as being interested but went on to say ‘you can easily get them interested in any activity’ using resources indicating that children need adults to gauge their interest. This one-way transmission of knowledge and skills is also evident in the perception that the role of the adult is to make ‘sure we are there to interact quite a lot as well because they learn from us’ and supports Cheeseman’s (2017) view that

practice is affected when there is a perception that adults hold the wisdom and responsibility and are experts (Degotardi, 2017).

When asked specifically about the particular skills which two-year olds need to learn in a positive way, one practitioner's response was to discuss the experiences that they have and the routine of the nursery indicating that it is not the individual skills children possess but rather the approach taken to develop the children which is of prime importance. This focus on the one-way transmission of knowledge and skills from adult to child is evident further in comments around the role of practitioners in managing behaviour 'we have to set boundaries' and the practitioner role involves 'making sure they know their manners.'

Returning to the issue of disposition, a learning to learn (Burgoyne, 1998) approach can enhance the process of learning and development and part of this involves the recognition and understanding of dispositions which can enhance children's power to direct their own learning (Dunlop, 2003) bringing us back to Claxton's concept of learning power (2007). Within the current constraints, seeing children's learning in this way is a significant challenge for practice, however, as explained previously, research indicates that better outcomes for children occur when adults act as co-constructors of meaning (Wall et al, 2015) as found in curriculums such as Reggio (Rinaldi, 2013).

Involvement with others, either at play or at work, creates opportunities for individuals to evaluate and refine their understanding as they are exposed to the thinking of others and as they participate in creating some form of shared understanding with others (Gauvain, 1995:39).

This co-construction could be embedded in practice if practitioners relied less on taken for granted assumptions based upon child development theory (Cheeseman, 2017) inherent in policy documents such as the EYFS. By adopting a mind mindedness

approach (Degotardi, 2017) and acting as partners in learning, toddlers' interests, agendas and intents would be revealed (Cheeseman, 2017) and practitioners would be less constrained by a limited discourse. This however would require confidence and reflective practice, and this is dependent on the agency of practitioners which shall now be explored.

8.4 Practitioner agency

Although not an area originally considered as a focus of this research, the responses of practitioners often indicated their lack of agency in practice. Analysis of the interview data highlighted that practitioners lack confidence both when discussing concepts that they are not particularly familiar with, in addition to those which they are more experienced with. The use of language which indicates uncertainty was taken as evidence for a lack of agency as was the way in which the EYFS was interpreted and applied.

We know that the ability of practitioners to judge effectively when to stand back and when to intervene is critical to enhancing creativity (Chappell et al, 2008) as is their choice to effect change (Fritz, 1943) and this ability will be determined in part by the confidence of practitioners to make autonomous decisions. Practitioner agency is fundamental here but the impact of environmental challenges (Eckhoff, 2011) inspection frameworks (Hanson and Appleby, 2015), the emphasis on evidencing practice rather than improving it (Cooke and Lawton, 2008) and the focus on quantitative results (Shonstrom, 2016) all serve to limit practitioner agency. In addition, the EYFS, as a significant influence on practice serves as a regime of truth (Fenech & Sumison, 2007, Foucault, 1980) which is constrained and controlled by policy makers

resulting in autonomy being removed from practitioners. Wall et al (2015) view the focus on age appropriateness and the scope and extent of the quality monitoring process as strengths of England's pedagogical approach although accountability and standards also serve as constraints of practice (Schiller and Willis, 2008).

Apprehension and uncertainty were identified frequently in the interviews where practitioners made comments such as 'I suppose' or 'I don't know, I think'. It was also evident where responses included a question for affirmation or confirmation by the interviewer such as 'can you?' 'you know?' These responses were particularly frequent during the first round of interviews where the focus was on dispositions, a subject area in which practitioners did not feel they had expertise in and this could be linked back to the low status of the early years workforce within England which leaves practitioners feeling powerless (Cooke and Lawton, 2008) and their actions framed by past experiences and social position (Duncan, 2011).

In the second round of interviews, questions around the general aims of early childhood were asked and practitioner perspectives about positive behaviour. It is interesting to note that practitioners expressed their views in a more confident manner when discussing expectations around children when management of behaviour is referred to more frequently (twenty-three times) throughout the Statutory Framework (DfE, 2017) and Development Matters (Early Education, 2012) compared to dispositions as a term which is not mentioned at all, curiosity which is mentioned only seven times and creativity mentioned only three times. This reinforces the suggestion made previously that curiosity and creativity are neglected in pedagogy (Leggett, 2017, Chak, 2007) in favour of a focus on distinguishing problem behaviour (Maclure et al, 2012), imposing regulative rules (Stirrup et al, 2016) and preparing children academically (Ang, 2014) to meet numeracy and literacy targets (Haslip and Gullo,

2017). The implications of this on practice and a barrier to a more process orientated system is significant considering that written guidance such as the EYFS have “the necessary authority to be taken as the truth” (Ortlipp, Arthur and Woodrow, 2011: 65).

In their references to the ‘battle of sitting’ we can see where practitioners respond to and adapt their practice to perceived rules not specified in policy guidance (Powell and Gooch, 2012) highlighting the challenge of guidance which is open to interpretation and the impact of personal values. As explained in chapter three, Duncan (2011) regards decision making as a process of bricolage and views agency as restrained rather than purposive and conscious and bound by “styles of thinking, sanctioned social relationships, institutions, the presumptions of particular social groups and places, lived law and social norms” (p1). In the figure below I have summarised these terms and linked this to practice within early years.

Figure 3 Factors influencing practitioner agency based on Duncan (2011)

Styles of thinking		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developmentalist approach• Children as passive
Sanctioned social relationships		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low status of early years workforce
Institutions		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educational system as a form of social control
Presumptions		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low importance of early years
Law		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The EYFS Statutory framework
Social norms		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accountability, values and perceptions of 'learning'

Certainly, within early years practice, pedagogical approaches are influenced by a range of theoretical perspectives (Wall et al, 2015) which as outlined previously in this thesis often reflect a developmentalist approach towards learning (Kilderry, 2015). In this context these can be regarded as 'styles of thinking'. These styles of thinking can serve to hold practitioners back from engaging "with the more difficult aspects of children's learning and development" (Manning-Morton, 2006:48) such as dispositions which are open to interpretation, hard to measure and may be evident in behaviours considered challenging according to current guidance. Sanctioned social relationships are evident in the ways that "individuals actions are framed by their past experience and current social position, and so they develop by necessity a practical sense of orientation that guides them in their actions" (Duncan, 2011:6).

The battle of sitting provides a good example of both a social norm and style of thinking which serves to constrain practice, even in the absence of guidance which formally recommends it.

An interesting theme to emerge from the data was around practitioner expertise and capability which presented itself as taken for granted assumptions that the achievement of training at level two and three resulted in 'qualified staff' and that on completion of this meant that training was complete. This provides support to Powell and Gooch's (2012) finding that 'knowing about' indicated common definitions about what knowledge is. This perspective is demonstrated in the statement 'I've got a level two and a level three. I've done both'. The use of 'done' here indicates the perspective that no further training or development is required for working with young children after this level. Indeed, the Statutory Framework (DfE, 2017: 21) states that "the daily experience of children in early years settings and the overall quality of provision depends on all practitioners having appropriate qualifications, training, skills and knowledge and a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities."

Reflective practice is noticeably absent from this description of staff requirements despite the research evidence demonstrating this to be an essential element of effective practice (Brownlee et al, 2015) and this in addition to the lack of opportunity for practitioners to engage in reflective dialogue around their practice (Powell and Gooch, 2012) limits agency further. The current focus of training serves only to advance knowledge, skills and practices and does not extend to practitioner dispositions or promote a culture of professional growth, an inside out, reflective approach or an ethic of responsibility for quality highlighted as necessary by Sheridan et al (2009). Indeed, a review of the impact of EYPS in 2013 which highlighted the positive impact of EYPS referred specifically to the enhanced confidence, reflective

practice and ability to enact change instilled in practitioners with this status (Davis and Capes, 2013). In addition, Neaum (2016) argues that professional autonomy is a necessity for the development of effective practice, but this is prevented by the lack of self-voice of the majority of practitioners working with children in the earliest years (Powell and Gooch, 2012).

In addition, one interesting perspective that came from an interview with a more senior member of staff in a team leader role was the belief that length of experience has high value and translates to more effective practice in the statement that

‘for people who are coming that are only young they don’t know what to expect from a two-year-old. I do only because I have had 14 years’ experience and I have been learning and going on courses’.

Later in the interview this perspective was reinforced by the comment ‘my assistants don’t know what to expect from a two-year-old because they don’t have experience’. Interestingly, and in contrast to this one of the participants had only worked with this age group a short while and regarded her role as an assistant to qualified staff but gave some very detailed and confident responses around the importance of being a creative practitioner

‘it affects the children if you are not creative at all. You have got to be as creative as you can whenever you are thinking about planning anything with children.’

Limited training opportunities which focus only on surface level knowledge and understanding serve as a barrier to the professionalisation of the early years workforce and furthermore limit the pedagogical approaches available. Brownlee et al (2015) make a distinction between professional development which relates to learning about professional practice and professional learning which refers to skills, approaches,

attitudes, values and beliefs. They recognise that knowledge can be viewed as absolute or constructed with beliefs about the process of knowledge having a significant impact upon how meanings are made and engagement in the learning process. Returning to the statement above, referring to level two and three. In saying 'I've done both', the practitioner indicates that her perspective is focussed on absolute knowledge, that the training opportunities and the information and guidance available provides all the information required to work in practice. This leaves no rationale for the practitioner to search for or even consider reflective or critical approaches to practice which can lead to transformative change (Brownlee et al, 2015).

As a senior member of staff, one practitioner in a leadership role discussed her responsibility for 'making sure' indicating a perceived regulatory role.

'Making sure the Nursery Officers are doing what they should...making sure they are planning correctly...making sure the ratios are always met'.

This regulation again links specifically to following the 'rules' or 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1980) of early years practice. Those rules outlined in the statutory and practice guidance (DFE, 2017, Early Education, 2013) and this serves to reinforce the absolute knowledge perceived to be contained in such documents. The result of this is that these conditions of practice act as constraints on educators motivations to act for the good (Salomon et al, 2014). A focus is needed to shift away from the child and practitioner compliance identified by Sims and Waniganayake (2015) and it makes sense for this to begin by promoting practitioner agency to enable them to question and reflect on dominant discourse as this will reveal ways in which children's agency can be promoted in practice.

8.5 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, a shift in attitude around how children's learning and development is interpreted is required to reveal, support and celebrate the agency of toddlers. With a pedagogical approach which is constrained and limited to such an extent by discourses on child development theory and taken for granted assumptions this poses a challenge, particularly considering the lack of agency held by practitioners.

Post-developmentalism (Edwards, 2009, Nolan and Kilderry, 2010) is an approach influenced by post-structuralist ideas which advocates that theory and practice should move beyond a reliance on child development theory. According to this perspective, children are regarded as capable, active citizens rather than simply 'developing.' This fits with the approach taken in Reggio Emilia which promotes the capabilities and power of young children. Nolan and Kilderry's (2010) framework acknowledges the importance of repositioning children's capabilities, viewing learning and development through a wider range of lenses rather than focusing on developmental lenses. In the previous chapter I explored the impact of the schematic developmental lens and the impact this has had on practice; this raises the question as to whether a disposition developmental lens could be used to view development and learning. "Looking at children's learning from a schematic perspective allows for new and different understandings to emerge and seemingly unconnected behaviours stimulate powerful young thinkers' intentional, conceptual explorations" (Atherton and Nutbrown: 2016:64).

In addition, a diverse approach to learning should be promoted to engage and empower our youngest children and this can only be achieved through empowering practitioners to be reflective and confident in their practice, by giving them agency.

To develop their agency, practitioners need support to become reflective and the confidence to question and critically analyse dominant approaches and discourse. It is encouraging to note that Powell and Gooch (2012) found an increase in practitioner confidence and agency when they were given the opportunities to reflect on and critique the status quo and reassuring to note that this was seen to 'translate into action' (p124). This reinforces Brownlee et al's (2015) suggestion that reflective practice can lead to transformative practice and provides optimism within a system of adversity considering the agenda around the early years workforce does not currently prioritise the training and development of practitioners. Empowering practitioners is a challenge where I feel academia can play a significant contribution in the provision of accessible material which promotes the development of reflective practice and confidence from within rather than from above.

9 Discourses around school readiness

In this chapter I explore the concept of school readiness and how this is defined and interpreted within policy and practice. As a key contemporary issue within the early years, the beliefs and expectations around school readiness can have a significant impact upon the experiences children have within early years settings and the expectations that are placed on them as learners. Dominant discourses of what constitutes school readiness is significant to practice and we know from the literature that there is a heavy focus within the early years on assessment and outcomes, a dominant discourse around curriculum in early years (Ang, 2014).

In describing a child's varying attitude towards engaging in listening at the setting, one practitioner gave the example of a child stating 'right, I am not in the mood to listen, don't want to listen, I would rather just play.' 'Just playing' is an interesting statement considering that central to the EYFS is a play-based curriculum (DfE, 2017, Pramling Samuelsson and Samuelsson, 2014). This perception of play was reinforced by another comment also indicating that play is valued less than adult led formal approaches to learning.

'If they are just left to play, which is fine to just let them play, but if that is all they are doing, like solely doing that then they are not getting the most out of it. They are just playing for the sake of playing'.

These may be interpreted as examples of where 'playing, can worry adults as is shown in the lingering policy scepticism around the place of play in early learning' (Atherton and Nutbrown, 2016: 63) and perhaps may link to the fact that "even as the intended principles of the curriculum espouse an exploratory play-based approach to the curriculum, they seem at odds with expectations set out in the standardised targets

and tests stipulated in the current assessment and curricular reforms” (Ang, 2014:191).

As mentioned previously, practitioners view their role as essential in preparing children for school ‘get children ready and set for when they go to school.’ These perspectives can be linked to the outcomes focus of the EYFS statutory framework (DfE 2017) which specifically explains the key role practitioners have in preparing children for school, highlighted in statements such as

‘ensuring children are ready to benefit from the opportunities available to them when they begin year one’ and ‘to help children prepare for more formal learning’ (p9).

In addition, ‘the three prime areas reflect the key skills and nine capacities all children need to develop and learn effectively and become ready for school’ (p8/9). This explicitly outlines the fundamental learning and development that must have taken place by the end of the Foundation stage for children to be school ready.

According to Murray (2015:1718) the English early years framework is characterised by narrow requirements around literacy and numeracy. She refers to this as “colonisation by external agents of the pedagogical relationship” and Neaum (2015: 249) relates this to the “ongoing troubled relationship between early years and early years policy and political rhetoric.”

A rather contradictory statement in the statutory framework implies that the EYFS is a preparatory phase whereby children are prepared to be able to learn in a positive way. “Early years providers must guide the development of children’s capabilities with a view to ensuring that children in their care complete the EYFS ready to benefit fully from the opportunities ahead of them” (p7).

One interpretation of this is that children should have the capacities to learn to be school ready, however, the promotion of these capacities is less evident within the EYFS, especially with a focus on ‘assessment arrangements for measuring progress’ (p5). With no explicit discussion of what these capabilities are and no instruction on how to measure and assess these capabilities it is no surprise that practitioners focus on those aspects of development whereby measurement and assessment follows a more straightforward and traditional approach to recognise and record skills, knowledge and understanding. Popham (2017) makes a distinction between measuring cognitive skills and measuring dispositions and explains that the measurement of cognition is more straightforward in that the level of skill, knowledge or development is highlighted in response to an assessment, be that an observation of behaviour, an exam or a written piece of work. However, Wood and Hedges (2016: 399) remind us that “knowledge-building is inherently bound with agency, control, power, and identities...not just with the instrumental attainment of specific curriculum goals.”

The EYFS profile (Standards and Testing Agency, 2017) involves a statutory assessment at the end of the EYFS which gives an indication of a “child’s knowledge, understanding and abilities, their progress against expected levels, and their readiness for Year 1” (Early Education, 2012:14). The profile measures children’s progress against seventeen Early Learning Goals from the prime and specific areas of learning and the Characteristics of Effective Learning. It is somewhat reassuring that the Characteristics of Effective Learning maintain presence within this assessment although regrettably, in the guidance around measuring CEL the statement “information about the child’s characteristics of effective learning gives year 1 teachers

vital background and context about their next stage of development and future learning needs” (Standards and Testing Agency, 2017: 23). plays down the importance of children’s approaches and attitudes to learning with the dispositions associated with active learning and creativity being valued and assessed only in terms of the next developmental stage. These discourses are “historically and geographically specific” and serve to define success in school (Bradbury, 2014: 351).

When considering the assessment focussed nature of education systems, Heckman and Kautz (2013:5) point out that “this focus is a consequence of a very limited conceptualization of human capabilities that assumes that achievement tests capture the important life skills”. They ask the question as to what important life skills are and point out that assessments may not measure the outcomes which do matter for success. To recap, the Statutory framework (DFE, 2017) upholds that the “three prime areas reflect the key skills and capacities all children need to develop and learn effectively and become ready for school”. The prime areas being Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED), Physical Development and Communication and Language. Although PSED includes making relationships, self-confidence and self-awareness, it also includes managing feelings and behaviour and it is here that it begins to become apparent why practitioners may focus largely on preparing and modifying children’s behaviour in readiness for school characterised in the responses below.

‘Just to get children ready and set for when they go to school and give them their first boundaries, so they can understand rules, understand sharing’.

‘Obviously, they need some timekeeping skills, they need social skills, understand boundaries, laws.’

‘I think sharing is the most important [social behaviour] because you see children have an argument over toys and you have to encourage them to pass it on’.

‘Learning to wait and take turns is important as well as your concentration because obviously further on in school your grades would suffer with things like if you weren’t listening and concentrating.’

One practitioner gave an example of active learning as where children engage ‘big floor jigsaws because they are all in a group and they are sharing, taking turns and concentrating on where the piece goes’ and again, the link back to positive behaviours is evident where sharing, turn taking and concentrating is emphasised.

It is concerning that the EYFS does not place the same emphasis on the CEL for their value in children’s readiness for school when the CEL refer to the approaches or processes children have towards learning and development. Instead the EYFS maintains a focus on the content curriculum rather than more active domains of learning (Ang, 2014) despite research and knowledge demonstrating otherwise (McDowell-Clark, 2016). This has implications for a disposition approach for within teacher centred approaches which focus on the development of factual knowledge and behaviour such as good manners, control is more important than creativity (Cheung, 2012).

An overemphasis on subjects such as literacy or maths prevents a balanced approach to learning (NAYEC, 2009). Children are currently primed in the EYFS in a very limited academic way for school (Ang, 2014). Faulkner & Coates (2013) refer to the prep-school nature of early years where academic preparation for literacy and numeracy (Haslip & Gullo, 2017) is driven by targets and attainment in a prescriptive, top down and assessment driven early years climate resulting in very young children being primed and tested in their academic abilities as part of school preparation (Ang, 2014). The learning outcomes and regimes of inspection (Neaum, 2016) approach ignores the importance of motivation to learn and resilience for school readiness (Pagani and

Fitzpatrick, 2014) and gives no consideration to how motivation, confidence, curiosity and creativity would benefit the workplace (Ang, 2014) and In addition, the focus on school readiness and assessment directs valuable attention from the quality of provision for two-year olds (Georgeson et al, 2014).

The evidence above highlights a real contradiction within the early years approach in England where policy and curriculum are not informed by research around best practice. This is of additional concern when the Statutory Framework claims that “the learning and development requirements are informed by the best available evidence on how children learn and reflect the broad range of skills, knowledge and attitudes children need as foundations for good future progress” (DfE, 2017: 7).

Popham (2017) maintains that the focus of education has been exclusively centred on cognitive skills with little focus on the affective skills which in his opinion provide more of an indication of the ways in which individuals will act in the future. “It is our task as early childhood educators to help today’s children learn to analyse, synthesize, and clarify information, not simply recite facts and figures from the past” (Rushton, 2011: 91). Ang’s (2014) recommendation that the role of early years education needs a shift in how it is perceived, in particular who benefits. A social pedagogic orientation places value on learning competencies as opposed to pre-primary subject content approaches which value learning of subjects such as maths and science (Williams et al, 2014) therefore, the way that learning is facilitated, and the adult child interactions should be a key concern for the pedagogical approach (Wall et al, 2015). This links to Laevers (2005) process of learning and Hatch’s (2010) teaching for learning.

9.1 The ‘othered’ areas of the EYFS

Adding further evidence to the influence of the EYFS and wider expectations around education, it became clear within the interviews and the practitioner observations that some elements of the EYFS are valued more than others. With regards to the impact of the curriculum, practitioners generally discuss the prime areas of learning with greatest confidence and enthusiasm although it must be acknowledged that five practitioners did maintain they focus on both areas. To recap, the characteristics of effective learning are regarded as fundamental to all other areas of learning within the EYFS and should have equal importance. The CEL include playing and exploring, active learning and creating and thinking critically and factors such as engagement, motivation and thinking are integral to them.

The research indicated that characteristics of effective learning were often regarded as an additional, optional or secondary focus ‘we observe the prime areas but also the ‘other ones.’ When asked specifically how CEL are observed, one practitioners response was

‘we don’t, we tend to just observe as they are playing,’ we observe the prime areas but then we have another box on the other side which is for the other ones’

‘If they are doing something and you think that’s to do with their learning and development then we’ll jot it down.’

Within the practitioner observations, the focus of the description tended to be on specific measurable outcomes, for example engaging in arts and crafts, using scissors, showing a preference for dominant hand, playing with a football, controlling the ball, mixing mud potions, repeating key words. These link specifically to elements of a Unique Child in Development Matters where practitioners are expected to

‘observe what a child is learning’ (Early Education, 2012) and which gives concrete examples of outcomes to be assessed through observation. This was reinforced in the statement that

‘we don’t observe for characteristics of effective learning but look for other things they do that can be logged in their learning and development’.

Explicit mention of dispositional language was made only in two of the nine observations where a child’s ability to focus was described and where children’s behaviour was observed in terms of their perseverance and determination. This means that seven of the observations made no reference to the dispositions and skills associated with the process of learning in an explicit way. Careful analysis of the observations revealed several additional dispositions could be highlighted in the description, children’s inquisitiveness, resourcefulness, persistence, imagination, curiosity, creativity, inventiveness could all be indicated by the examples in the discourse. The absence of this kind of language is therefore taken as evidence for the lack of dispositional language within early years practice.

9.2 The impact of discourse

In this research, the language of practitioners; the concepts, the terms used are framed and constrained by the discourse of education, more specifically the ‘sub’ discourse of early years education which contain fluid and evolving constructions of young children. This language in turn provides a framework within which practice forms. I argue in this research that the discourse of early years education is both influenced and constrained by the Early Years Foundation Stage (DFE, 2017)

meaning that the behaviours and development promoted and discouraged in young children is determined largely by practitioner's interpretations, understandings of and application of the EYFS. Referring back to the definition of discourse provided previously by Kress (1989), the EYFS provides a discourse via a set of statements (both specific statements around expected child development norms in Development Matters (Early Education, 2012), in the content and focus of the Statutory Framework and generally in the themes and principles of the EYFS. This expresses the meanings and values of early childhood education "giving structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about" (Kress, 1989:7). Therefore, the dominant discourses of the early years framework influence practice and those discourses which are only implicit or even absent in policy may be missed in practice.

9.3 Where is the discourse of disposition?

The data suggests that a discourse of disposition is not integral to early years practice. Practitioners were unable to discuss disposition in a confident and knowledgeable way which provides evidence that discourses of disposition are not readily available or accessible to practitioners. The interviews illustrated that practitioners were not familiar or confident with the concept of learning disposition. Four of the seven practitioners in the first round of interviews had not heard of the term, one mistakenly made links to learning disabilities and only two were confident they knew what it meant and made links in terms of the ways in which children learn. The following definitions given: 'different ways of learning' and 'the way you learn' indicate that practitioners *are* tuned in to the process of learning. However, although learning dispositions are very much related to the ways in which learning takes place it is critical that none of the

practitioners were able to give a clear and thorough definition of dispositions or provide examples without prompts. It is important here to point out that when the list of dispositions was given to practitioners they could all confidently identify the dispositions they felt were relevant to children aged two. This is taken as evidence that the language around dispositions is not something practitioners regularly use in practice although it is clear they are aware of a range of dispositions and their meaning. In support of this, the data from the practitioner observations highlighted that only in one observation had a practitioner referred to children demonstrating dispositions -Child A showed 'determination' and 'perseverance' when mixing mud potions.

In other observations practitioners referred to children engaging in a range of behaviours including 'finding out' which was mentioned in two observations and 'exploring' which was mentioned in four of the observations. Depending on the interpretation of the term, it could be concluded that 'finding out' and 'exploring' are behaviours which reveal curiosity, indicating that practitioners are aware of and tuned into the types of behaviours which indicate a curious approach but do not make explicit use of the term. This is an interesting finding which indicates that practitioners may have a superficial understanding of dispositions, although as Kilderry et al (2017) point out, opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of them in practice is necessary.

Within the practitioner observations, the focus was around what the children did and how this related to the prime and specific areas of learning of the EYFS (DfE, 2017). For example, playing in the mud kitchen, using equipment in a craft activity, kicking a ball, observing an aeroplane, noticing clouds, imitating behaviour in role play. This is taken as evidence for a focus on outcomes, on measurable behaviours which can be observed and assessed against the EYFS standards around expected and predicted

behaviours outlined in Development Matters (Early Education, 2012). This supports Ang's (2014) perspective that the early years is constrained by a discourse around assessment and that practitioners focus on the content curriculum and cognitive skills (Popham, 2017).

None of the observations made explicit reference to the process of learning as a key feature of the behaviour observed although practitioners did make note of children enjoying, interacting, playing, focussing, enjoying and being hands on in their observations. These processes of learning are therefore something that practitioners are aware of but perhaps are considered as secondary in comparison to the actual subject matter of the learning. This supports the research of Georgeson et al (2014) who found that practitioners in their study cited the prime areas of learning as key indicators of quality in provision for two-year olds. Interestingly no practitioners in Georgeson's research identified the Characteristics of Effective Learning as key for quality, and notably the researchers did not acknowledge this omission indicating these aspects were not a focus of the research. This issue of process vs outcome is integral to this chapter.

When discussing the assessment of dispositions in relation to adults, Diez (2006) suggests that dispositions should be embedded within curriculums, this too could be said for early years curriculums, particularly when practice is defined and constrained by curriculum guidance such as in the EYFS which has a significant influence on practice (Brooker and Woodhead, 2010) through the discourse it promotes.

It is pertinent here to reiterate that the term learning disposition is limited in policy and training guidance. It is not explicitly mentioned at all within the EYFS, either in the statutory framework or Development Matters. In addition, the Standards for the level

three Early Years Educator award make no reference to disposition (NCTL, 2013). The standards for Early Years Teacher Status (NCTL, 2013) explicitly state that Early Years Teacher's should "set goals that stretch and challenge children of all backgrounds, abilities and dispositions" (1.2) although the guidance gives no further detail about the types of disposition referred to. This is a step in the right direction towards recommendations made by Hosseini and Watt (2010) who suggest that teacher education programs should include more focus on creativity and that to promote creativity, teachers must "acquire knowledge and skills to infuse creative pedagogy into their school curriculum" (Cheung & Leung, 2013:397).

Cherrington (2016) found that practitioners use the language of Te Whāriki in New Zealand throughout their practice, regarding children as confident and competent learners and referring often to dispositions. We can conclude that language is significant as it has the power and ability to construct social realities and influence and shape individuals through the 'stories' people are told and those that they tell (Bruner, 2006) and the consequence of the absence of language regarding dispositions in England is likely to have a strong adverse effect upon practice.

Considering these findings, it is hardly surprising that practitioners who took part in this research who were all qualified to level two or three were neither familiar nor confident with the term disposition. It does raise questions as to why (albeit limited) knowledge and understanding of dispositions is the requirement of a graduate Early Years Teacher within early years but not a practitioner working at EYE level, particularly as the Statutory framework (DfE, 2017) outlines that a full and relevant level three qualification is required by the manager of a setting and at least half of the other staff must hold at least a level two qualification. The absence of criteria around

disposition demonstrates the wider lack of regard and value for these factors in young children's learning and development.

Feiman-Nemser and Schussler (2010) maintain that practitioners require knowledge and skills in addition to confidence to support children's creativity and curiosity and the conceptualisation of disposition is key to this. When the discussion in the interviews focussed broadly on dispositions, some practitioners felt that dispositions were fluid rather than constant:

'I think they just come and go, depending on the child on the day, because if a child is not in the right frame of mind to do anything, they won't if they're that stubborn; they'll be like, "No."'

This might indicate that dispositions are variable supporting Deakin-Crick et al's (2015) perspective that creativity as a disposition has both stable trait characteristics but is also affected by the social environment. This perspective is further reinforced by the statement

'you can see different behaviour in different two-year olds as well. It is just not always consistent, sometimes they might be really inquisitive and other times they might be really quiet'.

In this context, the practitioner appeared more confident in discussing inquisitiveness, frames of mind and stubbornness, reassuringly indicating that dispositional language is present and used. Practitioner confidence is enhanced through dialogue in addition to clear definitions and methods to identify and interpret dispositions (Kilderry et al, 2017), however as explained previously, practitioners within early years settings in England rarely get the opportunity to engage in this dialogue to express their voices (Powell and Gooch, 2012) and the EYFS lacks clear guidance on disposition thus

limiting their opportunities to develop workable and useable discourses which can influence practice.

9.4 Practitioner knowledge and understanding

It is important to acknowledge that there are significant gaps between the discourse of scholars and practitioners and this “discourse disconnect” (Julien and Williamson, 2010: 3) must be identified as a key factor which had an impact upon the responses in the interviews. The academic discourse of disposition is one underpinned by research and literature explored in this research and this is not necessarily available or accessible to practitioners working in settings, particularly those who have not followed an educational path to higher education. Earlier in this thesis I pointed out that policy does not always develop based on evidence from current research or from recommendations from experts in the field (McDowell-Clark, 2016). It therefore highlights a crucial role for scholars and academics to understand this lack of connection in discourse and to take steps to address this, perhaps through the development of resources which are accessible and useful in practice, whilst taking account the constraints of policy on action and agency. Cherrington’s (2016) research found that practitioners used the language of disposition throughout their practice which could be attributed in part to the fact that the language of disposition is visible and explicit within the Te Whāriki curriculum within which the practitioners were following.

The status of the early years workforce within England remains low and the limited pay and conditions (Cooke and Lawton, 2008) has a negative effect upon practitioner well-being (Boyd, 2013) competency (Royer and Moreau, 2015) and practice which is

constrained by the views that there are 'right' ways of thinking and doing (Cumming, 2015). In addition, training for early years practitioners such as the Early Years Educator qualification (focuses on the content curriculum, the what rather than the how (Carr and Claxton, 2004) the product rather than the process (Laevers, 2005). An additional factor is that in the current economic climate there is a lack of additional training and continual professional development opportunities (Goouch and Powell, 2013) which results in a lack of specialist training necessary for practitioners working with very young children (Dalli, 2011). It is clear that within England, practitioners are not supported or encouraged to become or view themselves as pedagogical experts with autonomy and opportunities to make decisions (Heikka et al, 2018). Further structural challenges which constrain practice include the focus on assessment and outcomes (Ang, 2014) and the influence of accountability and standards (Busby, 2018).

Despite these challenges to practitioner knowledge and understanding, it is important to reflect on elements of early years practice which have been enhanced by growing knowledge and understanding. In the introduction I discussed the concept of schema within early years and the growing knowledge and understanding in practice of schematic behaviour upon very young children's learning and development. Schemas are defined as repeated patterns of action which provide adults with the opportunity to note and understand children's intentions (Arnold, 2015) and motivations (Athey, 2007) and "the learning of very young children can be supported by practitioners developing a schematic pedagogy which focuses on structures of children's thinking" (Atherton and Nutbrown, 2016:63).

Some of the behaviours seen in behaviour demonstrating discovery through action (Arnold, 2015) associated with schemas can be repetitive and perceived as disrupting and challenging. For example, an intense interest in throwing objects and a fascination with flowing water as identified in a 'dynamic vertical' (Athey, 2007) or trajectory schema can, to a practitioner who does not have the knowledge or confidence to identify and support the schema be interpreted as challenging or disruptive behaviour. However, knowledge and understanding of this valuable, motivated and engaged interest can lead to valuable opportunities being offered for children to explore the concepts they are interested in. This provides reassurance that academic research can translate into workable information for practitioners providing them with new discourses to consider in practice. By introducing a 'schematic pedagogy' new and different understandings can emerge (Atherton and Nutbrown, 2016). The success of this approach provides reassurance that through supporting practitioners to extend their knowledge and understanding and confidence in aspects of practice that may be new or novel we can support them to widen the discourses which influence the way they work with young children as when practice becomes less reliant on dominant discourses or ways of knowing, new possibilities are opened up in practice (Degotardi, 2017).

In relation to continuing professional development, one of the final questions asked in the first round of interviews was to enquire whether practitioners would find it useful to develop their knowledge and understanding of disposition through some additional information, to which the response was a resounding yes. Practitioners felt that guidance which was 'not too lengthy, short and to the point' would be valuable in supporting their practice around dispositions. They suggested that information about dispositions which gave explanations and provided guidance on what practitioners

could do to support learning further would be valued. 'What it is and how to do' it was one recommendation with another suggesting a format 'similar to the EYFS with the learning objective and role of the adult laid out in a table.' Another suggested a checklist and a couple indicated a bulleted list would be useful. Although it is reassuring that practitioners are eager to develop their knowledge and understanding, indicating some level of reflective practice and acknowledgement that they too are continually potential lifelong learners, it does indicate that in developing this knowledge and understanding there is a clear preference for being told what to look for which may indicate their lack of confidence and agency in using their own initiative which is necessary for a successful disposition approach to learning (Feiman-Nemser and Schussler, 2010). These responses do however provide a valuable insight into some approaches that practitioners may find helpful to develop and extend their practice.

9.5 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, it is clear that the discourses which dominate early years are not ones that favour a disposition approach. Discourses focus on school readiness, numeracy, literacy and positive behaviours and as practitioners are trained to primarily focus on outcomes of learning it is these that ultimately have an impact on practice.

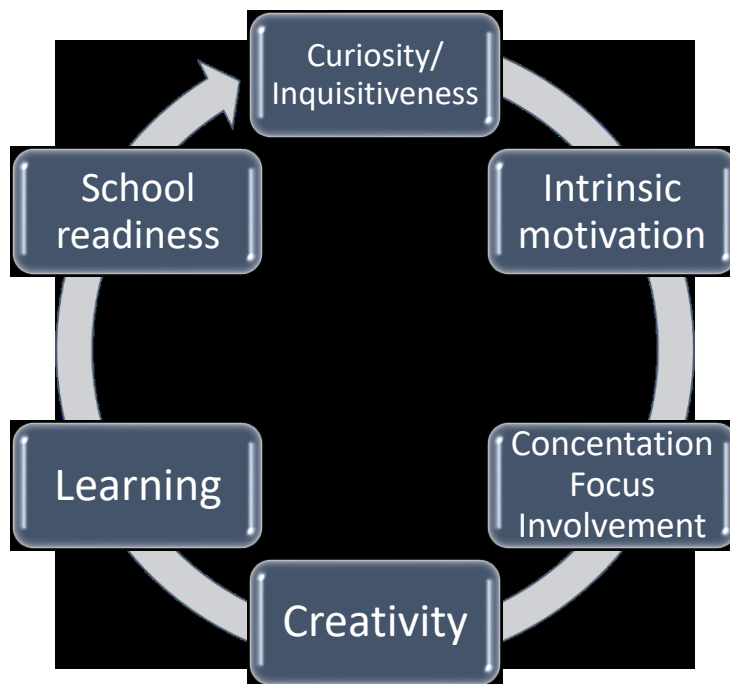
A range of wider structural conditions such as the low status of the workforce, limited opportunities for training and development, external constraints including the focus on assessment and outcomes all serve to limit the opportunities for practitioners to become more reflective and powerful in their approach. The power of dominant discourses of development and the agency of both children and practitioners explored previously provide further explanation for the current approach in early years.

Practitioners need to have the autonomy, agency and confidence to interpret practice guidance in a way which enables them to focus on the process of learning as opposed to the outcomes. This can be enhanced with knowledge and understanding of dispositions and value attributed to the importance of them. Once behaviours are interpreted in terms of the processes of learning they can be directed into more positive channels to celebrate varied and unique approaches to learning and development which may not necessarily fit with expectations of behaviour around school readiness.

The example of schema work opens up some possibilities for a change of approach and although it not quite so straightforward to fully transform dominant discourses which characterise and constrain practice within the early years it does give reassurance of the possibility of small-scale change based on the appropriate sharing of academic research findings.

An alternative approach to school readiness is suggested in the figure below which explains how a curious approach may lead to a child being intrinsically motivated to learn which will lead them to concentrate and focus on a task, demonstrating high levels of involvement. This may lead to creative and novel approaches to solving problems and can result in effective learning taking place. This constructs true school readiness which we should be aiming for, as if children have an intrinsic motivation, are curious and can approach learning in a creative way, surely those expected aspects of education such as literacy and numeracy will develop in a natural way.

Figure 4 The link between curiosity, creativity and school readiness.



10 Conclusion

An interpretivist approach was selected for this research based on the premise that I would be exploring practice reflecting the perspectives of a small sample of the early years workforce. I regard knowledge as a social construct (File et al, 2017) and meanings arise through and from relationships and interaction and this underpinned my decision to investigate the insider perspective (Lapan et al, 2012) and uncover the meaning of the phenomena (Merriam, 2009) of learning disposition for those most closely involved in practice. The significance of discourse which became clear early on in this research warranted an approach which would enable me to explore the ways in which these impact on policy and practice and this is only possible by considering the discourse of those working in practice.

During the pilot study and first round of interviews it became clear that the initial assumptions and expectations which directed the primary focus of the research to explore the ways that dispositions were encouraged in practice were challenged. There were stark differences in the way that dispositions, specifically creativity were defined and used in practice, therefore it was essential to follow in the direction of the research and uncover the meanings and assumptions held by practitioners in the field as they unfolded. The themes identified in the interviews were revealed through careful analysis and review of the data and this resulted in a decision to search for similar themes in documents developed by practitioners (observations) and in documents which influence and frame practice (the EYFS and training guidance).

As an academic working with a focus in early years it was essential that I acknowledged my own assumptions and knowledge and understanding throughout but also maintained the most objective stance possible to uncover and report those

definitions and interpretations held by participants as it was their discourses which are significant to this study.

This chapter is structured around the research questions initially outlined in the introduction to this thesis which framed and directed the focus of the research. Each research question is considered in turn where I summarise the assumptions I have made based on my findings. I then go on to reflect on the limitations of this study before concluding with recommendations for practice based on my findings.

10.1 In what ways are learning dispositions valued and promoted within early years settings?

Initially it was surprising to reveal the extent to which dispositions are absent from policy and practice within the early years, particularly considering the research and literature that have indicated the importance of these as motivations to learn. It was apparent that dispositions in general and specific dispositions such as creativity and curiosity are not at the forefront of practice and this could be attributed to a number of reasons including the lack of reference to them in policy (DfE, 2017, Early Education, 2012) and the challenge of defining and measuring dispositions (Sadler, 2002). In addition, the assessment and 'outcomes' focus of the EYFS can be regarded as incompatible with a disposition approach as it reflects a content rather than process orientated system (Laevers, 2005).

The current emphasis of training of early years practice focuses on a competence approach and the research indicated that practitioners regard knowledge as absolute (Brownlee et al, 2015) and policy as a regime of truth (Fenech and Sumison, 2007).

The result of this is that guidance such as Development Matters (Early Education, 2012) is interpreted in narrow ways and regarded as a document of ‘developmental truths’ (Wood and Hedges, 2016). This limits practitioner opportunities to challenge, to develop critical consciousness (Powell and Gooch, 2012) to be reflective and to demonstrate agency. Knowledge of disposition is not included as a competency unless a practitioner continues to study onto level six and gain Early Years Teacher Status (NCTL, 2013), therefore level three practitioners, at the forefront of practice are unlikely to have the opportunity to consider the meaning or relevance of disposition, particularly when this is not included as a focus of practice in the EYFS.

Reassuringly, when prompted with a list of possible dispositions, practitioners were able to identify the ones they regarded as relevant to two-year olds indicating that dispositions are considered in practice to some level, albeit in an implicit way, mirroring the ways in which they appear in policy. A range of terms associated with creativity and curiosity were highlighted and two-year olds were regarded as inquisitive, impatient and adventurous indicating that some clarification around disposition to support practitioners to make links between for example being curious and inquisitive and creative and adventurous would be useful.

Within the EYFS, dispositions seem to be presented as having value only in the way that they support children to achieve a worthy goal such as “show curiosity about numbers” and “creates and experiments with symbols and marks” (Early Education, 2012:33) rather than curiosity and creativity having value in their own right.

Despite creativity and curiosity being regarded as fundamental to the very earliest years of development a common theme to emerge from the research was that dispositions, particularly creativity was found more in children who were older, and

who demonstrated this through their language. This was taken as evidence of the impact of a narrow developmentalist approach within the early years whereby whilst practitioners focus on a child to become they miss what they are being.

Within the EYFS, the area which is concerned most with the processes involved in learning is the Characteristics of Effective Learning although it became evident that this area was in many ways othered in practice becoming a secondary focus and practitioners did not place much emphasis on the ways in which the CEL ‘underpin learning and development across all other areas and support the child to become an effective and motivated learner’ (Early Education, 2012:4). It is my view that a lack of focus on the Characteristics of Effective Learning is a missed opportunity to interpret the practice guidance in a more process orientated way. It is however an area of practice within the limits of the current approach which offers the opportunity to widen ways of thinking, filling in the gaps with a discourse of disposition.

10.2 What behaviours, skills and attributes are promoted and discouraged within the early years?

There is a tendency within the early years to view children’s behaviour at two-years old as developing, as becoming, as not quite there and this perspective was revealed in discussions and examples of practice in addition to in policy. A developmental, deficit view of early childhood is promoted within the EYFS (DfE, 2017, Early Education, 2012), and in practitioner training (NCTL, 2013). This approach is underpinned by traditional theories of child development and learning which provide a dominant discourse in the early years focussed on becoming.

One common emphasis of practice for two-year olds tends to be on the promotion of positive behaviours which are considered essential for children to be school ready. These positive behaviours include sitting, waiting, listening and concentrating and behaviours which are interpreted as challenging and therefore discouraged include being stubborn, bossy and impatient. The interpretation of these behaviours in this way reflects a limited discourse around what it means to be school ready which was a common theme to emerge from the research, despite the focus of the research being on two-year olds.

10.3 How do practitioners view the role of the early years in ensuring children are school ready?

Practitioners regarded their role as integral to preparation for school readiness and children are prepared primarily in terms of the promotion of perceived positive and appropriate behaviours for school. Behaviours which do not fit in with formal approaches to learning are discouraged and interpreted as challenging. Prime and specific areas of learning are prioritised over characteristics of effective learning which appear to be an additional, add on or 'othered' consideration rather than a primary one in practice. The EYFS focus on outcomes, assessment and behaviour management and lack of emphasis on process, capacity or disposition result in a constrained discourse of school readiness which restricts the range of ways in which practitioners interpret school ready.

10.4 How does policy impact on practitioner attitudes and approaches?

The EYFS (DfE, 2017, Early Education, 2012) is integral to early years practice and practitioners demonstrated a depth of knowledge and understanding of key elements of the EYFS including a unique child, the prime and specific areas of learning and areas of development. Practitioners lack confidence in reflective practice, and this could be attributed to their low status as an early years workforce and to the competence approach of training in the early years. A lack of agency has been identified within the early years workforce and the result of this is that a limited approach to learning and development based on those discourses which are more explicit within the EYFS is offered.

Practitioners tend to follow more explicit guidance of the EYFS which is not open to interpretation or critical analysis and again this leads to the conclusion that more explicit support to extend practice around the Characteristics of Learning would be one approach to embed a discourse of disposition.

The EYFS is based on a range of theoretical perspectives which promote a developmentalist approach which limits the agency of young children. By offering a wider discourse, practitioners can develop the confidence to question the assumptions made about children's learning and development and reflect on other approaches, viewing learning and development through a wider range of lenses.

10.5 What is the focus of the early childhood framework in England?

The EYFS has a range of explicit areas of focus, many of which can be traced back to classical child development theory which tends to position young children as passive in their learning and development and for learning to be a linear process with specific outcomes as aspirations. Prime and specific areas of learning are focussed on those skills and behaviours that can be measured against developmental norms within the guidance. The Characteristics of Effective Learning is an aspect of the EYFS which can most be likened to a disposition approach and these characteristics are promoted as key underpinnings of the EYFS. As outlined above, in practice, these elements seem to have a secondary focus. The child as a Unique Being is one of the principles of the EYFS and is inherent throughout the guidance, this is an aspect of practice which was evident throughout the interviews. A balance between a child and adult led approach is promoted but, in reality, the assessment focus of the EYFS requires children to be assessed and measured against expected standards which constrain pedagogical approach and limit practitioners to more formal, adult directed approaches to ensure children ultimately meet the early learning goals. This limited approach can be enhanced by a focus on promoting the agency of both children and practitioners within the early years.

10.6 How does the discourse of disposition affect practice?

The absence of a discourse around disposition results in this aspect of children's learning and development being missed, ignored or discouraged in practice. In addition, practice in the early years tends to favour outcomes over processes of

learning which leaves little opportunity to consider the variety of approaches through which children may learn and develop.

10.7 Final words and reflections

It is important to acknowledge that as an academic I have a vested interest in the recognition of the valuable work early years practitioners do and that I am dedicated to the drive to raise standards and quality within the early years in England. These values will have inevitably influenced the questions I asked and the factors I viewed as central to this study. This positionality has also enabled me to reflect on the ways that practitioners can become empowered with knowledge and the confidence to develop a reflective and critical approach, evidence of which I have seen frequently in my work with students on a Foundation Degree in Early Years. Despite the prevailing low status of the early years workforce, practitioners can and do extend their knowledge and understanding, reflective approach and consider a wider range of discourses than those presented in policy and this empowers practitioners, giving them the agency they, as professional experts in practice of our youngest children deserve.

10.8 My unique contribution to knowledge

This research has enabled me to develop a unique contribution to the field of disposition in the early years in a number of ways. The focus on practice with children under the age of three offers the first contribution. The perspectives of practitioners working with the youngest children within early years have traditionally been neglected

in literature and research and this study has provided a step towards redressing this balance, offering a contribution to the slowly growing knowledge base exploring factors affecting practice for these individuals. Furthermore, although, dispositions have been the focus of research for older children and adults, a disposition approach for very young children is not something that has been prioritised, despite the worth of instilling good habits and capacities early on in life where such rich and rapid learning and development take place. Indeed, the very label of the 'Foundation Stage' indicates its value in providing foundations not only for learning skills and knowledge but also the foundations for effective processes of learning providing a clear rationale for such a focus.

An interesting finding discussed in chapter seven was the presumption that very young children are expected to learn not through being active and through exploration but through sitting. The term 'battle of sitting' was adopted in response to the comment being used by a practitioner in the interviews. I regard this as a significant finding and area worthy of future research as this reflects the limited way in which children's learning and development is viewed and valued and one of the challenges of practice experienced by practitioners which, incidentally, is not a requirement of the EYFS.

The research also highlights the impact of taken for granted assumptions and implicit values which serve to constrain practice. For example, the characteristics of effective learning were regarded as 'othered' areas, secondary to the prime and specific areas which tend to be prioritised. This fits with the broader finding that practitioners focus on outcomes of learning rather than process which has implications for the practitioner role.

My critical review of the Early Years Foundation Stage in relation to the discourses embedded within it offers a further original contribution and I conclude that ultimately only through an increased emphasis on dispositions such as creativity and curiosity in training, continual professional development and through revised policy and practice will practitioners develop the knowledge, confidence and skills to promote these in young children. It is clear that in the current climate within our society that this will be a significant challenge. However, this research does offer small scale recommendations which can be embedded in practice and which may support practitioners to question and reflect on the approaches and discourses which dominate the early years in a step towards challenging the wider social, cultural, academic, political and economic issues which constrain effective practice. Using the schema work as an example, I have identified a practical, realistic and successful approach to extend the discourse of disposition to practice.

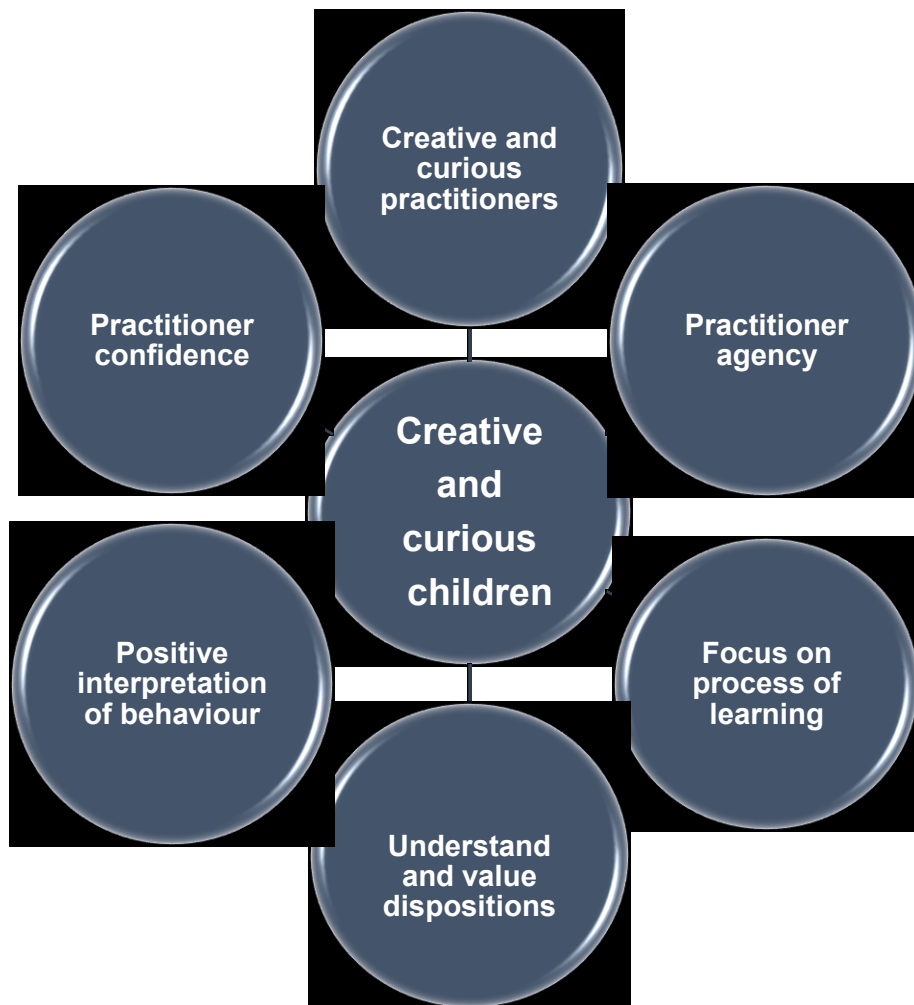
My findings and reflections have enabled me to develop a range of models of effective practice found in chapter six where I have collated a range of terms associated both positively and negatively with creativity and curiosity. In chapter eight I explored some of the factors affecting practitioner agency through the lens of Duncan (2011) who outlined a range of factors affecting individuals ability to make decisions. In chapter nine I provided a model outlining the links between curiosity, creativity and school readiness and below I provide a model which identifies a range of areas where enhancements could be made to enable a disposition approach in early years.

It is my perspective that these areas can be improved through extending the discourses of practice and this opens an exciting opportunity for scholarly and academic work to have a positive impact on effective practice. In summary, figure six, on the next page, outlines that for children to be creative and curious in their learning

they need practitioners working with them who have the confidence to reflect on practice and for this they require agency. Practitioners also need the autonomy to interpret behaviour of young children in ways which allow for reflection rather than being limited by assessment and school readiness discourse. Practitioners need to have a creative and curious approach, which again depends on their confidence and own lifelong learning approach. Finally, practitioners need to understand dispositions and have the tools (in the absence of formal assessment tools) in the form of a discourse of disposition.

In the next section I conclude with a model exploring the factors which enhance and weaken disposition based on the findings of this research, a key element of these factors is that this model can be applied throughout the lifespan and is not limited to the early years. This has wide implications for learning throughout the formal educational years, learning in further and higher education and professional development throughout the lifespan.

Figure 5 Areas requiring focus to enhance children's creativity and curiosity



10.9 Strengths and limitations of the study

Because of the qualitative nature of this research, I do not attempt to make grand claims which can be generalised across all early years practice within England. A small sample of settings offered the opportunity to highlight the perspectives only of the participants who took part. Furthermore, the research provided only a snapshot of perspectives which were grounded in time and context. These limitations of the study prevent me from being able to make broader generalisations from the data. It was neither the aim or the remit of this small scale interpretivist study to make wider generalisations, however, after investigation of some of the wider factors which have an impact on practice in England such as policy and practitioner training guidance it is apparent that supporting the development of learning dispositions of young children is not a priority and this may indicate that practice beyond those settings involved in the research may also lack such a focus. This is certainly an area worthy of further investigation.

Initially I expected through this research that I would be able to develop a toolkit to support practitioners to embed the discourse of disposition into practice but on reflection on the data collected it became clear that this rather simplistic approach would only be a small move towards embedding disposition in practice within a wider education system which encourages approaches which hinder a revised focus on the processes important to learning. It became necessary to explore the wider factors which have a strong influence on provision and practice, and more specifically, influence the discourses of early years as an understanding of these is essential to reveal some of the challenges faced in practice.

A strength of the study is that a number of influential discourses which frame and constrain early years practice in England and have a significant influence on the values of practitioners, their expectations and ultimately their practice have been revealed. These include discourses around 'becoming,' rather than 'being,' with practitioners focussing on the outcomes of learning rather than the processes and the discourse of developmentalism prevailing, and finally discourses of school readiness which prioritise academic outcomes and expected behaviours presumed necessary for formal learning.

The findings have wider implications for education more broadly in England as the National Curriculum (DFE, 2014), inspection frameworks (Hanson and Appleby, 2015) and league tables have a strong influence on practice. The current focus on attainment and progress demonstrated through final assessment (Leckie and Goldstein, 2017) results in teachers (and increasingly, in Higher Education, academics) having limited options but to focus on outcomes of learning as opposed to processes. Therefore, the models of effective practice which propose a revised focus on practitioner knowledge and understanding of disposition, practitioner agency, process rather than outcome, reflective practice and a view of development which moves away from a focus on 'becoming' has relevance to a range of educational settings within formal education and beyond.

This research has provided valuable evidence of the impact of policy on practice which has implications when policy is broad and open to interpretation and when practitioners do not feel empowered to question take for granted assumptions.

10.10 Future research

I explained in chapter four my rationale for using practitioner perspectives around disposition as opposed to collecting data specifically with children and this limitation raises questions regarding the extent to which this research truly represents the views of children. I propose that further research is needed directly with children to reveal the ways in which they display creative and curious behaviours and the ways in which these are encouraged or discouraged in practice.

Due to the small-scale nature of this research it would be pertinent to extend the investigation on a wider scale to explore the discourses which have importance and influence on early years practice more broadly as this would enable further generalisations to be made and recommendations for training on a grander scale.

As a concept central to this study, the 'battle of sitting' which is characterised by the beliefs of many educational professionals that learning takes place in a formal seated way is one area which is worthy of further investigation. The expectations around behaviour for learning have an impact on learning not just in early childhood but affect and constrain valuable opportunities to learn in a more active way during the formal school years, in further and higher education and for lifelong learning generally.

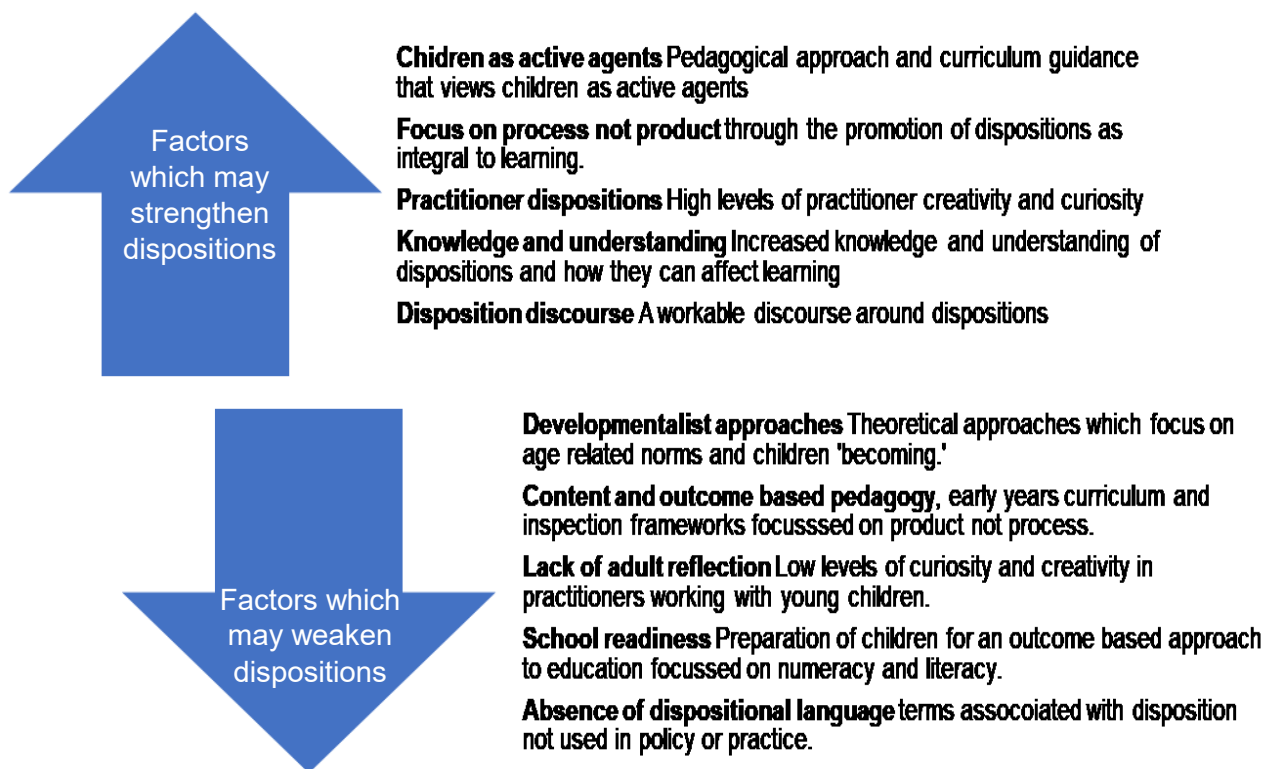
10.11 Final words

In a society increasingly characterised by disadvantage, poverty, inequality and uncertainty, we have a responsibility to our young children to support their learning and development in ways which will enable them to reach their potential. Beyond the early years is a long period of compulsory education which if approached by children

with strong dispositions to learn will have a positive impact on the challenging process of acquiring the depth and breadth of knowledge required within our twenty first century society. Strong creative and curious dispositions will enable young children to face challenges and new experiences with the confidence and the motivation to engage in a lifelong process of learning essential for success in such a rapidly changing and diverse society.

My final model summarises the factors that can strengthen and weaken dispositions and indicates where additional guidance and focus can be made to promote and strengthen the curiosity and creativity of very young children, thus enabling them to develop positive motivations for learning and become lifelong learners. This model provides a framework for where action can be taken and illustrates my reflections on this piece of research. As I mentioned earlier, this model also has implications for learners beyond the early years and can be used to review approaches to learning throughout the lifespan.

Figure 6 Factors which strengthen and weaken dispositions.



In the introduction I outlined my personal rationale for an interest in the field of disposition and it is fitting now to conclude with some final reflections on the dispositions I observe in my own children. The dispositions Amelia and Charlie displayed in their early years seem relatively enduring and consistent and continue to affect the ways in which they approach learning, their motivations and the ways in which professionals working within the education system respond to them. Charlie's curious, creative and reflective approach prove to be a challenge within a secondary school focussed on behaviour management and a top down, teacher led approach to learning whilst Amelia's more formal, (although now less resilient) approach to learning lends itself well to the expectations of teachers and that strong internal motivation to learn remains. Over the next few years which are characterised, constrained and

driven by continuous formal assessment at Key Stage four there seems little freedom for creativity and curiosity and Amelia and Charlie's 'success' will be determined largely by the ways in which they can conform to the expectations and requirements of this outcome driven system. It is my hope that their dispositions will endure through this period and can later be nourished and developed to add to their tools for success as they continue their journey of lifelong learning.

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12.1 Appendix 1 Interview schedule round one

Ethical considerations to remind participants:

- I would like to record the interviews, are you happy for me to do so?
- All recorded data will be stored on a secure computer and the data will be deleted once the interviews have been written up.
- I really welcome you sharing your experiences with me and want to take this opportunity to thank you for your time and knowledge.
- You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time
- You can choose not to answer any of the questions.
- If after the interview you wish for your responses to not be used as part of the research you can let me know up until the data is analysed in September.
- Your name will not be identified throughout the research and all data will remain anonymous.
- Please let me know if you would like any of the questions explaining.
- Please feel free to add any further information you feel I may not have asked.

Questions

1. Can you tell me about your role and experience working with two-year olds?
2. What skills do you think two-year olds need to have to be able to learn in a positive way?
3. Do you think those skills are static and constant or do they change?
4. What types of social behaviours do you observe in two-year olds?
5. Are there any behaviours that you feel provide a barrier to learning for two-year olds?
6. Do you focus more on the Prime areas of learning or Characteristics of effective learning for this age group or do you focus equally on them?
7. Can you give examples of toddlers behaviour demonstrating personal, social and emotional development?
8. What do you look for?
9. How do you observe characteristics of effective learning?
10. How does this lead into your planning and next steps?
11. In what way do you think characteristics of effective learning influence two-year olds behaviour?
12. How do you support children to develop characteristics of effective learning?
13. Have you heard of the term learning dispositions?
14. What is your understanding of learning dispositions?
15. How do you see these as having an impact on children's learning?
16. Are there any of these dispositions you have observed in two-year olds? take your time to identify them (List of dispositions).

17. Are there any dispositions that you observe regularly in two-year olds?
18. What dispositions do you feel are not relevant for children around the age of two?
19. Are toddlers creative in their play? Can you give examples?
20. In what ways do you feel you support the development of children's learning dispositions?
21. Do you feel a guide providing details of relevant dispositions explaining 'look fors' and 'next steps' would enhance your work with children?
22. What would make a guide useful?
23. What would make a guide difficult to use?

12.2 Appendix 2 List of possible dispositions

STRATEGIC	CREATIVE	TENACIOUS
ADVENTUROUS	INTREPID	PERSISTANT
SENSITIVE	AUDACIOUS	THOUGHTFUL
HESITANT	RISKY	REFLECTIVE
POSITIVE	OPTIMISTIC	BOSSY
TACTICAL	CAUTIOUS	EMOTIONAL
INTERFERING	PERSISTENT	REASONED
STUBBORN	ASSERTIVE	BOLD
OPTIMISTIC	WILLING	COURAGEOUS
IMAGINATIVE	INTERESTED	RESOURCEFUL
SPONTANEOUS	INDEPENDENT	INVENTIVE
EXPLORATIVE	AUTONOMOUS	COOPERATIVE
FOCUSSED	RESPONSIVE	PURPOSEFUL
IMPATIENT	CAUTIOUS	CRITICAL
MOTIVATED	COLLABORATIVE	RELUCTANT
PLAYFUL	RESILIENT	INQUISITIVE
SELF-MOTIVATED	CONTENTIOUS	FEISTY

12.3 Appendix 3 Interview schedule round two

Ethical considerations to remind participants:

- I would like to record the interviews, are you happy with that?
- All recorded data will be stored on a secure computer and the data will be deleted once the interviews have been written up.
- I really welcome you sharing your experiences with me and want to take this opportunity to thank you for your time and knowledge.
- You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time
- You can choose not to answer any of the questions.
- If after the interview you wish for your responses to not be used as part of the research you can let me know up until the data is analysed in September.
- Your name will not be identified throughout the research and all data will remain anonymous.
- Please let me know if you would like any of the questions explaining.
- Please feel free to add any further information you feel I may not have asked.

Questions

1. What do you feel the aim of nursery education and care is?
2. In what ways do you support children within nursery to be ready for school?
3. What skills do you feel children need to be successful in their education? Why do you feel these are important?
4. Do you feel there are any behaviours which prevent children from developing to their potential? Can you give an example?
5. How do you support children who do not easily fit into the routines of nursery -for example during circle time?
6. Can you list the types of positive behaviours that are encouraged within nursery?
7. Can you tell me the types of behaviours within nursery that are discouraged? Why?
8. What informs your knowledge about the types of behaviours that are discouraged and encouraged in young children?

12.4 Appendix 4 Consent forms (parents and practitioners)

Dear Parents/Carers

My name is Sarah Rawding and I am conducting some research to explore the ways in which children learn personal skills (such as co-operation, resilience, independence, self-regulation etc) which enable them to become effective learners of other more educational skills such as literacy and numeracy. These skills are also known as learning dispositions (and are closely linked to Characteristics of Effective Learning). Research shows that they are vital for effective later learning. I have chosen to focus my study on exploring the learning dispositions of two-year olds.

I will be attending the setting over the next few months to observe children during their play and daily routine. I will work closely with practitioners to develop positive and respectful relationships with children and will ensure my presence at the setting does not interfere with the daily routines and activities. I will respect the rights and opinions of children at all times and will consider the reactions of children to my presence to ensure this is not intrusive.

The research will have no negative effects on children or practitioners but will have benefits in that it will support children in their learning process. All observations will be documented but no names will be recorded therefore I can assure your child's involvement in the research will remain anonymous and the findings confidential although in line with the setting Safeguarding policy I have a duty to report any safeguarding concerns.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and I respect your decision as to whether to allow your child to be observed. Please return the slip below if you do *not* wish your child to be observed as part of this research. You may withdraw your consent for your child to be observed at any time during the data collection period (March to June) by returning this slip.

As the research progresses I would very much welcome your views and opinions and hope my findings will provide some useful guidance for practitioners and you as parents/carers to support your child's development. Please feel free to chat to me when I am in the setting or contact me using the details below. My research supervisor is Dr Anne Kellock, Sheffield Hallam University and can be contacted on 0114 225 4605 or a.kellock@shu.ac.uk should you have any issues you wish to raise.

I will ensure the final research document and a summary of the research is made available for you to read once this is completed.

If you do not wish your child to be observed as part of the research please return the following slip to the setting which will be passed onto me.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sarah Rawding

Sarah Rawding | Senior lecturer in Early Years | Sheffield Hallam University | 10416 Arundel | Tel: 0114 2254975 | s.rawding-ward@shu.ac.uk

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Research withdrawal slip

Please complete this slip and return to the setting if you do not wish for your child to be observed as part of the research or if you would like to withdraw your consent at any time.

Name of child.....

Parent/carers name.....

Parent/carers signature..... Date.....

Dear Practitioners

My name is Sarah Rawding and I am conducting some research into the ways in which children learn personal skills such as co-operation, resilience, independence and self-regulation which enable them to become effective learners of other more educational skills such as numeracy and literacy. These skills are also known as Learning Dispositions and are closely linked to the Characteristics of Effective Learning. Research shows that positive learning dispositions are a valuable aspect of later learning therefore I have chosen to focus my research on the dispositions of two-year olds and would like to develop resources to support early years practitioners to identify and support the development of learning dispositions.

I will be attending your setting over an extended period to conduct some observations of children in their play. My observations will focus on the behaviours and actions of two-year olds and not child-practitioner interactions. I intend to work closely with you to ensure my presence does not impact on the setting routines or your practice.

As experienced practitioners I would welcome your input into the study and would like to invite you to take part in an interview where I can gain an insight into your perspectives on children's learning. The findings from the interview as well as the data from observations will be used to develop resources for practitioners around dispositions. I will endeavour to arrange the interview at a convenient time and place for you and the interview should take no longer than one hour. I would like to record the interview to enable me to give you my full attention, the recordings will be erased as soon as the interview has been transcribed and no copies will be retained.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you have the right to decide not to participate. You also have the right to withdraw your participation and details of the timeframe for withdrawing your data will be given at the start of the interview. There will be no adverse consequences for non-participation or withdrawal. All data will be stored securely and I will assure your anonymity throughout as no names or identifying details will be disclosed. Please note that in line with your setting Safeguarding policy I have a duty to report any safeguarding concerns.

Please feel free to discuss the research with me while I am in the setting, or I can be contacted on the details below. My research supervisor is Dr. Anne. Kellock, Sheffield Hallam University and can be contacted on 0114 225 4605 or a.kellock@shu.ac.uk

Please return the slip below if you would like to be part of this research.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sarah Rawding

Practitioner consent form

By completing and returning this reply slip I give my consent to be interviewed as part of the research conducted by Sarah Rawding. I understand that I can choose not to answer any questions asked during the interview and may add additional information I feel is important at any time.

I give my consent for the interview to be digitally recorded (please tick) Yes ☐ No ☐

Practitioner name.....

Practitioner Signature..... Date.....

.....

Research withdrawal slip

Please complete and return this slip to me if you no longer wish to be part of the research.

I confirm that I would like to withdraw my consent for participation in the research conducted by Sarah Rawding

Practitioner name.....

Practitioner Signature..... Date.....

Dear Parents/Carers

My name is Sarah Rawding and I am conducting some research to explore the ways in which children learn personal skills (such as co-operation, resilience, independence, self-regulation etc) which enable them to become effective learners of other more educational skills such as literacy and numeracy. These skills are also known as learning dispositions (and are closely linked to Characteristics of Effective Learning). Research shows that they are vital for effective later learning. I have chosen to focus my study on exploring the learning dispositions of two-year olds.

I will be attending the setting over the next few months to observe children during their play and daily routine. I will work closely with practitioners to develop positive and respectful relationships with children and will ensure my presence at the setting does not interfere with the daily routines and activities. I will respect the rights and opinions of children at all times and will consider the reactions of children to my presence to ensure this is not intrusive. To enhance my observations, I would also like to analyse the observations and planning completed by practitioners in the setting. This will involve taking copies of documents included your child's development file. Please be assured that all copies will be anonymised, and no copies of photographs will be taken.

The research will have no negative effects on children or practitioners but will have benefits in that it will support children in their learning process. All observations will be documented but no names will be recorded therefore I can assure your child's involvement in the research will remain anonymous and the findings confidential although in line with the setting Safeguarding policy I have a duty to report any safeguarding concerns.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and I respect your decision as to whether to allow your child to be observed. Please return the slip below if you do *not* wish your child to be observed as part of this research. You may withdraw your consent for your child to be observed at any time during the data collection period (March to June) by returning this slip.

As the research progresses I would very much welcome your views and opinions and hope my findings will provide some useful guidance for practitioners and you as parents/carers to support your child's development. Please feel free to chat to me when I am in the setting or contact me using the details below. My research supervisor is Dr Anne Kellock, Sheffield Hallam University and can be contacted on 0114 225 4605 or a.kellock@shu.ac.uk should you have any issues you wish to raise.

I will ensure the final research document and a summary of the research is made available for you to read once this is completed.

If you do not wish your child to be observed as part of the research please return the following slip to the setting which will be passed onto me.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sarah Rawding

Research withdrawal slip

Please complete this slip and return to the setting if you do not wish for your child to be observed as part of the research or if you would prefer practitioner observations of your child not to be used. I would like to remind you that you can withdraw your consent at any time by returning this slip.

Name of child.....

Parent/carer name.....

Parent/carer signature..... Date.....

12.5 Appendix 5 Information poster for parents

My name is Sarah Rawding and I work in the Early Years team at Sheffield Hallam University.

I am conducting some research at the setting for my PhD and will be attending on a Thursday and Friday morning over the coming weeks.

The focus of my research is to look at the ways in which two-year olds learn in their play, in particular I am interested in their 'dispositions' for learning –their curiosity, creativity and assertiveness.



With your consent, I would like to use observations of your child as part of the research. I will work closely with practitioners to ensure that my presence does not impact on your child's daily routine. All observations will be confidential, and no names will be identified in the research. To add to the observations, I would also like to analyse the observations, planning and assessment conducted by practitioners in the setting. This would involve taking copies of a range of documents for analysis. All documents will be anonymised, and no copies of photographs will be taken.

You will receive a detailed consent form –this includes a slip to return if you do not want your child to be observed or their documents analysed. There are no adverse consequences for non-participation –this is entirely voluntary. If during the process of data collection, you decide you no longer wish your child to be involved you can return the slip at any point and your child's data will be removed from the study.

I am happy to discuss this research with you further while I am in the setting on a Thursday or Friday morning or my contact details can be found at the bottom of the page. My research supervisor is Dr. Anne. Kellock, Sheffield Hallam University and can be contacted on 0114 225 4605 or a.kellock@shu.ac.uk

Many thanks

Sarah