



Children under three in Greek day-care relationships with adults, peers and environment

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Children under three in Greek Day-care: Relationships with Adults, Peers and Environment

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of ten children aged one year four months to two years eleven months old in two Greek day-care nurseries, with the aim of informing thinking about the future development of policy and practice in relation to Greek Early Childhood Education and Care (henceforth known as ECEC) services. The study's framework is an ethnographic case study which took place in two settings over the course of six months. Children's perspectives were researched using an adaptation of the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2011). This approach employs a range of visual (cameras), verbal (informal discussions with children), and observational techniques to identify children's experiences and requires their active participation. Furthermore, it requires an additional input of information from adults who are significant for children. Thus, children's parents and practitioners were interviewed to provide their perspectives and interpretations on the children's experiences. A significant contribution of the research stems from identifying the important role that ancillary staff members, such as cooks and cleaners, also had in children's lives in the day-care settings.

Photographic, observational and interview data was collected and then analyzed using data-driven thematic analysis. Three main themes were identified and are examined in depth within this thesis: children's relationships with adults, their peers and their nursery environment. The broader theme of the environment refers to the nurseries spaces which appeared to be constituted by three elements: the space marked by a room (or outside area), particularly the floor, walls, and ceiling; the space defined by nursery toys and furniture, and the space defined by the positions of actors, the children and adults, within this space. In conclusion, this study is a contribution to the 'new sociology of childhood'. It extends the literature of the Greek ECEC research field by identifying childhood as a social construction and children as social actors. The study emphasises methodological and ethical issues and it is anticipated that it will contribute to the literature and methodology on conducting research with children under three.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

In this thesis I present the outcomes of research which focused on exploring the perspectives of children aged under three years old on their experiences in Greek ECEC provision. Previous Greek research, in this area and with this age group, has focused mostly on identifying the setting's quality and on recognising parents' and practitioners' perspectives on various issues, whilst children's perspectives were usually researched only in relation to the curriculum. The study goes further by recognising children's perspectives on their relationships with adults, peers and the nursery environment. The research uses an interpretative methodology by employing the ethnographic case study framework within two Greek ECEC settings. The data generated from various individuals (adults and children) and by using various methods (observations, interviews, photographs) was analysed and combined using data-driven thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). This approach assisted in identifying and presenting each child's perspectives on their experiences of day-care. The study also contributes to the methodological thinking in relation to researching children under the age of three and it is original because it uses the ethnographic case-study framework and an adaptation of the Mosaic Approach, initially introduced by Clark and Moss (2001), with children under the age of 2. The introduction chapter is organised into three sections. The first section presents a narrative of the research. In ethnographic studies such reflexivity is recognised as being important (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005). The second section provides an account of the initial design and the decisions made throughout the study which led to the thesis' current focus and form. The third section provides an overview of each of part of the thesis that follows this introductory section.

1.2. The Research Journey

This section presents a reflective account on how my thinking as an individual, an ECEC practitioner and a researcher has been shaped and developed by my professional and educational background and also by influences I received by being introduced to a new, for me, culture.

The Culture Shock

The first time I travelled outside Greece was in 2007 when Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) offered me a place to study for a Masters Degree in Early Childhood Studies. My initial excitement was replaced by fear of travelling, being alone in a foreign country and needing to use a different language to my mother tongue. When feelings of fear retreated, I started experiencing a culture shock associated both with things that other people did that I found odd and also with things that were 'normal' to me but not to others. This ranged from having to learn to decode facial expressions and gestures to being introduced to a culture where people were extremely polite but also to people who felt uncomfortable when I hugged or kissed them on both cheeks to greet them. In other cases I was the one who felt uncomfortable when, for example, I had to call my tutors, supervisors or people older than me by their first names since this, in the Greek culture, is considered inappropriate; indicating lack of respect. It was details like these that I had to absorb and I had to adapt to the customs in order to adjust to this new culture, even though I was not always successful at this. Nonetheless, I now realise that my research journey actually began at that point. In fact, I soon realised that I had to challenge my assumptions about what is 'normal', 'appropriate' and 'right' or 'wrong', and I started thinking that whether I would be successful or not in completing my degree would depend on my adaptive capacity. The only drawback was that I was receiving more information than I could absorb and I had no time to step back and find a new balance and perspective.

At the University, I had to take modules and write essays for my MA degree. But I was confident that the culture shock I described earlier on would not extend to

my studies because after all, I thought, children are children everywhere. My work experience, as a qualified early years practitioner in Greek nurseries, and my three years experience working as an early years practitioner in residential care for children under the age of six, made me feel certain that, at least, I would not find any surprises in the area I was more familiar with. However, my assumptions were challenged too in this area. My four years of undergraduate studies in Greece focused on positivist studies of children's age-related developmental stages and norms of behaviour (Parten, 1932; Piaget, 1959). However for my MA degree, I was introduced to a literature that was new to me; it included research based on observational techniques that were moving away from the assessment of developmental norms (Burman, 2008) and focused instead on positive aspects of children's behaviour. These approaches placed emphasis on what children can do, rather than on what they cannot do, and recognised that knowledge and skills have a socio-cultural purpose and cannot be seen as outcomes, emphasising that the learner cannot be separated from their learning environment (Carr, 2001).

All of these sources of information were interesting but at the same time extremely difficult to comprehend. I found that abandoning my positivist background was an extremely challenging task and this became clearer when I started planning the research for my MA dissertation. During the school placement I visited an English nursery with children aged two to four years old since I had always been interested in children under the age of three. The nursery was following the open plan system, which I had never experienced before. However, as a practitioner with work experience two things occurred to me in this setting: firstly there was a plethora of toys and equipment and secondly the programme structure of the setting seemed to emphasise individual activities over group ones. It was probably the latter observation, together with the influences of developmental psychology from my undergraduate studies, which led to the focus of my dissertation and resulted in me exploring children's social development in that setting.

After I had completed my Masters degree in the United Kingdom I returned to Greece to resume my practitioner role. There, I started using Carr's (2001) Learning Story observational approach with the children in my care, thinking that this could assist me to focus on what children can do, rather than what they cannot do. At the same time I started thinking about a PhD and how I could contribute to Greek research. By reviewing the relevant literature I identified that, as in other countries, research with children under the age of three was limited in Greece too. Since professionally I have always been interested in the education and care of children under the age of three and have gained my main professional experience in this area, I decided to conduct my project with children in that age group. Thus, I submitted a proposal to the University to conduct my research with this age group. My focus, in common with most Greek research at the time, was on identifying the settings' quality and proposing a curriculum for children under the age of three. My decision was guided by previous findings which had identified the relative low quality of Greek settings (Dragonas et al., 1995; Laloumi-Vidali, 1998; Petrogiannis, 2002), with some researchers attributing it to the lack of a curriculum for children under three years of age (Petrogiannis, 2002; 2006; 2010; Laloumi-Vidali, 1998).

The initial feedback I got was from people I respected, including one of my former tutors in TEI of Athens, who was not encouraging at all. My former tutor's opinion regarding my intentions was that day-care is not high school and that she envisaged an educational system where *'High schools would operate like nurseries and not the opposite'*. As I started attending modules for my PhD, having frequent meetings with my supervisors and studying in depth research frameworks which were new for Greek research, including case study (Yin, 1992) and ethnographic approaches (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), I decided to change my research focus. Thus, I took the opportunity to introduce a more interpretative approach in researching ECEC settings in the Greek context than had been previously used. A couple of years later, I found out that Bitou (2010), who explored the perspectives of children under the age of three about the curriculum, had already introduced the ethnographic case study approach into the Greek context.

Prior to Bitou introducing such an approach, positivist methodologies dominated the field of ECEC in Greece. In particular, Greek research followed two patterns: 1) researchers adopted a positivist approach and 2) the research focused mainly on identifying the settings' quality. For example, previous Greek research has identified various issues associated with Greek settings' low quality which ranged from practitioner's skills in assessing children's needs (Dragonas et al., 1995; Laloumi-Vidali, 1998), meeting parents' expectations (Laloumi-Vidali, 1998) and promoting parental involvement at the partnership level (Laloumi-Vidali, 1997) and also to structural aspects, including group size, child-staff ratios, programme structure and accommodation (Petrogiannis, 2002). The only positive finding, which was identified consistently and within various projects, was associated with adult-child interaction, which was rated relatively higher than other measurable aspects of setting environment (Petrogiannis and Melguish 1996; Petrogiannis, 2002; 2006; Mantziou, 2001). The researchers used quantitative rating scales to assess these aspects including Harms et al's (1980) Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (henceforth known as ITERS) and Harms et al's (1980) Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (henceforth known as ECERS).

In reviewing Greek research I also identified that young children seemed to be perceived by Greek researchers in a limited way as only the subjects of research, rather than as active participants in the projects as suggested by Alderson (2000). I would agree with Christensen and Prout (2002), who argue that even young children are able to give their assent to participate in a research project, because as an experienced practitioner I have identified children's competency in expressing their feelings and desires, provided someone is willing to 'listen' to those. Thus, I considered children's active participation as essential in this project. Also I wanted to explore in more depth issues relating to Greek ECEC services by using a more exploratory approach than those used in the majority of earlier Greek studies. In particular, I wanted to identify how those services were experienced by various individuals, including children, who are associated with the ECEC field (See discussion

below) because multiple individuals' perspectives on their experiences had not been researched before in the Greek context.

1.3. A Reflexive Approach to Research

This section presents a brief account of the developments this study went through. In particular, it presents how this study was initially conceptualized and planned and the changes that took place in order to bring it to fruition.

The Ambition

My initial proposal in 2009 was that the research would explore different perspectives in relation to Greek ECEC provision. My decision was influenced by the postmodernist approach in researching ECEC which places emphasis upon, amongst other things, the importance of bringing into dialogue various ECEC stakeholders in order to make meaning of the work that is being done in a setting (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Thus, I included in my study children, parents, practitioners, senior area managers, Greek ECEC experts, and even myself, as a researcher, and I identified three initial research questions:

1. What are the different participants' perspectives on their experiences of day-care services?
2. What would be the perspective of a researcher using a quantitative measurement approach to quality?
3. What are the similarities and differences across perspectives?

Then, I returned to Greece to conduct the field work in two settings with children under the age of three (See Methodology Chapter, p.86). After six months of field work I had an overwhelming amount of observational data generated by ten children, thirty two interviews conducted with adults, hundreds of photographs taken both by me and the children and the assessment of the two setting's quality, for which I used the ITERS scale. The vast amount of generated data made the completion of this thesis, according to the initial research questions, an unrealistic task. However, the reflective and reflexive nature of ethnographic studies allows researchers to be flexible and it is not

uncommon for ethnographic studies to shift focus (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Thus, I decided that my study would focus primarily on children's perspectives, especially since it was agreed among the supervisory team that the generated data adequately supported such an exploration. This is why, in the methodology chapter, I elaborate on the approaches I used to generate data that would provide evidence about children's perspectives on their experiences of their ECEC settings.

Emergent Research Questions

As a consequence of the changes mentioned above, the aim of the study developed. Consequently, this thesis explores children's experiences of day-care to inform thinking about the future development of policy and practice in relation to Greek ECEC services. Initially, I considered that having a broader aim was more appropriate than having research questions but as the data-driven thematic analysis progressed the following three research questions emerged to address this broader aim:

1. What are children's experiences in relation to adults?
2. What are children's experiences in relation to peers?
3. What are children's experiences in relation to their nursery environment?

The stance that this thesis adopts in relation to children and childhood has methodological implications ranging from the design of the study, the methods used to generate data, the data analysis and to the overall structure of the thesis. However, my positivist educational background, as presented above, had implications for this study as well. At the beginning of the study I tried hard to convince, mostly myself, that I had abandoned my positivist thinking. However, at this point, I consider it more honest to acknowledge not only its existence but also its contribution to the way my thinking has developed.

This study's contribution to the 'new sociology of childhood' (James and Prout, 1997; Corsaro, 2011) is that it extends the Greek ECEC literature by identifying childhood as a social construction (James and Prout, 1997), and children as

active agents who co-construct 'knowledge', 'culture' and their 'own identity' (Dahlberg, 2007 p.49). Within the new sociology of childhood children are recognized as individuals who are not only shaped by culture but who also shape culture (Corsaro, 2011). Furthermore, they have the legal right to be heard about all matters affecting them and to participate in decision making processes (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). All these mean, for this project, that childhood and children need to be contextualized in time, place and culture. This study agrees with Dahlberg et al.'s (2007) position that children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of being studied in their own right, that children should be seen as active participants rather than the subjects of a study, and finally that children's relationships with adults involve the exercise of power and researchers do not only need to acknowledge this but also to identify how children resist that power.

Overall, two settings participated in my study and were researched for six months (three months for each setting), using the ethnographic case study framework. The settings were located in a large city of Greece and they were under the supervision of the same local authority.

This project contributes to the discussion regarding participatory approaches with children under the age of three and it is the first Greek study that uses participatory approaches with children under the age of two. In order to engage children in the research process and explore their perspectives on their experiences of day-care, data was generated using an adaptation of the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2001). In general, ten children, five from each setting, between the ages of one year and four months to two years and eleven months participated in the study and they all attended full-time sessions. The number of children involved in the project was both manageable and at the same time provided me with a considerable amount of generated data. Furthermore, conversational interviews (Shuy, 2003) were conducted with the case study children's parents and the children's four practitioners to provide their perspectives and interpretations on the children's experiences. Interviews were also conducted with three ancillary staff members when it was identified

that they made a significant contribution to children's education and care. Ethical aspects are emphasized in this thesis in conducting research with human participants. Ethics was an ongoing process which extended throughout the research project; from the initial design, to the field work and finally to the final write up of the thesis (Cohen et al., 2007).

1.4. The Thesis Outline

The thesis is organised in four parts. Part I discusses the literature regarding the development of ECEC provision in Greece, alongside international developments during the same period. In particular, I present the socioeconomic and political changes that Greece went through during its recent history and the associations between these and the developments of Greek ECEC provision. The second section of the literature review discusses research findings from the Greek ECEC field and how these compare or contrast with international research findings.

Part II provides the methodological decisions that were made throughout the research process. I discuss in detail the research framework of this study and then I move on to discuss the ethical issues I encountered during the research process. The ethical procedures are discussed prior to presenting the methods I used to generate data. This decision was made in order to highlight the central role of ethical issues in this project and to point out that I treat ethics as an ongoing process. Then I move on to describe the methods used to generate data from the different individuals (adults and children) and the chapter ends by presenting an account of how I analysed the generated data.

Part III discusses the study's findings and it is divided into four sections. The first section presents contextual information relating to the two case study settings in order to give readers an overview of the settings and introduce the case study children. The other three sections present the three main themes that emerged from the data-driven thematic analysis. In particular, the second section discusses child-adult relationships, the third section peer relationships, and the fourth section child-environment relationships. At the end of each of the

latter three sections, I summarize the main findings of each section and discuss how my findings relate and interrelate with findings from the Greek and international ECEC research field.

Finally, Part IV provides a summary of the main findings of this study and how this thesis contributes to knowledge. Then, I move on to discuss the implications for theory, policy and practice and lastly, I present the limitations of this study as well and my recommendations for further research.

Part I: Literature Review

Chapter 2. Reviewing the Literature

2.1. Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents the developments of ECEC services in Greece from 1821 up to the present day and compares them with the developments occurring, during the same period, in an international context. A distinct characteristic of Greek ECEC and a key theme coming out of this part of the review is that the services were used to serve political ends. The second section presents developments in researching Greek ECEC services in an international context. More specifically, it focuses on presenting Greek and international findings about the perspectives of various stakeholders, including researchers', parents', practitioners', and children's perspectives. In this section a special reference is made to spatial issues, including the indoor and outdoor spaces of ECEC provision, and how these aspects, and the notion of time, are researched and how they are perceived and experienced by children.

2.2. Reviewing the Historic Development of Greek ECEC Services in an International Context

In order to understand the current context of ECEC in Greece, it is important to place it against the socio-economic changes that Greece went through during the 19th and 20th centuries. These two centuries were marked by socio-economic upheaval and political turbulence. From the establishment of the 'New Greek State' in 1821, following Greece's war of independence against Turkey, Greece participated in long lasting wars, went bankrupt on four occasions, borders changed, and the population increased significantly. All these factors contributed to a context of economic inequality within which a network of childcare services started to emerge.

Introductory Overview

This section is a brief introduction to the fuller account that follows on the historic development of preschool education in Greece from 1821 up to the present.

The published accounts that review the development of pre-school education in Greece focus primarily on the historical development of kindergartens which currently accept children aged four to six years old. However, childcare settings and kindergartens developed alongside each other over two centuries to become Greece's current pre-school education, for children under the age of 6. The kindergartens were established to serve the upper classes of Greek society, accepting for registration children aged three to six years old. Even though the first settings for children under three years of age were mainly orphanages, it seems that some of the first kindergartens did register poor and orphan children over and under the age of three (Rentzou, 2011). Thus, at some points, connections were established between childcare settings and kindergartens. However, limited historical evidence makes it difficult for any reviewer to identify clearly their aims, curriculum, or even the ages of the registered children. It seems likely that settings for younger children focused on children's care and protection and the kindergartens focused on their education and in particular on children's preparation for primary school (Rentzou, 2011). Also, it is unclear where the funding for these settings came from; some reviewers suggest that they were subsidised by wealthy Greeks and charitable bodies such as the church.

When not used by the state for nationalistic purposes, the theories underpinning the development of Greek settings matched the developments of ECEC services in the rest of Europe. For example, the theories of Froebel, Montessori and Piaget all influenced Greek settings at particular points, even though these influences came at a later stage than in the rest of Europe. This may be due to Greece's long periods of socio-economic and political instability. Generally, Greek ECEC services between 1821 and 1914 were mainly private and charitable initiatives. From 1914 to 1975 the state undertook a more active role in the development of settings but mainly for nationalistic purposes such as

spreading the Greek language to foreign language speaking areas; and from 1975 onwards the aims of settings shifted, as they began to take account of both parents and children's needs.

2.2.1. Greek ECEC: The first stage (1821-1914)

The texts that review the development of childcare services in Greece, from the establishment of the 'New Greek State' in 1821 onwards, agree that they were mainly set up to take care of poor, orphan, and abandoned children and to a much lesser extent were concerned with children's education (Papathanasiou, 2000; Kyprianos, 2007; Rentzou, 2011; Papaprokopiou and Kammenou, 2012). Nonetheless, the historical evidence concerning the development of settings for preschoolers, including orphanages, day-care settings (for children six months to six years old), nurseries (for children two and a half years to six years old), and kindergartens (for children four to six years old), shows that education and care co-existed within these settings, raising questions about the dichotomy proposed by the above authors.

The first kindergarten was established in Ermoupoli in 1827 by Protestant missionary Brewer, accepting children aged two to six years old (Rentzou, 2011). Ermoupoli was, and remains today, the capital City of Syros Island in the Aegean Sea. The economy of Syros started growing after the Greek revolution in 1821 because refugees from Crete, Psara Island, and Asia Minor (Anatolia) transferred their shipping and trading activities to Syros. In 1838, another kindergarten was established in the Ermoupoli region, with 205 registered children, aged five to eleven years old. The children were from diverse social backgrounds but were mainly the offspring of merchants and captains (Kyprianos, 2007). It is unclear if registration was mainly from these social groups who could afford the service since there is no historical evidence that the settings charged tuition fees. Possibly these groups were influenced by ideas about children's education and care from other regions and were therefore more open to registering their children at the settings. Furthermore, there was no need economically for merchants and captains to take their

children to work with them as was, for example, the case with people working in agriculture (See page 22).

However, according to Papathanasiou (2000), child protection and basic education in Greece began with the Aegina orphanage, which was established in 1829 by the first Greek Prime Minister, Kapodistrias. The Aegina orphanage was the first institution focused on child protection and one of the very first official schools of the newly established Greek state. Kyprianos (2007) explains that American protestant missionaries who first set up pre-school institutions in Greece were probably influenced by Pestalozzi's innovative educational ideas. Papathanasiou (2000) and Rentzou (2011) agree that these first institutions, providing childcare and education for young children, were established as private initiatives, for example by the church or charitable bodies. This is similar to the approach followed by other countries such as the UK (Young-Ihm Kwon, 2002). The Greek state only legalised and regulated these settings' operations a few years later, without showing any intention to establish state-run ones or to subsidise the existing ones. Thus, from the establishment of the 'New Greek State' in 1821 up to 1914, pre-school institutions were established and funded by private bodies (Kitsaras, 2001). Papathanasiou (2000) assumes that pre-school services were probably offered to children from birth and there are indications that children from a disadvantaged background could stay within these settings up to the age when they could work.

According to Kyprianos (2007), from 1868 up to 1879 there were 108 kindergartens operating within Greece's border areas, including Macedonia, Thrace, and some islands of the Aegean Sea, as well as areas that were still under Ottoman occupation. This suggests that the economy was growing in these areas but also that Greek communities were using kindergartens to support the formation of a national identity for the Greek speaking population and for Hellenization of the foreign speaking population (Kyprianos, 2007). Until the early 19th century, the majority of Greeks identified themselves more as Orthodox, sharing the same language, rather than Greeks with a shared historical past (Zervas, 2010). In particular, Zervas (2010, p.47) states:

The more difficult task for an independent Greece was to gain support from commoners who did not feel they were descendants of the ancient Greeks, and who had no particular sense of national history and identity. The Greek school system was chosen to serve as the main catalyst in shaping a Greek identity based on the ancient Greek past. Specifically, cultural and political leaders in Greece decided to rely upon the power of education as a nationalizing force. Both the school system and Greek history textbooks would be used in developing a strong notion of a Greek identity.

The schools and kindergartens established by missionary Brewer in 1827 in Syros and by missionaries John Henry and Frances Hill in 1832 in Athens followed the mutual teaching approach, where older children taught younger ones, preparing them for primary school (Rentzou, 2011). It is possible that settings were subsidised by local authorities and wealthy Greeks (Dimitriadi, 2011), since there are references to poor and orphan children attending settings for free (Kyprianos, 2007) earlier than 1872, when the first free kindergarten, for children aged three to six years old, was established in Athens by the 'Filekpaideutiki Etairia' foundation (Kyprianos, 2007; Rentzou, 2011). Staff working in this kindergarten were qualified as primary school teachers, indicating that the aim was to prepare children for primary school. At the same time, one of the foundation's aims was to train primary school teachers as kindergarten teachers (Dimitriadi, 2011).

Aikaterini Laskaridou is considered the social reformer with the most influence on the development of pre-school education in Greece establishing the first kindergartens informed by Froebel's educational approach (Kyprianos, 2007; Dimitriadi, 2011). Even though Greek texts discuss the influence of Froebel's ideas on Greek pre-school provision, it is not clear which of his ideas were incorporated into Greek settings. According to Manning (2005), Froebel's philosophy was developed around three main ideas: a) guided activities for fostering children's spirituality, b) respect for children's individuality and, c) the importance of play, and especially outdoor play, in children's education.

Froebel's ideas had started receiving recognition and acceptance in many parts of Europe and beyond from 1830 onwards (Uberheumen and Ulich, 1997). Laskaridou, who based Greek preschool education on Froebel's ideas, also had significant influence on kindergarten teachers' training (Kyprianos, 2007; Dimitriadi, 2011). Laskaridou was from a wealthy family and she was well educated, having studied different subjects in Vienna, Athens, Dresden, Berlin, London, and Paris (Dimitriadi, 2011). She supported education for women and worked as a pedagogue for two years in missionary Hill's girls' school (Elliniko Parthenagogeio), taking over the management in 1867 (Dimitriadi, 2011). In 1879 she returned to Greece from Dresden where she had learned about Froebel's approach and she put this into practice at the kindergarten that she established within Hill's school. Laskaridou then went on to train primary school teachers as kindergarten teachers in order to become '*missionaries to spread Froebel's ideas in Greece*' (Dimitriadi, 2011, p. 172). Those without a teaching degree were able to gain a certificate to work as '*children's supervisors*' (pedonomi). In 1887 Laskaridou terminated the operation of the school, for family reasons. The Greek-Turkish war in Crete in 1897 brought many refugees to Athens and Piraeus and Laskaridou was a pioneer in making a foundation to find jobs for women refugees. She also established two kindergartens for their children, one in Athens and one in Piraeus (Dimitriadi, 2011). During the same period she established the '*Kindergarten Teacher's School*' (Didaskalio Nipiagogon), which was legalised by the state in 1904 as the only school in Greece for training kindergarten teachers (Dimitriadi, 2011).

Despite Laskaridou's significant contribution to the development of Greek pre-school education, it is not clear if it was her or someone from the 'Filekpaideutiki Etairia' foundation that influenced the Minister of Education in 1896 to propose the first public law (Law BTMO'/1896) which officially recognised the existence of kindergartens. Laskaridou's contribution to Greece's preschool education was recognized by the state in 1914 with the proposal to establish the first state kindergartens which would operate according to Froebel's educational ideas (Dimitriadi, 2011). In England, the first Froebelian kindergarten was established earlier than this, in London in 1852 (Ailwood, 2007). However, Froebel's pedagogy became more widely known when it was adapted and put into

practice by the London School Board which was responsible for establishing Babies' Classes and Infant Schools from 1870 up to 1904 (Read, 2003; 2006), and from that point onwards from Margaret Mcmillan, a significant historical figure in ECEC (Ailwood, 2007), who was influenced by Froebelian thinking (Ailwood, 2007; Garrick, 2009).

2.2.2. Greek ECEC: The second stage (1914-1975)

The most significant development for Greece's preschool education during the first stage was the 1896 law, by which the state legislated and legalised kindergartens (Kyprianos, 2007). However, the state seems to have had little intention of developing state funded settings at this time, probably due to Greece's economic problems. Greece became bankrupt three times up to 1896, with the last occasion being in 1893 (Kyprianos, 2007). Following this, Greece's economic situation failed to improve. Participation in wars, including a three years civil war in 1949, alongside socioeconomic turbulence made it unlikely that the state would prioritise the development of preschool education. However, settings were developed up to 1975, with some breaks in between, mainly to serve the state's nationalistic purposes, alongside providing protection and care to the children of disadvantaged social groups (Rentzou, 2011; Papaprokopiou and Kammenou, 2012).

After the Balkan wars, Greece's borders expanded to include Macedonia and part of Epirus (See Figure 2.1), something that automatically led to significant population increase (Kyprianos, 2007; Papathanasiou, 2001). The people of these newly acquired areas did not speak Greek and the state suggested the establishment of national kindergartens to spread the Greek language, with the justification that otherwise children would fail in primary school (Kyprianos, 2007). Even though the government agreed that the kindergartens would follow a Froebelian approach (Dimitriadi, 2011), Laskaridou criticised the government for undermining the concept of kindergarten by using it:

- a) only in foreign language speaking areas,
- b) in order to spread the Greek language, and
- c) to prepare children for school.

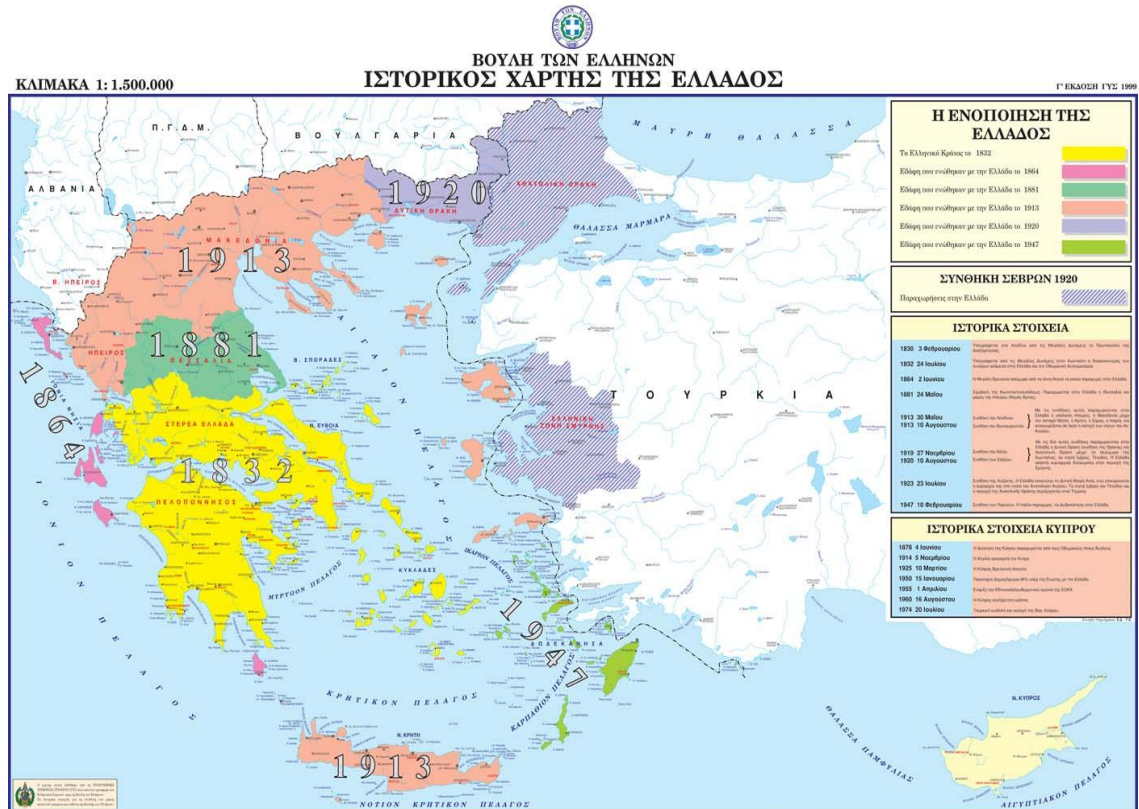


Figure 2.1: Territorial expansion of Greece 1832-1947

Source: Hellenic Army General Staff (2014)

There was no government response to this critique (Kyprianos, 2007). However, after the Balkan wars, the government established state training schools for kindergarten teachers (Kyprianos, 2007; Sarafidou and Margaritopoulos, 2009), so they could work mainly in border areas and more specifically in Macedonia (Kyprianos, 2007), whereas the first national kindergartens were established much later in 1929 (Papathanasiou, 2001).

During this period, influences from abroad in relation to new educational ideas were reaching Greece and, around 1918-1921, the new manager of the 'Kindergarten Teacher's School' (Didaskalio Nipiagogon), founded by Laskaridou, tried to introduce Montessori's approach into Greek kindergartens (Kyprianos, 2007). However, she found resistance from Laskaridou's students who wanted to remain faithful to Froebel's ideas (Kyprianos, 2007). The expensive equipment (Kyprianos, 2007) could be another reason why Montessori's approach did not develop in Greece in this period, probably along with the emphasis that is given up to the present on group and free play

activities (See Appendix 1 for how a typical day in public-run state and municipal, infant, day-care, nursery, and kindergarten settings is structured today). Montessori's ideas, which focused on developing children's motor and sensory education, and language (Montessori, 1912), seemed to have little effect, with only a few kindergartens being established. At the same time, kindergarten teacher training up to 1950 was based on Froebel's ideas (Kyprianos, 2007). Nonetheless, there is no available research evidence concerning the effect of Froebel's ideas on contemporary preschool education in Greece. What is pinpointed is the lack of an explicit theoretical background, mainly in day-care and nursery settings, underpinning practitioners' decisions about children's daily activities (Mantziou, 2001). Empirical evidence, however, suggests that Froebel's influence is identifiable in areas such as movement and group activities but not in others, such as gardening and outdoor play. Implicit evidence of the limited emphasis on outdoor play can be extracted from texts which discuss structural aspects of settings where the lack of sufficient outdoor space is pinpointed (Petrogiannis, 2010).

In 1919, Greece initiated a socially and economically devastating three year war with Turkey over Asia Minor. This not only led Greece to its fourth bankruptcy, in 1932, but it also resulted in Greece becoming home to more than a million refugees following the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (Kyprianos, 2007). An important development in 1922 was the foundation, within the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, of the '*Department of Early Years*', signifying '*the first step for establishing state nurseries*' (Papathanasiou, 2001, p.30). Indeed, four years after the Greek-Turkish war, in 1926, day-care settings [*vrefonipiaki stathmi*] and orphanages (Papathanasiou, 2001), as well as national [*Ethniki Paidiki Stathmi*] and workplace nurseries [*Ergostasiaki Paidki Stathmi*] (Rentzou, 2011), were established. Also, there was an increase in settings established by private and charitable initiatives (Papathanasiou, 2001). Although sources are not clear about the rationale for this, Papathanasiou (2001, p.31) suggests that the state's interest in building nurseries and day-care settings was most probably shaped by philanthropic rather than educational aims. He also provides evidence that the group size of 100 children and the aims of orphanages and day-care settings were the same at this time.

However, the reason why day-care and national nurseries were established at this point is not explicitly stated in historical accounts. Nonetheless, it seems likely that this development was influenced by a mass influx of refugees into Greece. Historically, this period is significant because the state officially recognised children's need for care and education when their mothers were at work (Papathanasiou, 2001).

National kindergartens, for children from four to six years old, were founded in 1929 (Papathanasiou, 2001). Kindergartens were set up under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and were considered part of the compulsory education system (Kyprianos, 2007). The aim was for kindergartens to be staffed by qualified kindergarten teachers who would focus on play activities with children, with ratios of one adult to every forty children or two adults to every sixty children (Kyprianos, 2007).

By 1936, the government had established only eight national nurseries, all in industrial areas (Papathanasiou, 2001). The nurseries' operating hours were the same as those of the factories where mothers of kindergarten children were employed, and this remains the same today: 7 am to 4 pm (Papathanasiou, 2001). In 1937, eleven years after the establishment of the first nurseries, the first daily/hourly programme was published (Papathanasiou, 2001). Despite no available data about this programme, Papathanasiou (2001) suggests that the Greek dictatorship probably shaped the programme. During that period, many liberal teachers were persecuted and managerial posts in all educational settings were held by those with leanings towards the dictatorship of the 'National Youth Organisation' (Ethnikos Organismos Neotitas) that followed the triptych of values: '*Nation-Religion-Family*' (Papathanasiou, 2001, p.34). It is significant, however, that even nowadays '*pride in Greek history and culture are reflected in the curriculum and pedagogy while, loyalty to village and family are paramount*' (OECD, 2011, pp.15-16).

The establishment of preschool settings for mainly nationalistic purposes continued throughout the subsequent years. In 1942, the 'National Rural Nurseries' were established by the Ministry of National Welfare, mainly in

northern Greece, in order to unify a diverse country under the same language (Rentzou, 2011; Papaprokopiou and Kammenou, 2012). A second aim was to provide assistance to families working in agriculture and to protect rural children from poverty (Rentzou, 2011). This was important because historically Greece's economy and society has been agrarian (OECD, 2011). However, this changed over the years and by 2003 agriculture contributed approximately 10% to the Gross National Product (GNP) and the people working in agriculture represented only 17% of the economically active population (Kasimis et al., 2003). Nonetheless, from 1942, relatively few settings were established in urban and industrial areas, indicating a failure of the Greek state to recognise the increasing needs of working women (Papaprokopiou and Kammenou, 2012) or the impact of urbanisation, mainly around Athens, evident by the 1950s (Petrogiannis, 2001). According to Rentzou (2011), the main reasons for the state taking so long to establish a nationwide network of settings offering early childhood education and care were the challenging characteristics of the Greek economy and the wider society, alongside the traditional Greek extended family framework which offered high levels of mutual support. Thus, children's care and education was traditionally a family task and seen to be mainly the mother's role (Petrogiannis, 2001; Rentzou, 2011). It was not until the 1950s that successive waves of urbanisation led to Greek families beginning to share their children's care with people other than family members, in particular friends, neighbours, and pre-school institutions (Petrogiannis, 2001). In this context, the majority of preschool settings in the 1950s were developed for children over the age of 2 (Petrogiannis, 2001).

There was a significant development of policy and practice in 1954 with the establishment of the 3045 law which set out the aims of the National Rural Nurseries and of the National Nurseries. These were that there be daily nursing and education of registered children, taking account of the children's needs, with a daily programme including physical and play activities, meals, resting, songs, and storytelling (Alepis, 1965). From 1962 onwards, there was a further development as the kindergartens came to operate under a national curriculum (Kitsaras, 2001).

Furthermore, it seems likely that urbanisation led to the establishment of the Infant Centre 'Mitera' (Kentro Vrefon 'H Mitera') in Athens in 1955 which offered residential care to abandoned children and services to protect single mothers and their children (Kentro Vrefon 'H Mitera', 2009). Within the centre's premises, the first three year training school for early years practitioners was established in the same year (Sxoli Ekpaideuseos Vrefokomon). The school became a higher education institute (Technological Educational Institution, TEI) in 1984 and it was renamed as 'TEI of Early Childhood Education' in 2007 (TEI of Athens, 2009).

Some years later, from 1967 until 1974, the Greek dictatorship appeared to use preschool education for purposes of manipulation by trying to teach children from an early age to be obedient (Rentzou, 2011). However, the social aspect of the ECEC settings was also emphasised. For example, in 1967, the 129 'Forced Law' (FEK 163: Anagastikos Nomos, AN.129, Article 6, 1967) was published stating the aim of the kindergartens:

Children's physical and cognitive development through games and activities, [to teach children] good manners, personal hygiene, to be disciplined and obedient, [and] to adjust smoothly to social life.

2.2.3. Greek ECEC: The third stage (1975- 2014)

In 1975, following 7 years of military junta, the form of government in Greece became, as it remains to this day, a Parliamentary Republic (Greek Constitution, Article 1). On the return of democracy, the Greek Constitution was reinstated along with the aims of education. Of particular importance, Article 16 (Greek Constitution, Article 16, Paragraph 2, 1975) states:

Education constitutes a basic mission for the State and shall aim at the moral, intellectual, professional and physical training of Greeks, the development of national and religious consciousness and at their formation as free and responsible citizens.

Furthermore, it is the state's constitutional commitment to offer free education at all levels (Article 16, Paragraphs 1 and 4, 1975). The country's current

population is approximately 11 million (OECD, 2012), and the educational system is structured in relation to three subsequent levels: primary (six to twelve years of age), secondary (twelve to eighteen years of age), and tertiary (university level) education. Compulsory education starts at the age of five as in England, Scotland and Wales, and extends up to fifteen years of age (Eurydice, 2014). The preschool sector is complex and there are four different types of state (municipal) or private preschool settings for children under the age of six (EMCC, 2006) which are presented below (See page 25).

In 1984, the '*National Nurseries and National Rural Nurseries*' were renamed as '*State Nurseries*' (Law 1431) and a different law (FEK 46 A', Article 6, 1984) allowed the establishment of infant classes and state day-care settings within the state nurseries. This development lowered the registration age and children as young as eight months up to the primary school entrance age of six years could register to attend the sessions. In 1997, the registration age was further lowered to the age of two months (FEK 645, 1997). However, from 2002 onwards it was increased to six months of age (FEK 497, 2002).

It is not clear if these decisions about establishing infant classes and setting minimum registration ages were based on the new demographic changes that Greece faced from 1980 up to 1996. During this period and, as a result of the repatriation of emigrants, the Greek population increased by approximately 825,000, with 625,000 emigrants coming from English and German speaking countries during the period 1980 to 1986. In addition, approximately 200,000¹ emigrants returned from the countries making up the former Soviet Union during the period 1990 to 1996 (Vidali and Adams, 2006). Also, the history of Greece in these two decades was marked by an influx of immigrants from Balkan countries including Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, and former Yugoslav Republics (OECD, 2005). All these arrivals seem to have changed drastically Greece's demographic and cultural homogeneity (OECD, 2005). However, this was not reflected in the 2001 census, probably because the Greek state was collecting

¹ Vidali and Adams (2006, p.359) state that '*The exact number of repatriates from former Soviet Union is not clear, due to the uncontrolled (illegal) entrance of many of them. However, the following years the enrolment at all levels rose from 8,455 newly immigrated students in 1995-1996 to 35,751 by 1998-1999*'.

information based on citizenship and not on ethnicity (CIA, 2013). As a result, the census showed that 93% of the population were Greek-born or the children of returning emigrants, 98% of the Greek population belonged to the Greek Orthodox church, whereas 99% spoke Greek which is the official language of Greece (OECD, 2005; CIA, 2013).

However, it was probably the state's decision to establish infant classes and state day-care settings that led to the development of preschool education in its current form. This means that now Greece has the lowest number of different kinds of settings amongst OECD countries, at four (EMCC, 2006). The settings, both private and state (municipal), are categorised according to the ages of children they accept (Nikolakaki et al., 2001). Thus, infant settings (vrefiki stathmi) accept children aged six months to two and a half years old, nurseries (paidiki stathmi) accept children aged two and a half to six years old, day-care settings (vrefonipiaki stathmi) accept children aged six months to six years old, and kindergartens (nipiagogeia) accept children aged four to six years old (FEK 497, 2002).

Structural Dimensions of ECEC Services

Settings with children aged six months to four years old (henceforth known as day-care or nursery settings) operate exclusively with qualified early years practitioners (vrefokomi) and trained early years assistants (voithi vrefokomi or pedokomi). At the lower level of qualification, early years assistants receive training from vocational centres (IEK's) supplemented by a certification from the Organisation for Vocational Education and Training (OEEK), or a school's graduation award from a relevant vocational high school (EPAL) or the Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED). Thus, their training is between one and two years, with the early years practitioners receiving a degree after four years of training at one of the three relevant Technological Educational Institutes (TEI's) (European Commission, 2011).

Kindergarten classes (Nipiagogeia), with children aged four to six years old, operate exclusively with kindergarten teachers who have gained a degree after

four years of studies at one of the eight relevant departments of Higher Education Universities (AEI's), (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997; Petrogiannis, 2010). Classes with children aged four to five years old can operate either with early years practitioners or kindergarten teachers (Petrogiannis, 2010). Even though private day-care and nursery settings are licensed to have kindergarten classes (for children aged five to six years old) this is not the case with the municipal ones which accept children up to the age of five (Petrogiannis, 2010). All directors of municipal settings have a relevant higher education degree as kindergarten teachers, early years practitioners, or social workers and have mainly administrative tasks and duties (Petrogiannis, 2010).

Especially in the municipalities, there are additional members of staff known as '*ancillary staff*' who are usually graduates of compulsory education or with a relevant vocational school's certificate such as security personnel, cleaners, people who are responsible for serving children's food (trapezokomey), and cooks (AMC, 2005). Early years practitioners, early years assistants, and ancillary staff members work for eight hours per day, while kindergarten teachers work for four hours (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997). People working in the early years education sector in Greece, have relatively low professional status and wages (Lambidi and Polemi-Todoulou, 1992; Petrogiannis, 2009; Rentzou, 2013), seen as similar to colleagues from other countries (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997).

In relation to adult-child ratios, research findings indicate that higher adult-child ratios associate with better developmental outcomes for children, and improve the quality of ECEC services (OECD, 2006). In the Greek ECEC sector in 1984, there was one kindergarten teacher and an assistant for every twenty five children aged three to six years old and two early years practitioners for every ten children aged eight months to three years old (FEK 46 A', Article 7, 1984). However, these numbers have changed over the years. Table 2.1, row 1, (page 28) presents the current legal requirements (FEK 497, 2002), but these numbers do not always reflect reality, especially because municipalities, surprisingly, set their own adult-child ratio requirements. For example, row 2 presents the requirements of the Athens Municipal Crèche (AMC), which has 77 day-care and nursery settings under its jurisdiction. Providing education and

care to approximately 5.500 children, it is the largest Municipality in Greece (AMC, 2013). The Crèche's requirements are, in some cases, far behind not only Greece's legal requirements but also the requirements of many other countries, for example Netherlands, France, Ireland and England. The ratios for England are presented in row 3 and are set by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2009).

1.	Legal requirements	<p>3:12 (for children aged 6 months to 2½ years)</p> <p>2:25 (for children aged 2½ years to 6 years)</p> <p>1:25 (for children aged 4 to 6 years in kindergarten classes)</p>
2.	Athens Municipal Crèche's requirements	<p>2:12 to 18 (for children aged 8 months to 3 years old)</p> <p>2:18 to 32 (for children aged 3 to 4½ years)</p> <p>2:33 (for children aged 4½ to 5½ years)</p>
3.	England's requirements	<p>1:3 (for children under the age of 2)</p> <p>1:4 (for children aged 2)</p> <p>1:13 (for children aged 3 and over) when the group is led by a qualified teacher or an early years practitioner</p> <p>1:8 (for children aged 3 and over) when the group is led by level 3 qualified practitioners.</p> <p>Reception classes: 1:30 (one reception class contains children that will reach the age of five during the course of the school year).</p>

Table 2.1: *Adult-child Ratio in Greece and England*

Concerning fees, kindergartens offer free sessions. Municipal day-care and nursery settings have monthly fees according to social criteria which are set by each Municipality's Early Years Education Administration Board (FEK 497,

Article 9, 2002). For example, at AMC, fees can be from zero, for those who have an annual income of less than €15.000, up to a maximum of €750 for those with an annual income of over €100.000 (AMC, 2012). Fees in private settings are significantly higher. According to OECD (2012), Greece has the lowest public expenditure level on ECEC for three year olds along with Switzerland and Ireland and it is ranked 11th, amongst 32 OECD countries, in relation to the public expenditure for five year olds. In comparison, the UK was ranked 3rd and 12th respectively (OECD, 2012). This makes Greek funding levels good for five year olds but less so for the younger children.

Organisation of Pre-school Provision

The kindergartens were, from their establishment, in 1929, placed under the Ministry of Education (today's Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports). The rest of the settings (nurseries and day-care settings) were, from their establishment up to 1994, placed under the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. This organisational structure and focus on welfare seems to influence the settings' operation up to the present. From 1994 up to 2001, nurseries and daycare settings belonged to the Ministry of Interior due to their transfer to the local authorities (Municipalities) [FEK 90, N. 2248, Article 42, 1994] but they were subsidised by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. In 2001, the Municipalities were made to take over the settings' funding as well (FEK 9 A', Law, 2880, Article 12, Paragraph, 6, 2001), with settings transferred fully under the Ministry of Interior. The transfer of day-care settings to local authorities is evident in other European countries as well (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997). In Greece, decentralization created a more flexible early years education sector, giving each Municipality's Early Years Education Administration Board the freedom to create their own Inner Regulations to provide further guidance about the operation of settings and make decisions on issues that were not included or could not be predicted by the statutory law published in 2002 regarding day-care and nursery operation (FEK 497, 2002).

However, the ministerial division of preschool education led to debates about the division between education and care (Laloumi-Vidali, 1998; Petrogiannis, 2006). This division, encountered in other countries as well (OECD, 2001), was

guided, in Greece, by a number of historic and socioeconomic factors, previously explained. However, there was criticism of the division being *'made official by the government's decision to support preschools [kindergartens] and phase out public (municipal) nurseries'* (Petrogiannis, 2006, p.31). Lalloumi-Vidali (1998) argues that the split model, which assumes that child centres (nurseries and day-care settings) are for protection and care and kindergartens for education, needs to be abandoned. Mantziou (2001) argues that the split model was strengthened by the fact that day-care and nursery settings were under the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare which focused on children's protection, wellbeing, and nutrition rather than their education. Furthermore, Mantziou's research indicates that the preservation of the continuing childcare focus was reinforced by the lack of an explicit educational theoretical background which could guide and support practitioners' daily activities (Mantziou, 2001).

The paradox concerning the findings is that, for approximately 50 years day-care and nursery settings have operated with well qualified and trained staff in comparison to the early years sector in other countries, such as the UK, which *'has always suffered from low levels of qualified staff'* (Pugh, 2006, p.17). It seems, however, that setting organisational structure in Greece is more influential than the practice of individuals, something that is in accordance with international research findings (Tizard et al., 1972). On the other hand, it might be the culture of Greek settings that is more influential because settings appear to have traditionally offered protection and care to children during the extended periods of time that Greece experienced social and economic instability.

The Curriculum of ECEC Settings

My review of statutory laws published up to 1985 for kindergartens (FEK 309, 1929; Decree 1316, 1942; Legislator's Decree 3045, 1954; Royal Decree 434, FEK 124, 1962; Royal Decree 494, 1962; Forced Law 129, FEK 163, 1967; Law 309, 1976; FEK 132 A', 1980), and for day-care and nursery settings (FEK 141, 1966) shows that the state was trying, amongst other things, to take into account social criteria by placing emphasis on assisting working parents and supplementing children's upbringing. A shift is observed in 1985 where the 1566

Law (FEK 167, 1985) explicitly referred to the sociability aspect of the kindergarten's aims.

However, it was not until the beginning of the 21st century, when day-care settings were transferred from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to Local Authorities, that the state took measures to respond to both children's and parents' needs, such as opening kindergartens for extended hours ('all-day kindergartens', FEK 188, 1997), providing compulsory pre-school education for all children from the age of four, and developing a more flexible operational and decision making process (Papaprokopiou and Kammenou, 2012). In 2007, Greece had 1360 municipal day-care and nursery settings for children up to the age of six, but most of them were in urban areas (Unicef, 2012). However, Greece remains one of the 8 countries, among 32 OECD countries, where participation rates in ECEC (for children aged four to six years old) are under 80% (Unicef, 2013).

The first national curriculum for kindergartens was published in 1962 and it was replaced in 1980 (Kitsaras, 2001), and again in 1989 (Kyprianos, 2007; Rentzou, 2011). The first curriculum incorporated influences from Montessori, Decroly and Dewey and reflected the conservative political ideology of that period in Greece (Kyprianos, 2007). Nonetheless, it was rejected as old fashioned by the main school for training kindergarten teachers (Didaskaleio Nipiagogon) and it was never put into practice (Kyprianos, 2007). The latter two versions incorporated influences from Piaget (Kyprianos, 2007).

In 1991, nurseries started to following the same curriculum as kindergartens (Presidential Decree, 486, 1989), that published in 1989 (Rentzou, 2011). The 1989 curriculum, was structured in regard to developmental psychology and in particular it incorporated Piaget's ideas about child development; it was considered more '*scientific*' than previous curricula and to a lesser degree organised around nationalistic ideas (Kyprianos, 2007, p.213). In 2001 another national curriculum was published (FEK 1366 B', 2001) which followed an '*interdisciplinary and thematic approach to teaching*' (Petrogiannis, 2010, p.132). This combined Piaget's and Vygotsky's ideas on learning (Kyprianos, 2007), and received criticism for leading to the '*schooling of the kindergarten*'

(Fragos, 2002, p.68). Similar concerns about '*schoolification*' (Bennet and Tayler, 2006, p.62) of ECEC were raised in other cultural contexts, including the UK.

However, developmentalism, which has been challenged in other countries (Burman, 2008), continues to shape the structure and operation of Greek ECEC provision. In particular, the significant influence of psychology and especially developmental psychology can be identified in the programme of studies of kindergarten teachers and early years practitioners and also in the most recently published new interdisciplinary national curriculum for kindergartens (Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports, 2011). For example, the programme of studies of kindergarten teachers at National and Kapodistrian University of Athens included for the 2012-2013 academic year twelve psychology related modules; with the students having to complete at least four of these modules to gain their degree (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 2012). During the same academic year, the requirements of the TEI of Early Childhood Education (for early years' practitioners) in Athens (TEI of Athens, 2012) included at least seven obligatory psychology related modules from the field of developmental, social, and clinical psychology.

The lack of a national curriculum for children under the age of three has probably led the Early Years Administration Board of some local authorities, such as AMC, to publish their own guidelines for the aims of settings and for good practice (AMC, 2005), and to suggest daily activities for children (See Appendix 1). In these guidelines, even though they are very general, one can identify the impact of developmental psychology. For example, amongst the aims of settings is a focus on children's multidimensional and holistic development in areas such as physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development and to inform parents on issues related to education and psychology (AMC, 2005, p.3). It may be the influence of psychology and research findings indicating low quality provision (Lambidi and Polemi Todoulou 1992; Dragonas et al., 1995; Petrogiannis and Melguish, 1996; Mantziou, 2001; Retzou 2010) that led researchers, including Petrogiannis (2002; 2006; 2010) and Laloumi-Vidali (1998), to underline the need for clear targets, principles,

and objectives in order to provide the '*right experiences, provision, and outcomes*' (Petrogiannis, 2002; 2006; 2010) for children under three.

2.2.4. Summary

Greece's long history of childcare and education, which started almost in parallel with the establishment of the 'New Greek State' in 1821, followed the country's socioeconomic and political changes (wars, poverty, and demographic changes) and, at the same, was open to influences from international thinking about teaching and learning. Socioeconomic and political influences seemed to lead settings to focus on either care or education, depending on the state's aspirations or on social demands. This history appeared to lead to a division of education and care, which is still evident today, without challenge from the state or the people working in the early years sector, although Greek and international research indicate that such division constitutes a paradox.

2.3. Researching Greek ECEC Services in an International Context

Introduction

Although Greek day-care and nursery provision for children under the age of 6 has a history of almost 90 years, starting from 1926, research into this provision is limited and, when it comes to children under three, it is indicative that only three researchers (Petrogiannis 1994; Rentzou 2011; Bitou 2010) have conducted research into this age group in Greece. Most research has focused on children over the age of three, including the very first study in the Greek ECEC field which was conducted in 1983 and published in 1991 by Tsiantis and his colleagues. From 1983 until 2010, the majority of research undertaken in day-care and nursery settings was carried out by researchers from the field of psychology rather than the fields of education or sociology. In addition, most studies have focused on quality related aspects of ECEC services. A distinctive characteristic of the Greek research to date is that researchers have predominately followed the positivist paradigm, using primarily quantitative methods for researching ECEC settings. The aim of this section is to present

the key themes of Greek research into ECEC services, setting these in an international context but with a primary focus on Europe and the US.

2.3.1. Defining Quality

The discourse of quality has shaped debates about practice in ECEC settings over recent decades but the consensus is that there is a lack of clarity over the definition of quality in the early years (Dahlberg, et al. 1999), and beyond (Weiler, 2004). Providing a universal definition of quality is a challenge because what constitutes quality in one context may not be meaningful or identified as quality in another. This is in part because of different cultural influences on the values, beliefs and constructions of childhood of the various early years stakeholders, including ECEC experts, practitioners, parents, and children (Pence and Moss, 1994; Dahlberg, et al. 1999; Langston and Abbott, 2005; Walsh, 2004). However, Pascal and Bertram (1997, p.7), suggest a definition of quality which seems to incorporate both recognition of cultural differences in diverse contexts and recognition of the perspectives of individuals: *'Quality is a value-laden, subjective and dynamic concept which varies with time, perspective and place'*.

Reviewing the discourses of quality in terms of research into early year's education internationally over recent decades, Farquhar (1990), Urban (2004), and Dahlberg et al. (1999), conclude that three main approaches have been followed. The first and dominant one has been trying to find associations between quality and developmental outcomes. The second approach to quality has been about recognising multiple perspectives. Finally, the third approach has been a postmodernist one. The post-modernist approach argues that it is important to locate the work that is happening in an early years setting in a specific time and place, and try to make meaning out of this work (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Dahlberg et al. (1999) suggest that the researcher has to use various forms of documentation to identify this work. The next step is to bring into the dialogue people who might have an interest in this work such as children, parents, staff, and the whole society (Williams, 1995). This, however, indicates a need to acknowledge that the various people might ascribe multiple meanings and understandings to the work of settings (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Greece,

which historically has tended to follow international trends, seems to have taken similar approaches to research into quality in day-care and nursery settings, focusing mainly on the first two approaches to date.

2.3.2. Researching Quality

Taking an overview, in the dominant approach to researching quality (Urban, 2004), researchers internationally have tried to find associations between early education and care and children's developmental and learning outcomes (Farquhar, 1990). Within this dominant approach, '*three waves*' of research have appeared (Petrogiannis, 1994, p. 10). In the first wave of research, beginning from the 1970s, the debate centred on whether out-of-home day-care helped or hindered children's development (Phillips and Howes, 1987; Farquhar, 1990), but there was no consideration of quality aspects (Petrogiannis, 1994) which might impact on this. In the second wave, in the 1980s, researchers tried to identify how measurable variables in the environment, such as adult-child ratios, group size, and practitioners' qualifications, might be associated with children's development. Finally, in the 1990s, during the third wave of studies, researchers turned to the question of how cultural and family factors might combine with programme variables to influence child outcomes (Farquhar, 1990).

Greece entered the research arena when international debates had already moved on towards the second and third waves of research within this dominant approach. Thus, in the Greek context, research into day-care provision has focused mainly on identifying setting quality by assessing measurable aspects of the environment (Tsiantis et al., 1991; Lambidi and Polemi Todoulou 1992; Dragonas et al., 1995; Petrogiannis and Melguish, 1996; Mantziou, 2001; Retzou 2010; Grammatikopoulos et al., 2012). Furthermore, Petrogiannis (2002) tried to find associations between setting quality and children's development.

One could argue that the majority of Greek projects represent researchers' views in relation to child-care quality. Only a few projects engage with recognising other perspectives and it is mainly parents' views (Laloumi Vidali,

1998; Sakellariou and Rentzou, 2007; 2008a; Rentzou and Sakellariou 2012; Rentzou, 2011; 2013; Grammatikopoulos et al., 2012). Even fewer projects engage with identifying practitioners' (Laloumi Vidali, 1997; Sakellariou and Rentzou, 2008b; Gregoriadis and Tsigilis, 2008; Rentzou, 2011) and children's views (Bitou, 2010). Only Rentzou (2011) includes researchers', parents', and practitioners' perspectives in one project simultaneously, but children's views once again remain at the margin.

In relation to child-care quality, Katz (1992) suggests four perspectives that should be taken into account to inform child-care policy, those of researchers /professionals, parents, practitioners and children. The brief review of Greek literature, presented above, reaffirms other reviewers' (Ceglowski and Bacigalupa, 2002) conclusions that the perspectives of researchers/professionals dominate in research, followed by those of parents, while child and practitioner perspectives have been studied minimally.

Therefore, it is particularly relevant for this study to review relevant research in terms of key themes that have been identified when the views of various groups have been researched.

2.3.3. Researchers' Views

In this section, research findings relating to the researchers' views are presented. The literature review suggests that when researchers assess setting quality they measure, using rating scales, the structural characteristics of environments (Ceglowski and Bacigalupa, 2002). These characteristics include adult-child ratios, staff qualifications, developmentally appropriate classroom practices, and adults' behaviour with and responsiveness to children. The researchers' ultimate purpose is to identify associations between these characteristics and developmental outcomes for children (Ceglowski and Bacigalupa, 2002).

Researchers' Views on Quality

The approaches that have been used internationally, for measuring setting quality, have been used in the Greek context too. For example, Tsiantis and his

colleagues, in 1983, were the first researchers who tried to measure the quality of Greek settings using rating scales (Dragonas et al., 1995). During that period the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) was developed in the US by Harms and Clifford (1980) for measuring setting quality, by rating structural characteristics of the setting environment. A few years later the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS, Harms et al., 1990) was developed.

The ECERS measures the quality of settings for preschoolers; over the age of three. ECERS has 43 items, to be rated on a 7 level scale (1 equals inadequate, 3 equals minimal, 5 equals good, and 7 equals excellent). The 43 items are categorised under seven subscales: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language–Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Programme Structure, and Parents and Staff. The ITERS measures the quality of infant/toddler settings (children under the age of three) on the same 7 level scale. The scale's 39 items are under seven subscales: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Listening and Talking, Activities, Interaction, Programme Structure and Parents and Staff.

The two scales have been developed by using lists of criteria for good practice drawn from the field of psychology (Penn, 1999). The ECERS scale has been critiqued for its lack of emphasis on areas such as play, parental involvement, ethnicity, gender and other aspects of diversity; and interpersonal relationships (Brophy and Statham, 1994, p.68). Revised editions have been developed for both scales (ECERS-R and ITERS-R), mainly to make scoring less ambiguous (Melhuish, 2001) and the items more *'inclusive and culturally sensitive'* (Harms et al., 2003, p.2). Furthermore, ECERS also has an extension scale, the ECERS-E (Sylva et al., 2003), which is more educationally orientated, in accordance with England's Early Years Foundation Stage framework, and it measures provision for literacy, numeracy (mathematics), science and the environment, as well diversity.

The EPPE project (Sylva et al., 2004), a large-scale longitudinal study of over 3000 children conducted in England from 1997-2003, found that the types of setting mattered in terms of quality, and settings integrating care and education

were rated as having higher quality than others. The REPEY study (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002), a qualitative study with case-studies linked to EPPE, identified staff qualifications as the key structural aspect that led to different practices. Nevertheless, the Greek studies indicate that the key aspects that affect the quality of the Greek settings are the organisational aspects. Maybe it is important to note that Greek settings have less variability in qualifications in relation to English settings.

Greek studies that have used ECERS as their primary research tool (Lambidi and Polemi Todoulou 1992; Mantziou, 2001; Rentzou 2010; Grammatikopoulos et al., 2012), or alternatively ITERS, with younger age groups (Petrogiannis and Melguish, 1996; Rentzou 2010; Grammatikopoulos et al., 2012), have identified Greek early years provision as being of generally low quality. The application of the scales in Greek settings led to an interesting pattern, across studies, where ratings on the 'Interaction' subscale were higher than other aspects. In other countries interaction aspects were rated lower than other aspects (Hadfield et al., 2012) which probably suggests that Greek settings emphasise staff-child relationships more than settings in other countries.

In general, Petrogiannis' (1994) findings from use of the ITERS scale were similar to those of Lambidi and Polemi-Todoulou's (1992) using the ECERS scale. In particular, in both projects, items assessing personal care routines, cleanliness, safety, and supervision of children's activities were rated higher than other items such as space and furnishing and programme structure. The low scores for space and furnishing could be attributed to economic reasons because settings rely on local authorities to subsidise them. Nonetheless, it was also identified that settings were less educationally focused as compared to settings in other European countries. One suggested reason for this difference could be the lack of an explicit theoretical background to guide activities in Greek day-care settings (Mantziou, 2001). Such a primary focus on care as opposed to educational outcomes reflects part of a divide that is historically established in Greece (See sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2).

Brophy and Statham (1994) and Douglas, (2005) argue that stakeholders, from different cultural contexts, could hold different views and values in relation to what constitutes quality in an ECEC setting, as compared to the group of US experts who agreed the variables measured by the ECERS scale. Nonetheless, the scales have been used worldwide, including in the Greek context. However, in Greece, Tsiantis and his colleagues (1991) aimed to develop an instrument that, in contrast to the ECERS scale, could measure setting quality by taking into account cultural characteristics, making it applicable to the assessment of ECEC provision across a wide variety of cultures (Dragonas et al., 1995; Petrogiannis, 1995). In that respect, researchers from three countries with contrasting cultures, Greece, Nigeria, and the Philippines, developed the 'Child Care Facility Schedule' (CCFS) through a project funded by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The CCFS was piloted in 20 private and state-run day-care settings in Greece, 15 settings in Nigeria, and 91 settings in the Philippines (Tsiantis et al., 1991). No exact information is given about the ages of children in these settings.

The authors suggest that, probably due to the introduction of the WHO's Mental Care Programme in all three countries, researchers held similar views on what constitutes quality in an ECEC setting. They highlight that the CCFS included items which were relevant to all three national groups. The user's manual, however, names only one of these items: item one in the Physical Environment category. Also, the user's manual, published by WHO (1990, p.12), underlines national variability in standards: *The indoor environment is spacious enough for the number of children present. In many regions, four square meters per child is considered a reasonable amount of indoor space per child. Adjust for residential standards in different countries.*

Nonetheless, the CCFS scale's reliability was tested in Greece and Nigeria. The validity study was conducted only in Greece where researchers randomly selected 90 day-care settings: private, state-run, and municipal, for children aged two and a half to five and a half years old (Dragonas et al., 1995). Even though study reports focused mostly on issues related to the scale's use, the findings do indicate the relatively low quality of the Greek settings (Tsiantis et al., 1988; Tsiantis et al., 1991; Dragonas et al., 1995). In particular, the findings

were that private settings, as compared to the state-run ones, scored higher in areas relating to children's well-being. Additional findings were that the environment of the private settings was satisfactory and the caregiver-child ratio was lower than the caregiver-child ratio in state-run settings. In the private settings there was also good coordination and responsiveness amongst the staff and staff worked more closely with parents than in the state-run settings. Furthermore, the rating scale indicated that in private settings children had the opportunity to be involved in more creative and developmentally appropriate activities and there were more opportunities for staff training than in the state-run settings. The researchers found that the municipal settings were well-organised and efficiently managed, there was a satisfactory adult-child ratio, and that the provision for staff and children was leading to a task-orientated environment where children were developing cooperation skills and creativity. In conclusion, the researchers found that the quality of the municipal and state-run settings, even though low, was more homogenous in relation to private settings and placed more emphasis on health and safety issues (Dragonas et al., 1995).

Quality and Developmental Outcomes

While the majority of researchers in Greece have measured setting quality, only Petrogiannis (1994; 2002) has tried to find associations between quality and children's development. He identifies three main variables which are associated with children's development. These are:

- a) the period that a child is registered in day-care, where the longer the period of registration the more competent children are in terms of cognitive and language development,
- b) group-size, where the larger the group the more children exhibit negative social behaviours and,
- c) the ITERS scale rating, where the lower the settings' quality, the less competent the children are in terms of developmental outcomes.

Petrogiannis' findings concur with international research findings where it was additionally identified that the duration of registered day-care was associated, in the long term, for children under the age of two, with anti-social behaviours

(Sylva et al., 2004; NICHD, 2003). Furthermore, Sylva et al. (2004), drawing on the EPPE study, propose key aspects which seem to improve quality in early years settings in England. EPPE findings coincide with those of the NICHD (2002) and the Cost Quality and Outcomes longitudinal studies conducted in the United States (CQO, Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999). The findings demonstrate that what is likely to improve quality is staff with theoretical and pedagogical knowledge, in particular knowledge and understanding of the curriculum, and of how young children learn. Additionally, the adults' skills in supporting children in resolving conflicts, helping parents to support children's learning in the home, and supporting 'sustained shared thinking'² are associated with better outcomes for children in areas of social, cognitive, and language development.

Quality Issues and Perspectives on Space

A key focus of this thesis is the environmental affordances of the early years settings for young children. This thesis investigates the nursery environment in relation both to children's agency and to the environment's affordances. Spencer and Blades (2005, p. 2) define the term affordances as *'the properties and possibilities that places can provide for those users, whether or not those possibilities were originally envisioned by the designers and planners'*.

Greek research findings indicate low scores on aspects such as space and furnishing and programme structure, as measured by ITERS and ECERS rating scales. Some authors argue that the characteristics of the physical setting can influence children's cognitive (David and Weinstein, 1987; Spencer and Blades, 2006) and social development (Spencer and Blades, 2006). Furthermore, work in the field of environmental psychology suggests clear associations between environmental features and children's competencies that vary across age groups (Maxwell, 2007). Thus, it is considered important at this point to briefly present debates on the structuring of space and time and the importance that these aspects might have for children's experiences in an ECEC setting.

² Sylva et al. (2004, p.36) define the 'sustained shared thinking' as *'an episode in which, two or more individuals "work together" in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc'*.

The history of architecture of institutions for young children shows that many spaces were initially built for other purposes (Rinaldi, 1998; Spencer and Blades, 2005). Rinaldi (1998, p.114) refers to them as '*hand-me-down*' buildings and Spencer and Blades (2005, p.1) identify them as places left over from the '*adult world*'. In Greece, a study of the Athens Municipal Crèche's (AMC) settings showed that the majority of buildings were free of technical or operational issues (AMC, 2014). However, none of the 77 settings has the required (by 2002 law) license to operate; something that is encountered in other cities as well (AMC, 2014), suggesting that some of these buildings could have been built for other purposes but later were modified to nurseries to cover the local needs for day-care provision. This was also the case with one of my case-study settings.

David and Weinstein (1987) suggest that systematic knowledge about children's interaction with the built environment could improve the design of settings for young children (David and Weinstein, 1987). Proshansky and Wolfe (1974) argue for the importance of including children in the design process of their settings. Nonetheless, children's spaces are usually created for children and not with children, and they are controlled by adults (Proshansky and Wolfe, 1974; Rasmussen, 2004; Spencer and Blades, 2006; Leverett, 2011). Proshansky and Wolfe (1974) suggest that failure to include children in the decision making process could result in failure to take account of their needs but also an imposition of adult perspectives on what a children's space should look like. Even though issues, including children's age, their safety, health, and welfare are usually taken into account when adults design spaces for children (Leverett, 2011), these spaces are structured according to adults' views and values (Proshansky and Wolfe, 1974; Leverett, 2011). For Proshansky and Wolfe, (1974, p.558), the '*spatial and physical aspects of a learning environment communicate a symbolic message*' about practitioners' goals and expectations. However, an effective classroom arrangement (Proshansky and Wolfe, 1974), with indoor and outdoor places designed to offer privacy, autonomy, belonging, and safety to children (Leverett, 2011), has to be a product of cooperation between children and adults and to take into account both groups' needs (Proshansky and Wolfe, 1974; Dudek, 2012; Leverett, 2011).

The terms space, place or area are used as interchangeable in this thesis and the indoor and outdoor spaces (places or areas) of the nurseries will be presented in the discussion (See Chapter 7) in relation to how the children were using and experiencing their nursery environment. However, it is important to identify the three elements of space that are important for this thesis: a) the space marked by a room or outside area, particularly the floor, walls and ceiling; b) the space defined by nursery toys and furniture; and c) the space defined by the positions of actors, the children and adults, within this space.

In relation to the outside areas, Titman (1994) argues that spaces convey messages about how adults expect children to use these spaces and consequently children read these places as sets of symbols that tell them what to be, do, think, and feel which influence their attitudes and behaviours in various ways. Similarly, Tovey (2007, pp. 53-54) suggests that:

A space covered in rubber safety matting and filled with bright coloured plastic toys communicates that children need to be protected from the real world of rich sensory experiences.

Children nowadays have fewer opportunities to engage with the natural world than in the past when children were using the outdoor environment to play and socialise (Clements, 2004; Garrick, 2009). For Corsaro (2011), outdoor areas are important social and physical places that enhance the formation of peer cultures. Listening to children's views, specific areas of the outdoor environment are listed among their favourite places within their setting including the slides or the garden (Clark and Moss, 2001).

Cob et al. (2005, p.4) argue that '*childhood space imposes limits upon children that serve to regulate and control the child's body, mind and actions*'. This is a strong statement, arguing that children have little to no say regarding the spaces they inhabit. However, other researchers view children, as active agents (James and Prout, 1990; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Clark and Moss, 2001; James, 2004) who are not only influenced but also influence the spaces they inhabit and who manage to create their own private spaces within their settings

(Skanfors et al., 2009; Corsaro, 2011). Nevertheless, only a few studies explore children's perspectives regarding how their settings should look and what they should include (Clark, 2007).

Children's perspectives on various issues are discussed below (See section 2.3.6) but their perspectives on space will be discussed here. Ghaziani (2008), using secondary analysis on three studies conducted with primary and secondary school children in the UK, found that children wanted their schools to be places for socialising, relaxation, and fun. They suggested that the indoor environment should be spacious, display art work, have colourful walls and floors, carpets, satisfactory levels of natural light, appropriate types of artificial lights, blinds to control sunlight and so on. Ghaziani (2010) had similar findings from her own research conducted in two classes with children aged five to seven years old. In particular, children's responses focused on the floor, ceiling, and walls, with children asking for them to be decorated and colourful. Children also referred to having big windows and in different shapes so they could sit next to them and see outside even when sat on the carpet, to have colourful curtains and carpets, and artificial lights of different and changing colours. These colour preferences and special attention to the ceiling, wall displays and decoration (especially regarding children's own drawings), and the floor is reported by Clark (2007) as well but in relation to three and four year olds. However, there is lack of research focusing on the perspectives of children under three in this area.

2.3.4. Parents' Views

Following the discussion of researcher perspectives on setting quality, parents' perspectives will be presented. Ceglowski and Bacigalupa (2002) identify, through a review of the relevant literature, that when parents' perspectives are researched, researchers focus mainly on parents' views about what constitutes quality, their perspectives about programme flexibility, and about staff responsiveness to their needs. The Greek research to date has focused mostly on quality indicators by investigating parents' views on the settings' quality in general, and on partnership issues.

Parents' Views on Education, Care, and Partnership Issues

In Greek settings, Sakellariou and Rentzou (2009) identified minimal quality when they evaluated the provision for parents and parental involvement in preschool settings. The researchers used non-participant observations during arrival and departure times, the ECERS-R scale to rate the settings' provision for parents, and they interviewed practitioners regarding issues they could not observe on staff-parent communication. Findings were that staff-parent communication mainly took the form of informal discussions, unless it concerned administrative issues, and there were limited opportunities for parents to get involved with their children's education.

Some authors believe that Greek parents are mostly interested in safety or nutrition aspects and they put less emphasis on issues related to relationships or on educational aspects of ECEC (Papaprokopiou, 2003). Furthermore, research evidence indicates that the settings also emphasise safety and nutrition issues and to a lesser degree educational ones (Lambidi and Polemi-Todoulou, 1992; Petrogiannis, 1994; Dragonas et al., 1995). Thus, it seems that there is a connection, to some extent, between the aspects that settings emphasise and those that parents prioritise, providing further evidence that aspects of care are of high importance both for parents and for ECEC providers.

Laloumi-Vidali (1998) was the first researcher who tried to identify Greek parents' expectations of day-care services. Her findings are based on 582 questionnaire responses from parents of children aged three to six and a half years old. Her results partly contradict Papaprokopiou's (2003) interpretations by suggesting that the majority of parents expect settings to integrate education and care. Another interesting finding was that working parents, who needed support, along with those who placed more emphasis on care, chose child care settings instead of kindergartens; these are traditionally and historically more educationally orientated. In a more recent project, Rentzou (2013) found that parents of children under and over the age of three ascribed more importance to care aspects than educational ones. Another interesting finding both for children under and over the age of three was that partnership issues were not assigned much importance either by parents or by practitioners. However, other

research has found that parents wish to work more closely in collaboration with practitioners (Laloumi Vidali, 1997; 1998; Sakellariou and Rentzou, 2007; 2008a; 2008b; Rentzou and Sakellariou 2012; Rentzou, 2011; 2013).

Laloumi Vidali (1998) also found that, apart from partnership issues, parents assign less importance to the caregiver-child relationships, the recreational aspects of ECEC settings, and the relationships between ECEC services and the local community. Laloumi-Vidali's results partly challenge both international (Singer, 1996) and Greek (Rentzou, 2013) findings. For example, Singer (1996) found that Dutch middle-class parents, reviewing child care settings, placed particular emphasis on parent-staff and child-staff interaction but limited emphasis on pedagogical aspects of provision. In the Greek context, Rentzou (2013) also found that parents of children up to the age of five and a half years ascribe more importance to staff-child and peer interaction than to those aspects relating to educational activities and to provision for parents and staff. One could argue, however, that it is not only the settings' activities that have an educational focus but that the quality of child-staff interaction could also be interpreted as an educational aspect.

In contrast to these findings, Laloumi-Vidali (1998) found that parents of children aged between three and six and a half years old seem to rate the educational factor more highly than others. She explains that she was expecting this finding '*because education has always been valued very highly by Greek parents*' (Laloumi-Vidali, 1998, p.28). Nonetheless, when similar findings are discussed nationally (Rentzou and Sakellariou, 2010; Petrogiannis and Melguish, 1996) and internationally (Elliot, 2006), authors and researchers attribute them to the welfare and charitable focus of day-care settings in contrast to the early learning and preparation-for-school focus of the kindergarten. This explanation seems to be more likely for Greece too since historically the kindergartens were used for educational purposes and day-care and nursery settings focused mainly on care and child protection (Rentzou, 2011; Papaprokopiou and Kammenou, 2012). Mantziou (2001) states that in Greece the focus on care, instead of education, is due to the fact that day-care settings were initially established under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health and Welfare and kindergartens have almost always been under the Ministry of

Education. This judgment suggests that the setting's organisational structure or culture could be more influential than individuals' practices (Tizard et al., 1972).

Tietze and Cryer (2004, p.56), in a comparative study between American and German infant/toddler settings, found that parents influence the settings and vice versa, speculating that:

If parents consider an aspect of child care more important, they might be more likely to demand this practice of the center staff, and the center will respond with higher ITERS scores on an item. Or when centers emphasize an aspect of quality, parents may become more aware of the practice and thus assign higher importance to it.

Thus, it seems likely that in Greek settings neither parents of young children nor their practitioners assign much importance to educational aspects, while they emphasise care aspects including safety and nutrition. For Kyprianos (2007) the aspects that parents prioritise are related to each country's early childhood care and education tradition. However, parents' priorities could also be related to children's ages. For example, in the US, Johansen et al., (1996), analysed longitudinal data and found that parents who had children younger than three years old did not seem to prioritise developmental or educational aspects when choosing out of home care. Findings from Greek research, both on setting quality (Lambidi and Polemi-Todoulou, 1992; Petrogiannis, 1994; Rentzou, 2012; 2013) and on parental views about important aspects of care (Rentzou, 2012; 2013), also indicate that the younger the child the more emphasis is placed on welfare and care aspects rather than on educational ones. In conclusion, the Greek research evidence indicates that Greek parents are not only interested in the nutrition and safety aspects of settings. For example, they would like to work more in partnership with practitioners and to assist with their children's education, but it seems that the way that Greek settings are structured and operate, as compared to some settings for this age group internationally, limits their active involvement.

Parents' Views on Quality

In relation to parents' perspectives on issues of quality, Greek and international research findings provide indications that sometimes parents' views and priorities differ from researchers'. Rentzou and Sakellariou (2012) found that parents rated setting quality more highly than the researchers. The researchers used the ECERS and ITERS Parent Questionnaires, which were developed by Cryer and Burhinal (1997) and Cryer et al. (2002), to identify parents' perspectives on quality. The questionnaires were adapted from ECERS and ITERS rating scales and consisted of three parts. In the first part, parents rated, on a three point scale, how important each aspect of the provision was for their child (where 1 stood for not at all important and 3 stood for very important). In the second part, parents rated, on a seven point scale, how they believed their classroom did on each item (where 0 stood for 'I don't know', 1 stood for 'not at all well', and 7 stood for 'very well'). Finally, the third part was collecting demographic data. Due to the fact that the Greek researchers wanted to compare parents' ratings with their own, they also used the ECERS and ITERS scales to measure the settings' quality.

The comparison between parents' and researchers' ratings showed that, while researchers rated settings for children up to thirty months old as inadequate and those for children of two and a half up to five years old as of minimum quality, parents rated the settings as of very good and good quality respectively. Also, parents gave their higher rating to the 'Interaction' subscale, both for younger and older children, with researchers' rating more highly the 'Listening and talking' subcategory for the younger children and the 'Interaction' one for the older children. Finally, researchers rated the 'Activities' subcategory lower in all settings but only the parents of older children did this. Furthermore, the parents of younger children gave their lowest rating to the 'Parents and staff' subcategory.

This pattern of parents rating settings higher than researchers has been observed elsewhere (Van Horn et al., 2001; Amirali Jinnah and Henley Walters, 2008; Leach et al., 2008). Van Horn et al. (2001) attributed this to the difference of opinion on aspects of quality between parents and researchers and on

parents' lack of knowledge on which aspects to ascribe importance. Other researchers have attributed this to parents' tendency to rate highly aspects that they think are more important for their child (Amirali Jinnah and Henley Walters, 2008; Leach et al., 2008). This latter explanation seems likely for the Greek sample if we take into account that parents rated aspects of care and interaction as higher and the educational and structural aspects as lower. Another possible interpretation could be that parents rate settings highly because their children seem generally happy (Singer, 1996) and they want to believe that they are providing positive experiences for their children as good parents. Similarly, Rentzou and Sakellariou (2012) attributed the significant variance in ratings to reasons, ranging from issues about researcher but particularly parental objectivity during the rating process and parents' lack of expertise or training in identifying high quality provision.

Other Greek projects challenge the perspective that parents cannot identify high quality settings. Grammatikopoulos et al. (2012) for example, using ECERS and ITERS scales and their Parent Questionnaires in Greek settings, argue that even though parents overestimate setting quality they could provide valid and reliable information about quality, but under particular conditions. More specifically Grammatikopoulos et al. (2012, p.12) state:

Since the majority of parent scores were between 5 and 7, it can be assumed that scores of 4 or 5 reflect the lowest level of quality, while the score of 7 shows the highest level of quality according to parents' opinions. Indeed, further comparison of the results revealed that despite the fact that parents may overestimate all aspects of ECE quality, their ratings were quite constant with those of the trained observers.

Nonetheless, the researchers considered parents' high ratings in all items as a drawback in identifying the aspects of quality that they consider important. For Singer (1996, p.65), parents seldom look at structural characteristics and they are happy as long as they can find '*day-care that fits in with their working hours and where the children are happy*'.

2.3.5. Practitioners' Views

Similarly to the projects discussed earlier, researchers have used quantitative research designs to identify practitioners' views on various issues related to ECEC settings in Greece. Ceglowski and Bacigalupa, (2002, p.88) suggest that, when practitioners' views are researched, researchers focus on administrative, collegial, parental, and sponsor relationships. In fact, practitioner-parent relationships remain at the centre of the Greek researchers' attention.

Practitioners' Views on Quality

Greek practitioners' views on quality have been researched in only one project, that by Rentzou (2012). Rentzou used the ACEI Global Guidelines Assessment scale, developed by the Association for Childhood Education International (Olney, 2006), to assess Greek settings' quality and, at the same time, she asked practitioners to use the same instrument to assess their classrooms. Rentzou's main aim was to compare her ratings against practitioners' ratings. The results showed that, in general, the practitioners rated the settings more highly than the researcher. In particular, the researcher rated preschool and infant/toddler classrooms as of adequate quality but the practitioners rated the preschool classrooms as of good or excellent quality and infant/toddler classrooms as of adequate or good quality. An important finding, according to Rentzou (2012, p.1346), was that:

Educators gave a higher score on matters that refer to them, their personal characteristics and the method of working and lower scores on questions related to programme policies, which are not decided by them.

Rentzou's (2012) finding provides further evidence that Greek settings invest mostly in the '*human factor*' (Petrogiannis, 1994, p.368), probably because it is something they can control, in contrary to programme policies. This could partly explain the relatively higher scores that the 'Interaction' aspect receives in relation to other aspects of the environment of Greek settings. Another reason for the higher scores on the interaction subscale could be the homogenous and higher level training of Greek early years educators since it has been reported

that training in ECEC leads to more sensitive interactions with children (Burchinal et al., 2002). Nonetheless, findings from Burchinal et al., (2002) and also from the EPPE study (Sylva et al., 2004) indicate that having more qualified staff enhances the quality of the settings, something that contrasts with Greek findings.

Practitioners' Views on Partnership

The technique of using questionnaires to collect data seems to be the mainstream approach in Greek research, and practitioners' views on partnership issues have been researched in this way as well. For example, Laloumi-Vidali, (1997), using closed-type questionnaires, researched practitioners' views concerning parents' involvement at the partnership level. Her findings indicate that practitioners who are parents themselves are more reluctant to work in collaboration with parents than those practitioners who have no children of their own. The focus on collaboration was mostly during the period of children's initial adjustment in the settings. Laloumi-Vidali argues that it was probably practitioners' views, beliefs, and experience that shaped their attitudes towards the concept of partnership during that period, rather than the available information on the issue (Laloumi-Vidali, 1997, p.24). Similarly, Papaprokopiou and Kammenou (2012, p.104), distributed questionnaires with open and closed questions to 150 practitioners and 213 parents in order to identify:

- a) The structure of the first meeting with the parents and the meeting process, and*
- b) Any possible innovative practices to facilitate children's smooth transition and integration into the day-care setting.*

The findings, once again, show that in general the relationships between practitioners and parents are mainly informal, with the parents' role being restricted to filling out forms. Also, it appears that it is mainly practitioners' own attitudes and judgments which guide children's induction and integration into settings, with no formal procedures for children's smoother adjustment into settings. Finally, Kakvoulis (1994), who evaluated children's transition from

nursery to primary school by distributing questionnaires to 566 parents, 75 nursery teachers, and 566 primary school teachers, found that 63% of the primary school teachers and 68% of parents considered that the difficulties of psychological adjustment that children faced in the first grade of primary school were not sufficiently serious to require special strategies. In contrast, 72% of nursery teachers held the opposite view. However, the majority of the respondents (97% of the nursery teachers, 98% of the first grade teachers and 97% of the parents) agreed that it was primarily the responsibility of nurseries, and to a lesser degree schools, to apply strategies for children's psychological adjustment at primary school.

While Greek research evidence suggests that transition related approaches relate mainly to individuals' values and beliefs (Papaprokopiou and Kammenou, 2012), Rentzou (2011, p.166), argues that *'Greek programmes do not provide opportunities for families to get involved and they do not encourage connections with families'*. However, according to the same study (Rentzou, 2011), practitioners' attitudes towards parents are less positive than parents' attitudes towards practitioners. This is despite the fact that partnership issues are stressed as important for children's well-being and development, mainly within the national guidelines for kindergarten settings (Birbili, 2011). Contrasting this, in the Athens Municipal Crèche (2014b) inner regulations, the only statement on partnership is that practitioners should provide assistance and guidance to parents when they face difficulties with their children.

International research findings highlight the significance of partnership for children's development (Sylva et al., 2004) and, in various countries, partnership working seems to have a central role in ECEC provision (Hujala et al., 2009). Papaprokopiou and Kammenou (2012), reviewing Greek laws relating to preschool education, conclude that the state believes children's education is exclusively the teachers' task. Maybe this is why Rentzou (2011) suggests the establishment of a relevant statutory framework in order to promote partnership issues. Rentzou's suggestion is evident in the frameworks of other countries including Australia (Edwards et al., 2008) and England (Early Education, 2012; EYFS Profile Handbook, 2013).

Practitioners Views on Staff-child Interaction

Issues relating to adult-child relationships are critical to discussions of quality in early childhood education and care. The nature of adult-child relationships within day-care settings is a contested subject which has been influenced by aspects of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958; 1969; 1982; 1988; Ainsworth, 1979; 1989; 2010). Some professional texts and guidance argue that some characteristics of the parent-child relationship do need to be replicated in day-care settings (Elfer, 2012), considering that '*young children need an additional attachment figure in nursery to promote positive self esteem and reduce anxiety in order to promote exploration*' (Elfer, 2006, p.82). However, Penn (1997), Dahlberg et al. (1999), and Trevarthen (2004) disagree with attempts to replicate home relationships within the nursery. Their main argument is that adult-child home relationships and institutional relationships differ and that nursery children should be given the opportunity to interact with a wider group of adults rather than be attached to one adult. In addition to that, Penn (1997) argues that the importance of children's interactions with their peers is ignored when attachment theory is applied to relationships within a nursery setting.

In the Greek context, practitioner-child relationships have mostly been discussed within projects researching setting quality (see for example the projects of: Dragonas et al., 1995; Lambidi and Polemi-Todoulou, 1992; Petrogiannis and Melguish, 1996; Mantziou, 2001; Rentzou and Sakellariou, 2010). Thus, the data about practitioner-child relationships is derived mainly from the use of ITERS and ECERS scales even though Petrogiannis and Melguish (1996), Rentzou and Sakellariou (2010) and Mantziou (2001) also used the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS, Arnett, 1989). Internationally there are examples of research projects that used more interpretative approaches to identify practitioners' perspectives on their interactions with children (Hopkins, 1988; Colley, 2006) and children's perspectives on their interactions with practitioners (Elfer, 2003; 2007; 2008), with Elfer's work being the most influential.

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) study found that sensitive and responsive caregiver behaviour is associated with less

negative and more positive play with other children (NICHD, 2001). In Greece, the results from using Arnet's (1989) CIS scale (Petrogiannis and Melguish, 1996; Mantziou, 2001; Rentzou and Sakellariou, 2010) indicate that practitioners interact 'positively' with children but at the same time exhibit 'detached' and 'permissive behaviours'. The 'positive interaction' behaviour concerns the warmth of the caregivers' interaction with children, the nature and quality of their communication with children, and the caregivers' enthusiasm and involvement with children. 'Detachment' focuses on whether or not the caregivers are emotionally and behaviourally remote from the children and if they spend a considerable proportion of their time in activities that do not involve interaction with children. Finally, 'Permissiveness' reflects a lax approach to children's misbehaviour, that is, evaluating the extent to which the caregivers avoid disciplining children even when their behaviour seems to indicate that firmness is necessary. Finally, the fourth dimension of the scale which measures 'Punitiveness' refers to practitioners' harsh or over controlling behaviour.

According to Rentzou and Sakellariou (2010), the finding that practitioners interacted positively with children but exhibited detached and permissive behaviours, observed in other projects as well (Petrogiannis 1994; Petrogiannis and Melguish, 1996; Mantziou, 2001), suggests that practitioners do not interact effectively with children. Indeed, adopting a supervisory style does not comply with international standards of providing high quality child care. However, Singer (2002), who observed similar approaches in Dutch day-care settings, where practitioners were observed taking a break during children's free play and taking care of children only if they requested it, provides evidence that this approach can benefit children because it leads to children solving conflicts on their own.

Petrogiannis (1994, p.368) however, provides another interpretation of Greek practitioners' behaviour and the lack of educationally orientated activities:

However, this observation could lead to thoughts that the emphasis is given, deliberately or not, so that the system has less demands on the staff. Supervision alone without the energetic and directive involvement

of the staff to a variety of educational activities means less trouble and fatigue for the caregivers.

Nonetheless, Petrogiannis (2002) found a significant correlation between CIS Permissiveness and ITERS Staff/Child interactions which suggests that this aspect of caregiver's behaviour promotes the overall practitioner-child interaction. What is more, Petrogiannis and Melgush (1996) and Petrogiannis (2002) found that the adult-child ratio is associated with permissiveness and punitiveness subscales, while Rentzou and Sakellariou (2010) found correlations between adult-child ratios and the detachment subscale. Also, Rentzou and Sakellariou (2010) found that a practitioner's educational level does not affect adult-child interactions, something that the researchers attributed to the limited variance that Greek early years practitioners have in terms of qualifications. This findings contrast with international research (Sylva et al, 2004).

It seems that interaction in Greek settings is considered to be of low quality even though they employ exclusively qualified educational staff. This might seem like a paradox but an explanation can be offered if we accept Petrogiannis's (2002, p.142) suggestion that *'caregiver's behaviour could act as an independent factor of quality which would not necessarily follow the pattern of quality of the centre'*, as measured by the ITERS scale. Petrogiannis (2002) came to this conclusion because only two aspects of the caregivers' interactions with children related strongly with the setting quality characteristics, the adult-child ratio and the ITERS total score. In particular, practitioners from lower quality settings were found to exhibit harsher and overly controlling behaviours. Furthermore, the practitioners were more permissive when there were more practitioners per child, but, group size was not found to correlate with practitioners' behavior in the classroom.

Even though most studies highlight the emphasis that Greek settings put on adult-child relationships, only one project provides some explanation of this. Gregoriadis and Tsigilis (2008) researched teacher-child relationships in 67 kindergarten settings, using the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) developed by Pianta in 1992. The scale measures Conflict, Dependency and

Closeness and consists of 28 items to be rated by practitioners on a five point scale. The Conflict subscale measures the degree to which a practitioner considers his or her relationship with the student as negative and conflictual. The Closeness subscale measures the degree to which a teacher experiences affection, warmth, and open communication with a student. Finally, the Dependency subscale measures the degree to which a teacher perceives a particular student as *'overly dependent; indicating problems when: the child over-relies on the teacher, reacts strongly to separation from the teacher, and requests help when not needed'* (Pianta, 1996, p.11).

Gregoriadis and Tsigilis (2008) found that Dependency and Closeness were positively correlated, but there were no significant correlations between Dependency and Conflict. Since the findings contrasted those of similar studies conducted in other western countries, the researchers concluded that, in the Greek collectivistic society, the notion of dependency may be interpreted differently to interpretations in other more individualistic societies such as the United States. In particular Gregoriadis and Tsigilis (2008, p.117) explain:

Perhaps kindergarten teachers associate the behavior of dependent children more with Closeness than with Conflict, because some of the dependent behaviors (e.g., personal confessions, demonstration of love and appreciation) can be interpreted, up to a point, as positive reinforcement to the teachers' effectiveness and self-esteem.

The method of collecting data from practitioners by using self-reporting techniques was also used by Sakellariou and Rentzou (2012a; 2012b). These researchers tried to identify pre-service kindergarten teachers' beliefs, intentions, and practices in relation to a variety of issues, with a particular focus on the importance of practitioner-child interactions. Findings indicate that practitioners' beliefs can predict their intentions. In particular, the researchers found that those who scored higher on the intention scale were more likely to interact in more positive ways with children. However, since the project's methodology was based on practitioners' self-reported responses, the researchers could not answer whether these beliefs and intentions were also reflected in practitioners' practices.

In another study, the same researchers (Sakellariou and Rentzou, 2012b) tried to compare Greek and Cypriot educators' self-reported beliefs and practices on developmentally appropriate practices. The researchers once again distributed questionnaires to be ranked by pre-service kindergarten teachers. The results indicate that the Cypriot kindergarten practitioners are more developmentally orientated in their teaching, in comparison to their Greek colleagues, in terms of trying to enhance children's development and learning. However, both groups report that the most influential factors on practice were other teachers and state regulations. Also, once more, staff-parent reciprocal relationships received the lowest score from both groups. In conclusion, the analysis showed that the educators' beliefs matched their practices.

To conclude, practitioner-parent and practitioner-child relationships have been the main focus of Greek studies to date when researching practitioners' views. However, what becomes evident, after reviewing the relevant literature, is that the findings primarily reflect the researchers' views and interpretations rather than practitioners' perspectives. This is because the methodology used to investigate practitioners' views did not provide adequate access to practitioners' explanations as to why they adopt a 'detached' approach in relation to their interactions with children, for example, or why they are reluctant to include parents in the educational process.

2.3.6. Adults' Views about Children and Children's Views of their ECEC Settings

The previous discussion of researcher, parent, and practitioner perspectives indicates that Greek researchers have chosen to study ECEC provision mainly from a researcher perspective. Parents and practitioners have mainly contributed by giving different levels of priority to the quality indicators that researchers have chosen to investigate. However, this is only one of the possible ways that research in ECEC settings can be conducted. Another possible way, which has been minimally applied in researching Greek settings, is to investigate the work that is done in the settings from the perspective of different stakeholders. Such an approach, evident in a range of international

research (Bertram and Pascal, 2007; Tobin et al., 2009; Weiss et al., 2013) employs primarily qualitative methods, including interviews and observations but also video recordings, to investigate the potentially different perspectives of various stakeholders, including practitioners, early childhood center directors, professors of ECEC, parents, and children.

The current project is focused on identifying children's experiences in their early years settings; thus, the focus of this part of the literature review will be on the different approaches to researching children's experiences, and findings relating to children's perspectives on their experiences. It is important to highlight that the discussion will focus primarily on international studies since such research is limited in Greece. Finally, it is also important to present information about how thinking has developed over the years and how constructions of children have changed from conceptualising children as research subjects to children as active participants within the new sociology of childhood (James and Prout, 1997).

Researching Quality from the Perspective of the Child's Experience

Children's views are rarely included or recognised in discussions about quality (Langsted, 1994) and in Greek research their views on this subject have been largely ignored. However, many researchers (Langsted, 1994; Evans and Fuller, 1998; Sheridan and Pramling Samuelson, 2001) argue that children have the right to be heard in such discussions.

Internationally, there have been a number of attempts to include children's views by researching their experiences in early years settings. For example, Walsh and Gardner (2005), argue that the Quality Learning Instrument (QLI) they developed can be used to assess and record the quality of children's learning experiences in an early years setting in a narrative form and to evaluate the classroom environment from the perspective of children's experiences. The researchers developed the QLI by reviewing the relevant literature and identifying nine key themes that they consider would be '*integral to any high-quality learning environment*' (Walsh and Gardner, 2005). The authors summarise the themes in the following key words: *academically*

(motivation, concentration, higher-order thinking skills, and multiple skills), socially (social interaction and respect), and emotionally (confidence, well-being, and independence). They propose, for example, that in order to identify that a setting provides high levels of motivation there should be evidence that children are eager to participate in activities, the adults should offer stimulating and age relevant activities, and the environment should be spacious and generously resourced. On the other hand, indications of low levels of motivation are that children seem unenthusiastic and apathetic, that adults dominate children's activities, and that the environment appears dull and uninspiring to children.

The researchers observed the classroom practice over two days in ten Northern Ireland primary schools (classrooms for children aged four to five years old) and in ten Danish kindergartens. They kept notes and took video recordings which were used to identify examples of high and low quality provision in relation to the nine themes. Walsh and Gardner (2005) reach conclusions about what constitutes a high quality learning environment by reviewing the relevant literature and asking early years 'experts' to assess their instrument's validity and reliability. It would appear, therefore, that, despite claims for the instrument, children's perspective and their expertise (Clark and Moss, 2001) was lost in the context of 'expert' assumptions about what constitutes a high quality learning environment.

Other researchers have studied children's perspectives on their experiences to identify what constitutes quality from children's point of view. For example Langsted (1994), with findings from interviews with twenty four Danish children, aged five, found that the most important quality criterion for children was the presence of other children, followed by the activities (the author does not specify what kind of activities), the toys, and the 'nice staff' (Langsted, 1994, p.37). Children gave the latter three factors equal weight but they were less important than the presence of other children. In Finland, Huttunen (1992) asked elementary children of the 3rd, 4th and 5th grades to write an essay about their experiences and memories of their early childhood programmes and found that children's more positive recollections were associated with their caregivers, their peers, and play activities. Children also referred to basic care issues such

as meals, outside activities, and hygiene, to the physical environment, including inside and outside spaces, and to the equipment, and the organisation and system of the programme such as rules and regulations.

Evans and Fuller (1998), researching in a different cultural context, the UK, found that the most important quality criterion for children related to the various activities in the setting. The children were asked by the researchers what they liked and disliked at their nursery. They identified symbolic play, construction, gross-motor activities, and literacy and numeracy as activities they liked. Their dislikes also focused on activities, this time including socio-dramatic play, home corner play, puzzles, and play involving small toys. Furthermore, they referred to negative interactions with peers (aggression), being disciplined by staff, and feeling physical discomfort such as going outside without a coat. In an earlier study in the USA, Armstrong and Sugawara (1989) also found that three to five year old children preferred play activities, either with toys and equipment, or activities involving other children and practitioners. On the other hand, children disliked aggressive acts, naps, and playing with specific play materials. This focus on children's likes and dislikes has been the epicentre of other studies as well (Clark and Moss, 2001; Maconochie, 2013). Findings from such studies indicate that children from various cultural backgrounds have in common their preference for play activities, even though one cannot expect a consensus between children in terms of liked and disliked activities even amongst children from the same culture. However there seems to be consensus in terms of views of negative and positive interactions with peers and adults.

Other researchers argue that quality must be seen from the perspective of children's participation in the decision making processes of settings. In particular, Sheridan and Pramling-Samuelson (2001, p.188), researching the participation and influence of five year old Swedish children in their settings, argue that:

For a preschool to be evaluated as high quality, children's practice of democracy should include most activities and processes that are going on in pre-school and not just embrace what goes on between them.

This point is made because the interviews with the children showed that children could decide on issues related to their own play, activities, and belongings. However, children rarely participated in discussion relating to or influencing the overall organisation, routines, curriculum content or activities initiated by teachers.

The researchers (Langsted, 1994; Evans and Fuller, 1998; Sheridan and Pramling-Samuelson, 2001; Maconochie, 2013), who use more interpretative approaches to researching children's perspectives on their experiences, stress the importance of listening to children's views. Children's opinions have a distinct value because they indicate the aspects of their settings that they consider important. Therefore, since this study is about children's perspectives on their experiences in early years settings, the discussion, from this point onwards, will give particular emphasis to interpretative projects investigating children's perspectives on their experiences about various aspects of their daily lives in ECEC settings, including their relationships with peers and adults. Perspectives from the positivist paradigm on these aspects will be presented only briefly.

Perspectives on Relationships between Children and Staff

Staff-child (or adult-child) relationships in Greece have been mainly researched from an adult perspective (see previous discussion on the views of researchers, parents and practitioners). Furthermore, they have been primarily investigated from a developmental perspective. The focus has been on trying to identify if interactions in ECEC settings have included those characteristics that international research indicates promotes better outcomes in terms of children's socio-emotional and cognitive development. The emphasis placed on adult perspectives, and not child perspectives, is implied when researchers state a focus on '*adult-child*' relationships and not on '*child-adult*' relationships. It was the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 that primarily changed the research field in ECEC settings (Ebrahim, 2011), placing children in the centre and establishing their right to be heard on all issues that concern them.

In the new sociology of childhood, researchers claim that listening to young children's perspectives is mainly achieved through the use of 'participatory methods' (See methodology section 3.6 on the use of the Mosaic Approach). However, the majority of the projects which use such methods focus on children over the age of five, while participatory research with younger children is limited (Clark, 2005). In fact, the younger the children the more researchers have studied their experiences primarily through the use of observations; structured observations within the positivistic paradigm and unstructured or semi-structured within the interpretative one. Peter Elfer (2003; 2007; 2008) has been influential in terms of researching under threes' experiences in the nursery by using interpretative observation and in particular the Tavistock method. The Tavistock method includes ten to twenty minutes of observation of a target child without recording. The observer focuses on the child's interactions with adults, other children, toys and objects. As soon as the observation ends the observer writes a narrative account of the observation by including, in chronological order, as much detail as possible about the observed actions and emotions (Elfer, 2006).

A key finding of Elfer and his colleagues in taking this approach to observations has been identifying the importance for children of having a 'key-person' (Elfer et al., 2012). In this view, the key-person approach enables the development of close relationships between individual children and individual practitioners, and between individual practitioners and parents (Elfer et al., 2012). The approach has been critiqued because of how it has been informed by Bowlby's attachment theory (See page 52); however, Elfer argues that the key person approach provides the child with a sense of being special and secure and gives children the opportunity to '*experience a close relationship that is affectionate and reliable*' (Elfer et al., 2012, p.23). Elfer (2008), notes that some children seem to seek individual attention, for example, when they feel distressed during the day but also during transition periods. Kagan and Neuman (1998, p.366) argue that children go through two kinds of transitions, 'vertical transitions' which are when children move from the familiar home environment to the new learning environment such as day-care or school and '*horizontal transitions*' which occur during the day and as children move from one environment to the

other. However, most literature concerns children's vertical transitions where it is found that, during these times, having close relationships seems to help children in terms of reducing the stress and anxiety that is triggered by reasons such as separation (Elfer, 2008). Findings similar to Elfer's are reported elsewhere (NICHD, 2003). Other studies (Dalli, 2000) argue that the transition policy that the setting follows, in relation to having a primary caregiver or not might affect the way children learn to relate with adults in the setting.

Because, in Greece, influences from the field of psychology dominate educational research and practice, it is not surprising that a concept similar to the key-person approach is explicitly used in practice in institutional care. However, it is surprising that this concept is only used in discussions of day-care settings but not in practice. The concept in institutional care is known as 'pedagogos anaphoras' which translates in English as: the practitioner that children can go/refer back to. According to Roufidou (2010) the term 'pedagogos anaphoras', signifies the *'pedagogue who ensures stability and continuity in the child's environment alongside personalised physical and emotional care'* (Roufidou, 2010, p.563).

On the other hand, Rentzou and Sakellariou (2010) adopt a more developmental approach than Roufidou in relation to care by stating that individualised care, and sensitive and responsive caregiving are crucial in order for children to form secure attachment relationships with their practitioners, which in the long term, they suggest, will assist children's holistic development. Roufidou (2008) argues for the need to establish the 'pedagogos anaphoras' concept in day-care settings too by highlighting how important it is for infants and toddlers to know that there is a familiar adult, emotionally available, that children can go back to when they want physical and emotional closeness and to be cared for. Roufidou's suggestion is similar to Elfer's key-person approach. Nonetheless, within the key-person approach, Elfer also highlights the importance of working in partnership with parents, something that is not highlighted by Roufidou (2008).

In addition, Elfer (2008) also argues about the importance for children of having a 'key-group', with consistency in staff and children. Melhuish (2003) as well as

Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) reviewed positivist studies and found indications that staff stability enhances children's well-being, and that group stability allows children to act in less solitary ways so that they become more peer-oriented and friendlier towards peers in distress. The concept of the key-group implicitly exists in Greek day-care, nursery, and kindergarten settings since the numbers of staff and children, who usually attend full time sessions (Monday to Friday), remain stable in each room throughout the academic year, from early September until the end of July. Also, in Greek settings there is greater stability than in many English ECEC settings for children under the age of four where the majority of children attend part-time sessions such as a few hours a week spread over two or three days (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997). It is indicative, for example, that in 2009 the attendance rate for children under the age of three in the United Kingdom was 35% and only 4% of the children attended more than 30 hours a week. In Greece, in the same year, the attendance rate was 11% with 7% of the children attending more than 30 hours a week (Moss, 2013). Nonetheless, children in Greek day-care and nursery settings are not allocated to one of the two workers in the room as a primary worker or key-person, while kindergarten children have only one teacher in their classroom (See discussion on ratios, page 27).

Kindergarten children's perspectives on their interactions with their teachers have been the subject of only one Greek study (Gregoriadis, 2008), and younger children's perspectives on child-adult interaction have not been researched to date. The reason for such limited Greek research in this area might be the difficulties that researchers encounter when trying to elicit young children's verbal and non verbal responses. Even though this is a demanding task, it can provide researchers and early years practitioners with important information on children's perspectives about their interactions with their practitioners. For example, Austin et al. (1996), who researched children's satisfaction with their child care providers, found that children's perceptions of teacher interactions were not related to the quality of the setting, as measured by ECERS, or to teacher behavior, as measured by the Teacher Behavior Rating Scale.

In the Greek context, Gregoriadis (2008) researched children's views on their interactions with their teachers by conducting interviews with 338 kindergarten children. He identified a number of criteria relating to Greek children's views about their teachers. The criteria were categorised under broad themes and ranked on their frequency in children's statements. Resulting from this, Gregoriadis' thematic analysis shows that children hold positive views about their teacher if she: 1) is available to support and help them 2) is fair and treats them equally 3) is emotionally close to them 4) is nice, polite, happy, and talks to them gently (personality traits) 5) praises them-avoids disciplining 6) provides care 7) provides interesting activities 8) wears nice clothes and jewellery (physical traits), and finally 8) if she participates in children's free play.

Generally, Greek kindergarten children appear to place particular value on physically and emotionally close relationships with their teacher. Gregoriadis (2008, p.5 and p.8 respectively) uses two extracts from the interviews he conducted with children which illustrate children's feelings about physical and emotional closeness with their practitioners. In particular Child 1 stated:

I love her because she loves me too. I can feel that she likes it when I'm close to her.

In contrast to Child 1, Child 2 highlighted the lack of emotional and physical closeness with his practitioner by stating:

She doesn't seem happy when she sees me in the morning. She doesn't smile to me and she always hugs N. But, she says 'Good morning' and smiles to other children. My mum loves me more.

Gregoriadis (2008) emphasises the accuracy with which children can describe the quality characteristics of their interactions with their teachers. However, another strong theme is children's emphasis on the existence or absence of physical and emotional closeness with their teachers. Children seem to value physical closeness even during free play activities. Thus, it seems that physically and emotionally close relationships and the care related aspects of child-adult interactions are powerful for Greek children in determining how they

view their teachers. Similar findings are discussed by Armstrong and Sugawaria (1989) who found that 55% of three to five year old children liked caregiving behaviours by their teachers such as watching, helping, rubbing their backs during naps, and caring for them, while 17% liked their teachers associating with them during play. Even though many children (45%) did not reply about the behaviours of teachers that they disliked, 24% of the children said they disliked behavioral restrictions by their teachers such as not allowing them to do things, making them be quiet and scolding children for doing something wrong.

Adults' power to discipline, identified as something that children dislike (Armstrong and Sugawaria, 1989; Georgiadis, 2008), provides another indication that children understand that staff control their daily routines in settings (Langsted, 1994). Corsaro (2011), who mainly researches children's peer cultures³ by focusing on children over the age of three, also provides strong evidence of children's understanding of adult power and control through discussions of children's role-play. He argues that children do not simply imitate adult models but they address their own concerns through these roles and he goes on to state, '*children's appropriation and embellishment of adult models is primarily about status, power, and control*' (Corsaro, 2011, p.166). In general however, children seem to dislike and reject adults' controlling or authoritative behaviours and these lead them to dislike their teacher (Gregoriadis, 2008) or their nursery (Evans and Fuller, 1998). In other cases, children challenge adult authority (Corsaro, 2011). In particular, Corsaro (2011, p.44) states:

Children attempt to evade adult rules through collaboratively produced secondary adjustments⁴, which enable children to gain a certain amount of control over their lives in these settings.

Thus, adults might control children's daily routine in nurseries but research indicates that children have ways of challenging this. An awareness of adult roles empowers children and leads them to question or even test adults'

³ Corsaro (2011, p.147), defines peer culture as 'a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers'.

⁴ Corsaro (2011, p.44), explains the secondary adjustments by quoting Goffman's statement that "secondary adjustments are any habitual arrangement by which a member of an organization employs unauthorized means, or obtains unauthorized ends, or both, thus getting around the organization's assumptions as to what he should do and get hence what he should be".

authority by discovering ways to evade their rules. Ebrahim (2011) describes three techniques, resistance, avoidance, and ignoring, which are strategies developed by children to evade adult rules and instructions. Ebrahim (2011) comes to the same conclusion as Corsaro (2011), which is that all three strategies along with peer collaboration are used by children as a means to gain control and construct social life at their settings.

Child-adult relationships and interactions, however, are not characterised by a constant battle for control. Children's understanding of adult roles enables them to attribute other characteristics to staff as well. Langsted (1994) claims that children also identify staff as being there to help and comfort them, for example when conflicts arise which they cannot manage themselves. Indeed, the comforting and supportive adult was ranked top in Greek children's positive views about their teachers (Gregoriadis, 2008). Nonetheless, research evidence indicates that children are able to solve a large number of conflicts with peers independently (Corsaro, 2011; Singer, 2002; Singer and Hännikäinen, 2002). Even though one cannot be certain about when children seek adult intervention (Göncü and Cannella, 1996), adults usually intervene without children appealing for their help (Singer, 2002). Research projects studying the teacher's role in relation to peer conflict (Göncü and Cannella, 1996; Singer and Hännikäinen, 2002; De Haan and Singer, 2003) focus primarily on the strategies teachers use to prevent or solve conflicts. These strategies include direct or indirect intervention. Direct intervention is about directing the children on what to do, telling them to stop fighting, or removing the source of conflict (File, 1994) and indirect intervention is about helping the children to solve the conflict (DeVries and Zan, 1994). Research evidence indicates that practitioners intervene in order to restore order and avoid peer conflict disrupting the class (Rogers, 2000), or to discourage aggressive behaviour that could cause physical harm (Roseth et al., 2008).

In closing this section, it seems important to note that when researchers study staff-child relationships they consider practitioners but not the wider range of adults that children interact with within settings, including cleaners and cooks. In Greece such personnel are called ancillary staff and there is a gap in the literature concerning their contribution to the organisation of settings and to

children's education and care. Even though there is no research in this area, Whalley (2001) makes some reference to the training of this group of employees in England and one Greek text (Sidiropoulou and Tsaoula, 2008) recognises that such personnel come into direct contact with children during routine and care times. Einarsdottir (2005) reports that children in her study, which was conducted in Iceland, photographed the kitchen of their nursery and the staff there, but the researcher makes no other remarks about the reasons for children's specific choices. Generally, the interactions of such staff with children and children's perspectives on this group of employees have not been the subject of any Greek or international studies.

Nevertheless, instruments for researching quality including ITERS underline that when scoring the items related to interaction, these other adults should be considered in rating where they are in the classroom regularly or for long periods of the day (Harms, Cryer, and Clifford, 2003). Additionally, the CCFS scale guidelines (WHO, 1990, p.17) underline that the 'director, cook, secretary, etc' should not be counted in adult-child ratios but it says nothing about taking account of this group when assessing children's interactions with adults. Thus, both scales, which have been used in Greek settings where ancillary staff have an active role in daily routines, allow the inclusion of ancillary staff in observations of interactions. However, none of the Greek researchers who used these scales mentions whether such personnel were indeed included. Even though this is not an area explicitly covered in the literature, my professional experience shows that ancillary staff appears to play an important role in children's daycare and nursery life in Greece. This is especially so during transition times as well as on a daily basis during meal times. Also, they are usually present during outdoor free play.

Debates about humans as social beings have a long history. Probably the first reference we have to the social nature of human beings derives from the Greek philosopher Aristotle who stated that '*Man is by nature a social being*' (384-322 BC, 1523A, lines 2-3). However, this statement probably refers to adults only because, as Aries (1962) observes, children's social importance was unacknowledged until the 17th century and improved from that point onwards. Up to the 17th century, childhood was mainly conceptualised as a subculture

within the adult culture and from the 17th century onwards began to be interpreted as a cultural product (Higgins and Parsons, 1983). Eckerman et al. (1975) argue that we probably owe the knowledge we have about early human sociability to developmental psychologists who started, more systematically from the second half of the 20th century onwards, investigating children's interactions, mainly with adults. Developmental psychologists' early discussions on sociability have tended to present a deficit view on the social skills of infant and toddlers by focusing on one-to-one relationships, primarily with the child's mother (Eckerman et al., 1975). However, Piaget (1932/1965) and particularly Vygotsky (1978) included discussion of the importance of peer interactions for children's social and cognitive development.

In this study, a major part of my methodology was influenced by the literature of Bruner (1977; 1983) and Trevarthen (1977; 1993), who researched infants' and babies' behavioural cues, mostly during interactions with their mothers. Their methods and theories constitute part of the literature review on which my research is based, but the methodological differences which are explained further on, are due to the different context and aims of my study.

The pioneering work of these authors in the 1970s showed that children can, from an early age, communicate their feelings and emotions, and that the caregivers' responsiveness to these early communicative behaviours is essential, not only for children's later language development (Bruner, 1977; 1983; Trevarthen, 1977; 1993), but also for '*normal brain development and psychological growth*' (Trevarthen, 1993, p.68). However, there are some differences between those projects and my study because my aim was to research child-practitioner and not child-parent interactions. Even though both Bruner and Trevarthen refer mostly to child-mother interaction, expressions like '*caretaker*' (Bruner, 1977, p.276) or '*mother or other principal companion*' (Trevarthen, 1977, p.255) are included in their conclusions about how adult-child communication is established. Nonetheless, it is not clear from their description what is meant by '*other principal companion*'. The importance of key adults, other than the parent, forming close emotional relationships with young children in their care, so that children '*thrive both emotionally and cognitively*' (Anning and Edwards, 1999, p.14), is nevertheless underlined by other more

recent authors (Elfer et al., 2003). Therefore, it was considered important to focus on these relationships in this study to identify whether they play a significant role in younger children's daily experiences.

Trevarthen (1977), identifies communicative behaviours from birth up to the age of eight months, including the early smile, the baby's cry (with which s/he tries to convey specific needs or conditions), her/his vocalizations (slight movement of the mouth and tongue), pre-speech (weakly voiced mouth activity), and gesticulation (hand movement). However, such behaviours are encountered in older non-verbal children as well and in this study specific emphasis was placed on observing such actions even for older children.

Furthermore, findings from studies with babies of nine to twelve months old playing with their caregivers, who use everyday objects or playthings, leads both authors to conclude that it is not only the mother or the caregiver who starts, extends or redirects the play but also the child who can become '*a giver of signals*' (Bruner 1983, p.75), for example about the object s/he desires (Trevarthen, 1977). Nonetheless, both authors emphasise that, if the caregiver fails to respond to the child's initiatives for communication, this provokes specific responses on the baby's side such as efforts to re-establish communication. If these efforts fail then the child might withdraw, avoid looking at the caregiver or start crying. Therefore, Trevarthen (1977) argues that it is the caregiver's adaptive capacity which will determine whether the communication will be sustained or not.

Bruner and Trevarthen were pioneers in this area of study, with their projects taking place in laboratories. However, Bowlby (1958; 1969; 1982; 1988) and Ainsworth (1979; 1989), researching in hospitals, further influenced researchers to study adult-child dyads but in different contexts and by using different methodologies. For example, Schaffer and Emerson (1964), also interested in children's social development, observed children from birth up to the age of eighteen months during interactions with their mothers in the home context and interviewed the children's mothers. In the following years, the research expanded into various contexts, including day-care and nursery settings, with children's interactions with other significant adults, such as practitioners, under

scrutiny by using a range of methodologies (See previous discussion on adult-child relationships).

Perspectives on Peer Relationships

Children and especially those in day-care settings do not interact exclusively with adults but they play and interact with other children as well, younger and older. Thus, it is important to review the development of the relevant literature on peer relationships and children's social lives. Despite the cultural differences that have been identified in children's interactions in various cultural settings (See page 74), play is usually seen as universal (Schaefer and Drewes, 2011). This is because there is no ethnographic study of children so far to have identified a cultural context where children do not engage in play activities. Play has been researched from a developmental psychology perspective and subsequently from sociological, historical, and educational perspectives. Similarly to early studies of play, early research into children's peer relationships was undertaken within the field of psychology and social psychology with sociologists taking an interest at a much later stage. This thesis adopts a more sociological stance in investigating children's relationships, including child-adult and peer relationships. However, it is important to provide the reader with a brief review of how the early studies viewed children's play and peer relationships.

Playing with Peers

The majority of early research in the field of play highlights the social aspects of play; it emphasises play's contribution to children's social (Parten, 1932) or to their cognitive development (Piaget, 1962). Later studies however, focused on the formation and establishment of peer cultures (Corsaro, 1979; 1981; 1985; 1988; 1994; 2011; Corsaro and Eder, 1990; Evaldsson and Corsaro, 1998).

For Sutton-Smith (1986, p.26) '*the predominant nature of play throughout history has been play with others, not play with objects*'. Maybe this is why children's social behaviour and development has predominately been researched by observing them during play and especially during free play with

their peers. Following this approach, researchers have identified stages of play that relate to specific behaviours and age groups (Parten, 1932; Piaget, 1969).

For example Parten's (1932) early typology has a developmental focus and identifies 6 types of children's social participation in play. It shows that children from birth to two years of age exhibit mostly unoccupied behaviour; from two to two and a half years children engage mainly in solitary play; from two and a half to three years children engage in parallel play; from three and a half to four and a half years children engage in associative play; and from four to five years children engage mostly in cooperative play. Parten reached these conclusions by observing 42 nursery school children during free play. Her definitions for the 6 types of play are provided briefly below.

1) Unoccupied behaviour: Children do not really play at all. They either stand around and glance for a time at others, or engage in aimless activities.

2) Solitary play: Children play alone with toys that are different from those used by children within speaking distance. They make no attempt to interact with others.

3) Onlooker behaviour: Children spend most of their time watching others by standing closely so they can see and hear everything that takes place. They make comments on the play of others but do not attempt to join in.

4) Parallel play: Children play beside, but not really with, other children. They use the same toys in close proximity to others, yet in an independent way.

5) Associative play: Children engage in rather disorganised play with other children. But, there is no assignment of activities or roles; individual children play in their own ways

6) Cooperative play: Children engage in organised play with rules with other children, children are assigned different roles and one child's efforts are supplemented by those of another.

In another early study of social play, Maudry and Nekula (1939), observed 92 children aged six months to twenty five months old during play with unfamiliar children, and found that, at between six to eight months, children handled their peers as if they were play material, from nine to thirteen months children saw others as obstacles to play material, resulting in conflict episodes, and only

when children were approaching the age of two (from nineteen to twenty five months) did they identify their peers as partners.

Following the same stage-like approach, Piaget identified 3 stages of play: **exercise play**, from birth to two years old which matches with the sensori-motor stage, **symbolic play** from two to six years old, and **games with rules** over the age of seven (Paraskevopoulos, 1985). According to Rubin et al. (1976, p.414) it was Smilansky who elaborated on Piaget's categories by presenting four sequential play categories: a) '**functional play**' which is simple repetitive muscle movements with or without the use of objects, b) '**constructive play**' where the child constructs or creates something, c) '**dramatic play**' where the child substitutes imaginary situations to satisfy his/her wishes and needs, and d) '**games with rules**' where the child accepts and adjusts to prearranged rules.

From the previous discussion, it is clear from a developmental perspective that, in order for children to progress from one stage of play to the next, they need more complex social skills. Thus, both Parten and Piaget but also Maudry and Nekula agree that it is predominately children's ages that guide the type of play the children will engage with, regardless of context. However, there is a growing literature, which provides evidence that children rarely engage in solitary play when in the company of peers, but on the contrary expend a lot of time and effort on initiating and sustaining interactions with them (Rubin et al., 1976; Corsaro, 1985; Corsaro and Eder, 1990; Singer, 2002). Such studies, contradict the very early developmental studies and challenges these early findings by showing increasing evidence of sociability from a very early age (See discussion on peer friendships, page 73). Furthermore, Broadhead (2009), who studied children over the age of three in day-care and nursery settings, argues that it is the settings' playful rather than task orientated pedagogy that facilitates social and cooperative play and not only children's ages.

This thesis adopts a sociological approach in studying children's interactions investigating the unfolding of such relationships as part of each child's social continuum rather than as discrete stages of development. This approach does not reject the importance of earlier researchers' work, including Piaget's, but sees children embedded in the context of peer culture. Thus, Corsaro's

approach to peer relationships is more relevant to this study even though Corsaro's focus is on older children, three to six years of age, whereas my study focuses on children under the age of three.

For sociologist Corsaro (1988), children's social development and their socialisation are collective processes that take place publicly rather than privately; thus, he argues that theories of social development need to be released from the dogma of individualism which views children's social development solely as children's internalisation of adult knowledge and skills. Furthermore, children engage in numerous play routines when interacting with their peers. For Evaldsson and Corsaro (1998, p.381), play and games have multiple meanings which, apart from offering joy, also offer opportunities for children to '*address complexities and ambiguities in their relations with each other and adults*'. Corsaro's documentation of children's peer cultures, for over 20 years, has allowed him to categorise children's play routines into three main categories: 1) the spontaneous fantasy or imaginative play where children spontaneously pretend to be animals and imaginary figures such as fairies, monsters, and princesses by the use of toy figures or physical embodiment, 2) the socio-dramatic role play which includes children's collaboratively produced pretend activities through the use of family, school, and occupational features within their local peer cultures, and 3) games with rules such as card games, sports games, and chase and catch games (Evaldsson and Corsaro, 1998). The chase and catch games were observed across all age groups that Corsaro studied (three to six years old) whereas the younger children, three to four years old, were observed engaging mostly in spontaneous fantasy and imaginative play. It is important to note though that Corsaro's research focused on older children, from three years old up to the age of six, in comparison to the developmental studies discussed earlier on.

Peer Friendships

Piaget's influence has been evident in research concerning the development of children's friendships. In particular, Corsaro (1994) identified three trends in research on children's friendships. Initially, the Piagetian scholars perceived friendship as an abstract concept that, like play, is acquired in a stage-like

fashion; the second wave of research viewed friendship as serving specific functions for children's social and emotional development; and the third wave of research focused mostly on documenting the development of friendships and how friendships affect social relations more generally. For Corsaro (1994), the first two approaches were more individualistic in focus while his more sociologically orientated perspective is that friendship is also a collective and cultural process.

Corsaro's point of view seems to be confirmed by recent research evidence which supports the view that children show an interest in their peers from their earliest years. For example, Rubin and his colleagues (Rubin et al., 2008; Parker et al., 2006) highlight babies' early social exchanges with other babies such as pointing or vocalising. This evidence, however, could be a result of the continually increasing numbers of children who attend day-care settings from an early age due to maternal employment (Howes, 1987). Furthermore, the nature of children's social exchanges varies widely across place and time. For example, in some cultures young children have to become carers for babies or infants with little adult involvement (Whiting et al., 1992). Thus, these children, both younger and older, develop different interpersonal skills that might extend their interaction with other children.

In general, though, there have been very few studies about peer interaction during a child's first year of life but in those that exist the infant's ability to shape triadic interactions is highlighted (Schaffer, 1971; Selby and Bradley, 2003; Nash and Hay, 2003). Shonkoff and Phillips (2000), reviewing child development literature, argue that young children show an interest in their peers from as early as two months of age by avidly staring at one another. As the children grow a few months older, and when they are given the opportunity, *'they touch, smile, try to get their age mate's attention, and they imitate their peers'* (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000, p.166). At the same time, prosocial behaviours such as smiling, touching, and helping their peers have been observed in Dutch ethnographic studies as a means used by children to indicate affinity towards their peers in day-care settings (Singer and De Haan, 2010).

Corsaro (1981) identified that the majority of research on the functions of play has emphasised the preparation for adult roles aspect and not the functions play serves within children's peer cultures. More recent studies, mainly ethnographic, have introduced a new focus which highlights the importance of play within children's peer cultures (Corsaro, 2011). Singer and De Haan (2007), reviewing the relevant ethnographic literature on peer relationships for children from birth to four years old, found that research has focused mostly on togetherness and belonging, level of joint play, communication of young children, imitation, pretend play, conflict behaviour and reconciliation, humour, and social and moral rules. It seems that the categories that Singer and De Haan (2007) suggest fall under the broader theme of 'children's friendships'.

The literature suggests that young children make friends from their early years (Vaughn and Santos, 2009), and that even one year olds have favourite playmates in day-care settings (Singer and De Haan, 2010). Even though there is no clear evidence about positive developmental outcomes for children from early friendships, there are, however, indications that having friends can support children's adaptation during normative transitions (Ladd, 1990; Hartup, 1992; Hartup, 1996; Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 2000; Peters, 2003). Nonetheless, Parker et al. (2006, p.446) suggest that '*friendship cannot be presumed unless children have been expressly asked whether the relationship in question is a friendship*'. Furthermore, the authors state that friendship usually includes the characteristics of admiration, liking one another, being committed to one another and feeling comfortable being perceived as friends by others. Some authors agree that the main characteristic of friendship is reciprocity (Howes, 1988; Hartup and Stevens, 1999; Dunn, 2004). However, Hartup and Stevens (1999) suggest that both adults and children conceive friendship in similar ways. Corsaro's (1988) research evidence partly opposes this view because he demonstrated that younger children can characterise someone who temporarily plays or shares the same interest with them as a friend. Thus, younger children do not necessarily share a definition about friendship with adults or with older children. Also, Rubin et al. (1994), trying to identify what it is that attracts seven year olds to play with same age children that they have never met before, conclude that children find it easier to play with peers who share the same play

preferences. Similarly, Singer and De Haan (2010) found that sameness in play preferences increases the likelihood of children becoming friends. Additionally, while they did not find any associations between friendship and children's ethnicity, they found that similarity in gender and age, as well as the time that children spend in playing together also increases the likelihood of them becoming friends.

In general, it seems that sharing the same play interests might prepare the grounds for friendship development, among younger and among older children. For Corsaro (2011) friendship is about playing together in specific areas and protecting the play from intruders. Maybe Corsaro's (1988) use of the term 'peer' is more accurate for describing interactions of children who are not, yet, friends. In particular, Corsaro (1988, p.21) states that *'young children's recognition of shared interest or community in the course of play activities is quite similar to what adults mean by the term peer'* (Corsaro, 1988, p.21). Corsaro (1988) argues that in order for children to see themselves as peers they first need to see themselves as members of the peer culture and this develops over time and as children start doing things together. Nonetheless, children who have older siblings are initially introduced into peer culture by them (Corsaro and Eder, 1990).

Apart from the notion of *'peer culture'*, the term *'togetherness'* is used (Hannikainen, 1998; Hannikainen, 1999; De Haan and Singer, 2001; Singer and De Haan, 2007; 2010) to describe children's sense of belonging in a group, their early interactions, and friendships. For Hannikainen (2001), children express togetherness by using playful actions throughout the day and during various joint activities including circle time, gymnastics, aesthetics and routine times and also when they participate in chores such as tidying up. De Haan and Singer (2001) support the view that children in day-care settings are aware of the importance of friendship, even though the evidence is stronger for school age children, at least in terms of the ways that adults define the term *'friendship'*. Singer and De Haan's studies were conducted in day-care settings in the Netherlands with children under and over the age of three.

According to De Haan and Singer (2001), children express their awareness of the importance of friendship by supporting other children in conflict situations, by restoring their relationships after conflict incidents, and by explicitly labelling or referring to friendships. In general, the researchers argue that young children use a rich repertory of actions to express their relationship of togetherness such as establishing '*common ground*', '*cooperation*', and '*care*' (De Haan and Singer, 2001, pp.117). In particular, day-care children who use the mechanism of finding common ground engage in expressing their commonalities by imitating their peers, by repeating words, and by explicitly labelling sameness. Through the mechanism of cooperation, children express common desires and goals by offering or promising something to other children. In addition, by the mechanism of care, they try to satisfy the needs of their peers by offering help, especially to younger children, in particular by expressing compassion, and by comforting others (De Haan and Singer, 2001). Similarly, Hannikainen (2001) argues that togetherness is demonstrated in five year olds by being caring, comforting other children, praising and encouraging them and using various verbal and bodily expressions such as touching to show togetherness.

Corsaro (1979) identifies that both younger and older children rely mostly on non-verbal and indirect strategies to gain access to peer groups even though over the age of four they are more likely than two and three year olds to use negotiation and thus language skills for entering a group's play. Children's verbal and/or non-verbal strategies, as identified by Corsaro (1979) are presented in Table 2.2.

Verbal Strategies	Non-verbal Strategies	Either verbal or not verbal Strategies
Ask children about what they are doing.	Physically entering the area.	Produce similar behaviour
Make claims about the area or an object.	Encirclement (make circles around the area before s/he decides to enter).	Physically enter the area and produce behaviour that disrupts the activity

Greet, explicitly ask for access, refer to friendship or personal characteristics of a participant.		Offer a toy to someone in the group
Refer to adult authority		
Ask for help from a non-participant before or right after entering the area.		
Suggest another activity.		

Table 2.2: *Children's Verbal and/or Non-verbal Strategies for Gaining Access into a Group's Play*

Therefore, according to Corsaro (1979), children use a wide range of different strategies to enter group play which fall under three main categories: verbal, non-verbal, and both verbal and non-verbal strategies. The oldest children are more likely to use verbal strategies but this could be considered as 'rational' because four year old children are usually more competent in speech in comparison to children aged two and three years old. However, in relation to offering (and accepting) toys, Broadhead (1997) found that this is a strategy resulting in successful entry to ongoing group play and especially when the offering of objects, or of physical help, relates to the group's play. The strategies of offering related objects or physical help provide indications that children were observing their peers activity before they seek entrance. Broadhead's (1997) research was on four year old children's social exchanges during free play in various areas of their nursery (home corner, sand, and water), during different play activities (rough and tumble play and art activities), and when children were using diverse objects (small and large construction material, table toys, small figures and accessories, and modelling materials). What might be an important finding from Broadhead's (1997) study was that only a few cooperative

episodes occurred in the home corner even though it was often used throughout her observations by more than one child. In particular, her analysis showed that more cooperative play occurred during rough and tumble play (42 episodes), playing with small figures and accessories (42 episodes), playing with large construction toys (38 episodes), or with water (27 episodes), rather than when children were playing in the home corner (24 episodes), at the sand (16 episodes), or with modelling materials (9 episodes).

For other children, playing at the home corner provides opportunities to replicate favourite domestic activities in the nursery and assists them not only to adjust within the setting during the initial transition but also to start building friendships with children who share the same interests (Brooker, 2000). For example, Brooker (2000) found that 10 out of 16 children, during their first 10 days at school, chose the activity areas of the home corner (role play), drawing, sand and water. Adding to this, a questionnaire given by the researcher, to be filled by children's parents, on whether their child helped them with household tasks showed that children assisted in tidying (toys, bedrooms, books, and games), cleaning (hovering, dusting, washing up and polishing), and cooking. Thus, children through play bring the culture of home into the nursery and these familiar activities not only seem to help them adjust in an unfamiliar environment but also provide the basis for forming close relationships with other children who bring the same culture into the setting.

Peer Conflicts

Maybe it is important to acknowledge at this point that children's interactions and interpersonal relationships with their peers are not only about being friends and playing together but they also include rejection, conflicts, negotiations and peace-making strategies (Kernan, Singer, and Swinnen, 2010). Even though children's motivation to continue playing with their peers makes them avoid conflict or try and find a solution (Verbeek, Hartup, and Collins, 2000), conflicts seem to be inevitable within a group of young children. This is especially when individual children try to enter group play and the group tries to protect their play from intruders (Corsaro, 2011). Nash and Hay (2003, p.230) argue that children even within their first year:

Engage in conflict and use force against their companions; that they engage in complex, contingent social games with unfamiliar adults and peers; that they share toys with peers spontaneously and in response to expressions of interest in their possessions, at rates higher than shown by older toddlers.

Younger children use mostly non-verbal tactics to resolve conflicts (De Haan and Singer 2010) but their gradual language development, between the ages of two to five, assists them to engage in negotiations by bargaining, asking for explanations, compromising, and making alternative proposals to their peers (Killen and Turiel, 1991). However, actions such as '*offering toys, smiling, pointing, or kissing*' constitute the non-verbal strategies that children use for conflict resolution (De Haan and Singer, 2010, p. 424).

Some studies suggest that there may be cultural difference in how children deal with conflict or potential conflict. Medina et al. (2001) found that Dutch preschoolers prioritise preserving their own views regardless of whether their actions could disrupt their play with peers, whereas Andalusian children, whose society is viewed by the authors as more collectivistic, prioritise sustaining peer interaction instead of preserving personal goals. In Dutch multicultural settings, Singer and De Haan (2010) did not find cultural differences in the reasons why children engaged in conflict. Instead, the researchers found that conflicts were mainly about objects and about gaining access into another child's or a group's play. They were also a result of unwelcome physical contact, or arose from conflicting play ideas such as two children wanting to play '*mother and baby*' but none of the children wanting to be the baby (Singer and De Haan, 2010, p. 92). For Corsaro (1994), peer group entry, sustaining shared action, and making friends involves a great degree of complexity due to young children's tendency to protect shared space, objects, and also their play from outsiders. However, Hartup et al. (1993) found that conflicts occur more frequently between friends than between non friends and that conflict between friends lasts for longer periods of time than between non friends. Also, research findings indicate that when conflicts among friends are resolved it is more likely that the children will

continue their interaction as opposed to when conflicts occur amongst associates (Hartup et al, 1988).

For Verbeek, Hartup, and Collins (2000, pp.39-40), conflicts are:

Instrumental in initiating and maintaining friendships, and to a lesser extent in terminating them. Children manage conflicts and adopt peace-making strategies in order to meet the expectations of themselves and their friends, further their understanding of the obligations and responsibilities of friendship, and maintain these relationships through time.

Singer and De Haan (2010) see conflict episodes as beneficial for children because they give them the opportunity to see their peers' point of view and co-construct social rules. Making a different point, Corsaro points out their communal significance because they assist children to develop '*a shared sense of control over their social world*' (Corsaro, 2011, p.217).

Research evidence also indicates cultural differences in relation to conflict resolution strategies. For example, Corsaro (2011) identifies how in Italian nurseries children use discussion to manage conflict, but African-American children in the USA use oppositional talk such as teasing and challenging one another, and American upper-middle class children try to control their friends' behaviour by threatening them, for example, that they will stop being friends. Butovskaya et al. (2000) found that the initiator of peace-making in USA and Swedish settings was equally divided between the initiator and the recipient of conflict, whereas in Italian, Kalmyk, and Russian settings the initiator of the conflict was the child who made the attempt at reconciliation. Singer and De Haan (2010) did not find any cultural differences in conflict resolution between Moroccan, Antillean, and Dutch children who attended the same multicultural setting. However, the researchers found that bystander Moroccan and Antillean children would intervene in the conflict more often than bystander native Dutch children and that Dutch children's conflicts lasted for longer compared with those of the Moroccan children. The researchers attributed Moroccan and Antillean children's actions to their inclination to feel responsible for their peers

which might reflect the more collectivistic values in their upbringing at home in relation to the more individualist orientation of the upbringing of Dutch children.

2.3.7. Summary

This chapter was divided into two sections. The first section presented the development of the Greek ECEC provision from the establishment of the 'New Greek State' to this day in an international context. It is probably evident throughout the first section of the review that the Greek state used preschool, and school, education to create a homogeneous population with one common national identity, religion, and language. Nonetheless, it seems that settings for children under the age of three had always emphasised aspects of care rather than education and that the Greek ECEC provision always placed children's socialisation high on the agenda. The aspects of care and socialisation seem to associate both with Greek culture and the history of ECEC provision shaping the settings' programme structure and affecting children's experiences up this day. As it is argued in this thesis, children seem to actively seek to be cared for by the adults of their settings and they also seem to start, from very early on, shaping friendships with their peers by participating in group activities or by initiating such interactions with their peers.

The second section presented Greek and international findings in relation to the perspectives on ECEC services of various stakeholders. This presentation included researchers', parents', practitioners', and children's perspectives. However, it also highlighted a gap in the Greek and international literature concerning the perspectives and the contribution of ancillary staff members in children's daily lives in ECEC settings. By reviewing the Greek literature, it seems that Greek research is dominated by studies with a developmental psychology orientation and the various stakeholders' perspectives were researched from a positivist spectrum, leaving children's perspectives once again at the margin. This thesis introduces a new standpoint in Greek research by placing children at the centre in order to identify their perspectives and experiences from their ECECE settings. It also uses a more interpretative and sociologically orientated approach than used before by the majority of Greek researchers, in order to 'listen' to children's views. Children in this thesis are

seen as active agents who influence and are influenced by the places they inhabit. However, more importantly, children are seen as individuals who can effectively communicate their feelings and desires about their physical settings, and about other children and adults; practitioners and ancillary staff members. Finally, it is suggested that aspects of space and time should not remain implicit in research projects; instead they should be explicitly acknowledged and highlighted because they seem to influence and shape the way children perceive and experience the settings they live and act upon.

Part II: Methodology

Chapter 3. The Research Process

3.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the design of the project and describe the methodological decisions made throughout it. First, I explain why the ethnographic case study framework was adopted. I argue that the ethnographic case study framework was the most appropriate approach both in order to explore children's experiences and for describing more accurately the process that was followed throughout the project; from its initial stages up to the data generation and data analysis stages. In the next section, I elaborate on the ethical procedures that were followed for gaining access to the research sites and for gaining the participants consent. I place particular emphasis on describing ethical procedures that I followed during the data generation process. The discussion on ethical issues comes prior to describing the methods that were employed to generate data in order to highlight the central role of ethics for this study. In particular, ethical issues were prioritized from the study's initial stages of designing it, during the fieldwork, and up to the stage of the final write up. In the third part I discuss the methods used to generate data. In particular, I explain how I used an adaptation of the Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2011) which allows researchers to generate data from different sources including children and adults, and from different methods such as visual (camera), observational, and interview techniques. In the final part of the chapter I describe the procedure of data-driven thematic analysis that I followed to analyse the generated data.

3.2. Aim of the Study

The aim of the study was to explore the experiences of day-care of children under the age of three and to inform thinking about the future development of policy and practice in relation to Greek ECEC services. The selected means of inquiry was an ethnographic case study as I considered this to be the most suitable approach to assist me in investigating children's experiences. Research in Greek settings using interpretative methodologies is limited. Therefore, this

project also aims to contribute to methodological thinking in relation to researching provision for under threes in Greece.

Two ECEC settings in a large Greek city were selected to support exploration of children's perspectives on their experiences. Fieldwork was undertaken in 2010 and lasted for six months from the middle of January 2010 until the end of July 2011, with three months allocated for research in each setting. The methods that were used were piloted at a different setting for a month. At that time, 95 early years settings were under the jurisdiction of the municipality of the city and they were geographically divided into 7 sections. Every section consisted of approximately 14 settings and was supervised by a senior area manager. For the purposes of this study I classified as section A and section B the two sections in which I conducted my study. In the study, one setting from section A and one from section B took part. I undertook the fieldwork in one classroom from setting A which I classified as being the Blue Classroom and in one classroom from setting B which I classified as being the Green Classroom. Ten children aged one year four months to two years eleven months participated in the study and their perspectives were researched by employing an adaptation of Clark and Moss's (2001) Mosaic Approach (MA). For an extensive analysis on the use of the MA in this study see section 3.6. Conversational interviews (Shuy, 2003) were used to generate data from adults. This thesis includes data from interviewing ten parents, four practitioners, and three ancillary staff members (cleaners and cooks). The overall goal was to identify children's perspectives on their experiences and to make suggestions that would contribute to current debates on policy and practice in relation to Greek ECEC provision.

3.3. Methodology, Epistemology, Ontology

When a researcher has been influenced by both the positivist and interpretative paradigms, as I have (See discussion Chapter 1), I believe they should explicitly acknowledge this, along with the methodological, epistemological, and ontological implications for the project. Kaplan (1973) argues that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish methodology from epistemology because one shapes the other. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p.21), explain how these interrelate by

stating that '*ontological assumptions will give rise to epistemological assumptions which have methodological implications for the choice of particular data collection techniques*'. However, Guba and Lincoln (1994) highlight that the selected techniques are not the determining characteristic since both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used appropriately in either qualitative or quantitative research. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the data gathering methods do not embody ontological and epistemological assumptions as argued by Morgan and Smircich (1980). Thus, the methods do have implications for the kind of data that will be generated, and they can guide the way data is analysed, and also how this is presented. The tension between these two paradigms might be evident at times in the thesis. However, in this study the interpretative research method prevailed, as will be explained below.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.22) support the notion that '*all research is interpretative*' because the researcher's beliefs about the world guide how it should be understood and studied. This study followed the interpretative paradigm because it aimed to identify children's perspectives on their experiences and adults' interpretations of children's experiences. Children are seen as active agents who construct their social lives in their ECEC settings (Corsaro, 2011) and at the same time they influence and are influenced by the adult social world in which they live. Labelling the research as interpretative is important in order to ensure a shared understanding with the reader. However, as people often define the same words differently, the aim of the following section is also to examine the meaning of key terminology, including methods and methodology and ethnography and case study, to clarify meaning and contextualise those in terms that best serve the purposes of this study.

Methodology was considered in this project to be a means of piecing together, giving meaning, explaining, and justifying the whole research process (Kaplan, 1973; Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005). The term '*research process*' in the current project refers not only to the design, fieldwork, data analysis, and writing up but also to the methodological decisions that were made during this process, for example in relation to ethical issues. Neuman (2006) disagrees with those authors in social research who use the terms methodology and methods interchangeably because he considers methodology as something broader

which includes, amongst other elements, the methods as well. As Neuman (2006, p.2) correctly emphasises, methodology and methods '*are closely linked and interdependent, but distinct*'. Therefore, in this study, the methods were the '*tools*' (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002, p.29) that were used for generating, analysing, and presenting the data and they assisted in answering the research questions. For example, conversational interviews and unstructured observations are considered as methods in this study, drawn from the interpretative paradigm. The interviews were used in order to explore adults' interpretations of children's experiences and the observations to explore children's perspectives on their own experiences. These methods facilitated data generation (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009) and also enabled me to gain an understanding and describe the different interpretations that individuals attribute to those experiences, perspectives, and meanings (MacNaughton and Rolfe, 2001; Ryan and Campbell, 2001).

3.4. The 'Ethnographic Case study' Research Framework

Introduction

The previous discussion focused on clarifying how the words 'methods' and 'methodology' are defined in this project. This section will focus on providing the rationale for the overall framework of the study.

The present study was initially designed as a case study where the case was a large Greek city and two additional cases (sub-units), at day-care level, were selected to support exploration of children's perspectives. It was decided to follow the case study approach because other authors including Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2001) argue that case study seems to be the most appropriate research method in early years settings. The authors claim that case study provides critical insights about the area of research, the specific children, and the aspect the case study is researching. However, during the six month period of the research project, a more flexible and reflexive research design was developed in response to a variety of issues and in order for the project to progress. For example alterations were required when concerns were raised by practitioners in relation to the use of the cameras (See page 105).

Additionally, the ancillary staff members who were not identified in the initial design were included in the project when their important role within the settings became evident. Thus, the framework of ethnography is more accurate in describing the research design, during this six month period, and its development as an evolving process. Nonetheless, because the case study framework guided the project in its early steps, the approach that best describes this study as a whole is the 'ethnographic case study' one. Even though it is not widely used there are, however, researchers, including Bath (2009), who support the view that ethnography can be combined with other methodological frameworks in educational research. Bath's argument concerns the introduction of an ethnographic action research approach into educational settings. This approach was employed by other researchers in ECEC settings internationally including Machonohie (2013). In my study I also combine another methodology with ethnography, the case study tradition which was previously used by Bitou (2010) in the Greek context. I now go on to discuss ethnography and following that I consider its relationship to case study research.

3.4.1. Ethnography as a Theoretical Framework

Ethnography has been the subject of discussion by a range of authors who discuss methodological issues, including Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005), Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), and Alversson and Skoldberg (2009). The above authors have tried to depict not only the characteristics that make ethnography a distinct theoretical framework but also the similarities it has with other frameworks such as phenomenology and grounded theory, and the influences from theoretical frameworks such as hermeneutics and feminism. The purpose of this section is to discuss ethnography's distinct characteristics in an attempt to achieve a deeper understanding of the main issues surrounding it. A further aim is to contextualise it in the specific project and demonstrate how it was defined and used within it.

According to Marvasti (2004, p.36) '*the word ethnography literally means to write about people or cultures, from the Greek words 'ethnos' (people) and graphei (to write)*'. This definition, however, does not fully incorporate all those features that the word 'ethnos' includes and the closest translation in English

might be the words 'nation/country'. Thus, the words 'nation/country' (ethnos) refer to a specific group of people who live in a particular geographic area, and share characteristics such as language, history, and culture (Oxford Dictionary, 2007). Accepting this latest definition helps to make sense of why anthropologists were the group of researchers who initially used ethnographic research to study peoples' lives and cultures from the perspective of the experiencing person as argued by Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) and Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009). Usually, in early ethnographic studies, the people studied did not share the same 'ethnos' as the researchers (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Marvasti's literal definition of the term 'ethnography' could provide a reason as to why ethnography found fertile ground to develop in the social sciences, particularly if we accept that people, within the same ethnos, create their own sub-cultures. Thus, it is these sub-cultures which are the subjects of study. This also allows researchers who are part of the same ethnos, and sometimes part of the same sub-culture, as in my case, to conduct ethnographic research as a means to gain a deeper understanding of these sub-cultures (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009).

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.2) attribute the lack of clarity over '*a standard, well-defined meaning*' for ethnography to its complex history. Ethnography, as they state '*tended to get swallowed up in a general, multidisciplinary, movement promoting qualitative approaches*' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.2). My review of texts which discuss the influences that ethnography has received from other theories (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009), shows that ethnography has been subject to wide-ranging influences including symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics, feminism, anthropological and sociological functionalism, philosophical pragmatism, Marxism, structuralism, constructionism, post-structuralism and postmodernism. This is probably because ethnography takes into account the cultural aspects of the researched groups in a similar way to anthropology (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009), hermeneutics and phenomenology (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005). Furthermore, it focuses on actors' perspectives and their interpretations, something that it is also encountered in symbolic interactionism and grounded theory (Liamputtong

and Ezzy, 1995; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Moustakas, 1994). That focus on perspectives and interpretations and how things are done in a specific culture or sub-culture might be considered 'rational' since the main focus of qualitative research is to understand meanings and interpretations (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005), or *'how people see their world'*, as argued by Grills, (1998, p.4).

Ethnography as a method and methodology

From the previous discussion it is evident that ethnography is embedded in a maze of theoretical traditions and part of the reason for this is probably the fact that it shares with other approaches and traditions similar methods of data generation, more often qualitative methods. For example, ethnographic methodology requires long term participant observations which are also a distinctive characteristic of anthropological research (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). I initially planned participant observation for use in this project in relation to children. However, because I was in the setting for an extended period of time, I was inevitably observing or listening to the things that a range of people, who came into the classroom, were doing or saying. Even though I did not keep detailed, ongoing observational notes on these issues, when I considered that something was significant for the participants, I recorded this in my notebook and discussed it with them during the interviews. One example of an issue to be followed up in interview was the relationship of particular ancillary staff members with children.

Ethnography also requires in-depth interviewing which is encountered in other theoretical perspectives as well (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005), and field notes and memo writing (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). From the interpretative paradigm one can include different kinds of unstructured interviews such as oral history (life histories, biographical memory, creative interviewing) which are more popular amongst the feminist movement (Fontana and Frey, 2005). Another type of in-depth interviewing is the conversational interview (Shuy, 2003). Many authors (Kvale, 1996; Heyl, 2001; Stage and Mattson, 2003) suggest that interviews in the form of a conversation are used within ethnographic research. Even though this study was designed to

be conducted using semi-structured interviews, the final format of the interviews is more appropriately described as unstructured or conversational. This was because both the interviewees and I introduced topics for discussion and shared thoughts and experiences as we tried to develop a shared understanding of the issues we were discussing (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Schaeffer and Maynard, 2003; Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005; Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). Because of this and my familiarity with participants, gained through the daily interaction with them over an extended period, interviews took on the characteristic of an everyday discussion and the interviewees were the '*conversational partners*' (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p.10). A similar approach to interviewing was followed by Acker (1999), in her ethnographic work with primary school teachers.

In terms of methodologies, ethnography overlaps with qualitative inquiry, interpretative method, case study, and life histories (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This becomes even more complex when authors like Smith (1978, p.316) treat '*educational ethnography, participant observation, qualitative observation, case study, or field study...as synonyms*', or when ethnography is described both as a method (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005; Yin, 1981), and methodology (Crotty, 2003; Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005). Of course this does not occur only in the case of ethnography. For example some authors (Fontana and Frey, 2005; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009) consider life histories to be a method but Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), consider it a methodology. All these lead one to the same conclusion as Geertz (1973, p.6), that ethnography cannot be defined by the methods or the procedures it employs but by its ability to produce what he calls '*thick descriptions*', and this can only be achieved by generating detailed data and background information.

For this project, ethnography is a methodological framework which describes better than any other framework the project as an evolving process. I considered that the flexible and reflexive nature of ethnography would allow me to reach the 'thick descriptions' that Geertz suggests and that this would be achieved by engagement with the participants for a prolonged period of time, allowing me to become part of the settings' sub-culture. I decided it would also give me the opportunity to gain a shared understanding with the participants on

a variety of issues. In order to achieve this shared understanding with participants, it was important to be flexible with the methods that I would employ. Thus, the methods were the tools that would assist me to reach this understanding. The ultimate goal was to represent the participants' perspectives by providing an account that can be understood by people who are interested in similar paradigms, by people of the same sub-culture, but also by people who are not directly connected with the sub-cultures that are described.

Ethnography's Reflexive and Flexible Nature

The distinct characteristics that ethnography has in comparison to some of the above traditions is the reflexive (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) and flexible (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009) nature of its design. This flexible and reflexive design has led to criticism in terms of what is claimed to be a vague methodology, with ambiguous data, open to different interpretations (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). Nonetheless, other traditions such as the feminist tradition also pinpoint the reflexive nature of the research process (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005).

The term 'reflexive' is used to highlight the fact that researchers are aware of their subjectivity, not only regarding their research project but also in relation to the participants, by acknowledging that researchers constitute an inseparable part of the research (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005; Roulston, 2010). Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) and Roulston (2010) suggest that all these factors have implications for the way that the research and the findings are presented and these factors should be explored and explicitly acknowledged by researchers.

The word 'flexible' is defined by Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009, p.120), as *'something that changes or can change from one time to another'*. The authors suggest that flexibility should be employed by researchers throughout the research project. This includes flexibility when the researchers interact with the participants, when they generate the data, and when they interpret and reflect on the data. Lastly, they highlight, among other things, the importance of 'intellectual flexibility' as an important element which allows one to *'make*

continual interpretations at various theoretical and metatheoretical levels' (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009, p.314).

The way reflexivity and flexibility, but also reflectivity, were enacted in this project was in relation to both the research process and the participants. Because I designed the project, implemented it in practice, and analysed the data generated, I cannot separate myself from the research process. Furthermore, the fact that I stayed in each setting for approximately three months compromised my identity as a practitioner/researcher to a certain extent, and made it more difficult to sustain a more detached researcher role. However this dichotomy had to be addressed and in my role as a practitioner/researcher I was able to build a relationship of trust with the participants, that is the practitioners and children who, over time, seemed to begin to perceive me as part of their setting. Gaining practitioners' and parents' trust was necessary and positive for my research as this meant they were increasingly willing to share their experiences with me as my time in the setting continued.

Even though I refer to the issue of trust in discussion of ethical issues (See page 125), it is important to state here that being aware that the practitioners saw me as one of their team meant that I had to keep reminding them that I was in fact there as a researcher. Also, I had in mind continually that the participants had no prior experience of this kind of research so sometimes I felt I had to protect them from potential harm. For example, on one occasion I decided to end a conversation when the interviewee expressed concern that she was probably being too explicit about professional issues and this could endanger her professional status. Thus, reflexivity was employed during the data generation process and also during the analysis where one of the main concerns was to try and present the findings without jeopardising the participants' personal and professional status.

The rationale for the above discussion has not been simply to justify the complexity of ethnography due to the numerous theories and traditions that can be found embedded in it, but also to indicate its flexible and reflexive nature. Ethnography allows one to borrow and employ the appropriate theories,

methods, and principles from other approaches and traditions, but also to alter and develop the design of the project whilst in progress in order to complete it successfully and answer the research questions. Some authors criticise the flexible methodology of ethnography, as stated earlier. However, what might be important to note is that ethnography as with any other framework, methodology, or method, is designed and used by people. As Corbin (2009, p.36), states '*people change and methods change*'. In the latter statement I would add that methodologies and theories which are used by people change too. The theories (or the methodologies, or the methods), should be employed by researchers in order to assist them with their project, but researchers should not be slaves of these theories, these methodologies, or these methods.

The decision to provide a definition of ethnography at this stage, and not earlier in this section, was made in order to demonstrate that the ethnographic framework has been adopted following critical consideration of the differences between other authors' definitions of ethnography and how it was perceived in this project. For example Hamersley and Atkinson (1995, p.1) define ethnography as:

[...] referring primarily to a particular method or set of methods. In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in peoples' daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions-in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research.

In this research, emphasis has been given to ethical issues such as non-exploitation of the participants, respect, and honesty, which are features of qualitative research but particularly considered a contribution of the feminist movement (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002; Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005; Fontana and Frey, 2005). The view that ethnography automatically provides a justification for doing research 'covertly' was not considered ethical for this study and this approach was not followed. The main reason was that covert research could be misleading for the project findings, especially if I was making assumptions and, possibly, false interpretations. This could also result in

participants feeling betrayed. Thus, it was considered essential to seek the actors' perspectives and interpretations on events, in order to achieve as far as possible a shared understanding between us, on issues that seemed important for them. Consequently, whenever as a researcher I identified a noteworthy issue, I suggested it as a subject for discussion during an interview and it was left for participants to decide whether they wanted to elaborate on it or not.

3.4.2. Ethnographic Study or Case Study Project?

The previous discussion might lead one to think that the research project fits best into the flexible and reflexive framework of ethnography. However, as was stated earlier, the ethnographic framework alone and similarly the case study alone cannot adequately describe the whole research process. This is because the case study framework guided my thinking and the project in the initial stages of planning but the ethnographic framework describes better the decisions that were made during the project. Thus, it must be explicitly recognised that both frameworks influenced the study and the framework that best describes the whole research as an evolving process is the 'ethnographic case study' type. Using both terms to describe my research not only acknowledges that both frameworks guided my work at different stages but also that both my project and my thinking developed during the process of using these frameworks. Thus, the concept of 'ethnographic case study' captures all the significant elements that assisted the project from start to completion.

Yin (1981, p.58) considers case study as a research strategy and when he refers to types of data collection methods he provides ethnography as an example. Willis (2007) believes that ethnography and case study have more similarities than dissimilarities), but Yin (1992) argues that case study and ethnography should not be confused with each other. According to Yin (1992, pp.124-125) case study *'is to be used as any other empirical, scientific method'*, but he argues that ethnography cannot be used as a scientific method because of its assumption that there are multiple realities, which are socially constructed, and not a single objective reality. Yin's statement however implies that realists, who believe in one objective reality, are not able to carry out ethnographic

studies but there are researchers, including Roberts and Sander (2005), who support a realist approach to ethnography.

In this study, ethnography is considered primarily as a research framework rather than a methodology or a research strategy. This is, as stated before, because the case study strategy of the initial design seemed inadequate to describe all the features of the research when considered at the end of the project, in contrast to a more flexible methodology such as ethnography.

The argument that many amendments were made to the initial design of the research and its procedures does not fully justify why ethnography describes the project better than case study. For example, in this study more people were included in the research than I had initially planned to use and the consent papers were amended, the new participants were interviewed, and negotiations took place around ethical issues throughout the research process. However, case study can also be flexible and reflexive if needed concerning such issues (Willis, 2007; Yin, 1981).

What might be an important difference with case study in comparison with ethnography is that the epicentre of the study was initially the actors' perspectives but then both my observations and the actors' interpretations of the events moved the project onto a new level. For example, cultural aspects such as beliefs, concepts, values, and principles, but most importantly the meaning these had for the actors, provided me with new interpretations and understandings. The emphasis on cultural issues and social meaning are central in ethnographic research (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Geertz, 1973). Frake (1964, p.112) argues that '*ethnography should be a theory of cultural behaviour in a particular society*'. Apart from the particularity of context, time could also play an important role in ethnographic studies; this is the case if we accept the naturalists' point of view that peoples' perceptions and interpretations are constantly constructed and reconstructed (Hamersley and Atkinson, 1995). This means that an ethnographic study cannot have the boundaries that Stake (1995) claims should exist in case study, even if those boundaries are not clearly evident (Yin, 1992). For example, Stake (1995, p.2), states '*A child may be a case. A teacher may be a case. But teaching*

lacks the specificity, the boundedness, to be called a case'. Thus, according to Stake it is very important to identify which features are within the boundary of a case study and which outside. However, putting boundaries and making inflexible decisions as to which features should be included in the research and which should not, restricts the researcher in terms of gaining a more holistic picture, not only about how specific features are important for the actors but also why they are important.

The boundaries of time and place were taken into account in this study. Corbin (2009, p.37) states that *'all phenomena have to be located within the context of time and place'*. My research, for example, took place during a period for Greece of social and economic instability and these factors appeared to shape the experiences and views of some of the research participants. Thus, the time when the study took place is considered very important and affected the research in various ways. Furthermore, the research was conducted in two ECEC settings and, even though they were under the jurisdiction of the same municipality, it seemed that they had developed their own sub-cultures. So, place was really important but not in terms of comparing and/or contrasting the two settings but in elaborating on the features that make them distinctive and possibly unique.

Maybe the main similarity that ethnography and case study have is the acknowledgement that the methodology of a project does not have to stop developing when the initial design is agreed but continues throughout the project and also during the analysis of the data. However, ethnography seems to be more flexible in terms of methodological modifications. In my view, when the data leads researchers in new unanticipated directions, it is important to acknowledge this and not to simply stay faithful to the initial design because these directions could provide researchers with new insights.

In conclusion, for this research the features of place and time were important but also cultural aspects, ethical issues, and my role in the whole research process, are considered important characteristics which influenced, but also assisted completion, of the research project. Methods were drawn from the interpretative and qualitative paradigms in order to generate data (observations,

interviews and photographic data), and analyse them (thematic analysis). Concepts such as the non-exploitation of the participants were borrowed from the feminist movement because it was thought that this was important for the project. However, the case study framework was important at the initial stages of designing the study where I identified the case study settings I would be researching. Thus, I consider that identifying the project as an 'ethnographic case study' not only provides an acknowledgement that both frameworks supported the research process at different stages but can also assist a reader to understand the main characteristics of the study. This categorisation is relevant even though neither of these frameworks was adopted to the degree that other authors propose.

3.5. Conducting Research with Human Participants

Introduction

This section engages with the ethical issues, both at a theoretical and a practical level, that arise when one conducts research with adults and children, including gaining children's 'assent'. Power dynamics will be discussed throughout this section and in parallel to other ethical issues, because they were not static but context dependent and relational. The discussion will be developed in relation to ethical issues about the methods that were used to generate, analyse, and present the data.

3.5.1. Ethical Practices and Procedures in Greek Research

Even though ethics is a very important aspect of methodology, in Greece it seems that it does not receive appropriate attention. This is probably because such emphasis on ethics is not currently prominent as an aspect of the culture of research in Greece. For example, from the forty Higher Education Institutes in Greece, only one university includes in their website ethical guidelines which they name 'codes of ethics and deontology'⁵ in research' (University of Thrace,

⁵ Every profession in Greece has its own code of deontology. It consists of rules and obligations that graduates have towards their profession. At the day of their graduation all graduates repeat the oath, swearing to practice their profession ethically; something similar to the Hippocratic Oath.

2011). Apart from this university, there are some departments, within different universities, such as the biological sciences (biology, biotechnology and medicine), which have codes of ethics; in social sciences only the departments of psychology have ethical requirements. Following many authors' suggestions that research should be done with participants, including children (Hood et al., 1996; Alderson, 2000; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2000), and not on them, the ethical procedures and practices for conducting research in Greek early years settings might need to be reconsidered and revised. This is particularly important because Greece is among the majority of countries which have signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Article 12 of the convention clearly states that children should have the freedom to express their views in all matters affecting them regardless of their age. Furthermore, a later implementation of Article 12, coming from the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005, pp. 6-7), highlights children's rights to express their views not only at home but also *'in the development of policies and services, including through research and consultations'*, and in paragraph 40 it is stated that children's rights within research should be respected.

One reason why ethical issues might not have been a priority in Greek educational research to date could be because the majority of research conducted in Greek early years settings has been undertaken in the tradition of quantitative research. Thus, researchers might consider the participants as *'donors of data'* and not as *'knowledgeable reporters of their social and cultural realities'* (Wood et al., 2010, p.2). This could be why Greek researchers focus mostly on ensuring participants' anonymity (Laloumi-Vidali, 1998); and gaining consent from main gatekeepers such as administrative boards of child care centres (Retzou, 2010) or children's guardians (Petrogiannis, 1998). However, Mantziou (2001) and Bitou (2010) do report seeking young children's consent for their studies. In this project, I consider it important to be explicit about the procedures for gaining informed consent from adults and seeking children's assent along with consideration of the ethical dilemmas that were encountered during the research process.

3.5.2. Gaining Access and Consent

This section discusses issues of gaining access to the research sites. Gaining access requires going through different 'gatekeepers' (Broadhead and Rist, 1976; Homan, 2002; Miller and Bell, 2002), seeking their approval, and also negotiating access. After I gained Sheffield Hallam University's (SHU's) ethics committee approval, I started the procedures for gaining access to the ECEC settings in Greece. This included four steps: gaining the organisation's board approval, gaining the staff's approval, and finally gaining parents' and children's approval (See this study's distributed consent letters in Appendix 2). Throughout these stages, different gatekeepers needed to be approached in order to gain access into different groups (See Figure 3.1).

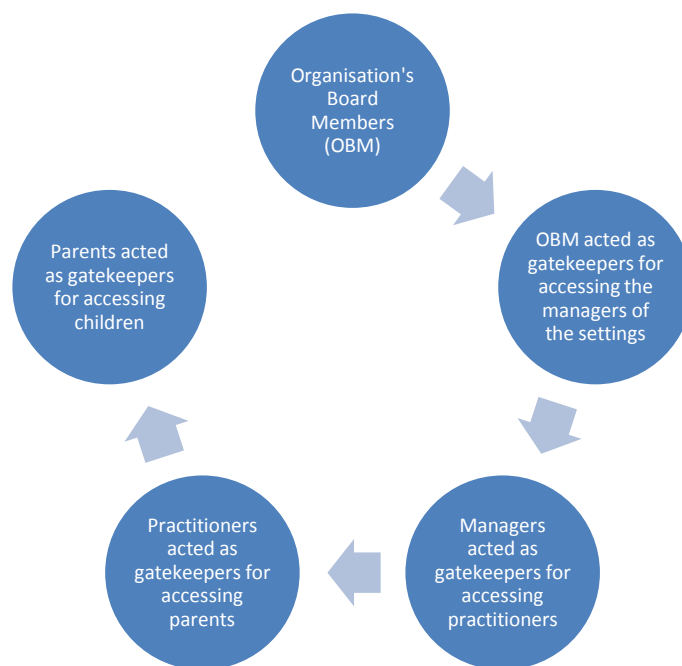


Figure 3.1: *People and bodies acting as gatekeepers for accessing different groups of participants.*

3.5.3. Gaining Access to the Organisation

Since, in Greece, research in early years settings is not common practice, many problems can occur in terms of gaining access. This is because the administrative boards of ECEC settings, which are in charge of authorising access, do not have ethical guidelines for conducting research, something

which is probably encountered in other countries as well. In this case, this created uncertainty about the kinds of reassurance I should provide and the board's requirements for conducting ethical research. Gaining the approval of the organisation's administrative board involved ongoing negotiations over a period of approximately three months since, during informal discussions I had with some of the board's members, they expressed concerns that the organisation's reputation might be at risk (Broadhead and Rist, 1976), especially if parents were not satisfied by the provided services. I explained that the intention was not to harm the organisation's reputation but to give the staff, parents and especially children the opportunity to make their voices heard (Pascal and Bertram, 2009). I explained to them the ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence (Farrell, 2005), stating that knowing the participants' views could support the development of the organisation rather than harm it. In addition, I had to convince them of my professionalism by presenting some of my previous work at a conference to demonstrate how I approached the research and how I presented the results. In the end the board's decision was to allow access to the organisation and thus, to their ECEC settings.

Even though some argue that *'gatekeepers may in effect (unknowingly) imply and authorise consent where they provide access to less powerful groups'* (Miller and Bell, 2002, p.65), the power dynamics change once the gatekeepers allow access. Once the fieldwork was underway, the board members' power, ostensibly, seemed to weaken since they could not control the decisions of individuals who had to choose whether to participate in the project or not. Nevertheless, they could intervene during the fieldwork if someone reported to them something that they might not approve of, including practices that were not within the initial agreement for allowing access. They could also regain control at the end of a study if the researcher, as I did, promises, at their request, to report the main findings back to them (Broadhead and Rist, 1976). All participants were informed about this offer prior to giving consent.

Contacting the Settings

Despite no indication that any board member exercised power or tried to control the research process during fieldwork, they retained the power to propose which settings could participate in the project (Miller and Bell, 2002). However, in terms of sampling, settings were recruited based on the criterion that they had classes with children under the age of three. Thus, the sample was purposive rather than random (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005). Due to the fact that access was assured by the administrative board, I was confident in negotiating with one of the board's members about the settings' voluntary participation, a primary requirement of my research agenda. The board's member agreed to provide me with contact details for three settings, meeting the criterion of age, from which two could be selected. Therefore, a mix of the '*snowball or chain sampling*' and of the '*volunteer sampling*' approaches were followed in this study to recruit the settings (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005, pp.47-48). According to Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) the first approach refers to sampling by asking key informants who have relevant knowledge to suggest to the researcher potential participants. In my study, the organisation's administrative board member phoned three managers⁶, whilst I was present, to ask them about their possible participation. I had the chance to talk with the managers on the phone and provide explanations about the project. I also proposed visiting the settings in order to answer any questions they might have. Out of the three managers, two agreed to see me before they made their final decision. In the meeting with the managers of these two settings, I informed them orally and in writing of my research aims; the procedures I intended to follow; and what was being asked of them, the setting, and the research participants in general. Both managers volunteered for their settings to participate in the project.

The '*volunteer sampling*' approach was also followed after I started visiting the settings to inform potential participants about the purposes of the study, in order to achieve practitioners' and parents' voluntary participation (See discussion below). However, the sample of ancillary staff members was 'opportunistic'

⁶ The word manager is used as the most appropriate translation of the Greek word 'Hypefthini' which means 'the person in charge' and is used within Greek ECEC settings.

(Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005, p.48) because they were included in the study by following up on new leads after the original sample of respondents was decided.

3.5.4. Gaining Practitioners' Consent

After I had gained the managers' consent informally, I moved on to inform the practitioners because my aim was to ask the managers to sign the consent letter after the practitioners had agreed to participate. In this way, I planned to empower the practitioners so that they would not feel they were giving consent to something that was already agreed. In Setting A, the four practitioners who were leading the two classes with the younger children came to the meeting. We had an introductory discussion about what the research would involve and I gave them the consent letter, allowing time for them to read it. Then I moved on to show them a video (Tucker, 2003) about how the cameras would be used by children during the research. I also answered their questions, providing explanations on the use of the photographs and stating that I would use them only in the context of the settings for discussions with children, parents, and practitioners. Also, I explained to them that the photographs I would be using within the thesis would be blurred so that children would not be identifiable. Some practitioners were concerned that I would be judging their work since they were unsure about the kind of observations I would be carrying out. The negotiations included the promise that I would share my observations with them if they requested. At the end of the meeting all four practitioners volunteered to participate in the research. I selected the classroom with the younger children (sixteen months to two and a half old) because this age group fitted best with my research purposes and design.

The two practitioners at Setting B, who were working with the younger children, were informed by the manager about the project. A few days later, I held a meeting with these practitioners to show them the video (Tucker, 2003) about the use of the cameras with children. They agreed to participate in the project but without asking questions or raising any concerns. Even though the practitioners were not explicit about their views on video recording, they seemed to feel uncomfortable about it. When I went to Setting B to start my research, therefore, I considered it more ethical to discard video recording as a

means of data generation. The decision was also made because my prior experience of video recording in Setting A suggested that it made practitioners feel uncomfortable. The practitioners made light hearted remarks about expecting to see themselves on a weekly TV talk show which shows videos taken by a hidden camera. The revelations shown on such programmes are associated with the illegal or corrupt actions of individuals and/or organisations. However, the issue of children's health and safety in ECEC settings was discussed once on one of these shows after the carelessness of a member of staff resulted in an irreversible health problem for a three year old boy; the child suffered from burns after he drank washing liquid instead of water (Papastathopoulou, 2004). A second factor, influencing my decision not to use video recording was that none of the participants had prior experience of participating in a research project and I was concerned that video recording might make it an uncomfortable process for them. Finally, because I was also uncertain about the extent to which participation was 'voluntary' (Homan, 2002) in this context, I aimed to reduce any potential threats to wellbeing.

All of the above demonstrates that participants did not necessarily interpret the design in the same way as I did when I was planning and developing the project. For that reason it was important to be receptive to participants' responses, flexible with the design and willing to change it on the basis of ethical considerations. Not doing this could have had negative consequences for the study, such as people withdrawing from it. The participants may have gained the impression that research is a threatening experience and researchers people who do not take into account their feelings. Following the research agenda, without being attuned to what the participants were experiencing, could have increased the possibility of future researchers' access to these sites being denied (Walsh, 1998). Thus, researchers have a moral responsibility not only towards participants, but also towards future researchers and, by giving a positive experience to participants can act as gatekeepers for future researchers.

3.5.5. Gaining Parents' Consent

The third stage of gaining access was to seek parents' consent. The manager of setting A distributed consent letters to all parents of the two classrooms with the younger children, and arranged a meeting for me to inform them orally of the project and answer their questions. Having the manager acting as a gatekeeper has ethical implications and might suggest to the parents, as potential participants, that they were obliged to participate or that their denial could have negative implications for their child (Flewitt, 2005). However, this did not seem to be the case for this study because, from the twenty five parents invited to the meeting, only three came. During the meeting I showed them the video, shown to practitioners, of how photos and videos of their children would be used in the research. The only concern one parent voiced was that their children would probably not be able to cooperate in the research and use the cameras due to their age. After being reassured that none of the children would be forced to participate, they gave verbal consent. Concerned that the parents might have felt uncomfortable about the participation, since this was a small group I suggested that they take a day to think about it and then provide me with their final answer. However, they all decided to participate giving me the signed consent letters at the end of the meeting. Two more parents were recruited after I started visiting the setting on a daily basis in order to secure participation of the planned number of children (five). These parents were selected because their children were among the youngest in the setting (under the age of two). Parents were informed about the research purposes and their rights as participants without the presence of the staff (Flewitt, 2005) so that they could feel they had the freedom to deny participation. Both parents agreed that their children could participate in the project.

The parents of Setting B were informed in early February, at arrival time, about the purposes of the research. It was not possible to arrange a separate meeting with them due to the nursery's policy to have such meetings only when issues were raised from the nursery. Due to the fact that I had already started my research in Setting A, one of the practitioners volunteered to collect the consent letters from Setting B parents who agreed to their children's participation.

However, when I visited setting B to start my project in May 2010, I had to give new consent letters to the parents who agreed to participate. The new letters added the information that confidentiality could be broken if there was a concern about a child's well-being (Sikes, 2008; Furey and Kay, 2010; Shaw, Brady, and Davey, 2011). This revised practice was agreed following concerns raised about the wellbeing of a child in Setting A. At that time there was not much clear guidance available, neither institutional, nor from the British Educational Research Association (BERA), on researchers' duties when concerns were raised about a child's wellbeing and the limits of confidentiality (Furey and Kay, 2010). Nonetheless, it was agreed among the supervisory team that the best practice in the relevant circumstances would be to inform the manager about my concerns and withdraw the child and existing data from the project.

Since this incident occurred at the end of my research in Setting A, it also affected not only the way I approached my research from then onwards but also my relationships with children and adults in Setting B from whom I, unconsciously, distanced myself. In general, I was struggling to form as close relationships with children and adults from Setting B as I did with those of Setting A but at the time I was uncertain of why this was happening and about the impact it might have on the study. However, my reflections on this issue are presented at the end of this thesis (See page 310).

Furthermore, an ethical dilemma in relation to parents' consent was raised when two children indicated they wanted to participate in the project and, even though their parents were approached again during the fieldwork, they did not give consent. When one sees children as social actors (Christensen and Prout, 2002), situations like these lead researchers to face ethical dilemmas and, although I am not certain that I made the right decision, my approach was to give children the opportunity to use the cameras and participate in the MA activities because I did not want them to feel excluded. However, I did not collect observational data and I did not use other data gathered by them such as photographs.

One last ethical issue arose in relation to interviewing parents. At the time I did not consider that there might be an ethical problem in terms of practitioners

knowing which parents agreed to be interviewed. When, however, I started conducting the interviews towards the end of my fieldwork, some practitioners jokingly asked me what the parents had said about the setting. Initially I tried to avoid this discussion but when questions became more direct I reminded them that the parent interviews, as with the staff interviews, were confidential. I also made it clear that the reason I was not revealing information was not because parents talked negatively about the setting but because it was my obligation to adhere to the assurance of confidentiality, and secure the data from third parties during the fieldwork process (Christensen and Prout, 2002). I was not asked for information about their colleagues' interviews and parents did not ask what practitioners said about them or their child, perhaps indicating that the relationship of trust created with practitioners was stronger than the one with parents. This is likely to be because I interacted with practitioners for extended periods of time in contrast to the shorter interactions with parents. It may be that there was some blurring in practitioners' eyes of my role in the setting, resulting in them coming to consider me as one of them, rather than as a researcher. Therefore, creating a relationship of trust can have negative aspects, leading to ethical problems to be overcome in terms of relationships between the researcher and the participants and between the participants, if the researcher reveals information which could lead to conflicts. This kind of experience could also, at a practical level, put the completion of the project at risk.

In conclusion, to ensure the informed consent of the adult participants, I informed them in words that they could understand (Coady, 2001), for example by avoiding formal research terminology, about the nature, the purposes of the project and any potential risk it might contain (Christians, 2000; Bulmer, 2001; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2007); and I also aimed to provide honest answers to their questions and concerns. Furthermore, I stated clearly that they had the right to deny participation or withdraw at any stage of the project (Cohen et al., 2007). In case of withdrawal, they were informed that they could withdraw any unprocessed data (Coady, 2001). This information was stated to them in written form in consent letters and orally, and the information was repeated prior to the interviews. However, a possible withdrawal could have

negative implications for the project and it could have raised more questions in relation to who owns the data as Aubrey et al. (2000) argue. Fortunately none of the participants or the settings withdrew at any stage since I had not suggested a time limit for withdrawal.

3.5.6. Gaining Children's Assent

The final stage of gaining access was to gain children's 'assent'. The word assent is used by many researchers because, similarly to other countries, the Greek legal framework underlines that children and young people under the age of 18 are considered juvenile (N. 3189/2003 FEK A/243/21.10.2003). Thus, it is their parents and guardians who consent on children's behalf up to that age for non-research related issues. Probably the same applies to research as it is common practice that parents' consent has to be requested prior to children's assent (Cohen et al., 2007). Therefore, it is evident that parents act as 'gatekeepers' for children (Dockett and Perry, 2011). Greig and Taylor (1999), urge researchers to review whether their research questions, in a project that involves children, might be answered by proxy, for example using someone such as the parent, justifying this if necessary. For this project, this approach was not considered democratic because the value position of this study is that research about children should be with and for children and not on them (Hood et al., 1996; Alderson, 2000; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2000). Therefore, children were approached as individuals capable of giving their assent (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988; Christensen and Prout, 2002; Lahman, 2008; Brooker, 2000) without considering that their age would be a barrier (OHCHR, 2005; Alderson, 2000).

Initially I was introduced to all children, by the practitioners, as someone who attends a school for grownups⁷, and the practitioners explained that I would be there to play with them. I presented myself to children in words they could understand (Coady, 2001), by underlying that I would be in their classroom every day because I wanted to do an 'assignment' and I would like to play with them and also note down how they spent their day at nursery. Children were

⁷ It is not uncommon for ECEC settings to be mentioned as 'schools' both by parents and practitioners.

familiar with the term 'assignment' because students from the ECEC department of the university who undertake their six month or weekly placements regularly organise activities with children as part of their assignments. Even though the term was used to gain a shared understanding with the children (Conroy and Harcourt, 2009), at the same time it implied that they had the freedom to participate if and whenever they wanted. This is because students usually ask for children's voluntary participation in their activities. Therefore, it does not seem obligatory as, for example, when children are doing an adult-led activity with their practitioners (Skanfors, 2009).

What might have assisted children to classify me as a student, from the initial introduction onwards, or as an adult with limited power in the classroom rather than as a practitioner, was my general behaviour during my stay in the settings. For example I followed the practitioners' activities rather than leading them, I tried to avoid interfering, for example avoided resolving conflicts when practitioners were present, and whenever children requested my permission to play with a toy or leave the classroom I prompted them to ask their practitioners. An indicative example that suggests that children did not consider me as a practitioner was when on one occasion a child sitting opposite to me at the table used gestures to describe to me that he spat on his practitioner as she passed by him and he then started laughing.

Gaining children's trust is similar to gaining adults' trust and requires time (Punch, 2002). However, gaining young children's assent, in contrast to older children's and adults' consent, is considered a less explicit process (Skanfors, 2009). I accepted as indications that children provided their assent in this project the fact that they did not appear to be experiencing discomfort (Cocks, 2007) and they looked happy to participate. In one case, where a child's behaviour changed to being uncharacteristically aggressive, something that the practitioner and I attributed to the fact that I was observing her, I postponed the observations (Cohen et al., 2007) for two weeks. At the end of this period, I asked the child whether it was alright to observe her during her play and, even though I got no verbal reply, her facial expression and body language indicated that she was giving assent; she looked at me at times and smiled as she continued her play. Some authors might consider this particular behaviour as

non-refusal or passive acceptance and thus not a form of assent (Alderson and Morrow, 2004). However, what I tried to do was to be '*vigilant to the responses*' of each child (Cocks, 2007, p.257; Skanfors, 2009). As Walsh correctly emphasises, '*being ethical is not the same thing as being comfortable, and being unethical is not the same thing as being uncomfortable*' (Walsh, 1998, p.60). So, what might be important is to be vigilant in responding to the verbal and non-verbal responses of children, and adults, but also to be reflexive and try to decode these responses and act accordingly. For this study, this proved important for making the most 'appropriate' ethical decisions in these contexts. Those decisions were made on the premise that participants were, primarily, active participants and not the subjects or the objects of the study (Homan, 2002; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2000).

Furthermore, practices such as asking children to 'sign' consent letters which were employed by other researchers (Bitou, 2010) or select smiley faces (Dockett and Perry, 2011) in order to indicate their assent were not used because they are adaptations of research with adults and might create confusion with this age group. Also, I was the one who was interested in learning about children's lives, so I considered that I should also be the one who would try and adjust to their world rather than asking children to adjust to my adult or research world. As with gaining adults' consent (Christensen and Prout, 2002; Ezzy, 2002; Church, 2002; Miller and Belle, 2002; Pring, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007; American Anthropological Association, 2004), gaining children's assent should be seen as an ongoing process which might change from day to day but also from one activity to the other. Assent is not something that one can establish at the beginning of the research and then put aside (Cocks, 2007), and it is definitely not something that one can claim has been gained merely by having children 'sign' a consent letter (Kon, 2006).

Thus, much emphasis was given to the power relations because, especially in the case of conducting research with children, unconstrained adult power could lead to abuse (Greig and Taylor 1999; Cohen et al., 2007). Apart from the case where the child appeared to change her behaviour in response to my observations, none of the other children appeared to feel discomfort or unhappy during the research. However they were able to express their agency (Corsaro,

2011) when, for example, some of them decided not to use the cameras; others decided not to participate in the nursery tours; and some decided not to follow my research agenda (Ring, 2000) during the map-making activity, (for a description of these activities see section 3.6.1).

By trying to avoid exercising power and taking advantage of children's relative vulnerability for the benefit of my research, I approached them just once during each activity asking for their participation. The drawback of approaching children only once is that one cannot be certain if children dissented to participate to the specific activity or if it was the specific day, or time, that affected their willingness to participate. Also, this approach did not give children the opportunity to reconsider their decision since I regarded it as final. This is similar to assuming that gaining children's assent in the beginning of the project does not require reaffirmation at later stages. What is more, since I was the one who had the material for the activities and who was deciding when the activities would take place, I had the control. Even though the project was designed as participatory in order to empower children (Clark et al., 2003) and to transfer control to them (Ring, 2000), this was not always successful. The reasons for limiting children's options, leading them at times into a relatively passive role, were either because I was following my own research agenda (Ring, 2000) or because I was following the setting's routines since I was there as a guest. The latter did not allow flexibility in organising activities with the children at specific times of the day such as meal times or adult-led activities, during which time I was either assisting the practitioners or I was undertaking observations.

In relation to observations, Skanfors (2009), identified three themes concerning how children, aged 2 to 5 years old, showed their dissent when she was asked to observe them: not responding, pulling away, and ignoring her. As Skanfors correctly emphasises '*many of the insights gained [in ethnographic studies] are only understood when the fieldwork is finished*' (Skanfors, 2009, p.10). One of these insights in my study concerned children's assent during observations since, in contrast to Skanfors, I was not asking for children's permission prior to every observation. The primary reason was because I did not want to disrupt children's play but at the same time my notes, from the approximately twenty minute period of observations taken each time, demonstrated that children

were aware that I was observing them; my fieldnotes included many instances where the target-children were observing or looking at me in return. However, I did not consider those behaviours as passive acceptance because during the observations I trusted my intuition (Skanfors, 2009) on judging whether children's behaviours were indicating assent or dissent and that I was not intruding on their privacy. Also, I considered that both my previous experience in working with children of this age and the familiarity I was gaining day by day with the specific children's responses would assist me to recognise when I should cease the observations. Thus, even if the children were not voicing their disagreement, I could be certain that this would be reflected in their behaviour and they would show their annoyance by using different strategies such as turning their back on me. I did not foresee that target children would show their dissent and prevent me from observing them, through distraction methods. For example, children would come and sit next to me and invite me to play with them; they would approach and start to talk to me or ask me questions; or they would ask to use my notebook so they could 'write' too. When children's actions did not indicate annoyance or direct dissent one cannot be certain about their intentions behind these actions. However, the result was that, often I ended my observations by responding positively to children's request for play or chat, for example. Other researchers who have recorded similar responses from children, interpreted children's actions as indications that children did not want them to be non-participant observers (Elfer, 2008,). It is also possible that children were simply trying to indicate they wanted me to engage with them in a more interactive way instead of looking or observing.

In conclusion, even though I designed the project as participatory because I wanted to conduct research with children and not on them and I perceived them as active contributors rather than passive participants, it is likely that this was not always the case. Therefore, it would be more accurate, and ethically correct, to state that this project was conducted both *with* and at times *on* children. The latter refers to those times when children's passive acceptance was evident or when they were not aware that I was observing them as sometimes happened when I was conducting shorter than twenty minutes observations. At other times when children were approaching me, it was not until the end of the project that I

realised this could be a strategy they used for distracting me from observing them or because they were seeking for different kinds of attention than the attention I was giving them by following my research agenda. Thus, incidents like this one could be interpreted as conducting research on children.

3.5.7. Ensuring Participants' Anonymity and the Confidentiality of Data

The previous discussion focused on consent and power issues, which were discussed separately for each group of participants due to the complexity of the issues surrounding them. However, there were some common issues such as the participants' anonymity and the confidentiality of the data (Cohen et al., 2007; Christensen and Prout, 2002). In this study I gave specific attention to presenting the key findings in a way that the participants and the organisation would not be easily identifiable as a means to ensure their anonymity (Cohen et al., 2007). The limits of confidentiality were discussed earlier in terms of concerns being raised about a particular child's wellbeing during the study. However, it needs to be acknowledged that since data is being used in reports, the issue of confidentiality of the data becomes rather problematic.

In this study, I informed the participants that the data would be kept secure from third parties during the fieldwork (Christensen and Prout, 2002) such as other parents and practitioners. I also informed them that extracted parts of interview and observational data might be used in reports. Furthermore, I reassured the parents and practitioners that using pseudonyms would ensure their anonymity (Christensen and Prout, 2002) and that I would modify any photographs I used in the thesis but that there remained the risk of them being identified by 'insiders' (Christians, 2000; Pollard and Filer, 1996) such as people who could identify them by the reported quotes.

Something that I did not take into account during this study was the confidentiality of the data generated from and by children. Discussions took place with parents and practitioners over themes emerging from the observational data and I showed photographs to them so that they could provide me with their interpretations of children's actions and intentions.

However, I did not question the ethicality of this approach during the design period or during the fieldwork, and I did not consider whether I should try and seek children's permission prior to discussing their experiences and perspectives with adults. Nonetheless, the intention was not to disclose information or invade children's privacy but to discuss with people who are significant in children's lives and who, due to their familiarity with the children, are more knowledgeable about children's actions and intentions. It was intended that the inclusion of interpretations from significant others would assist me in presenting the thesis as a credible and trustworthy account of children's experiences.

To sum up, the project was carefully designed to pose no or minimal⁸ risk for the participants and the alterations that occurred in the design during the study were made to ensure that. However, no matter how thoroughly one has thought about ethical issues, prior to the research, it appears that other issues will arise during the study which will then lead to new issues having to be considered. Therefore, researchers ought to constantly negotiate with participants to address such issues as they arise (Pring, 2003; Christensen and Prout, 2002). Consequently, being flexible and reflexive are important elements for overcoming ethical and other methodological issues but, due to the fact that research involves personal interactions, it is difficult to eliminate human error or refrain from it and from misunderstandings (Aubrey et al., 2000). Since ethical pitfalls can only be avoided by avoiding research, as Bronferbrenner (1952) accurately highlighted, I cannot claim with certainty that I conducted an ethical project. Nonetheless, I have tried to demonstrate how I aimed to take into account, throughout the project, as many aspects as possible to avoid harming the participants.

⁸ The National Science Foundation's Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences (2008, p.11), explains: '*Minimal Risk* means that 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 or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests'.

3.6. The Mosaic Approach

Introduction

Data for this study was generated using an adaptation of the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2001) with children which included observational, visual data such as videos and photographs, taken both by children and the researcher. The Mosaic Approach also included undertaking interviews with children's parents and practitioners. Ancillary staff members were also interviewed. The data generation methods were piloted prior to their use for approximately a month in a Greek ECEC for children under the age of three (for a detailed account on piloting see Appendix 3). This section presents how the methods were put into practice during the main study. It also discusses the advantages and disadvantages of each method along with reflection on my role in the settings.

Ten children participated in the main study, aged one year four months to two years eleven months old. In order to generate data from children, the techniques of the Mosaic Approach were adjusted or altered according to the children's ages, abilities, needs, interests and the way they chose to communicate, either verbally (Clark and Moss, 2001) or non-verbally (Manning-Morton and Thorp, 2003; Elfer, 2004). Bruner and Trevarthen's categorisations of infants' and babies' communicative behaviours have informed the focus of the observations. Since the research sample comprised children aged sixteen months to three years and due to the recognition that children do not always follow developmental 'norms', it was taken into account what the above authors regarded as communicative behaviours both prior to and after the age of sixteen months (See page 69). The interviews suggested by Clark and Moss (2001) or the 'child conferencing' (Clark, 2001, p.335) were replaced by informal discussions with verbal children during free play, structured activities, and role play. The use of video was eventually discarded. Instead, photographs taken by children (Clark and Moss, 2001), or by me (Warming, 2005), were used to stimulate discussion with children, their parents, and their practitioners. The photographs were also used during the map making activity, with the children who assented to participate.

3.6.1. Visual Data

The decision to use an adaptation of the Mosaic Approach for researching Greek children's experiences was primarily a result of piloting the research methods and of the decisions I made as to what would best fit both the Greek context and the specific settings and children. Greek children's perspectives on their experiences in day-care settings have not been researched before. The only exception in Greece is research undertaken by Bitou (2010) who used the Mosaic Approach in order to identify the perspectives of children under the age of three on the curriculum in a comparative study between children from Greece and the UK. However, my project had a broader focus which included children's perspectives on their experiences as a whole. Thus, children's contribution to the project was essential and the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2001), was considered the most appropriate means to elicit children's responses. The range of photographic, verbal (informal discussions with children) and observational techniques (Clark, 2007) which were used allowed verbal and non-verbal children to contribute actively to the project (Alderson, 2000). Additionally, children's parents and practitioners were interviewed to provide their interpretations on children's experiences. This was important in order to complete each child's mosaic and assisted in providing a holistic picture about each child's life in the setting from people who knew the children better than anyone else.

In general the Mosaic Approach has mostly been used with children over the age of three years old (Clark and Moss, 2001; Clark, 2001). Clark (2001) used the Mosaic Approach with only one child under the age of three, Toni who was twenty two months old, and the photographs that were part of his mosaic were taken by his sister. Other researchers (Yoshida and Smith, 2008; Sumsion et al., 2011) placed head cameras on babies and toddlers' foreheads in order to see what they see and to understand children's experiences from their perspectives. It could be argued that this approach raises many ethical issues and turns children into research subjects rather than active agents who have a right to privacy and some control over the data generated. In my study the younger, non-verbal, children aged one year four months and one year six

months old were given the opportunity to use the camera in the same way as the older children. The fact that they used the camera freely, for as much time as they wanted and in order to photograph whatever they liked, was thought to provide truthful indications of how they experience the environment as well as what attracts their attention without them having to speak (Walker, 1993; Lancaster, 2003). Clark and Moss (2001, p.24) state that '*photographs can offer a powerful new language for young children*'. However, if we consider photographs as a new language, it does not necessarily mean that children also need to explain their photographs through spoken language as also argued by Lancaster (2003), even though there were times when the older children verbally stated their intentions when taking photographs.

The majority of the photographs taken by children were placed in personal photo albums which were given to the children one day prior to the interview with the children's parents. The parents were asked to look through the albums with their children at home. During the interviews the parents, who were asked to attend with the album, were asked about their children's reactions when seeing the album. This was something that assisted the flow of the conversational interviews with parents. Some of the photographs that children took were also a subject of discussion with practitioners and ancillary staff members, and used to identify their interpretations of children's intentions. In the first setting, the practitioners spontaneously went through some of the albums with the children in the classroom on the day that parents brought back the albums for the interview. In the second setting, apart from putting the photographs in photo albums and giving them to the children, the photographs were placed on the classroom's tables and I recorded children's reactions and the interactions that occurred amongst children and amongst children and adults.

Photographs, taken by me or the children, were also used during the map-making activity where children were invited to use the photographs to make a map of their favourite activities, corners, and areas in the setting (Clark and Moss, 2001; Clark, 2001). However, at the time I concluded that the activity was not as successful as I initially thought because children decided to express their agency (Alderson, 2000) instead of following my agenda (Ring, 2000). Three

children participated in the activity. Two of them decided to undertake the activity together but they experimented with gluing, rather than using the photos to make a map of their nursery. After placing some of the photographs on the 30x30 paperboard I had given them, to restrict the number of photographs used, the two children started gluing photographs one on top of the other, gluing layers of almost all the photographs provided, which was about 30 photographs. The third child placed the photographs one opposite each other and asked me to draw roads on the spaces left between them so he could 'drive' a car he had brought with him around the photographs. Nonetheless, the activity fulfilled the original intention which was to identify aspects that children consider important within their nursery. This became clear during the analysis. In particular, the combination of observational and interview data showed that the first two children valued aspects of peer relationships and the third child was intrigued by activities that included cars.

The nursery tour activity involved children in guiding the researcher through the nursery, taking photographs and/or talking about the places in the nursery that they considered important. The nursery tour activity only took place in the second setting where children had the opportunity to visit, apart from their classroom, another area of the nursery and the outdoors. The children from Setting A did not have the opportunity to use the outdoors (See chapter 4). During the nursery tour activity I aimed to note down children's comments. This proved very helpful in terms of presenting both children's voices and intentions and in some cases it simplified the categorisation of the photographs under specific themes. For example, one child verbally indicated his intention to photograph the sky from the classroom window but no matter how high he tried to raise the camera he only managed to photograph the nursery's wall across the window. Thus, the photographs also provided this study with rich observational data deriving from diverse activities, both structured and unstructured.

3.6.2. Observational Data

Observation was the main technique for exploring younger children's actions when playing with other people and/or material (Elfer, 2004), and was used with

toddlers too since it can provide information about children's needs and interests (Sharman et al., 1995; Hobart and Frankel, 2004). The combination of observations, photographic data, and data from conversations with children and parents assisted in drawing a holistic and detailed picture of children's experiences (Clark, 2001).

However, the main aim of the observations was to explore children's experiences and identify their interests. Therefore, narrative, unstructured observations were used for every target child, instead of observational techniques which assess children's abilities or development and seek answers to predetermined questions, as in the case of developmental checklists (Hobart and Frankel, 2004; Palaiologou, 2008).

Narrative observations have the advantage of recording *'anything and everything that happens (such as dialogues, movements, emotions), and this offers rich evidence of the children's behaviour'* (Palaiologou, 2008, p.61). The main disadvantage of this method was that the events were unfolding quickly and sometimes it proved unfeasible to note everything down (Hobart and Frankel, 2004). In order to overcome this drawback, to some degree, a form of short hand and codes were used (Hobart and Frankel, 2004) to quickly describe children's actions. Amongst the potential disadvantages is the fact that in narrative observations the *'observers might find themselves recording something which is not relevant to the observation'* or the observations *'may produce an unwieldy amount of information'* (Hobart and Frankel, 2004, p.38). However, for the present research, these were not considered to be drawbacks. This is because the study aimed to *'let(ting) the elements of the situation speak for themselves'* (Cohen et al., 2007, p.398), by collecting as much information as possible. Therefore, everything was approached as 'relevant' starting from what the activity was about, how many children and adults participated, and what the target child's verbal and non-verbal reactions were to all these.

Participant and Non-participant Observations

The observations were either participant or non-participant. Some argue that because we are part of the world we are studying, non-participant observation is

just an illusion (Adler and Adler, 1994, In: Cohen et al., 2007, p.397). It is essential however, to explain the framework of participant and non-participant observations for this project. Children were observed, using non-participant observations, in a plethora of situations during their daily routine, for instance at their arrival, during mealtimes, free play, when they played alone and with peers, and in teacher-led activities. Thus, the non-participant observations relate to situations where observations were undertaken by being close to children so that I could see and hear what was taking place but without interrupting the activity (Palaiologou, 2008). Non-participant observations usually remain in theory, however, since some authors describe how a non-participant observer might be included by children in their play (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2001, p.200; Corsaro, 2011). Nonetheless, flexibility was the main component of this research so, when children decided to include me in their play, I sometimes continued the research activity but as a participant observer. On other occasions I would choose to postpone the research activity and play with the children. Nonetheless, participant observation was employed in cases where I organised and led activities with toddlers such as tours within the nursery and the map-making activity.

Riddall-Leech (2005) underlines the issue that combining the researcher's engagement in children's activities with observation may hinder the recording of the data and the researcher might miss vital information. Nonetheless, other authors (Morrison, 1993; Cohen et al, 2007) identify how participant observation can generate data which is strong on reality and, provided the researcher stays long enough at the setting, generate 'thick descriptions', and an '*accurate explanation and interpretation of events rather than relying on the researcher's own reality*' (Cohen et al., 2007, p.405). Furthermore, in the case of participant observation, Cohen et al. (2007), highlight the possibility of changes in the behaviour of the observed unless the observer stays with them for a sufficient period of time. For this project, spending three months in each setting was considered sufficient time in order to eliminate the possibility of changes in the behaviour of the settings' actors, children and adults.

Generating Data from Non-verbal Children

Even though the younger children used the camera to take photographs, the main technique for generating data from them was through unstructured observations. At the initial planning stage of the study, the major issue for the project concerned accessing younger children's non-verbal means of communication, more specifically, identifying which behavioural cues should be recorded and how they would be interpreted to identify how these children experienced day-care. The assistance of the literature deriving from developmental psychology was essential, not only for informing decisions about the foci of observation but also for interpreting the cues (See discussion about Bruner and Trevarthen, page 69).

By taking into account Bruner's (1977; 1983) and Trevarthen's (1977; 1993) suggestions, younger and older children's vocalizations, pre-speech, and gesticulation were recorded during the observations. Moreover, practitioners' responsiveness or non-responsiveness, and any spontaneous comments and interpretations made by them, during the observation, about the purposes and acts of the children were also noted down. This approach was considered essential because the practitioners could provide alternative or more accurate interpretations due to their familiarity with the child, whilst their adaptive capacity was also noted down since it has been considered important for sustaining communication with the child. This approach has been used by Sylverster-Bradley and Trevarthen (1977) and resulted in concluding that babies 9-12 months old and their caregivers had built between them a *'highly articulate and personal communicative system'* (in Trevarthen, 1977, p.255). Furthermore, I mentioned, during the interviews, some of children's non-verbal actions and these were subjects of joint interpretation with parents and practitioners, to achieve an understanding between us about the child's actions and intentions and thus about children's experiences.

3.6.3. Interview Data

In the initial research design I proposed to interview two groups of adults. The first group comprised the case study children's parents and practitioners who

would be interviewed to provide their interpretations of the experiences of the children participating in the project. Their interviews were part of the Mosaic Approach. I proposed that the second group of adults (parents, practitioners, and senior area managers) would be asked to provide their perspectives on their own experiences of the ECEC services. However, due to time constraints and word limit issues of this thesis, I decided to exclude the data of this second group of adults. By adopting a flexible and reflexive approach I decided to modify the project when it became clear that the overwhelming amount of the gathered data would be difficult to manage. The rich data generated from and by children influenced the decision to exclude adults' data and focus on children's perspectives. This was because adults' perspectives had been researched before but there is limited ethnographic research with under threes, both in Greece and internationally. However, during the study, another group of employees, the ancillary staff members, were included in the project because I identified that they played a major role in the lives of the children. Thus, from the thirty two adults who volunteered to be interviewed, this thesis presents the views of seventeen adults; ten parents, four practitioners, and three ancillary staff members.

Why Interviews?

Since the study aimed to explore adults' perspectives on children's experiences an interview was deemed to be the most appropriate means of inquiry because it encourages interaction, elaboration, and clarifications according to the interviewees' responses (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; May, 1997; Mason, 2002). Interviews also offer *'rich insights into people's experiences, opinions, aspirations, attitudes, and feelings'*, as suggested by May (1997, p.109), and provide the researcher with information on how people understand these experiences, their lives, and their world in general (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). All these would assist in answering the research question by generating rich data from participants (Creswell, 2003; Fontana, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007), and achieve a shared understanding between myself and the interviewees about their perspectives. Interviews also show how people position themselves in this world and in different contexts and give them the opportunity to unravel their 'multiple identities' (Reynolds and Pope, 1991; Deaux, 1993, McEwen, 1996;

Jones and McEwen, 2000). For example, during the interviews with some of the practitioners and the ancillary staff members, their parent or grandparent identity came to the fore when they were talking about the case study children. This shift between different roles when discussing and/or answering questions was initially revealed during piloting. This revelation strengthened the decision to conduct interviews for this study, rather than use other data generation methods such as questionnaires, in order to allow the participants to reveal their multiple identities.

Conversational Interviews

Many authors (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009; Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005; Rubin and Rubin, 1995) refer to the interview as a two-way conversation where people listen to each other, take turns, and construct and reconstruct meaning between them constantly. The difference between an everyday conversation and an interview is that the latter is more purposeful and the interviewer is seeking to generate 'thick descriptions' through this interaction with the interviewee, probably, concentrating more on what the interviewee is saying than is usual when two people have an everyday conversation (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). What I also tried to gain through the discussions with the participants was their perspectives on issues which I had identified as important by being a participant observer in the settings (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). These issues were associated both with children and adults.

Even though the interviews were initially designed to be semi-structured, my reflections on how they were finally conducted suggests that the term 'conversational' best describes the process. Rubin and Rubin (1995, p.10), consider interviews as '*conversational partnerships*' where the interviewee is a partner and not the object of the study. They also highlight that seeing the interviewees as partners is a recognition, by the researcher, that they have an active role in the interview process. Schaeffer and Maynard (2003) underline the point that conversational interviews can improve the quality of the interview and the quality of the generated data. The friendly style of conversational interviews was probably a result of conducting an ethnographic study and of interacting with the interviewees for extended periods of time on a daily basis.

All these had the benefit of encouraging the interviewees to ask for clarifications, suggest topics for discussion, and also, where relevant, disagree with me (Schaeffer and Maynard, 2003; Shuy, 2003). This style also assisted in sharing power with the participants (Rubin and Rubin, 1995), given that my status as a qualified early years practitioner and researcher could be intimidating for some participants (See page 127). On the other hand, the interviews were conducted in the nurseries, something that one could argue empowered the participants, especially the staff, due to their long term familiarity with the site (Elwood and Martin, 2000). However, by reflecting on the interviews I would argue that the majority of them were balanced in terms of power which was shifting between us throughout the interview process (Hoffmann, 2007). For example, I had the power when I was asking the questions but once I uttered the question the power shifted back to the interviewees who had the power to either answer the question or not, to provide a laconic or a highly articulated answer, and even to refer the question back to me.

Shuy (2003) considers conversational interviews as a successful approach to interviewing which can provide more accurate data due to its flexibility but also its similarity to everyday conversation which makes it seem a more natural process for the interviewees. The interviews were undertaken approximately two and a half months after the participants were initially approached and so the conversational type of interviewing was more appropriate. This was because our daily interaction during these months, especially with the staff in the settings, could be characterised as informal. So, any other, more formal, type of interviewing would have made it a rather uncomfortable process.

The decision to allow some time to pass before I conducted the interviews was identified as essential during the piloting stage because it would assist in gaining the participants' trust (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Allowing time to pass also gave me the opportunity to become familiar with the children we would be discussing but also with the routine of the setting which was important, not only for identifying potential issues for discussion, but also for identifying the most appropriate time of day when the interviews could take place. All of these factors allowed me to contribute to the conversation in a substantive way and

engage in in-depth discussions with the interviewees. Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005, p.58), suggest that in-depth interviews last for approximately ninety minutes. However, time is not always a reliable indicator and in-depth discussions can occur in less time. This is because trust, which is, according to Rubin and Rubin (1995), the main element of conducting in-depth interviews, had been built by interacting with the participants for a period of three months beforehand and they seemed to have accepted me as an integral part of their setting. Thus, I only needed to sustain this trust during the interview process, rather than establish it (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Also, during my ethnographic study, the time I had spent with the participants resulted in creating a 'shared language' and we could refer to examples or experiences that both of us had witnessed in the setting (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). This provided a starting point for discussion but also could give depth to the discussion and sustain it.

A result of conducting ethnographic research and an indication of gaining participants' trust was that the staff approached me and volunteered to be interviewed. Gaining the participants' trust, however, led to me conducting more interviews than the ones initially planned for in terms of making the project manageable. This was because many of the participants explained that they were volunteering because they wanted to help me (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). A member of the ancillary staff volunteered because, as she said, it was the first time someone had asked for her opinion. All these offers made it difficult for me to turn down people simply because I had already reached the required number of participants in terms of manageability.

My Role during the Interviews

The interviewees were not asked to comment on the experience of being interviewed. Consequently what is represented here is only how I perceived the process of my conversation with different people. Some of the interviewees were more talkative than others (Cohen et al., 2007). As a result there was a difference in the degree of effort required to sustain conversations. However I found that I could adjust to the interaction style of each interviewee. One interviewee came across as excessively assertive in explaining her views which made the conversation an intense and intimidating process for me, something

which was probably associated with power issues (Miller and Bell, 2002; Cohen et al., 2007). The parent seemed from the beginning to want to have control of the interview and started by asking me various questions about my professional background and the research purposes. After I replied to her initial questions, and some follow up questions, the interview started unfolding and there were various instances where she directed my questions back to me. In general, the parent seemed to be very confident throughout the process, leaving me with the impression that she was more experienced than me in conducting interviews or perhaps that we shared differing views on how the discussion should unfold. For example, I was prepared, based on the previous interviews I had conducted, for a casual discussion around particular issues surrounding her child and she seemed to be prepared to have an interview on as formal a basis as possible. This incident though was atypical of my relationship in general with parents. In fact, the majority of the parents seemed to see me as an 'expert' and asked for advice on issues concerning their children. In relation to the staff, only one of the ancillary staff members expressed a feeling of 'incompetence' (Rubin and Rubin, 1995), in case the conversation were to revolve around '*pedagogical issues*' as she said. In the interviews I tried to be supportive, listen carefully, and encourage the interviewees when this was needed. However, the interview as a process also required mutual adjustment and effort from both sides for sustaining and promoting the conversation because the interaction style could also change within the same interview. So, the interviewees were not passive participants who were there just to reply to my questions but they were actively engaging in the interview process by asking questions and for clarification as well (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

The conversational style of the interviews allowed me to unravel my 'multiple identities' too, as student, early years practitioner, and employee of different day-care settings, and to share experiences with the interviewees. Thus, it was a reciprocal interaction where both sides were sharing information and not just the interviewees (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Fontana and Frey, 2005). This enabled a relationship based on trust to grow during the interviews because some of the interviewees identified me as a student and linked me with their children who were students too or they associated me with ECEC settings I had

worked at and that they knew (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). It was probably the friendly style of the interviews and my willingness to share information with parents and staff which resulted in them sharing with me their fears and anxieties (Scheurich, 1995). These were associated with the children and also with the future in general since the interviews took place during a period in which Greece was experiencing significant economic instability. Thus, the interviews and the research project in general cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context in which they took place because it seemed that this was also shaping the participants' perspectives (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

However, it must be stated here, that another aim of the interviews was to avoid taking for granted what the interviewees were stating (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Cohen et al., 2007; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This was not an easy task due to my familiarity with the Greek nurseries and the familiarity I gained after being in these specific ones for three months (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). My assumption that early years practitioners share 'common terminology' and define terms in the same way was another drawback. In some cases, I asked practitioners how they interpreted terms used, such as 'free play', but other terms, such as 'pedagogue', which is extensively used amongst Greek early years practitioners, was taken for granted by me as having a shared definition.

Ethnographic studies where the ethnographer does not share the cultural background of the participants (Corsaro, 2011) provides rich insights because the researcher tries to get an understanding of the researched culture. However, familiarity is not always a limitation. In my case, sharing the culture of the participants had advantages too, especially in decoding adults' and children's non-verbal cues and body language. For example, the movement of the head slightly up and then down to indicate 'Yes' and mostly up and then down to indicate 'No' could probably be confusing and difficult to interpret for someone who has not been accustomed to such cues. This could pose a problem and lead to misunderstandings, both during an interview and when noting down observations, which unfold quickly, and especially when, in these

observations, the actors are young children with limited language skills and extensive use of body language.

3.6.4. Limitations of the Mosaic Approach

The Mosaic Approach was an important tool in this study for identifying children's experiences of day-care. However, there were some limitations in regards to the use of the various methods and the activities. One of the limitations of the approach is that it guides researchers as to how to use the various tools, including the cameras and activities such as the nursery tours. However, the authors do not explicitly recognise that specified activities might not be suitable for all settings. For example, a nursery tour was not suitable for the first setting where I conducted my project since children rarely visited parts of the nursery beyond their classroom. Similarly, the approach fails to recognise that adults are implicitly guiding children when, for example, children are asked to follow the research agenda during activities such as the map-making activity, or when they are asked to photograph their favourite places. Such guidance could be seen as limiting children's agency. In my study, as discussed earlier, not all children were willing to participate in the various activities or use the camera for taking photographs. Furthermore, when participating in the various research activities, children were exercising their agency rather than participating because they felt obliged to follow my research agenda. Thus, researchers who use the approach should be prepared to modify their research agenda and modify their methods according to children's responses. A final point is that the approach provides researchers with rich observational, interview and photographic data but it is not self-evident how that wide-ranging and complex data should be combined and categorised in order to be analysed. However, if the potential limitations are acknowledged, the Mosaic Approach is a valuable approach in identifying children's experiences of their ECEC settings.

In summing up, this section has focused on presenting the way that the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2011) was used in this project by taking into account issues that came up during the piloting and during the main study. For example, the cameras and the photographs were used in activities according to

children's abilities and interests. Also, I undertook the observations as either a participant or a non-participant observer by being vigilant and sensitive to children's responses. Finally, the interviews were conducted in a conversational style because this was the most appropriate approach, building on the familiarity I had gained by interacting with the interviewees for an extended period of time. All these factors contributed to a rich and detailed set of data which provided evidence of children's perspectives on their experiences within their settings.

3.7. Thematic Analysis

In order to analyse the visual, observational, and interview data which I generated for each child I employed thematic analysis. This seemed a valuable approach because it would allow me to compare or contrast the emerging themes of each child's set of data with the emerging themes of the other children's sets of data. Thematic analysis has been criticised for failing '*to acknowledge implicit theories which guide work at an early stage*' (Silverman, 2005, p.180). It has also been criticised because '*it might be strong on providing categorizations without necessarily explanatory potential*' (Cohen et al., 2007, p.495).

However, I believe these criticisms can be addressed by taking an approach that is informed by theory. Aronson (1994) states that thematic analysis sets out to find emerging themes from the interviews or observations and then build a valid argument for choosing the themes by reading the related literature. However, Braun and Clarke (2006), and Boyatzis (1998) state that thematic analysis can be either theory-driven or data-driven and that both of them have implications for the research and the findings. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006) state that using theory-driven thematic analysis is not wrong provided you make explicit that your theory is driving your analysis. However, Boyatzis (1998, p. 35), argues that, if the themes derive from the theory, then it will be difficult for the researcher to see what '*the data might be saying*'.

In this project, theories from developmental psychology guided the work during the planning stage where there was ambiguity as to which aspects of children's

non-verbal actions I should focus on when undertaking observations. Observations of children's non-verbal gestures, cues, and body language enriched the observational data with what proved to be significant details which provided possible interpretations about their actions and intentions. However, the analysis is mainly data-driven because the themes which emerged from different data (photographic, observational, interview) and from different sources (adults and children) were synthesised to identify children's perspectives on their experiences of their ECEC settings.

In my project the analysis of data was completed in three stages and proved a time consuming and challenging process lasting for approximately one and a half years.

The first stage took place during the fieldwork and the approach of '*pattern coding*' was followed (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.69). During the first weeks of the fieldwork, patterns emerged, for example, regarding children's interaction with ancillary staff members and their peers. This interaction was followed up by more targeted observations and interviews. A similar approach was followed in relation to other themes. Thus, the first stage lasted for as long as the field work lasted, six months. The second stage of the analysis took place after the data generation period had finished and it was a period of reading and re-reading the observational data in order to reduce the large amount of data and categorise it under broad themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). During this stage, all children's observational data were organised under 24 themes where I noted specific observed actions and how many times they occurred within my observations. For example, the 'social interactions' theme appeared most times within my observations, 127 times; and under this theme I placed actions such as physical contact, for example children hug and kiss adults or other children, gestures and facial expressions or body actions which indicated positive social actions. Examples of these last actions were smiling and laughing, helping adults, and approaching or playing with other children (See Appendix 4). This approach was a messy one because many of children's observed actions could be placed in various categories. Thus, I decided to move on and re-read the observations and make a summary of every child's observations by noting down

patterns of behaviours. An example of Georgios' (1.4) summary of observations is presented below:

Georgios often goes next to his practitioner and other children (he does not seem to seek for anything in particular). Most times adults talk to him or kiss him as do other children (mostly hug him and kiss him), he seems to enjoy it. He also enjoys ignoring adults' instructions when being 'naughty' (he usually laughs and tries to be 'naughty' again). He looks at the corridor often and also goes next to the beds and the mirror very often. He dances a lot. He sings on his own, he enjoys made up songs that the practitioner sings to him. He experiments with the toys and chairs (usually throws them down) or tries to put them one next to the other.

After reading all children's summaries, I used big sheets of paper to illustrate common themes between children's actions (See Figure 3.2), followed by long discussions with the supervisory team.

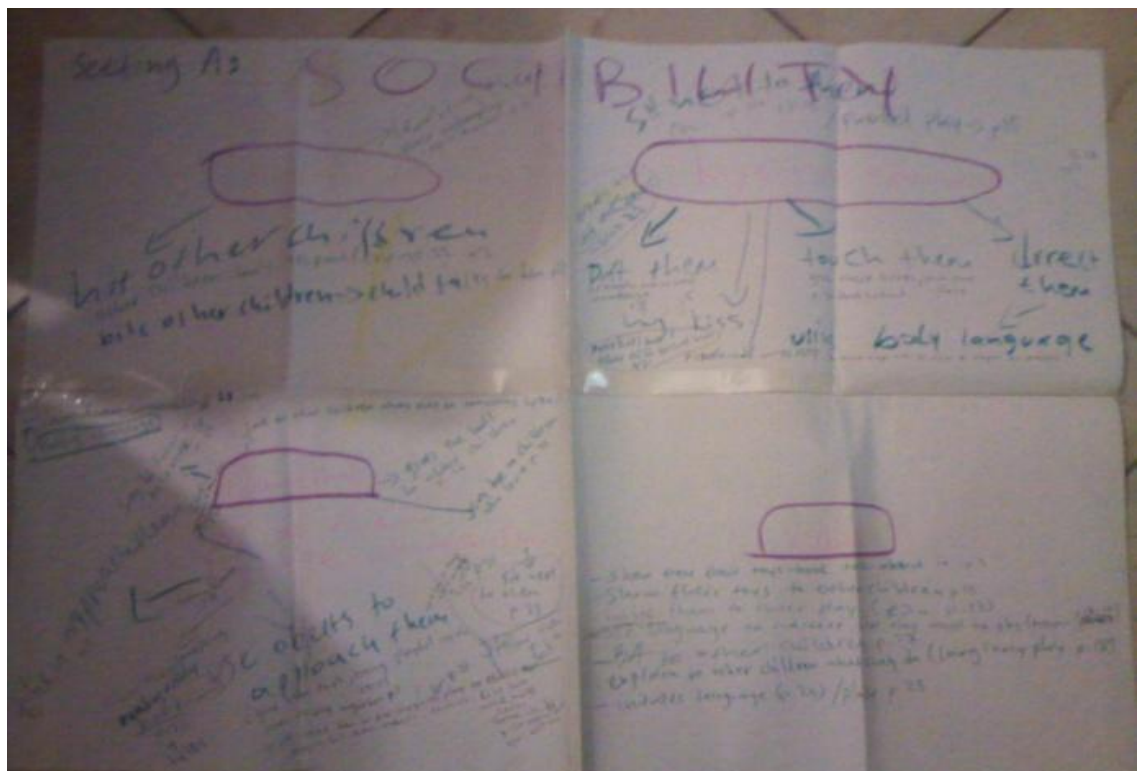


Figure 3.2: EK's photograph of analysing the sociability theme for the Green Class children

The illustration method is described by Miles and Huberman (1994, p.71) as '*mapping of concepts*'. Figure 3.2 above illustrates the aspects of Green Class children that emerged in relation to the 'sociability' theme. This included four aspects: conflicts, physical contact, verbal and non-verbal acts of sociability. Next to each action I wrote each child's name and the page number of their observation document where the action appeared. Then I moved on to do the same for the Blue Class children but on a different sheet of paper.

However, all the above procedures that I followed had the same drawback. They gave me a general picture of children's actions but did not provide me with answers about the reasons why children acted in this way, about their intentions, and in general about what all these were saying about children's experiences. This categorisation, however, proved important because it helped me to identify the first two main themes to emerge. One concerned children's interactions with adults and the other children's interactions with their peers. In order to start to follow these themes I had to revisit my observational data and try to identify first similarities and then differences among the children. Finally, the third stage was to supplement the interpretations deriving from my observational data with any relevant photographs taken by the children or by me and finally with data from parents' and practitioners' interviews. All these resulted in drawing a more holistic picture about children's experiences within their setting by bringing together evidence from various sources.

During the third stage, it also appeared that some of the children's photographs as well as my interpretations from the observational data did not fall clearly under the two themes even though some of this data included interactions with other children or adults. This is because the data seemed to relate primarily to the way children were experiencing their nursery's space; including the physical environment and the nursery's toys and furniture or the walls displays. Thus, a third theme emerged, concerning the relationships between children and their environment. I followed the same approach as with the previous two themes of child-adult relationships and peer relationships where the observational data were supplemented by relevant photographic and interview data.

Transcription issues are discussed alongside translation issues (See section 3.8. below). I sent the interview transcripts to the interviewees as a way to ensure the accuracy of the transcription and to empower them by giving them the chance to have a say on the way they were represented (Forbat and Henderson, 2005). For example, I attached an introductory paragraph explaining that they might feel uncomfortable reading the transcript because spoken language is usually different from written accounts. I also invited them to remove from the transcripts anything they thought might make them feel uncomfortable if published and to change or add things to the transcript as appropriate. The interviewees were given a week to make any changes they wished and send me back the transcripts. No participants contacted me regarding requested changes to the transcribed interviews.

One participant emailed me asking for clarification on the use of the transcript. She seemed worried because during a conversation with colleagues she mentioned that I had emailed her the transcript and someone from the setting asked to read it. She was also falsely informed that I intended to send all transcripts to the organisation's board. This led me to call the interviewee to reassure her that this was a misunderstanding. During that contact we decided that the best approach to be followed was for the interviewee to avoid providing information or discussing the transcript with her colleagues. We also decided to send her a clarification letter which she could use in case someone insisted on reading the transcript. The letter explained that my obligation towards the organisation was to send them a summary of the results after I had submitted my thesis. It also stated that the interview transcripts were confidential and were sent to be read exclusively by the interviewees.

Another incident occurred, a few months later, during one of my visits to the settings, where one interviewee referred to her experience of reading the interview transcript. The interviewee expressed a feeling of embarrassment, commenting on the way she was represented and stating that she had no idea that she repeatedly used specific words and expressions when she spoke. Due to the fact that I had not started translating data at that point, I promised that I would exclude these expressions during the translation of her interview, for use in the thesis, in order to ensure that she would not be easily identifiable. This

incident suggests that researchers should include in their agenda a final visit to the site a few weeks or months after their last visit in order to listen to any second thoughts or concerns the participants might have before beginning data analysis or writing up.

3.8. Transcribing and Translating Data

It is important to note here that all generated data was initially recorded in Greek and that I translated long parts of observational and interview data into English to assist communication with the supervisory team. I undertook the translation at different stages of the study. First of all I translated observational data during the pilot study in order to discuss with the supervisory team the best approach to be followed in generating such data (See Appendix 3 about piloting the methods). I translated a second set of observational data during the fieldwork and as I was following up emerging patterns. During the fieldwork I also translated a whole interview transcript in order to get feedback from the supervisory team on the way I was conducting the conversational interviews. However, the greatest amount of translation took place during the stage of analysis where I had to support my understandings and interpretations of the emerging themes with observational and interview data.

The fact that I am Greek and conducted the research in Greek settings with Greek participants but am presenting these to an international audience in a language that is not my mother tongue raises translation issues and possibly further ethical dilemmas. For example, there are issues as to how Greek culture and the sub-cultures of settings are presented in the thesis. There are also issues as to how the participants as individuals are presented and whose ‘voice’ is represented in the thesis. Researchers, including Twinn (1997), Temple (1997), Temple and Young, (2004), and Esposito (2001), have identified issues of representation regarding translated data. All these authors point out that not only are there limited texts which investigate the implications of translating research data but also that most times translation issues remain implicit in relevant projects. In Greek studies, only Petrogiannis (1993) has discussed translation issues but this was only in relation to translating from English to Greek instruments used such as questionnaires.

In this study, I conducted the translation of all interviews and observational data which I had previously transcribed. The reason for not employing someone else to either transcribe or translate was not only financial but also because I thought this process would bring me closer to my data and assist me later on with my interpretations. I took the decision to transcribe interviews and observations on my own because I was the person who conducted the interviews and undertook the observations and so it was easier for me to recall incidents and fill in any gaps relating to either inaudible parts of the interviews or unclear parts of the observations rather than having an outsider doing these. Also, I decided to transcribe the interviews word by word, thinking that this would help me when translating these sets of data more accurately and that I would not intervene much with the data if, for example, I was summarizing what was said. However, Kvale (1996, p.167) argues that once data is transcribed, it is *'already interpreted data'*, but Cohen et al. (2007, p.367) suggest that *'there can be no single correct transcription'* but what is important is *'how a transcription is useful to the research'*.

In relation to translating data, my prior experience in translating observations for the module 'Observing Young Learners' during my MA degree resulted in identifying that my translations included interpretations of the data. This is something I consciously tried to refrain from in this study by trying to conduct direct translations and by comparing again and again the translated extracts with the original ones. Twinn (1997) argues that all translations include interpretations and she suggests that the best way to maximize the reliability of a study is to use only one translator.

Similarly to Cohen et al.'s (2007) argument in relation to transcripts, Temple and Young (2004, p.165) argue that there is *'no single correct translation of a text'*. Thus, it would be more relevant here to discuss my rationale behind translations. My main dilemma regarded whether or not the participants 'voices' should be presented according to the Greek reality or to be 'modified' for an international audience in order to avoid misunderstandings or criticism. However, my decision was based on what I thought more ethical and, to me, what was more ethical was to try and reproduce in the English language, as

accurately as possible, what the participants said and did in order that the translations would reflect the Greek reality and culture. I hoped that the readers would keep in mind the fact that the context in which the research was conducted was not an English speaking one.

I would now like to provide some examples relevant to this study regarding informal interactions amongst Greeks because what might be seen as the norm in the Greek context could be considered as rudeness in an English context. For example, in everyday informal interactions, Greek people usually thank people who offer them something they have not asked for but they rarely thank someone who hands them something they have asked for. In a day-care context, this means that it is the norm that a practitioner does not thank a child (or an adult) who hands her a toy that she has asked for, without this being considered rude.

Furthermore, it is not the norm to say *'please'* when asking for something from children or other people in the Greek context. For example, an English practitioner would probably use the phrase *'Can you please finish off your meal?'* This would be used to prompt a child to return his attention back to food but a Greek practitioner would be more likely say to the child *'We're eating now!'* Practitioners usually use the same tactic with other activities where they need to prompt children, saying for example, when referring to one child or a group of children, *'we're tidying up now, we're dancing now, we're singing now'* etc. Even though some might interpret these statements as implicit indications of the collectivistic nature of Greek society, because practitioners usually use the plural, other people, not accustomed to the settings' culture, might interpret these statements as examples of an authoritative use of the spoken language. In general, transcripts and translations of transcripts were analysed to be used in this thesis with the aim to represent the participants' voices but also to present the essence of the settings' culture and reality.

3.9. Conclusion

The aim of the study is to explore children's experiences of day-care. This chapter described the methodological decisions made throughout the study to

support this exploration. The selected means of enquiry was an ethnographic case study because interpretative approaches have been rare in the Greek research and especially with this age group. Ten children, under the age of three, from two Greek ECEC settings, participated to the study which was conducted over six months. In order to generate data from children an adaptation of the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2011) was used which allowed children to participate actively in the project by taking photographs and participating in various activities such as their nursery's mapmaking and nursery tours. Additionally, data was generated through observations and also through interviews with children's parents and practitioners in order to complete each child's 'mosaic' and provide a holistic picture about children's perspectives on their experiences within their settings. At the same time, I described the challenges of having to put into practice the data generation methods and also the ethical dilemmas that I encountered throughout the project. Lastly, I described the process followed in this study for analysing the data using data-driven thematic analysis. This method proved both time consuming and challenging, indicating that the term 'data-driven thematic analysis' is not self-evident in terms of the process that will be followed. At the end of this section, I presented briefly the challenges and implications of transcribing and translating research data.

Part III: Presenting the Findings

Chapter 4. Contextual Information

This chapter provides contextual information about the two classes from two different settings that the fieldwork was conducted in. In this chapter I introduce the case study children and the staff working at the nurseries. Also, I provide information about the indoor and outdoor space of the settings and the chapter ends by discussing the differences and similarities between the two settings.

4.1. Introducing the Settings

I have named the class of Setting A as Green Class and that of Setting B as Blue Class. Five children from each class participated in the study and they were aged from sixteen months to two years eleven months when the project began. In the Green Class there were nine children registered between the ages of one year and two and a half years old and, in the Blue Class, there were seventeen children between the ages of two and a half and three and a half years old. All ten case study children that participated in the study attended nursery five days per week. This is the norm in Greek nursery provision settings because parents pay monthly fees according to their income and not daily or hourly fees (See discussion on structural aspects of Greek ECECE settings, page 25). The children from both classes are introduced below (Table 4.1 and 4.2). It is important to note that all study participants, both children and adults, were given Greek pseudonyms. Children and practitioners, who did not participate in the study but were present during the observations in the classroom, were given international pseudonyms such as John, Paul, and Louise. This distinction was made to enable readers to clearly identify the study's participants and therefore focus on the case study children when reading the thesis.

From all the case study children, only Aspa, two years four months (henceforth known as 2.4), and Kostas two years nine months old (henceforth known as 2.9), were in the group with children they knew from other groups. Aspa had known one of her peers, and her practitioners, for approximately sixteen months because she had attended the sessions from the age of eight months and

Kostas was in the same classroom as his cousin Aaron (2.6). For the purposes of this study, information was collected regarding the registration procedures. The time that case study children spent with the same group of children and adults varied, with some children in the same group for three months and others for up to nine months. Normally parents' applications were submitted at the end of the academic year (July) and the children only started attending sessions at the beginning of the academic year in September, or shortly after. If children were deregistered, then other children could take their place, thus start attending sessions later in the year. Furthermore, children who attended sessions in the previous academic year or who had siblings attending sessions were given priority over new applicants. In general, the organisation's policy is to help parents whose socioeconomic circumstances had changed unexpectedly. Thus, despite the standard admissions policy, applications were accepted throughout the year. There was only one session a day which extended from 7.00 am to 4.00 pm and the arrival time for both case study settings was from 7.00 am to 9.00 am. There were two departure times, one after lunch time at 1.00 pm and the other from 3.00 pm to 4.00 pm. However, parents could pick up their children throughout the day if they wanted to and on special occasions they could bring them in after 9.00 am. This was likely to happen if, for example, they had an appointment with a paediatrician.

4.2. Setting the Scene for the Green Class

Five children participated in this study from the Green Class, aged sixteen months (1.4) to two years four months (2.4), (See Table 4.1). The Green Class was located in a non-purpose built building (Setting A) which was transformed into a nursery to cater for the nursery provision needed in that area of the city. The spacious outdoor area in this setting was only used by four to five year olds due to health and safety reasons. Staff explained in their interviews that the outdoor area was not considered age appropriate for the younger children because metal slides and swings and the use of soil instead of grass or synthetic carpet rendered this outside space unsuitable for a younger age group, within the context of Greek nursery provision.

Green Class Case Study Children				
Child's Pseudonym and Age when the Project began	Child's Age when first registered at the nursery / Time spent with the same group of children /adults	Time spent in the setting daily	Siblings	Pseudonyms of Key Adults interviewed
Georgios 16 months (1.4)	13 months old / 3 months	9.00 am to 2.30-3.00 pm	No	Parent: Efi (mother) Practitioner: Fofa
Litsa 17 months (1.5)	13 months old / 4 months	7.00 am to 1.00 pm	No	Parent: Athina (mother) Practitioner: Nadia.
Aspa 2 years 4 months (2.4)	8 months old 6 months	8.00 am to 3.30-4.00 pm	An older brother and an older sister	Parent: Pavlos (father) Practitioner: Nadia.
Christos 2 years 4 months (2.4)	22 months old 6 months	8.30am to 3.30- 4.00pm	An older brother and an older sister	Parent: Maria (mother) Practitioner: Fofa.
Filio 2 years 4 months (2.4)	22 months old 6 months	8.30am to 3.30- 4.00pm	An older and a younger brother	Parent: Eirini (mother) Practitioner: Fofa

Table 4.1: *Introducing Green Class Case Study Children*

Green Classroom's indoor space arrangement is presented in Figure 4 below. The room lacked space because there were 17 beds around the room which were needed to provide a space for children to sleep at mid-day.

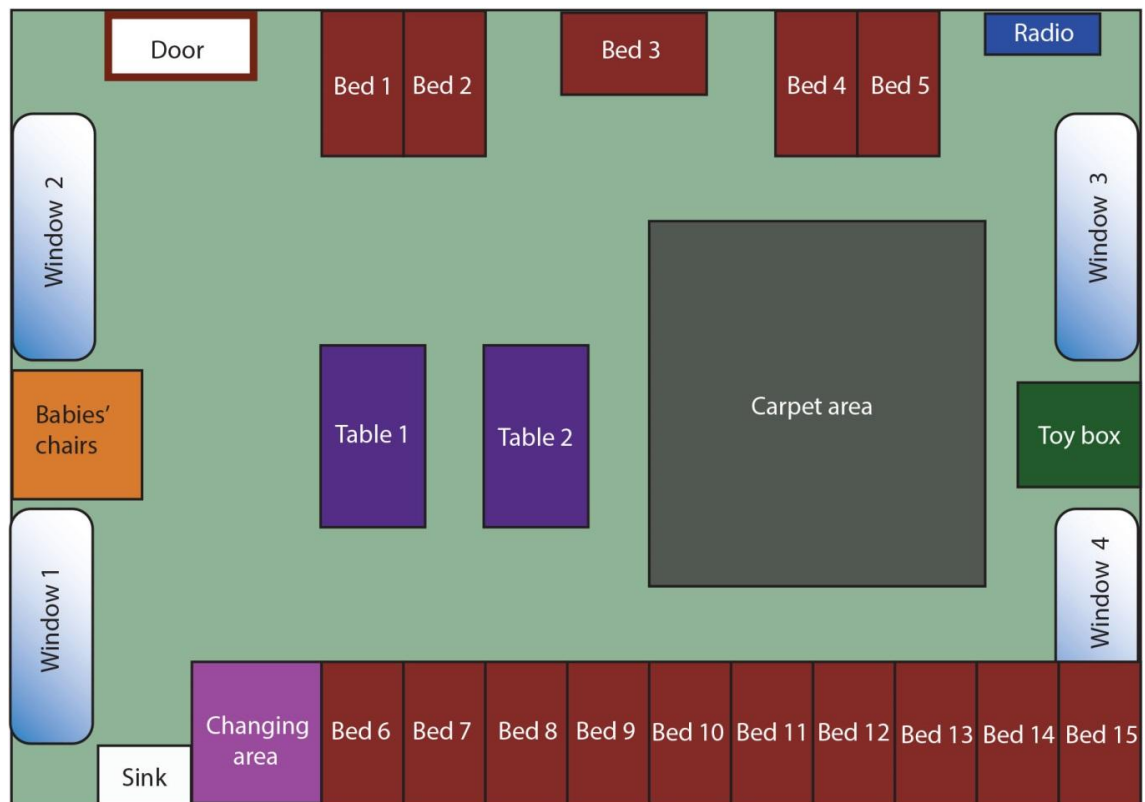


Figure 4.1: *Green Class room plan*

Some clarification points are presented below which provide further explanations regarding the Green classroom's arrangement:

1. Under Window 1 there was a sofa where practitioners usually sat and on the wall between the window and the sink there was a bookshelf.
2. Under Window 2 there were some child-sized chairs.
3. In front of Bed 6 there was an adult-sized chair.
4. Under Windows 3 and 4 there were two beds parallel to the wall. On the wall between window 4 and the toy box there was a mirror.
5. Over Beds 10 to 13 there was a wall shelf with some large toys (See Appendix 5, Figure 3).
6. There was no space between Beds 6 to 15 but there was some space between Beds 1 to 5.
7. Tables 1 and 2 were placed next to each other forming a bigger table.

The Green Class toys comprised some cutlery toys, some dolls, a few rattles and toy phones. These toys were all made from plastic and filled the classroom's small toy box (See Appendix 5, Figures 1 and 2). There was also a

shelf with some large toys over children's beds (See Appendix 5, Figure 3). Most of these photographs presenting salient aspects of the classroom were taken by the children of the Green Class.

There was no organised daily programme for the children in Green Class and the main teacher-led activities were singing and dancing which were suggested spontaneously by practitioners. The children could freely decide to participate but practitioners would often use prompts to encourage participation. Another less frequent activity, was adults reading books to children. The adult-led activities were usually short, for example, a few songs to sing, or a dance, or a story read until children appeared to lose interest. Thus, the children's day would mostly comprise of child-led free play and the routines of eating, diapering and sleeping.

4.3. Setting the Scene for the Blue Class

Five children participated in this study from the Blue Class, aged two years five months (2.5) to two years eleven months (2.11) (See Table 4.2 below).

Blue Class Case Study Children				
Child's Pseudonym and Age when the Project began	Child's Age when first registered at the nursery / Time spent with the same group of children /adults	Time spent in the setting daily	Siblings	Pseudonyms of Key Adults interviewed
Dimitris 2 years 5 months (2.5)	20 months old 9 months	7.30 am to 4.00 pm	The youngest of three boys	Parent: Nikos (father) Practitioner: Katerina
Kostas 2 years 9 months old (2.9)	14 months old (at a private setting) / 9 months (at the case study setting with the same group of children	8.00 am to 4.00 pm	—	Parent: Vivi (mother) Practitioner: Antigoni

	/adults)			
Stathoula 2 years 10 months old (2.10)	25 months old / 9 months	8.30 am to 2.00- 3.00 pm	_____	Parent: Voula (mother) Practitioner: Katerina
Yiannis 2 years 11 months old (2.11)	26 months old/ 9 months	9.00 am to 2.00- 3.00 pm	An older sister	Parent: Eleftheria (mother) Practitioner: Katerina
Manolis 2 years 11 months old (2.11)	26 months old / 9 months	9.00 am to 2.30 pm-3.00 pm	An older brother.	Parent: Aleka (mother) Practitioner: Antigoni

Table 4.2: *Introducing Blue Class Case Study Children*

The Blue Class accommodation was more spacious than that for the Green Class. Blue Class children had a more varied set of toys, including small construction material, plastic animals and toy cutlery. Many of the toys were easily accessible to children without adult assistance. Plastic toys were again predominant with the only different materials being the puzzles which had wooden or paper pieces and a child-size living room which was made of soft material.

Figure 4.2 below presents the Blue Class's room plan followed by some points of clarification.

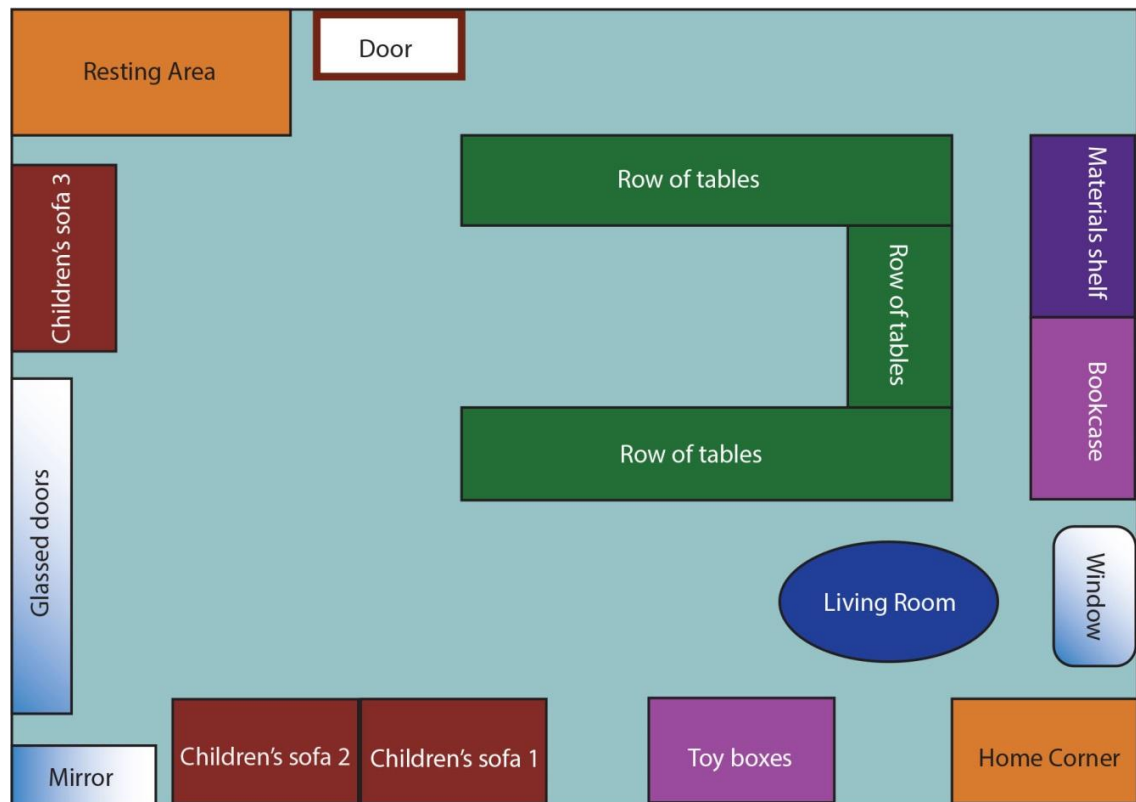


Figure 4.2: *Blue Class room plan*

In order for the reader to get a clearer idea about the arrangement of the classroom's toys and furniture some points of clarification are outlined below:

1. The resting area of the Blue Class looked like a wooden house from the outside and inside it had 2 beds.
2. The glassed doors led to a balcony with a view of the block of flats across from the setting.
3. Next to the materials' shelf there was a window from where a small kitchen and part of the corridor could be seen. Under the window there was a drawer unit where each child placed their drawings. A radio was placed on top of this.
4. The bookcase included children's puzzles and other toys as well as books.
5. The living room area included a soft table and chairs and it was usually used by children when they were playing in the home corner.
6. The plastic toy boxes provided storage for different kinds of construction material and animals (See Appendix 5, Figures 4 and 5).

The Blue Class was accommodated on the second floor in a three storey building which was purpose built. On the ground floor, there was the outdoor area and the 'Orange Classroom'. The 'Orange Classroom' was a spacious room with some mattresses in it, construction material, a table, some child-sized chairs and a greengrocery area. The first floor was used by the older children and the second floor by the younger age group. The structure of the setting had led to the decision that the cleaners would alternate between the classes that they cleaned weekly and thus the floors they were responsible for. Some of the cleaners would, however, join the Blue Class group during outdoors play or in the 'Orange Classroom'.

The outdoor space of Setting B was covered with synthetic carpet and it had small plastic slides and see-saws for children to play on (See Appendix 5, Figures 6 and 7). However, the outside area was relatively small and shaped like a parallelogram, surrounded by a block of flats. The nursery had another outdoor area, bigger in size and without buildings facing it, but this was used by other older children.

4.4. Differences and Similarities among the two Settings

Setting A (Green Class) was mostly a family-type setting which prioritised aspects of care probably because it accepted for registration children from the age of eight months up to four years of age. Setting B (Blue Class) was more educationally orientated as it accepted for registration children aged two to four years old.

To support understanding of the context of child-adult relationships, which is further discussed in chapter 5, it is important to describe the most commonly observed positioning of children and adults within the indoor and outdoor spaces of the two settings. This spatially focused contextual information is significant because, firstly, it highlights children's active role in seeking to develop multidimensional relationships with adults and secondly, it shows how the affordances of the indoor and outdoor environments impact upon the formation of these relationships. During specific periods of time throughout the

day children had opportunities to interact with other children and members of staff from outside their classroom environment and the importance of this was noted. Also, the children from the Blue Class had set times for using different areas of the setting which again meant opportunities for interaction with staff members other than their own practitioners.

In each of the two classes there were two trained early years' practitioners. One practitioner of each class had a higher education degree in ECEC and the second practitioner of each class had an associate degree in ECEC. Fofo and Nadia worked in the Green Class and Katerina and Antigoni in the Blue one. The practitioners, from both classes, worked in close proximity with children throughout the day. However, during routine times such as meal times, and during practitioner-led activities, including dancing and singing times, practitioners would often position themselves as being available for direct interaction. In contrast, during free play time, the adults adopted a more supervisory style which led to them physically distancing themselves from the children and having relatively few direct interactions with them. The term 'free play time' was defined by practitioners, during their interviews, as the time of the day when children could freely choose activities and playmates.

During free play time the practitioners of the Green Class usually sat on the settee (See Green Class room plan, Figure 4.1). The practitioners mainly placed themselves amongst the children during meal times and during practitioner-led activities such as dancing, singing, and storytelling, which took place on the carpet area. Throughout the practitioner-led activities the practitioners sat on a child-sized chair and the children were seated or stood on the carpet in front of them. For the three months that I undertook research in the Green Class I usually sat on the adult-size chair next to the changing area or on the child-sized chairs near the room's entrance door. For a few weeks during my stay two students from a university early childhood studies department undertook a placement in the Green Class. For most of the day the students usually sat amongst the children, either on the floor or at the table, in closer proximity to children than the practitioners.

In the Blue Class, the practitioners usually sat at the middle row of tables (See Blue Class room plan, Figure 4.2) both during meal times and during some child-led or practitioner-led play activities, including playing with puzzles, play dough, or small construction material. Outdoors and in the 'Orange Classroom' the practitioners usually sat on child-sized chairs at the entrance door of each area. The Orange Room was a classroom on the ground floor of the nursery. The children visited that room when they could not use the outdoor space, either due to the hot weather, or because children from other classes were using it. In the Blue Class, I sat at either the first or third row of tables or on one of the settees. Outdoors I sat at the bench, and in the 'Orange Classroom' I sat near the entrance door and opposite the practitioners.

In the Green Class children had more opportunities to interact with practitioners from other classes than the children from the Blue Class. This was because all children and their practitioners usually gathered in the Green Class from 7 am before going to their own classes at about 8:30 am or before their parents picked them up in the afternoon (for the structure of a typical day in both settings see Appendix 6).

Children from both classes also had opportunities to interact with ancillary staff members. There were two ancillary staff members appointed to every class but they were responsible for other classes as well. These two members of staff visited the classes at least twice a day. One was the cleaner who cleaned up after meals, and the other the cook or the 'trapezokomos' who brought the food into the classrooms and served it to children. The ancillary staff members had short interactions with children throughout the day which became more extended, particular during meal times, when they would offer assistance to children.

Chapter 5. Perspectives on Child-Adult Relationships

This chapter focuses on child-adult relationships. The term ‘adults’ is used to refer to nursery staff, including practitioners and ancillary staff members such as cleaners, cooks and members of staff responsible for serving children’s meals (called ‘trapezokomos’ in Greek settings). The chapter is divided into three sections as they emerged from the data-driven thematic analysis. It draws on material from observations, photographs and interviews to present children’s perspectives on important aspects of their relationships with adults. The first section discusses children’s experiences on their relationships with adults during the period of transition from home to nursery. The second section focuses on children’s experiences on their daily interactions with adults once they have begun to settle at nursery. Finally, the third section discusses children’s experiences on the role of adults in relation to children’s engagement with peers, for example seeking adult support to enter the play of a group of other children.

5.1. Child-Adult Relationships during Transition Times

This sub-section will report findings concerning children’s views on their relationships with adults during transition times. ‘*Transition*’ here is defined as children’s passage from home to starting nursery. The practitioners considered the ‘transition period’ to extend over the first months that children were registered at the nursery (September to October). The data, however, signify the existence of two kinds of transitions for children. In particular, there was the initial transition into the setting that seemed to be an individualised experience for each child that could extend beyond these two months (vertical transition), and secondly there was the daily transition from home to nursery (horizontal transition). Across settings and due to the timings of my research there was only one child, Georgios(1.4), who was observed experiencing the vertical transition, whilst several children seemed to experience the horizontal, daily, transition from home to nursery as a significant experience.

Interviews with members of staff revealed that during the period of children's vertical transition in both settings, ancillary staff members were asked to assist practitioners with, for example, comforting children who were crying and assisting them with their meals. As children seemed to settle within the class, ancillary staff members would return to their main duties and their interactions with children became more limited again. This meant that only short interactions were observed between ancillary staff members and children, mainly during meal times, in the outdoor area, during their short visits to the classrooms and just before children left the settings in the afternoon.

5.1.1. I Want to be Close to You

During his vertical transition into the nursery, Georgios (1.4) seemed to communicate a desire for emotionally close relationships with adults. Georgios' case unfolded over a period of approximately two months whilst I was at the nursery, and at this point it was almost 3 months since Georgios had first started attending nursery sessions. Georgios was still experiencing some difficulties of adjustment to the nursery's environment. He seemed to find parting from his dad very distressing and often looked to a special adult in the nursery for comfort at these points. For example, he sought comfort from cuddles with adults, special attention, or just being in close proximity to an adult. Observation No 1 presents one of these occasions where Georgios felt distressed after his father left the nursery.

Observation No:1

Fieldnotes: Georgios (1.4)

Area of Provision: Green Classroom

Other Children: *Stuart [from the 2 to 3 years old group]*

Other Adults: Fofo, Alice (Alice was the practitioner of the 2 to 3 years old group).

Extract from a 20min Observation

Date of observation: 24/3/2010

Georgios has just come into the classroom with his father. Alice takes Georgios from his father's arms straight away and Georgios starts crying intensely.

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No1 Continued)

Fofo approaches them and takes Georgios in her arms. She then goes to the table.

Fofo: Who wants to sit at the table and sing songs?

She puts Georgios down and sits at the table. Georgios, who has already stopped crying, walks towards the door and looks out into the corridor. He then looks at Stuart who is crying and returns to sit next to Fofo. Instantly he next decides to approach some children who are sat at the baby chairs, he looks at them, and then moves again next to Fofo who speaks to the other children.

Fofo: Today we'll make cookies!

Georgios walks towards the carpet area, where he picks up some toy cutlery and brings it to the table where Fofo is still seated.

Georgios appeared very upset when his dad left. He went to look in the corridor, indicating that he was checking to see if his father had completely disappeared, although he did not seem to be as upset as when his father had first left. Georgios moved away from Fofo briefly a few times but found a way to move back to her. By initiating such actions, Georgios, indicated how important it was for him to be in close proximity with Fofo. Fofo seemed to be the special person that Georgios was seeking when he was upset, providing indications that he had identified her as the person who could offer him security and calm him down. Observations of Georgios show that he was following Fofo around the classroom and wanting cuddles from her. During the six months that I was in the settings, none of the other study children seemed to have, or to seek out, such a close relationship with adults, either practitioners or ancillary staff members, as Georgios seemed to have with Fofo.

The following episodes show how Georgios responded when Fofo left the class. In Observation No 2 it seemed that Georgios was still experiencing the difficult emotions of the initial transition period. In Observation No 3 it seemed that Georgios had started settling within the nursery's environment. Furthermore, Observation No 3 was made about three weeks after Observation No 2 and

around that period two children, younger than Georgios, had joined the group⁹. The reference to the younger children is relevant due to the way Fofo seemed to interpret Georgios' actions prior to and after these children had joined the group.

Observation No:2

Fieldnotes: Georgios (1.4)

Area of Provision: Green Classroom

Other Children: -

Adults: Fofo, Nadia, Carol (Carol is the nursery's headteacher).

Extract from a 20min Observation

23/3/2010:

Fofo holds Georgios in her arms before she hands him to Nadia for a cuddle. Georgios cries and raises his hands towards Fofo who kisses him while he keeps crying and raising his hands.

Georgios: Ahhh, mum!

Fofo leaves the classroom, because her working day is over, and Georgios cries even louder as he sees her leaving. The classroom's door opens. It is Carol who enters the room, smiles at him, and blows him kisses. Georgios stops crying but when Carol closes the door behind her after her brief stay, he starts crying again.

Georgios stays for a few more minutes, cuddled by Nadia, who is singing songs to him. As he is cuddled he interacts briefly or looks, periodically, at the four adults who are in the classroom at this time.

Observation No 3 below was undertaken approximately a month after Observation No 2 and shows Georgios', to some extent, different reaction when Fofo left the room.

⁹ It is atypical for new children to register to nursery near the end of the academic year.

Observation No:3**Fieldnotes:** Georgios (1:4)**Area of Provision:** Green Classroom**Other Children:** Louise (2.2), Ryan (2.3) Aspa (2.4), Litsa (1.5)**Adults:** Fofa, Nadia, E.K.**Extract from a 20min Observation****13/04/2010:**

Georgios approaches Fofa from behind, Fofa turns her attention to him.

Fofa: Kisses?

Georgios looks at her and raises his hands. Fofa talks to Nadia and does not respond to him. She then leaves the class. Georgios starts crying and approaches me.

E.K.: Fofa will come back, she went out for her lunch break.

Georgios looks upset as he walks towards the table and tries to throw down a chair. The chair, instead of falling down, falls onto another chair and Georgios starts laughing. He then turns his attention to some toy cutlery which is on the table and starts playing.

As the observation unfolds Georgios engages in interaction with Louise, Ryan, Aspa, and Litsa.

In both observations, Georgios was active in seeking out Fofa, seemingly for physical and emotional closeness. He attempted to communicate this by crying and raising his hands. Georgios' attempt to forge a close relationship with one adult was not observed in any of the other case study children. Nonetheless, Georgios' reaction was less intense in the second episode and he seemed to be reassured by my explanation that Fofa would return to the class. Indeed Georgios, in Observation No 3, cried until he was distracted by something 'funny' and he also showed an interest in other children within the class whereas, in Observation No 2, he only showed an interest in adults.

Across the observations Georgios seemed to be asserting his perspective which was that close relationships with adults were important to him. Fofa usually responded positively to Georgios' requests for physical contact. Fofa's

perspective seemed to be that she had to provide just enough emotional warmth and comfort to allow Georgios to settle but that she should be trying all the time to wean Georgios off too close a relationship with her by engaging him in peer relationships. Nonetheless, observational data indicate that Georgios, even at the time of the very first observations, was taking an interest in other children by looking at them from a close distance and by trying out ways to approach them (See Observation No 26). However, when he was upset he seemed to seek interaction with adults only.

Efi, Georgios' mum, when asked for her interpretation of Georgios' perspective on the transition to nursery, seemed to confirm that Georgios would seek out physical comfort in the form of cuddles when he was upset. Furthermore, Efi stated that Georgios, lately, had been asking for '*more cuddling*' at home, probably because he was receiving '*a bit less cuddling*' at nursery due to the presence of the new, younger children. Fofo had noticed that '*lately*' Georgios was not so '*attached*' to her, explaining that, since the younger children had joined the group, Georgios '*realised he's not the class's baby anymore*'. There is no evidence from observations of Georgios indicating that the presence of the younger children had something to do with Georgios' shift in actions. Georgios' perspective seemed to be that Fofo was the special adult who he could return to when he wanted cuddles and to be picked up even when younger children joined the setting.

There were also indications that Georgios' attitude towards his relationship with Fofo and attempts to establish emotional closeness with her had started to recede towards the end of my stay at the setting. Georgios was three months older by then (1.7) and during that period he had been active in developing a new and close relationship with a practitioner from another classroom, Adele. Georgios communicated his preference for Adele by approaching her, smiling at her, and cuddling her. The environment offered opportunities for children to make choices about their relationships with adults because, at specific times of the day, they could interact with practitioners from other classrooms as well as with their own practitioners. However, it is important to note that this seemed to have happened after Georgios had established a first close relationship with one adult, Fofo. After that, Georgios seemed to become more confident in

exploring the nursery's social environment and starting to interact with a wider circle of adults, actively seeking out physically affectionate and comforting relationships with other adults.

5.1.2. You calmed me down. I want you to be special still!

Manolis (2.11) was a slightly older child than Georgios (1.4) and he was in the Blue Class. Manolis also seemed to seek emotionally close relationships with adults but this had occurred several months prior to my start at the setting. I became aware of his experiences during interviews with his mum, Aleka, and an ancillary staff member, Fotini, as well as in relation to the photographs taken by Manolis. It seemed that, for Manolis, the adult who was willing to meet his emotional needs during the initial transition period would continue being important to him even after several months and once he had adjusted happily to nursery life.

As well as seeking out relationships with trained nursery staff, several children seemed to have special feelings for some of the ancillary staff who worked in the setting. In the Blue Class, three out of the five children who participated in the research project chose to photograph one of the ancillary staff members, Fotini. Fotini was the cleaner for the class every other week, since cleaners changed their classroom responsibilities weekly. By choosing to photograph Fotini, over the other adults that the children had the opportunity to interact with at the nursery, children appeared to be showing a special interest in her. Fotini was the only cleaner who sometimes chose to join the group outdoors. Manolis was in the group of three children who chose to photograph Fotini, taking two photographs of her outdoors (See Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1: *Manolis' (2.11) sequence of two photographs of Fotini*

Even though, there are no references to Fotini in any of the recorded observations of Manolis, the fact she was the only adult that he chose to photograph, apart from his practitioner Antigoni, suggests that her presence in the nursery was significant for him. All of Manolis' photographs appeared to be intentional, as his comments (See Observation No 4) suggest. Therefore, it seems likely that Fotini was the intended subject in his photographs. Observation No 4 contains some of my notes made during the nursery tour activity when Manolis was using the camera.

Observation No: 4

Fieldnotes: Manolis (2.11)

Area of Provision: Blue Classroom

Other Children: --

Other Adults: E.K

Extract from observational notes during nursery tour activity:

Manolis: I took [a photograph of] the lights!

I want [to take a photograph of] the sky.

I want [to take a photograph of] my t-shirt.

I want [to photograph] this and this and he points at the home corner and the toysdrawer.

For these reasons, photographing Fotini seemed like an intentional action suggesting that she might be a special person for Manolis. However, the rest of the observational data provided no indication as to why this was the case. However, the interview data from Fotini and Manolis' mum, Aleka, indicated that Fotini had played a significant role during Manolis' vertical transition.

Initially Fotini spoke about her role in Manolis' life at the nursery when I asked her if she ever had a special relationship with any of the children, and if the child's parents knew about this relationship. Fotini said:

At the beginning [of the year], during the transition period, one of the mums, Manolis' mum, saw that I was helping and she thanked me. I was helping because all the children were crying and the headteacher told us that we should also help in the class.

When I asked Aleka, Manolis' mum, about Manolis' relationships with the ancillary staff members, she said:

At the beginning when we had lots of crying and drama he was closer to this lady, who I really like myself too, Fotini. She helped a lot, in general everyone helps in here, and when he was crying she would take him and he would calm down.

It seemed that Fotini represented for Manolis the special person who helped him deal with his distress and anxiety during his transition to nursery. It is not clear if their relationship receded due to changing organisational aspects of the nursery or due to Manolis' decreasing need for such emotional closeness and physical contact. The role of cleaner, that Fotini had in the setting, seemed to be an obstacle to sustaining relationships with children after the transition period. This is because Fotini, after the initial transition, was again primarily occupied with her main duties and so her interactions with Manolis and the other children were limited again. Indeed, from the observations it appeared that short interactions with the children occurred either when Fotini was coming to clean the classroom after meal times, or if she decided to join the group outdoors.

Manolis' choice in photographing Fotini probably indicated that she remained a special person for him in the setting, even though it was not clear from observations if Manolis wanted to sustain a close relationship with Fotini and the nursery's operational aspects prevented this. What might be noteworthy is that Manolis photographed Fotini regardless of not seeing her for extended periods of time during the day, and despite the fact that more than nine months had passed since he first started attending the nursery sessions. Manolis' case provides further evidence that emotionally and physically close relationships with adults were important for some children during their vertical transitions.

5.1.3. I Like Familiarity

The previous two sub-sections have presented findings on children's search for emotional and physical closeness with adults, and adult responses, during their first few months in the nursery. This sub-section will report findings relating to

children's perspectives on the relationships that they were seeking to establish during the daily, horizontal, transitions from home to nursery and in particular how they sought to replicate familiar experiences from their community and family lives, such as being fed and helping with household chores.

Sometimes I Want You to Feed Me

Ancillary staff members often helped by offering emotional and physical closeness to children who seemed to want it and by assisting during routine tasks such as offering to feed the children. Some children appeared very interested in these ancillary staff members, evidenced by their repeated attempts to interact with them and photograph them.

Christos (2.4) photographed Loukia who was the nursery cook and Koula who was the class cleaner. He also tried to take another photograph of Loukia during the nursery tour activity, leading me into the nursery's kitchen. Loukia visited the class for short periods throughout the day and would also spend time there at the end of her working day before she left. She spent more time in the class during meal times and, even after the transition period, she was observed offering to assist the children with their meals.

Maria, Christos' mum, said that, when viewing Loukia's photograph, Christos became '*very excited*' adding that he '*associated Loukia with meal times*'. Imitating Christos' voice, she said: '*Loukia mam¹⁰, us lentil*' [*Loukia brings us food, brings us lentil soup*]. Indeed Christos observed Loukia closely every time she brought food into the class and when she also offered to assist him and the other children with their meals. However, Christos would often refuse such offers, perhaps because he had recently started eating by himself and was enjoying the independence. Nonetheless, Loukia did assist the younger children such as Georgios (1.4). Although children sometimes sought autonomy, at other times they wanted to return to being cared for by adults, for example, at meal times. The incorporation of feeding into their imaginary and pretend play indicated that children saw this as an important interaction in their daily lives. Loukia's association with meal times therefore might have made her a special

¹⁰ Food.

person to children such as Christos as she offered a familiar experience of being cared for. The nursery environment provided various adults, in addition to trained practitioners, who were available to take up the carer role and afforded the children the opportunity to decide whether to accept or reject these offers of help.

I Can Pretend You are My 'Yiayia'¹¹

Christos also photographed the class's cleaner, Koula. Maria, his mum, stated that Christos referred to Koula as 'Yiayia' when he saw her photograph in the album and suggested that there were some features of Koula which resembled her own mother's characteristics. In the setting, there were two ancillary staff members who were identified as grandmas. Although Christos was not observed calling Koula 'Yiayia', other children did, including Litsa (1.5) and Aspa (2.4). On one occasion Aspa (2.4) saw Koula entering the class and said '*Papou, yiayia [grandpa, grandma]*'. Koula responded '*Aspa, what's my name?*' and Aspa replied '*Yiayia!*' For her part Koula stated that she found the role fulfilling and may even have encouraged the children to refer to her in this way. Certainly children seemed happy to accept ancillary staff members in the familiar role of grandma at the nursery. Observation No 5 shows Christos incorporating the 'Yiayia' figure into his imaginary play, and provides further evidence that children were seeking to replicate the emotionally close and nurturing relationships from their family and community lives within the nursery.

Observation No:5

Fieldnotes: Christos (2.4)

Area of Provision: Green Classroom

Other Children: -

Other Adults: E.K.

Extract from 20min observation

Date of observation: 13/04/2010

Christos gives me the telephone he is playing with but before I take it I ask:

(Observation Continued)

¹¹ As 'Yiayia' is identified a woman who is old enough to have grandchildren. In Greek there is no other word to describe people younger in age, like Koula, who could have grandchildren. Similarly to the word 'nana' which is used in English.

(Observation No 5 Continued)

E.K.: Who is it?

Christos: Yiayia!

I pretend to talk on the phone.

E.K.: Yes, we are at school. Yes, he can talk to you. Christos, your grandma wants to talk to you.

I hand the phone over to Christos.

Christos: Yes?

Christos 'talks' on the phone next to me before he moves on to the table to continue privately with his 'conversation'.

'Yiayia' seemed to be an important figure for Christos since he decided to 'call' her while he was in the class. In similar situations the other children pretended that they were calling their mums. This observation was made a few days after Easter and Christos and his parents had visited his grandparents' village for the holidays. By acknowledging Koula as 'Yiayia' and by photographing her, Christos considered her a special person in the setting. Koula seemed to be the adult who most resembled his grandma and, since she was happy to take up this role, Christos and the other children had opportunities for replicating this emotionally close relationship in the nursery.

Can I Help you like I Help my Mum?

In addition to replicating nurturing relationships, some children also seemed to want to recreate home experiences involving close family members. Christos, for example, often sought out opportunities to be close to adults by offering to help them, usually with chores or closing the class door after practitioners' requests. In the following episode Christos eagerly offered to assist Loukia to wash the dishes.

Observation No:6**Fieldnotes:** Christos (2.4)**Area of Provision:** Green Classroom**Other Children:** -**Other Adults:** Loukia**Extract from a 20min observation**

Loukia, the cook, comes into the classroom and jokingly asks the children:

Loukia: Who will come into the kitchen to help me wash the dishes?

Christos runs fast from the carpet area towards the changing area, where Loukia stands, shouting:

Christos: Ego! [Me].

Loukia picks him up and places him on the changing table. She starts singing him a nursery rhyme and Christos laughs. When she finishes singing she takes him down and she leaves the class as she smilingly comments on Christos' offer to assist her.

Christos did not seem to like participating in many activities in the class. Even though observational and interview data showed that he enjoyed dancing, in the nursery he was often seen to be observing activities from a distance rather than joining in. In contrast he was very keen to assist with chores. For example, he was observed taking a piece of bread from the floor and placing it on the dustpan that Koula was holding without her prompting. His mum noted that, even though he enjoyed playing with his older brother and sister, one of his favourite activities at home was taking part in household chores such as putting clothes in the laundry. Thus, another possible interpretation as to why Christos photographed Koula and Loukia could be that their presence in the class meant that he would have the opportunity to replicate familiar and enjoyable experiences from home. The formal daily programme did not encourage children's involvement in such activities; however there were plenty of informal opportunities, particularly for children who took the initiative, to participate.

Some of the other children in the Green Class were also eager to engage in such activities. Aspa (2.4) was observed taking papers the practitioner gave her to the bin. Other children were observed incorporating the 'washing' of toys into their pretend play. The older children from the Blue Class meanwhile incorporated 'cooking' into their imaginary play. The combined data suggested that the opportunities offered by the setting for recreating these kinds of familiar experiences imaginatively and through real life helping were important for some of the children. Their eagerness to participate in such activities might also be explained by the fact that these activities also offered other opportunities for closeness with adults which were akin to those experienced at home. Most of the interactions of this kind that were observed were child-initiated, highlighting once again children's active role in building multidimensional relationships with adults.

In conclusion, what seemed to be important from children's perspectives was the availability of particular adults to smooth the horizontal transition from home to nursery by taking up the carer role. Some children seemed to want a special person who could offer them emotional and physical closeness during everyday transitions. They wanted to engage with adults who represented familiar experiences in their home and family lives, and to have the opportunity to repeat familiar experiences within the nursery, including household chores. The children played an active role in developing these relationships and took the initiative to recreate these familiar experiences. These relationships and familiar experiences continued to be a consideration for children even though some children's desire for close interaction seemed to recede over time, either because they were ready to start forming new relationships with peers and other adults, or because they were seeking greater autonomy and independence.

5.2. Child-Adult Interactions after the First Transition Period

Even though some children's need for physically and emotionally close relationships seemed to be more intense during the transition periods, most of the children seemed to seek close interactions with adults on a daily basis.

Therefore this section will present children's perspectives on their relationships with adults as they were observed during children's daily interactions with those adults. In particular I will present some children's invitations for close interactions and the responses from the adults in this respect.

5.2.1. Will you Comfort me?

The adults in both settings would almost instantly step in to cuddle any crying children and they would often make themselves available to comfort the children in situations where they showed signs of distress. There were only a few occasions where adults did not intervene instantly and the children were observed to actively seek out an adult to comfort them.

Stathoula (2.10) from the Blue Class twice asked adults for explanations of events involving other children. For example, she approached me to ask why Liza, who was sitting next to me, was crying and I explained. On another occasion she enquired again about another child. On several occasions I observed children looking at the practitioners when for example other children were crying. It is not clear from the observations if the children were looking at the adults to comfort the children or if they were seeking an explanation of what was going on.

In the following observation though, Christos (2.4) indicated by crying that he wanted physical closeness and a comforter adult.

Observation No:7

Fieldnotes: Christos (2.4)

Area of Provision: Green Classroom

Other Children: Aspa (2.4)

Other Adults: Fofa, Nadia.

Extract from a 20min observation

Fofa asks children to tidy up the classroom.

Aspa and Christos argue about who will take a toy to the toy box. Fofa steps in and gives Christos two different toys to take to the toy box.

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 7 Continued)

Christos has been crying since Aspa took the toy to the box and after a few minutes Fofo decides to cuddle him and they sit at the table. She talks to him and Christos seems calm. Fofo sits him on her chair as she stands up but Christos starts crying again.

Nadia, who sits at the settee, says to Christos:

Nadia: Come over here for me to measure your temperature.

Christos keeps crying as he walks towards Nadia who takes him on her lap. Nadia holds him tenderly and talks to him. When she removes the thermometer, Christos, who has now calmed down, steps down and goes and sits at the table looking at the other children in the class.

Christos seemed upset after his argument with Aspa and even Fofo's alternative solution, to provide him with other toys, did not seem to calm him down. Christos, by crying, seemed to communicate a desire for close physical contact with an adult indicating that he was not ready to stop crying when Fofo left him sitting on the chair on his own. At that point the availability of two practitioners in the room provided an alternative to Christos since Nadia offered to continue the affectionate interaction until Christos decided he could cope in the class without the adults' support.

Blue Class children were less likely to seek relationships of this kind. For example Kostas (2.9) was the only child from that class who was observed once approaching a practitioner, probably seeking comfort. This episode is presented below.

Observation No:8

Fieldnotes: Kostas (2.9)

Area of Provision: Orange Classroom

Other Children: Yiannis (2.11), Dimitris (2.5)

Other Adults: Blue Class Practitioner

Extract from a 20min observation

Kostas puts his palm under the toy box on which Yiannis is sitting.

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 8 Continued)

Kostas' finger is caught under the box and he starts crying. The practitioner walks towards them and takes Yiannis off the box, she then asks children to start tidying up. Kostas approaches her and by pointing at the toy box he says:

Kostas: This one!

Practitioner: I know.

When the other children finish tidying up, the practitioner demonstrates how the camera works and gives it to Kostas who, during tidying up, stands next to her. Kostas photographs Dimitris and says:

Kostas: I photographed you!

He comments as he looks at his finger:

Kostas: It doesn't hurt anymore!

Kostas seemed to see the practitioner as someone who would give him comfort when he was hurt. He seemed to maintain this view even though the practitioner appeared more focussed on health and safety issues. Kostas actively sought comfort by approaching, talking, and staying next to the practitioner. This episode provided further evidence that some children, when in distress, sought comfort and physically close interactions with adults.

Children varied in the extent to which they viewed adults as potential comforters in situations of distress. For example Dimitris (2.5) was observed crying a few times because other children had hit him but he was rarely observed seeking adults to either intervene or comfort him. The only observed incident was where he had a conversation with practitioners about hurting his knee which is presented below.

Observation No:9**Fieldnotes:** Dimitris (2:5)**Area of Provision:** Outdoors**Other Children:** -**Other Adults:** Practitioner 1 (of the Blue Class), Practitioner 2 (of another class), E.K.**Extract from a 20min observation**

Dimitris loses his balance and falls down as he chats with Practitioner 2. He shows her that he is hurt.

Practitioner 2: Gosh!

As Dimitris stands up he raises his shorts and the practitioner says:

Practitioner 2: You hurt your knee too?

Dimitris: I hurt [my knee]!

Both practitioners look at Dimitris' leg. Dimitris leaves and comes to sit at the bench, next to me. We chat about some other children who play with the see-saw before he leaves to join them.

From this observation it is unclear if Dimitris would have gone to ask for comfort from practitioners if he had not fallen just in front of them. Dimitris' actions, raising his shorts and commenting that he was hurt, suggest that he was seeking comfort. When he did not appear to get a comforting response, Dimitris decided to leave. However, his action to come and sit next to me, indicate that, at that point, Dimitris probably wanted closeness to an adult for support.

Dimitris father, Nikos, referred during an interview with him to an incident that took place in the past where Dimitris reported to a practitioner that he had fallen down and the practitioner replied to him '*It's your fault*'. Nikos said:

Dimitris came home and said to us 'Mum, I fell and she told me it's my fault!'

No practitioners in either setting were observed, during my stay, giving such unsympathetic replies when children were upset. However, this incident may have contributed to Dimitris' view of practitioners and to his relatively limited requests for comfort when hurt.

5.2.2. I want Cuddles!

When not in distress, children sought physically close interactions with adults by using a variety of strategies since their confidence in seeking out adult engagement varied. Some children seemed to use the same approaches they used to initiate interaction with their peers. This included going near or close to adults, talking to them, and giving them toys. One strategy used by children solely with the adults was by commenting on their own or adults' clothes and on their own actions or playthings.

The following episode from the field notes relating to Stathoula (2:10) provided further evidence that children took the lead in approaching adults to initiate verbal and physical interactions.

Observation No:10**Fieldnotes:** Stathoula (2:10)**Area of Provision:** Outdoors**Other Children:** -**Other Adults:** Katerina, Antigoni.**Extract from a 20min observation**

Stathoula goes near Antigoni and talks to her. Antigoni kisses her and says:

Antigoni: You don't wear a diaper anymore?

Statoula nods.

Antigoni: Seriously? You don't use a diaper at night? Bravo!

Stathoula lies down a couple of times on Antigoni's lap, then she takes the feather she had previously found and waves it near Antigoni's face.

Stathoula: Look, a feather!

Antigoni asserts: Oh, come on! Please, don't put it on my face!

Stathoula takes the feather down and moves between Antigoni's legs. From there, she hugs and kisses Katerina who sits next to Antigoni. Katerina turns to show the other cheek and Stathoula kisses her again. She now moves onto Katerina's lap and hugs and kisses her again. Katerina kisses her back.

Stathoula was proactive in communicating her desire for affection. She wanted to engage in a playful and affectionate relationship and she indicated it by lying on the practitioner's lap and by using the feather. When the first adult indicated she did not want to continue with this kind of interaction, Stathoula was not discouraged and she was persistent in seeking an alternative adult, seemingly aware that she could seek this support from different adults. She was able to do this because there were two practitioners present, both responsive and willing to participate in a playful and affectionate interaction.

Stathoula from the Blue Class and Georgios (1.4) from the Green, whose case was discussed in the beginning of the chapter, were the only children in the study who approached the adults seeking close relationships in this kind of way. Most of the study children, including Filio (2.4) from the Green Class, appeared to use proximity to adults as a common strategy to signal a desire for interaction. Filio preferred being around adults rather than children. She would usually respond positively to adults' requests for chatting, cuddling, or kissing, and she would use a more indirect strategy to gain positive adult attention by moving close or near them throughout the day, either to play with her toys or to show them her clothes.

Christos (2.4), also from the Green Class, was also observed using a more indirect strategy to gain affectionate responses from adults. Christos was observed a few times, on different occasions, approaching a student who was sitting on the floor and then sitting on her lap. The student's position in the space probably gave the student an intermediate status between adult and child, something that seemed to encourage Christos to take the initiative and seek physical closeness by using his body language as his language skills were limited.

Furthermore, some children from the Green Class, including Christos, were observed indicating to practitioners that they needed nappies changing, while others would sometimes start crying for no apparent reason. These actions were probably a strategy to attract adults' attention, perhaps indicating a desire for exclusive engagement since the adults would intervene almost instantly in such situations.

The following observation of Aspa, who was mostly observed seeking interactions with her peers, provides further evidence about some children's desire for close interactions with adults as well.

Observation No:11

Fieldnotes: Aspa (2:4)

Area of Provision: Green Classroom

Other Children: Georgios (1:4)

Other Adults: Nadia, Beth (Beth is a practitioner from another class).

Extract from a 20min observation.

Some of the children are in bed ready to sleep. Aspa is stood up in her bed and looks at Beth who entered the room.

Beth: Peek-a-boo!

Beth addresses her playful game to the children who are in bed and all of them, including Aspa, laugh. Aspa leans her head on the upper wooden bar of her bed.

Nadia goes next to Georgios' bed because he had started crying and then Aspa starts crying too. Nadia moves next to Aspa.

Nadia: Do you want me to sit next to you until you fall asleep?

Aspa: 'Kaká [poo]'

Nadia takes Aspa out of her bed and places her onto the changing table.

Nadia: You didn't poo!

Aspa is sitting calm and sleepy on the changing table as Nadia changes her nappy anyway. When Nadia finishes with the nappy changing, she takes Aspa back to her bed and puts the blanket on top of Aspa's body as Aspa stays laid down.

In this episode Aspa did not make her reason for crying explicit initially. Aspa, by giving Nadia a reason to pick her up from her bed, appeared to want physical contact and interaction that was focused on her and not shared with others. Being taken away to the changing area could offer her the opportunity for such interaction. Even though Aspa was one of the most competent children in her group in terms of speaking, she did not explicitly ask for a 'hug'. This probably

indicates that either the word 'hug' was not accessible or available to her at the time, or that she used an indirect way to get what she wanted without risking a possible rejection. Aspa was observed, prior to this incident and around the same time of the day, asking the practitioner to change her nappy. The practitioner checked the nappy while Aspa was in bed, confirmed it did not need changing, and prompted her to sleep. Both incidents indicate that Aspa seemed to see practitioners as adults who prioritised aspects of physical care over other requests for attention. Therefore, it seems likely that Aspa, rather than directly requesting attention, used a strategy that she viewed as more likely to be successful in this context.

5.2.3. Chat with me!

The children also seemed to seek out adults to chat with. When children took the initiative to start verbal interactions, practitioners would more often respond positively to children's invitations indoors rather than outdoors. Also, there was more direct interaction between adults and individual children during routine times and teacher-led activities rather than during free play and child-led activities.

Filio (2.4), who mostly seemed to prefer interacting with adults, was observed on a few occasions trying to initiate conversations with them. The following episodes (See Observation No 12 and Observation No 13) show her attempts at verbal interaction with the same practitioner during a routine time and during free play time respectively.

Observation No:12

Fieldnotes: Filio (2.4)

Area of Provision: Green Class

Other Children: Christos (2.4)

Other Adults: Class's practitioners, E.K.

Extract from a 10min observation

The children are sat at the table and they are ready to start eating cereal for breakfast. The practitioner tries to comfort Clare who cries.

Practitioner: Will we eat cereal Clare?

Filio: I will!

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No12 Continued)

Filio looks at me and by pointing at the tray with the bowls on the table says:

Filio: Look Eleni!

Eleni: What is it? Is it corn flakes?

Filio: Yes, corn flakes!

The practitioner starts assisting Christos with his breakfast and she comments:

Practitioner: Look! Christos is eating!

Filio: 'Bravooo!' and continues eating.

Filio: Táki [milk]*

The practitioner who has just given Christos a spoonful of milk, without the cereal, says to Filio:

Practitioner: You want just milk too?

Filio nods.

The practitioner takes Filio's spoon and feeds her milk from her bowl.

Filio looks at Christos and smiles, she then looks at me saying:

Filio: Alone!

E.K.: You eat on your own?

Filio: (nods) Corn flakes!

**táki is the last two syllables of the word 'galatáki' that the practitioner used which is diminutive of the word 'gála' and means milk.*

Throughout the observation Filio appeared to be trying to establish communication with an adult. She tried to achieve this by responding to the adults' comments and by commenting on her own actions. It seemed that for Filio it was important that she could eat on her own. Thus, her comment about the 'Táki* [milk]' seemed an attempt to attract the practitioner's attention rather than a request for assistance. In situations like these though, it appeared rather difficult for adults to interpret children's sometimes obscure intentions. Despite some difficulties, Filio was persistent in her attempts to establish communication with adults within the limits of her language skills. She used the vocabulary that was accessible to her and also comments that seemed to be within the range of

adults' interests. The latter provided indications that Filio was tuned into the adults and she was initiating verbal interaction, perhaps with the anticipation that the adults would respond and sustain it.

The practitioners seemed to be more available for verbal interaction with children during routine times than during free play, and it seemed that during free play time children tried to increase their efforts to establish verbal interaction with the adults. In the following observation, Filio's attempts to establish a dialogue with the same practitioner during free play are presented.

Observation No:13

Fieldnotes: Filio (2:4)

Area of Provision: Green Classroom

Other Children: Nicole (1:4), Clare (2:2)

Other Adults: Class's Practitioners, E.K.

Extract from a 20min observation

The practitioner has just let Filio down from her lap after checking her temperature. The class's practitioners chat with each other and Filio approaches me. She instantly decides to go next to one of the practitioners who is trying to calm down Nicole who is crying. She stands there for a while and then she moves away from them. After a few minutes she decides to go back. She approaches the practitioner, who was previously with Nicole, and points at her finger nail showing to the practitioner that a small part of it has broken. The practitioner does not respond to Filio; she is cutting cardboard and chats with the other practitioner. Filio approaches me.

Filio: Look!

E.K.: What is it?

Filio shows me the broken nail and I help her remove it from her finger. Clare comes close to us and the two girls pretend they are fighting. Filio turns her attention back to me, playing with my notes and the mobile phone that I use for timing the observations. She decides to sit next to me and she looks periodically at my notes, the practitioners, and the children who are in the class.

In this situation as well it seemed that Filio was trying to initiate interaction with adults by approaching them. Since the practitioner was busy, consoling Nicole, Filio decided to leave and she returned when the ground seemed more fruitful

to start a verbal interaction. Filio was observed a few times during the study approaching adults and showing her clothes to them and on this occasion showing the nail was probably another excuse to initiate interaction. However, the practitioner did not seem to realise Filio's intentions and she then decided to come to me, persisting in the attempt to gain attention.

5.2.4. Let's be playful!

Stathoula (2.10) from the Blue Class, used similar strategies to Filio (2.4) from the Green Class to approach adults. These strategies included going close to adults, talking to them, and showing them her clothes or toys. Even though Stathoula's exact intentions were not entirely clear, the use of these strategies indicate that she was probably seeking out adults to engage with her in a playful manner.

Stathoula was equally interested in interacting with children and adults other than staff and she was observed approaching other children's parents and grandparents during drop off and pick up times. Her mum, Voula, said that Stathoula felt the need to greet everyone in the morning, and she wondered if Stathoula was doing this because she needed attention.

The following episode shows Stathoula's interactions with an ancillary staff member and provides further evidence that Stathoula was actively seeking to engage with adults in a playful manner.

Observation No:14

Fieldnotes: Stathoula (2:10)

Area of Provision: Outdoors

Other Children: Steven (3years), Tina (2:6)

Other Adults: Evangelia (ancillary staff member)

Extract from a 20min Observation

Evangelia sits on a chair at the door which leads to the outdoor area but her chair is placed in the indoor space of the nursery. She has Stathoula on her lap and tickles her.

Stathoula: Come here for a minute.

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 14 Continued)

Stathoula stands up and invites Evangelia to go outdoors by taking her by the hand. Evangelia doesn't seem willing to follow Stathoula outdoors.

Stathoula shows Evangelia her shoes.

Evangelia: Very nice!

Stathoula approaches Steven in the outdoors area and then returns near to Evangelia who takes her on her lap again. Stathoula leaves but instantly returns near to Evangelia. This time Evangelia leads Stathoula outdoors. Stathoula goes and sits on Steven's lap as he is sitting on the floor playing with Tina.

In this observation Evangelia's display of affection provided a starting point for establishing an interaction which Stathoula then tried to prolong. Stathoula's actions, by leaving and returning, were probably aimed in an indirect way to attract Evangelia outdoors after her direct attempts had seemed to fail. Stathoula was actively seeking to include Evangelia in a playful interaction and she was persistent in her attempts to promote and sustain this interaction. Stathoula also seemed consistent in her strategies, by using interchangeably affectionate actions and verbal communication, to achieve an adult's response (also see Observation No 10).

In the following episode Stathoula is using playthings to initiate playful interactions with adults.

Observation No:15

Fieldnotes: Stathoula (2.10)

Area of Provision: Blue Classroom

Other Children: Liza (2.11), Nicky (2.9)

Other Adults: Katerina (Class's practitioner), E.K.

Extract from a 20min Observation

The children are playing with lego. Stathoula picks up some pieces, which when assembled make a pig, and brings it to me to assemble it.

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 15 Continued)

When I do it Stathoula looks between the front 'legs' of the pig and asks:

Stathoula: What's inside?

E.K.: Nothing.

Stathoula brings me a sheep and asks me to assemble it as well. As I do it she heads towards Katerina who holds Liza and is cuddling her. She then turns around, picks up two lego bricks and gives them to Katerina. Liza drops the horse she was holding and Stathoula takes it.

Katerina prompts Stathoula: Give it back to Liza.

Stathoula gives it back and walks towards Nicky pretending that she will throw Nicky's lego down but she doesn't and she returns near to Katerina. Katerina picks Stathoula up and lifts her up and down a few times before she eventually leaves her to stand on the floor. Stathoula laughs, takes a few steps back, and runs again getting onto Katerina's lap.

In this episode Stathoula used playthings to approach and initiate interaction with adults. Stathoula was proactive in communicating her desire for playful interaction and imaginative in order to achieve it, as she also did in the previous observation with Evangelia and in Observation No 10 where she used a feather to sustain the interaction with her practitioner. All these indicate that Stathoula was adjusting to adults' responses and she was trying out a range of strategies including verbal communication, body language, and playthings to elicit from adults the response she seemed to desire.

5.2.5. It's my choice!

This sub-section presents findings in relation to children's responses to adults' invitations for verbal, affectionate, and playful interactions. Children seemed to perceive such interactions as being on offer, and that they had the power to accept or reject them. In most of the observed cases, the adults would usually invite the children to go near them instead of approaching the children directly. This style, which was adopted by most adults in the settings, was probably empowering for children, enabling them to choose whether to accept or reject these invitations, for example by not approaching the adults.

Below two episodes are presented which demonstrate the response of Litsa (1.5), from the Green Class, to practitioners' offers to engage in exclusive interaction and displays of affection. The observations provided evidence that Litsa seemed to recognise that she had the power to decide whether to accept or reject these invitations.

Observation No:16

Fieldnotes: Litsa (1.5)

Area of Provision: Green Classroom

Other Children: -

Other Adults: Nadia

Extract from a 20min observation

Nadia asks Litsa to go near her on the settee. As Litsa approaches her, Nadia picks her up.

Nadia: Where are you my love?

Nadia kisses her and, as she strokes Litsa's tummy, she says:

Nadia: Oh, oh, oh you are such a bug!

Litsa laughs.

The practitioner keeps cuddling Litsa.

Nadia: You're so sweet, like a croissant!

Nadia lets her down and Litsa walks towards the carpet area.

In Observation No 16 Litsa chose to engage in playful interaction with her practitioner. In the following observation, Litsa indicates she does not wish to have a playful interaction with a practitioner from another class.

Observation No:17

Fieldnotes: Litsa (1.5)

Area of Provision: Green Classroom

Other Children: -

Other Adults: Alice (Practitioner from another class)

Extract from a 20min observation

There are five children playing at the table and five practitioners in the class. Litsa stands up from her chair and Alice, who is seated at the settee, says to her:

Alice: Where are you going?

(Observation No 17 Continued)

(Observation No 17 Continued)

Alice indicates, with a hand gesture, that she wants to take Litsa onto her lap.

Litsa looks at her and then starts looking around the class until Fofu comes and picks her up. Fofu sits at the table with the other children and places Litsa onto her lap.

In both of these episodes, Litsa did not invite these interactions or shows of affection. Litsa seemed to recognise that she could autonomously accept or reject adult offers of affectionate and playful interaction. Other observations of Litsa indicate that she was positive in interacting with adults other than her own practitioners. This reinforces the interpretation that she used the power she had to reject Alice's invitation for affection in Observation No 17. What might be noteworthy is that both adults invited Litsa to go near them instead of them approaching Litsa. This style of behaviour, which was adopted in similar situations by the adults in both settings, seemed to empower children to choose whether to accept these invitations or reject them by not approaching the adults.

As with playful interactions, the children could decide to accept or reject adults' offers of verbal interaction. Observational data indicated that when children decided to reject adult invitations they would either ignore them or they would choose to pursue an alternative activity, usually after providing adults with a laconic response such as 'Yes' or 'No'. When children chose to accept such invitations they would often try to sustain the interaction as the following episode indicates (See Observation No 18).

Filio (2.4), from the Green Class, would take up most of the opportunities she was given to interact verbally with adults.

Observation No:18**Fieldnotes:** Filio (2.4)**Area of Provision:** Green Classroom**Other Children:** Nicole (1.4)**Other Adults:** Carol (Headteacher), Fofo (Green Class Practitioner)**Extract from a 20min observation**

The children are eating breakfast when Carol enters the class and she says to Filio:

Carol: Filio, how are you?

Filio: Good!

Carol: Did you eat [spit roasted] lamb [on Easter]?

Filio: Yes.

Filio: How are you?

Carol: I'm busy, doing paperwork.

Then Carol starts talking to Nicole and Filio looks at them.

Fofo: Filio we are eating our bread now!

Filio: Look Fofo!

Filio shows to Fofo her top's drawstring.

Fofo: Yes my love, it's very nice!

Filio seemed confident in her interactions with adults as in her attempt to sustain the conversation with Carol. Filio also tried to establish communication with Fofo, after Fofo prompted her to eat her bread. This probably indicates that if confident children like Filio were interested in chatting with adults they would actively seek to engage in verbal interaction with them.

5.2.6. I like being altogether, but not always!

As with accepting or rejecting adults' invitations for one-to-one interaction, children from both classes seemed to be aware of their autonomy to accept or reject invitations to participate in group activities such as dancing, singing, and storytelling. This was probably re-enforced by the style which was adopted by practitioners who would prompt but not insist on all children's participation. The children could also observe from a close proximity and join in if, and whenever, they wanted.

For some children, the adults' presence in these activities seemed to be the main reason for their participation. For other, children the kind of the activity seemed to be the main motivation, with some children engaging mostly in dancing activities, others in storytelling, and others in singing activities. In some cases children's motivations were not entirely clear. For example, Filio (2.4) from the Green Class and Stathoula (2.10) from the Blue Class were two of the children who seemed to enjoy both adults' company and storytelling. Observational data indicated that the two girls would respond positively to adults' prompts for joining the group during storytelling. It is not clear if the two girls liked to participate in that activity because they were enjoying the storytelling, because adults were participating, or for both reasons. Nonetheless, storytelling was one of the activities that gave children the opportunity to interact with adults and their peers and become part of a larger group.

However, children were not always keen to join in group activities. The following observation of Aspa provides further evidence of children's awareness of their autonomy regarding participation in group activities and their confidence in rejecting adults' suggestions or suggesting alternative activities to practitioners.

Observation No:19**Fieldnotes:** Aspa (2.4)**Area of Provision:** Green Classroom**Other Children:** Mark (2.2), Christos (2.4), Litsa (1.5), Georgios (1.4)**Other Adults:** Fofu**Extract from a 20min observation**

Fofu has invited the children to the carpet to sing songs. Aspa sits in front of her and imitates the movements of the song that Fofu is singing along with Christos and Litsa. Aspa looks at Mark who is at the table pretending he is cleaning/washing a toy. Fofu says to him:

Fofu: Mark, will you come to sing songs with us?

Mark: 'Poupizo' [I'm cleaning].

Fofu: What?

Aspa: 'Poupizi [He's cleaning]

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 19 Continued)

After singing a few songs, with Aspa, Christos, and Georgios, Fofo asks the children to tidy up the class and Aspa helps Fofo do it. When they finish tidying the room, Fofo asks the children:

Fofo: Do you want to dance?

Aspa: Nooooo!

Aspa points at the table.

Fofo: You want to sit down?

Aspa: Yes!

In this episode Mark seemed to understand that he could exercise autonomy in choosing to join group activities or choosing not to participate. Similarly, Aspa was confident enough to reject the practitioner's suggestion for a dancing group activity and in suggesting an alternative. It seemed that the adult's style was not only supportive of children's participation in group activities at their own rate but also gave them the freedom to make autonomous decisions on whether to participate or not.

5.2.7. 'Why?'

The children, apart from rejecting adults' invitations for one-to-one interaction and group activities, were also observed challenging adult rules verbally or through use of their body language. Dimitris (2.5), from the Blue Class, was one of the children who were observed verbally challenging adult rules. One episode is presented below.

Observation No:20**Fieldnotes:** Dimitris (2.5)**Area of Provision:** Blue Classroom**Other Children:** -**Other Adults:** Katerina, E.K.**Extract from a 20min observation**

Dimitris puts some playdough in a plastic cup he had taken from the home corner. He takes a spoon too and heads towards the child-sized living room. The practitioner who sits nearby says to him.

Katerina: Don't put the play-dough in there.

Dimitris: Why?

Katerina: Because it sticks onto the cup and then you put the cup in your mouth. Although, I think it's time to tidy up and go to Mrs Rosie's class.

Dimitris: Why?

Katerina: Because I'll need to leave in a few minutes.

Dimitris goes to the drawer to store the play-dough but he can't find its box and comes to me saying:

Dimitris: Where is the box?

E.K.: I don't know, Katerina will know.

Katerina gives him the box and Dimitris and the other children go towards the door.

Katerina says to Dimitris who steps outside the class:

Katerina: Come here, don't leave, we're queuing.

Dimitris asserts: The other children left!

In this episode, Katerina gives instructions initially without explanation, although she is seemingly happy to respond when questioned, when Dimitris repeated the 'Why?' Dimitris seemed sufficiently confident to question the adult's authority and he was persistent in seeking answers. Dimitris also challenged Katerina's decision on queuing which provides further evidence that some children did not take for granted, or passively accept, adult rules.

Children, who seemed to be less competent in speech, including Georgios (1.4), were observed challenging adult rules using body language such as body

posture, facial expressions, and eye movements. One of these episodes is provided below.

Observation No:21

Fieldnotes: Georgios (1.4)

Area of Provision: Green Classroom

Other Children: -

Other Adults: Adele (Practitioner of 2 to 3 years old group), Fofo (Green Class Practitioner), E.K.

Extract from a 20min observation

It's late in the afternoon and Adele and Fofo are seated on the settee. Georgios has just woken up and, after Fofo takes him down from his bed, he starts walking around the room. He approaches the table and starts taking the chairs out from it. After he removes a couple of chairs, Adele says to him in a sweet tone:

Adele: No, don't take more chairs out of there!

Georgios starts putting the chairs back at the table.

Adele: Bravo!

Georgios smiles at her as he wilily tries to take the chairs out again.

Adele more decisively says: Don't!

Georgios smilingly approaches Adele.

Adele: Come here for me to give you a hug!

Georgios ignores her invitation and starts walking towards the corridor, stepping outside the class.

Fofo: Georgios, come here to put your shoes on.

Georgios turns around and looks at Fofo briefly, then he looks at the corridor again.

Adele: Have you noticed what he's doing Eleni? He's challenging us. He wants to see how we'll react!

Fofo once again invites Georgios near her and this time Georgios decides to approach her. After they have finished with the shoes Georgios comes near me in the changing area where I am sat. He is mouthing his finger and mutters.

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 21 Continued)

E.K.: What is it Georgios?

Georgios: Dad!

E.K.: You want your dad? Your mum will be here in a few minutes.

Georgios keeps muttering as he walks towards the corridor looking at times over his shoulder, towards Adele. Georgios looks at his peers' bags which are hung on a hanger in the corridor. Adele invites him once again to come back inside. Georgios stamps his right foot peevishly on the floor. He then comes inside the class but he instantly decides to run towards the corridor again where he starts playing with the bags.

Fofa: Georgios...

Georgios ignores Fofa, having turned his back to her, and he examines one of the bags. He then turns around looking both at Adele and Fofa. Fofa once again invites him to come inside the class. Georgios decides to come and stand next to me and he starts muttering again.

Georgios seemed to try out different ways to challenge adult rules throughout the observation by using his body language. He seemed consistent in restoring his relationship with adults, by periodically following their instructions, which provides an indication regarding Georgios' understanding of adults' authority in the class. Georgios offered adults a reason why he was standing at the corridor, probably suggesting his awareness of the nursery's routines and in particular the pick-up times. The practitioners' persistence in asking Georgios to re-enter the class was probably perceived by him as irritating since it did not seem to be something he wanted to conform with. Georgios' way of showing his annoyance seemed to be by using his body language; stamping his foot, having turned his back on the practitioners, and muttering. Once again, adults' position in space and the style they adopted, by inviting Georgios near them, seemed to encourage Georgios to make autonomous decisions and also seemed to give him the freedom to try out ways to challenge their rules and question their authority.

Georgios' mum, Efi, noted that he resented being under pressure or restricted and, in such situations, *'he would grumble'*. Fofa, Georgios' practitioner, and Efi highlighted Georgios' extensive use of body language to show his feelings including his likes and dislikes. Fofa stated:

He 'says' it, he shows it to you; he'll mutter, he'll pull you. He doesn't cry, he mutters.

Thus, it seemed that children with limited language skills, like Georgios, were employing body language not only to communicate their desires but also to challenge adults' authority.

5.3. Child-adult Interactions in Relation to Children's Peers

Although sometimes children seemed to challenge adults' authority and their rules, at other times they seemed to identify them as people with power and as authority figures that could intervene when children were under physical attack, excluded from play by other children, or when conflicts over toys occurred. Observational data indicated that the adults would intervene almost instantly, and without children having requested their assistance, to prevent or solve conflicts amongst children. However, some episodes where children actively seek adult help are presented below.

5.3.1. Will you Help me Play with my Friends?

In the following episode, Yiannis' (2:11) seemed to seek adult assistance to enter a child's play. In general, Yiannis was the only child of the Blue Class who was observed seeking adults' assistance to help him resolve conflicts with his peers.

Observation No:22

Fieldnotes: Yiannis (2.11)

Area of Provision: Orange Classroom

Other Children: John (2.11), Manolis (2.11), Steven (2.6), Kostas (2.9), Craig (3.1), Brian (2.6)

Other Adults: E.K.

Extract from a 20min observation

Yiannis walks around the room before he approaches John who has made a car road with construction material on a table. John pushes his cars on the road.

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 22 Continued)

Manolis approaches John, he takes a piece off of John's road, and by placing it on the floor he starts rolling his own car on it. Yiannis takes another car and sits on the floor next to Manolis where four more boys join them. Yiannis stands up and approaches John who still plays at the table. John starts muttering.

Yiannis informs John: I won't ruin it.

John lets him stand there for a while but then he pushes Yiannis away.

Yiannis protests: Don't push!

I'm seated near the table and Yiannis approaches me saying:

Yiannis: John is pushing me!

E.K.: John, don't push him.

Yiannis moves again next to John, looking at him as John pushes his car on the road.

It appeared that Yiannis wanted to play with John but John was not keen to allow Yiannis to join the play. Yiannis, who was not ready to give up, asked for my intervention, probably expecting that my power as an adult would override that of John. Yiannis appeared to lack the power either to defend himself from physical aggression or to enforce a right to join the play. He explicitly indicated that he wanted a peacemaker adult to intervene and one who could exercise power to assist him to enter John's play. This incident provided an indication of some children's perspectives about adults as people who have more power to enforce things, suggesting children's awareness of adults' relative power over children.

5.3.2. I Want You to Listen to Me!

In situations of peer conflict, some of the children were observed informing adults. It is not clear from the observations if the children wanted to make friends, be protected, or have some kind of punitive response applied. For example Kostas (2.9), from the Blue Class, was observed reporting to the practitioner that Liza (2.11) hit him. The practitioner responded by removing Liza from the group while Kostas decided to inform me as well about Liza's

action. In the following episode Yiannis reported a physical attack by Nicky (2.9) to his practitioner.

Observation No:23

Fieldnotes: Yiannis (2.11)

Area of Provision: Orange Classroomroom

Other Children: Tina (2.6), Nicky (2.9), Liza (2.11)

Other Adults: Blue Class Practitioner Extract from a 20min observation.

The children are tidying up the class to get ready for the breakfast. Yiannis puts some toys in the toy box that Tina holds. He approaches the practitioner who stands by the toy shelf, tidying up toys, and says to her:

Yiannis: Nicky hit me.

Liza approaches them and Yiannis looks at her.

Yiannis moves again next to the practitioner and repeats twice that he got hit by Nicky but the practitioner does not seem to listen to him. Yiannis goes back next to Tina and continues placing toys in her toy box. After a few minutes Yiannis approaches the practitioner again.

Yiannis: Nicky hit me.

Practitioner: Nicky, did you hit Yiannis?

Nicky: Yes.

The practitioner does not say anything to either of the children.

In this episode Yiannis persisted despite difficulties in getting the practitioner to listen to him. This provides an indication that Yiannis was aware that persistence was sometimes needed to ensure that adults would listen to his point of view. This is evidenced by the repetition of the complaint. Yiannis seemed to seek from the adult, as an authoritative figure, a response to an incident of physical aggression. However, similarly to Kostas' incident, it is not clear if Yiannis wanted assistance to become friends with Nicky again, if he wanted the adult to protect him, or if he was appealing to the adult as an authority figure, expecting some kind of punitive response.

5.3.3. Get this toy for me!

The disputes over equipment or toys would usually be settled after a few seconds. The conflict incident would terminate either because one of the children would leave or because they would manage to regain possession of the toy. This meant that the children would usually seek adult assistance only for ongoing disputes. One of these episodes is presented in Observation No 24.

Observation No: 24

Fieldnotes: Aspa (2:4)

Area of Provision: Green Classroom

Other Children: Christos (2:4)

Other Adults: Carol (Head-teacher)

Extract from a 10min observation

Aspa cries because Christos took one of her pans. She approaches him and takes it back but Christos returns to the table and gets another of her pans. Aspa goes near Carol who had just entered the room and 'complains' about Christos actions.

Carol: You didn't give one to Christos so he can play too though.

Carol keeps talking to Aspa who just looks at her.

Aspa was confident enough that she would regain the possession of her toy but, when Christos did not seem keen on giving up easily Aspa sought the adult's assistance. Aspa recognised this adult as having the power to resolve disputes over toys in her favour. Aspa remained quiet as Carol kept talking to her, providing an indication that she had started to accept that her expectations were not going to be met. This episode contradicted the following one where Aspa challenged the adult's interpretations of events. This episode however, provided further evidence about Aspa's perspectives on adults as authority figures.

Observation No:25**Fieldnotes:** Aspa (2.4)**Area of Provision:** Green Classroom**Other Children:** Christos (2.4), Nicole (1.4)**Other Adults:** Green Class Practitioner, E.K.**Extract from a 20min observation**

Aspa walks towards the practitioner who is at the table chatting with Christos.

Practitioner: What is it Aspa?

Aspa points at the pan that Nicole is playing with at the table and says:

Aspa: It's mine.

Practitioner: No, it's Nicole's.

Aspa: No, it's mine!

Practitioner: No, it's Nicole's!

Aspa takes a chair and comes and sits next to me. She points at the pan again and says to me:

Aspa: I want it!

Aspa again approached adults as people who could use adult power to intervene on her behalf. This time, however, she tried to override the practitioner's interpretation of events but backed down when the adult reasserted her position. Nonetheless, Aspa was persistent and she did not seem to lack confidence in making her desire explicit and in seeking for alternative adults who could use their authority to get her the toy.

5.4. Understanding Child-Adult Relationships

The previous sections of chapter 5 discussed child-adult relationships during and after the first transition period and presented comparative findings about children's interactions with adults in relation to children's peers. In summary, children seemed to require from adults emotionally close and nurturing relationships during the transition period, a need that seemed to recede over time. Even though children seemed to continue seeking emotionally close relationships after the first transition period, there were signs of awareness of their own agency in making autonomous decisions and they then seemed to

start challenging adults' relative power. Nonetheless, during conflicts with their peers, children seemed to recognise adults as authority figures and to seek from them an exercise of their power in the children's interests. Children's active role in relation to the formation of child-adult relationships and interactions was highlighted throughout the chapter. In this section of chapter 5, I discuss the findings regarding child-adult relationships in relation to the Greek and international literature and I explain how this thesis adds to the relevant literature.

5.4.1. Valuing Aspects of Interaction and Care

Findings across previous Greek studies which used quantitative scoring systems such as the ITERS and ECERS scales to measure the quality of the settings reveal that adult-child interaction is rated higher than other measurable aspects, such as the activities or the programme structure aspects. This common finding suggests that Greek settings place emphasis on the importance of adult-child relationships. In England, Hadfield et al. (2012), for example, identified lower rating scores in adult-child interactions in relation to other measurable aspects. A possible explanation for this contrast could be that in Greece, in relation to several other European countries such as the UK (Pugh, 2006), all early years practitioners working in day-care have received relevant training which focused on young children from one to four years (European Commission, 2011). Thus, this finding could be a result of having qualified staff who understand the emotional needs of children

Gregoriadis and Tsigilis (2008), however, attributed the emphasis on child-adult relationships to practitioners' efforts to compensate for the lack of quality in relation to other structural aspects, such as the activities, by investing more in the quality of interactions with children. Also, Grammatikopoulos et al. (2012) and Rentzou and Sakellariou (2012), who asked parents to rate their ECEC settings' quality, concluded that parents rated the care and interaction aspects higher than the educational and structural ones. This finding is attributed by researchers to parents' wishful thinking about the services offered to their children. Regardless of the reasons behind parents' choices, this finding provides, some indication that Greek parents highly value aspects of care. This

study also extends the findings revealed in relevant literature by suggesting that Greek children also value aspects of care.

By reviewing the recent history and development of Greek ECEC provision, it is evident that aspects of care and socialisation have been historically promoted more than educational aspects in child care settings. In fact, aspects of care and welfare have always been a priority for under threes and educational aspects were emphasised mainly for older children. In a society described as collectivistic by Gregoriadis and Tsigilis (2008), one which had gone through many stages, including wars and poverty, throughout its recent history and which struggled to create homogeneity amongst its diverse population, one would expect all these aspects to be reflected in the culture of ECECE settings. This is particularly likely because Greek ECEC provision was established simultaneously with the 'New Greek State' and developed alongside it. Thus, this emphasis on relationships that are associated with care and child-adult interaction could also be attributed to the collectivistic nature of Greek society and to the culture of Greek ECEC provision as it was shaped throughout all these years of change. However, the division between education and care, which is a feature of many systems internationally (OECD, 2001), has been criticised by Greek researchers including Lalloumi-Vidali (1998) and Petrogiannis (2006).

Regardless of the reasons behind the emphasis placed on care and interaction by Greek parents and the settings, this study provides evidence that different kinds of relationships are also important for Greek children. Other researchers from the interpretative paradigm, including Evans and Fuller (1998), have also identified that children over the age of three consider relationships important. The findings of my study also agree with the more limited findings for under threes of Elfer (2003; 2007; 2008), relating to children's desire for close relationships. It seems that different kinds of relationships not only affect children's experiences but also shape their perspectives about their time spent at nursery. This thesis extends the existing Greek and international literature on child-adult relationships by examining the perspectives of children under the age of three about these relationships. It differs from the previous studies in that it highlights children's agency in the formation of these relationships by

providing evidence regarding the significance of child-adult relationships for children. Examples of children who were actively seeking to engage in affectionate interactions with adults are provided below.

5.4.2. Child-adult Relationships during Transition Times

The significance of adult-child relationships in day-care has been influenced by aspects of Bowlby's and Ainsworth's attachment theory. The debates concerning whether parent-child relationships should be replicated in ECEC settings, as argued by Elfer (2006; 2012) or not, as argued by Penn (1997) and Dahlberg et al. (1999), have highlighted this as an important aspect of practice. For Elfer (2006; 2008) and Elfer et al. (2012) the existence of affectionate and consistent relationships in ECEC provision is a factor that can promote children's self-esteem, reduce their anxiety, and promote exploration. In Greece only a few researchers, including Roufidou (2008; 2010), argue about the importance of having emotionally available adults who will offer individualised and sensitive caregiving to children. This study suggests that children are proactive in seeking out adults who will offer them such exclusiveness, both during transitions and throughout the day.

Vertical Transitions

Several projects, including the NICHD study (2003) and Elfer's work (2008), have identified that children's transitions during different stages of their school life and especially their transition from home to nursery are recognised internationally as important stages in their lives which might cause them distress and anxiety. Kagan and Neuman's (1998) review of the relevant literature up to the late 1990s suggested that successful transitions have multidimensional benefits for children that range from benefits in children's mental health to success in forming friendships and also to success in the school setting.

In Greece, children's transition from home to nursery in day-care and nursery settings is an under-researched area. Only two researchers have reported findings on kindergarten children's transition into primary school. Research was mainly carried out by investigating teachers' and parents' perspectives

(Kakvoulis, 1994) and the perspectives of kindergarten and primary school teachers (Carida, (2011). Papaprokopiou and Kammenou (2012) have identified that Greek ECEC settings do not have formal procedures to ensure children's smooth transition to settings and that transition related issues are absent from policy guidance. This study offers evidence on how transition periods are experienced by some young children, thereby adding another dimension to the relevant Greek literature. In particular, the study suggests that transition periods might not be experienced by children as fixed periods although it is probably perceived in this way by adults. My findings coincide with findings from the international research field which show that some children seek individual attention when they feel distressed during the day but also during transition periods (Elfer, 2008). Furthermore, the evidence supports Kagan and Neuman's (1998) notion about the significance for children of both vertical transitions from home to nursery and horizontal, every day, transitions as children move from home to nursery.

The data also signifies that, for adults, vertical transitions normally extend over the first month of a child's registration but children do not seem to experience it as a fixed period of this length. Georgios (1.4), who was the youngest child in this study, was observed experiencing adjustment difficulties even after several months of having registered at the setting. The lack of formal procedures to ensure children's vertical transitions from home to the setting and the fact that Elfer's key worker concept is not used in Greek ECEC settings could be one of the reasons for Georgios' difficulties. However there were signs of Georgios' exercising agency in relation to his difficult transition by seeking to be physically and emotionally close to one of his two practitioners during times of distress and returning to her when he wanted cuddles and to be picked up. I also had indications from the actions and communication of older children like Manolis (2.11) that the person, who had offered him comfort during his transition time, assisted him to settle down in the setting, and remained a special person to him, even several months after he had adjusted to the setting. The person that Manolis had formed a close relationship with, during that time, was an ancillary staff member. The structure of the Greek settings allows ancillary staff members to interact with children in a sustained way during transition times.

Dahlberg et al. (1999) argued that children should have the opportunity to interact with a wider group of adults rather than just be attached to one caregiver. Penn (1997) added to that argument that attachment theory, with its exclusive focus on adult relationships, ignores the significance of peer interactions for children's sense of belonging. This study's findings indicate that the environment of the settings offered opportunities for children to exercise agency and make choices about their preferred relationships with adults, since they could interact with practitioners from other classrooms as well as with their own practitioners and ancillary staff members. Georgios' case, which unfolded during my stay at the setting, provided particular evidence that, even when the concept of the key worker is not explicitly used in a setting, children who are given the opportunity to exercise agency may seek to form close relationships with adults during vertical transitions. Therefore, what is probably needed to promote wellbeing for the children is for all potential adults to be emotionally available and responsive when children want physical and emotional closeness and to be cared for as suggested by Roufidou (2008).

In the case of Georgios, after he had established a first close relationship with one adult, he seemed to become more confident in exploring the nursery's social environment and he started interacting with a wider circle of adults. Georgios was observed actively seeking out a physically affectionate and comforting relationship with a practitioner from another class by approaching, smiling at and cuddling her. This finding suggests that some children may want to establish several close relationships, rather than one exclusive relationship, supporting the positions of Dahlberg et al. (1999) and Penn (1997).

In relation to his peers, Georgios' very first observations show him taking an interest in other children by looking at them from a short distance and by trying out different ways to approach them. These findings coincide with research relating to similar age children during their first days in day-care, conducted by Thyssen (2000). Furthermore, in times of distress Georgios seemed to exclusively seek interaction with adults and especially with the practitioner from his own classroom that he had shown signs of attachment to previously. This finding replicates findings from the international context and in particular those of Thyssen (2000) and Elfer (2008). Thus, Georgios's perspective seemed to be

that interaction with children and adults was important to him, something he demonstrated by exercising his agency. Furthermore, the formation of a close relationship with one particular adult seemed to be the one that offered him the reassurance he needed in order to start interacting with a wider circle of adults.

Horizontal Transitions

In this study Georgios was seen to be experiencing vertical transitions in a certain way and other children were also observed experiencing horizontal, every day, transitions. These horizontal transitions occur as children move from home to the day-care setting (Kagan and Neuman, 1998). In this study there were indications that, especially for the younger children, the replication of familiar nurturing experiences from their family and community lives supported children during horizontal transitions. Brooker's (2000) study provided indications that the opportunities offered by specific areas of the setting, including the home corner, to replicate favourite domestic activities, assisted children during vertical transitions and in particular helped children to start building friendships with children who shared the same interests. For Thyssen (2000, p.41) the replication of such actions were signs that children in the setting '*carry on the life that they see other children and adults live around them*'.

The evidence of this study suggests that the replication of domestic activities and nurturing relationships within the ECEC setting assist some children during horizontal transitions. An interesting finding is that children used ancillary staff members, including cleaners and cooks (or people serving the meals), to replicate such relationships in the setting, as well as using the qualified practitioners in this respect. The children were able to do this due to the distinctive aspect of the Greek setting's staffing structure, which provided opportunities for the ancillary staff to spend time with children throughout the day. There is strong evidence from data relating to Christos (2.4) and also indications from data relating to Aspa (2.4) and Litsa (1.5), none of whom was experiencing a vertical transition at the time, that the replication of familiar experiences from their family and community lives, in the life of the setting, supported children during horizontal transitions. My findings highlight Christos'

willingness to be cared for by ancillary staff members and practitioners during meal times, despite having gained autonomy in that area previously. Additionally, all three children took advantage of the opportunity offered by the environment to replicate the emotionally close and nurturing relationship of the familiar figure of 'Yiayia' (grandma) in setting relationships with Koula who was an ancillary staff member. Findings of a qualitative research project showed that Greek grandmothers consider traditionally prepared food important and they offered help to their employed daughters or daughters-in-law by preparing meals for their grandchildren or for the whole family (Svensson-Dianellou et al., 2010). This helps to explain why children identified with the person who both encouraged this kind of relationship and offered children help during meal times as the 'Yiayia' of the setting.

Aspa and Christos also seemed to wish to replicate the familiar experience of helping with household chores within the setting, even though there were no explicitly planned opportunities to replicate such activities. However, the variety of adults that children had the opportunity to interact with, and especially ancillary staff members who were mainly engaged with such activities, supported children to express their agency and showed the importance of such opportunities in replicating familiar actions and relationships within their setting.

It seems likely that the distinctive role of ancillary staff members, in terms of serving the food, cleaning, offering to assist children with their meals and choosing to spend their spare time with children, led to children identifying them as people who cared about them in addition to caring for them. This enabled the children to exercise their agency and form close relationships with these emotionally available adults regardless of their role and status in the setting. The data indicates that these emotionally close relationships with ancillary staff members assisted Christos, in particular, during horizontal transitions and Manolis during vertical ones.

The group of nursery employees known as ancillary workers have not been previously included in either Greek or international research. In the Greek context in particular, only one text by Sidiropoulou and Tsaoula (2008) has recognised that these members of staff came into direct contact with children

during routine and care times but it did not elaborate on the contact or the relationships that children formed with these members of staff. My research provides evidence that ancillary staff members have a much more active and substantial role in children's education and care than previously recognised. My findings show that, in the Greek context, these members of staff interact with children in a particularly sustained way during vertical transitions and, to a lesser extent, on a daily basis and throughout the year. However, it seems that even after they stop interacting with children in a sustained way, they remain important figures in children's lives. This probably happens because such staff members once helped children to overcome a stressful period of their lives in the setting, as happened with Manolis. Additionally, the daily interactions of ancillary staff with children seems to assist some children during daily horizontal transitions because their role of cleaning, serving and offering assistance with meals resembles the children's experiences of carers from their home and family lives.

My research extends the existing literature about the significant adults in a young child's nursery life by including amongst this important group the ancillary staff members; this study reveals their potentially significant role in children's daily experiences. Furthermore, it provides indications that the significance of the adult-child interaction for children is not affected by staff's educational level. My interpretation contrasts with international research findings which indicated that qualified staff were more effective in their interactions with children and that qualifications did matter, as identified by Sylva et al. (2004), Mathers et al. (2007) and Hadfield et al., (2012) for example. The findings do, however, support limited evidence, identified previously, both in Greece and internationally. For example, in Greece, Rentzou and Sakellariou (2010) found that staff qualifications did not affect the quality of adult-child interactions but they attributed their findings to the relatively limited variance that Greek early years practitioners had in terms of their qualifications. In an international context, Mathers et al. (2011) found stronger evidence regarding the impact of qualifications on the quality of provision for children aged thirty months to five years and little evidence regarding the impact of an early years professional on the quality of provision for children aged from birth to thirty months. However,

the researchers highlighted the limited number of professionals working with the under threes' age group.

5.4.3. Child-Adult Relationships after the First Transition Period

The previous discussion highlighted how transition periods are experienced by children and provided an account of how children exercise their agency to form relationships with any emotionally available adult to navigate these sometimes stressful periods of their nursery lives. This section provides evidence on how children use their agency to engage with adults throughout the day and after they have adjusted to the setting. In particular, I discuss the findings of this study alongside the relevant literature about children exercising agency to initiate and accept or reject warm, sensitive, affectionate and playful interactions with adults, or even to challenge adults' authority.

Ceglowski and Bacigalupa (2002) argued that adults' responsiveness to children was amongst the main characteristics measured by researchers in order to identify the quality of the adult-child interactions and any associations between these characteristics and developmental outcomes for children. International longitudinal studies, including the NICHD study (2001), identified that sensitive and responsive caregiver behaviour is associated with children's less negative and more positive play with other children. Furthermore, studies conducted in Greece to assess adult-child interaction by various researchers, including Petrogiannis and Melguish (1996) and Rentzou and Sakellariou (2010), highlighted Greek practitioners' positive interactions with children by rating criteria such as the warmth in caregivers' interaction with children, the nature and quality of their communication with children and caregivers' enthusiasm and involvement with children. However, because the overall rating of Greek settings' quality was consistently low and this finding was replicated across various studies, Petrogiannis (2002) suggested that the quality of caregiver's behaviours could act as a factor that is independent of other factors relating to a setting's quality.

A limitation of these previous studies is that they discussed adults' actions rather than explicitly recognising that children, even very young children, also

participate in this reciprocal interaction. This study highlights children's active role, identifying their use of various strategies to initiate warm and affectionate interactions with adults. The adults from both settings stepped in almost instantly, making themselves available to comfort and cuddle children in situations of distress. International research evidence in day-care indicated that young children identified staff as being there to help and comfort them (Langsted, 1994; Thyssen, 2000). Findings by Armstrong and Sugawaria (1989), which identified that three to five year old children liked receiving caregiving behaviours from their teachers, are confirmed by Gregoriadis (2008) who conducted his research in Greek settings with the same age group. In particular, Greek kindergarten children appear to value physically and emotionally close relationships with their teachers and they hold positive views about caring and supportive teachers who are emotionally close to them and provide them with care and attention (Gregoriadis, 2008).

In this study it appears that children under the age of three also value emotionally and physically close relationships with adults. Findings also support previous limited research with under threes, which highlighted that children were proactive in seeking from adults such interactions (Thyssen, 2000). Because this study's children varied in the extent to which they viewed adults as potential comforters, their actions to initiate such interactions also varied. Some of the younger children in the study were observed crying to indicate their desire to have physically close contacts with adults and exclusiveness. The act of crying initiated an instant response from adults; thus, it was probably perceived by the less verbal children as a successful strategy for meeting their needs instantly. The older children sought comfort when hurt by approaching, talking and staying physically close to practitioners. The decision to focus observations on communicative behaviours identified by previous researchers in their studies with babies and infants, mainly in laboratory contexts, including Bruner (1977) and Trevarthen (1977), assisted in identifying that not only babies and infants but also older children communicated their feelings and desires with the use of body language.

Previous research by Thyssen (2000) identified that children wanted to be comforted and be physically close to adults even when they were not in

distress. In this study, when not in distress, children sought physically and emotionally close interactions with adults. They used a variety of strategies since their confidence in seeking out adult engagement varied. This included going near or close to adults, talking to them, giving them toys and commenting on their own or adults' clothes and on their own actions or play-things. Some of the younger children were also observed crying with no apparent reason, or indicating that their diapers needed changing. This latter strategy suggests that some children may identify practitioners as adults who prioritised aspects of physical care over other requests for attention. Therefore, it seems likely that some children, rather than directly requesting attention, use a strategy that they view as more likely to be successful in this particular cultural context. Practitioners' emphasis on care rather than education is a consistent finding across Greek studies (Lambidi and Polemi-Todoulou, 1992; Petrogiannis, 1994; Rentzou, 2012; 2013). Although children's strategies to seek emotionally and physically close interactions with adults varied according to their confidence, nevertheless a pattern emerged amongst all case study children who appeared to use proximity to adults as a common strategy to signal their desire for interaction.

Previous research from the international and Greek research field identified that kindergarten age children did not like it when adults were uninterested or did not engage with their play activities (Armstrong and Sugawaria, 1989), when they did not participate in their free play (Gregoriadis, 2008) and when they did not talk to them nicely (Gregoriadis, 2008). Findings from this study provide evidence that younger children are also proactive in seeking out adults to chat and have playful interactions with. This finding validates earlier evidence, from laboratory contexts (Bruner 1983) and day-care contexts (Thyssen, 2000), which showed that even very young children had an active role in starting, extending or redirecting play with their caregivers. In this study children used verbal communication, body language and also employed playthings to assist them to achieve such interactions. Adults' adaptive capacity and their responsiveness to these invitations, considered crucial for sustaining and extending communication (Trevvarthen, 1977; Thyssen, 2000), were more positive in the indoor rather than outdoor environment. Also, there was more

direct interaction between adults and individual children during routine times and teacher-led activities rather than during free play and child-initiated activities. These findings support previous research by Kontos (1999), with older age groups, who identified that practitioners adopted different roles and modified their interactions with children depending on whether the activity was adult-led or if it was free play time.

Greek practitioners' predominantly supervisory style has been identified in previous Greek studies (Petrogiannis, 1994; Petroagiannis and Melguish, 1996; Mantziou, 2001) and criticized for affecting the quality of the adult-child interaction (Rentzou and Sakellariou, 2010). In this study it was also observed that practitioners were adopting a supervisory style both indoors and outdoors by remaining physically remote from children during free play or child initiated activities. Other studies (Legendre and Munchenbach, 2011) found that, when adults were physically remote from children (more than two meters away), children aged eighteen to forty months spent more time interacting with their peers, something that seemed to be the case in this study as well. In relation to child-adult relationships, the findings indicate that the adults' supervisory style was not an obstacle for confident children like Stathoula (2.10) or Filio (2.4). This is because both girls were generally keen to interact with adults and would approach the practitioners and actively seek to engage them in either playful or verbal interaction. However, this particular adult style was probably inhibiting for less confident children with limited verbal skills like Christos (2.4).

Whilst a limitation in some respects, the physically remote style of adults in this study encouraged both younger and older children to exercise agency and decide whether to accept or reject adult-initiated verbal, playful and emotionally or physically close interactions. Children seemed to perceive such interactions as being on offer, whilst being aware that they had the power to accept or reject them. The adults usually invited children to go near them instead of actually approaching the children themselves, something which empowered even the younger children, including Litsa (1.5), to choose whether to accept or reject these invitations, which they could do by approaching or ignoring adults' invitations respectively. Thus, adults' positioning in space seemed to reinforce children's autonomous decisions.

Another finding, relating to adult style, observed in both settings, concerns how this style affected children's participation in group activities. In particular, by prompting but not insisting on all children's participation in group activities, adults seemed to assist children, building their confidence by empowering them to accept or reject participation to such activities. This finding contrasts findings with same age children from the Greek context where Bitou (2010) found that practitioners insisted on all children's participation in group activities. Nonetheless, the findings of this study support the important idea of Dunphy and Farrell (2011), that the opportunity to choose activities provided a context in which children could exercise their autonomy, and it extends this finding to the under the three age group.

Some children of this study were also observed using strategies such as: ignoring, avoiding, and verbally resisting adult rules and challenging adult authority. These actions were mainly reported in relation to older groups of children by Corsaro (2011). The decision to include observations of facial expressions, gestures and body language in general enriched the data, providing evidence of children's additional use of body language to indicate resistance to adult authority. Furthermore, the case study children were additionally found to use the same strategies of ignoring, avoiding, and verbally resisting adult rules for evading individual adult-child interaction and group activities.

In this study it was also identified that adults were not only recognised by children as being there to comfort them or as people they could have playful or emotionally and physically close interactions with. Langsted (1994) suggested that children seemed to recognise adults also as people with power who would assist them in relation to peer conflicts. However, conflict incidents were limited in both settings that participated to this study. This could be partly attributed to adults' supervisory style, which seemed to benefit children because it enabled them to solve peer conflicts independently, as was also found by Singer (2002). It could also be a result of practitioners' tendency to intervene in order to prevent or solve conflicts and discourage actions that could cause physical harm and mostly this intervention took place without children appealing for their help. Such an approach by practitioners was observed in various contexts

internationally, including by Göncü and Cannella (1996), De Haan and Singer (2003) and Roseth et al. (2008).

However, less powerful children, such as Yiannis (2.11) in this study, seemed to expect adults' help in entering the play of a group or single child. This finding is in accord with the findings by Corsaro (2011) regarding older age groups. Nonetheless, this finding shows that even younger children have an awareness of adults' relative power over them and also that they recognize adults' ability to enforce ways of behaving within the peer group. For these case study children, enforcement concerned assisting them to enter their peers' play, resolving disputes over toys in their favour and protecting them from physical aggression. All these also provide indications of children's recognition of limits on their agency.

5.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this section highlighted children's active role in the formation of relationships with various adults, including practitioners and ancillary staff members, within their nursery settings, supporting the ideas of Dahlberg et al. (1999). Evidence regarding under threes' agency are limited, both in Greece and internationally. In particular, this chapter started by presenting findings regarding how some children experienced vertical transitions, as defined by Kagan and Neuman (1998). It presented children's active role in the formation of close emotional relationships with significant adults, which seems to have assisted them during this stressful period of nursery life. The section then moved on to explain how children seek to replicate familiar domestic and nurturing experiences from their home and community lives in order to assist them with their daily transition from home to nursery. The significant contribution of the ancillary staff members was highlighted extending the existing literature about the significant adults in children's nursery lives. Finally, it presented children's perspectives on adults' roles within their settings. In particular, the thesis provides evidence that children do not identify adults only as people who have power but also as peacemakers and as people with whom they can have playful and emotionally and physically close relationships. The study identified that for young children these emotionally close interactions seemed to be

important, not only when they were in distress but throughout the day. These findings provide evidence about young children's awareness of their own and adult roles within the setting and extend the limited literature in this area with this age group. Throughout the chapter there were examples that highlighted children exercising agency by using various strategies to actively contribute to the formation of the child-adult relationships. All these provide evidence of the reciprocity of the child-adult relationships suggesting that research should focus on both parties to get a full understanding of these relationships.

Chapter 6. Perspectives on Peer Relationships

Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a holistic account of peer relationships within the nursery classes and draws on children's experiences regarding their interactions with other children. It also includes parents' and practitioners' interpretations of these relationships and discussion of the environmental affordances which support the formation of peer relationships. Similarities and differences across the case study children's experiences, in relation to their peers, are discussed throughout the chapter, to show how children with varying dispositions and styles of engagement with other children were supported by the nurseries. In particular, this chapter presents children's strategies to engage in reciprocal interaction with children from their group and with children from other groups. Then I move on to discuss the differences I identified in various kinds of peer relationships, including children having activity playmates, showing an interest in particular children and developing early 'friendships'. The findings chapter ends by presenting children's desire to be part of a group identity. In the concluding section of the chapter, I discuss how my findings relate to earlier findings on peer relationships, mainly from the international research field.

6.1. Taking an Interest in Other Children

Children used a variety of strategies to show their interest in other children including observation, close proximity, and physical contact. This section elaborates on such actions by presenting data that shows children's interest in other children from their group (familiar children) and in children from other groups (less familiar children).

6.1.1. Taking an Interest in Children of their Group (familiar children)

Several case study children seemed interested in other children in their group which was shown, for example, in looking, following, and touching other children. Children also moved close or next to other children during periods of

free play and, at times, they attempted to join in with a group of children. Extracts of observations below exemplify the contexts within which children developed their interest in other children. In the first episode (See Observation No 26) Georgios' actions are presented as indicating his interest for other children of his group.

Georgios often chose to spend time watching other children close by, seemingly interested in their play. He also responded positively to physical contact initiated by other children, such as hugs and kisses, and sometimes he chose to initiate physical contact. Even though Georgios' limited language skills were a barrier in initiating or sustaining verbal communication with other children, there were occasions when he seemed to intentionally use body language to communicate that he wanted to participate in other children's play.

Observation No:26

Fieldnotes: Georgios (1.4)

Area of Provision: Green Classroom

Other Children: Jen (2.2), Filio (2.4), Aspa (2.4), Nicole (1.4)

Other Adults: Fofo

Extract from a 20min observation

There are nine children in the classroom. Georgios walks up and down at the carpet area and he stands next to the space between two beds looking towards the other children in the class before he goes to sit at a baby chair.

Fofo invites all children on the carpet area for a dancing activity and Georgios approaches them by going into the space between the two beds again, opposite the carpet area. Georgios moves closer to the children who are dancing on the carpet by doing circles around himself and then around the carpet. He stands and looks at them as they dance holding hands and he starts moving his body to the rhythm of the music, spinning around, and jumping to the right and to the left. After going back and forth between the changing area, where I am sat, and the children at the carpet area, Georgios takes Jen's hand and they dance.

Georgios tries to dance with Filio but Aspa pushes him away saying 'Oh, come on Georgios!' Georgios retreats towards the changing area again. The music stops, Fofo changes the CD and Georgios goes near the practitioner and among the other children who are already gathered around her. The music starts again and everyone is dancing in a circle apart from Nicole. Georgios once again is dancing away from the group for a while.

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 26 Continued)

Georgios stops dancing and he decides to walk and then run around the classroom. Georgios' attention is attracted by children's loud laughter and he instantly decides to join in and dance with them for a while before he leaves again.

Observations of Georgios show that two of the things he most enjoyed in the setting were singing and dancing, even when there was no music on. The structure of the programme gave Georgios the opportunity to experience these since dancing and singing were two of the most popular activities initiated both by children and by practitioners. In the observational extract above, Georgios developed an interest in both the activity and in other children. The nursery's programme supported his choice to watch from a distance since practitioners prompted but did not insist that all the children participate. This gave him the opportunity for a self-directed experience of watching and trying out ways to engage with other children. This seemed to be important for Georgios because the way he positioned himself in space showed that he was uncertain about whether he wanted to join the group or of how to do that. It seemed that Georgios needed time to overcome his uncertainty and he achieved that by keeping a physical distance from the group but without losing eye contact with group members. Georgios eventually joined in when he felt ready and confident enough. All of these strategies enabled Georgios to develop his interest in other children at his own pace and through short bursts of engagement by observing, communicating using mainly body language, and engaging with other children, individually and as a group.

Georgios seemed to enjoy having others around him and it seemed that he tried out possible ways of joining the children who were dancing on the carpet area by interacting briefly with a familiar child, Jen, and by being part of the group and then leaving. Jen (2.2) had been observed being affectionate to him on several occasions previously by kissing and hugging him. Thus, on that occasion, she probably provided him with the reassurance that he would be accepted into the group since she was someone who 'liked' him. After acceptance was established Georgios could attempt to dance with someone

else until Aspa pushed him away and he decided to leave. However, as I watched, Georgios seemed to be more confident and certain about his decisions. For example, he went next to Fofo when she changed the CD and stood among the other children around her, rather than observing them from a distance, as he did at the beginning of the observation. Also, when children's laughter attracted his attention, he instantly decided to join the group.

In general, Georgios' interactions with other children were short, as were most of the younger children's interactions. However, he usually responded positively to other children's invitations to play. In one of my observations, for example, Jen approached Georgios and placed the toy-phone on his ear. Georgios kept it there for a while and then gave it back to her. Georgios was not only interacting with children for short periods of time but also his engagement with toys was short-lived. However, this is discussed in section 7.1.1. (p. 283).

Georgios' mum's interpretation of his experiences of the nursery were that he liked '*dancing with the other children*' and once again she underlined that he did not like being forced to do things. Efi, his mum, expected that his interactions with other children would be limited but it transpired that this was not the case, as she explained:

I was expecting him to be more isolated, being alone. But my husband who brings him in the morning tells me that there are two or three girls who, when they see him, say 'Georgios!' and go on to kiss him.

Fofo, his practitioner, could not identify if Georgios had any preference for specific children. However, she described Georgios as '*sociable*' but this may have been because he had short interactions with his peers throughout the day.

6.1.2. Showing an Interest in Children from other Groups (less familiar children)

Georgios' approach to other children was characteristic of the younger children; for example, the younger children were inclined to move close to or follow children from their group, as Nicole does by following Georgios (See Appendix 7, Figure 1), and they would just look at children from other groups. The oldest

children, however, would, more often, follow children from other groups to indicate their interest in them. In addition, the oldest children's actions revealed their willingness to join in less familiar children's activities but they hesitated to do so. The comparison of children's actions with children from their own group and children from other groups would not have been possible if the nurseries did not provide them with the opportunity to interact with children from other classes.

The two observational extracts below contrast the ways in which Yiannis (2.11), one of the oldest of the case study children, observed familiar children (See Observation No 27, Episode 1) and how he took an interest in less familiar children (See Observation No 27, Episode 2).

Observation No: 27

Fieldnotes: Yiannis (2.11)

Area of Provision: **Episode 1:** Blue Classroom / **Episode 2:** Outdoors

Other Children: Paul (3years old), Evan (2.11) / John (3years old), group of children aged 3 to 4 years old.

Other Adults: Antigoni (Blue Class's Practitioner), Linda (ancillary staff member) / Practitioner of the 3 to 4 years old group.

Extracts from two 20min observations

Episode 1:

Children are in the Blue Classroom and Yiannis studies the children who are sat at the table. Then he looks at two children and their mums who just entered the class and then at Antigoni who talks to Paul. He looks at Linda, at the other children in the class, and finally at Evan who talks with his mum.

Episode 2:

It is 10 am and the children are outdoors sharing the space with the three to four years old group. Yiannis looks at the children of the older group who talk to each other and then he sits down and looks at John (from our group) who is riding an elephant see-saw. Yiannis smiles at a girl from the other group as she passes by in front of him, singing. John leaves his see-saw and Yiannis gets on it and rides it around the slide. His attention is attracted by three older children who chat and when they start walking Yiannis follows them for a while and then he sits down on a different see-saw which is closer to them. [...] Yiannis moves his see-saw to the other side of the yard as he observes two older boys who chat. It is 10:10 am and Yiannis is still looking towards the direction of the two boys until his attention is attracted by some other children of the three to four years old group who are gathered around their practitioner who chats with them.

Even though Yiannis is older than Georgios (1.4) he seemed to also prefer showing his interest in other children by first observing them from a distance and then, especially in the second episode, by using close proximity and facial expressions to identify with them. These actions provide evidence that Yiannis was trying to be sociable and used different strategies to indicate his interest in the older children that he had the opportunity to interact with when they were sharing the same space. During the second episode, Yiannis seemed to be interested mostly in the older children, rather than the children from his group. Similarly to Yiannis, observations of Aspa, demonstrate that she mostly took an interest in what the children from other groups were doing, rather than the actions of the children of her group. The following observational extract (See Observation No 28) is the only one which showed Aspa taking an interest in the children of another group a step further by approaching the children, rather than by just looking at them, as she usually did. It might be noteworthy that this is the penultimate observation of Aspa.

Observation No:28**Fieldnotes:** Aspa**Area of Provision:** Classroom of 3 to 4 year old group**Other Children:** Jen, Louise, Filio, Christos (Green Class Children), Jason, Carmen (Children from the 3 to 4 year old group).**Other Adults:** Practitioner of the 3 to 4 year old group, Nadia (Green Class Practitioner)**Extract from a 20min observation**

Children are in the classroom of the three to four years old group and Aspa occasionally looks around the room at the other children of her group including Jen, Louise who approaches and 'feeds' her with a plastic spoon, Filio who sits at the table 'reading' a book, and Georgios who is sat with the other class's practitioner, who is singing rhymes to him. Then Aspa notices some of the older children who are playing in the hairdresser space of their class. She walks towards them, followed by Filio, and stands there looking at them playing while she is mouthing a plastic spoon.

The practitioner talks to an older boy and this attracts Aspa's attention until she starts looking at another boy from the older group. Louise once again approaches Aspa who then decides to follow Louise across the room. Aspa stops and stares at Louise from a distance and then goes near her. Aspa decides to move next to Jen looking at the same time across the room at Jason and Carmen who are trying to screw the plastic bolts of a toy onto it.

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 28 Continued)

[...] Aspa looks again at the children who are in the hairdresser space and she goes near them, mouthing her spoon until her attention is attracted by Christos (2.4) and an older boy who teases him. The observation ends as Nadia enters the room, informing us that we are going back to our class.

Aspa took an interest in other children by looking both at children from our group and children from the older group. She was confident enough to follow Louise, who indicated that she wanted to interact with her by approaching her twice. However, Aspa only observed the children from the older group or moved close to them; she did not engage further with them. Even though Aspa looked at the children from her group as well, for example Filio, Georgios and Jen, it seemed that the children from the other group were the ones who attracted her attention the most. Aspa looked at them in a more sustained way and twice approached the children who were playing in the hairdresser space, even though she did other things in-between. The fact that the older children did not indicate that they wanted to interact with her, as Louise did, but Aspa still returned to them perhaps reinforces the interpretation that she wanted to be included in their play but she did not have a strategy that would assist her to achieve her aim.

6.1.3. Showing a Generalised Interest in other Children

The previous section demonstrated how younger and older children expressed a visual interest in children from other groups in a more sustained way than they did with children from their group. This section will look at how Litsa, (1.5) from the Green Class, showed a generalised interest in others, without preference as to familiarity, gender, age, or other characteristics of the children. Observation No 29 presents one of these episodes where Litsa took an interest both in children from her group and in children from other groups.

Observation No:29**Fieldnotes:** Litsa (1.5)**Area of Provision:** Green Classroom**Other Children:** Jen [2.4], Nicole [1.4] (Green Class Children), Marta, Nina, Jono, Julia, Colin, Keith (Children of the 4 to 5 years old group)**Other Adults:** 4 practitioners**Extract from a 20min observation**

It is 8.10 am and children are in the Green Classroom with the children of the four to five years old group. When the observation starts six children and four practitioners are present but more children keep coming. Five children are sitting on the carpet in front of the toy box and Litsa picks up a doll and a spoon off the box and sits next to Jen. She tries to attract the attention of Marta, Nina, and Jono by looking and smiling at them [...]

Litsa picks up a phone and pretending she chats on the phone she says:

Litsa: Yes?

Litsa then smiles at Jono. Marta and Nina are leaving and Litsa moves her body in front of Jen babbling on the phone and laughing out loud as she looks at Jono who moves his car towards Julia saying:

Jono: Police is coming!

Jen takes her car and moves next to Jono with Litsa joining them. Litsa is watching both children leaving and then comes back to stand beside Jen again.

Litsa nods her head looking at Jen and says:

Litsa: Come!

Jen ignores her and Litsa decides once again to join Jen and Jono, who keep playing with cars. Marta and Nina attract her attention for a while until Jen starts talking to Litsa for a few seconds and then Litsa picks up the phone again. She pretends she is chatting on the phone as she moves closer to Marta and Nina and in front of Jono, who are all seated on the floor. Litsa attempts to pick up one of the toys the girls are playing with but Marta asserts:

Marta: Oh, come on!

Litsa lays the toy down and distances herself from them whilst she is seated on the floor. She then stands up and walks towards the table where five children are sitting, including Jono who has now transferred his cars there, and plays with Colin. Colin moves his car in front of Litsa and she smiles at the children who are sat across the table. She glances at Marta and Nina, who are still playing at the carpet, and then at Jen who is now standing next to Litsa.

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 29 Continued)

Litsa stands in front of Nicole and starts following her, first in the space between two of the beds and then, as she moves to stand in front of the class's mirror. Nicole leaves from there too and Litsa takes her baby-doll and sits down on the floor. Litsa instantly stands up and moves in front of Keith who plays with a phone toy. However, Keith leaves and Litsa picks up a ball from the floor before she walks towards the table and sits down at a chair. She looks at two older boys who just entered the room and she smiles at them as they go to join the other children who are sat at the table.

Litsa's mum, Athina, her practitioner, and I all identified that Litsa was interested in interacting with the oldest children. During the interview Athina said that Litsa could play with older children provided they did not see her as a baby and she continued by underlining that Litsa '*Plays better with older children who don't compel her [do something]*'. Athina also considered that nursery offered Litsa the opportunity to interact '*with a range of children*' of different ages.

Nadia, her practitioner, had observed that Litsa did not approach younger children and her interpretation was that Litsa was interested in older children because '*they show her more things than a younger child could show her*'. Nadia explained:

Litsa participates mostly in what the older children are doing, whereas she's not even approaching Suzan [1 year old], she's not approaching any of the youngest ones. [...] For example she was looking at Suzan who was crying; she was looking at her bewildered. Or she was observing Nicole [1.4] who had gone near the radiator crying because Ryan had annoyed her. Then she continued playing with the other children, being naughty, and doing whatever they were doing altogether. I think she gains things from being with the oldest children.

Both from the observational extract (See Observation No 29) where Litsa is following Nicole, but also from the practitioner's narration, it seemed that Litsa was interested in younger children too. The fact that her interest was not as 'evident' with the younger age group as it was for the older children probably gave the practitioner the impression that Litsa was not so much interested in

the younger children. However, data analysis showed that this was not the case. It seemed that Litsa showed a generalised interest in others by interacting with children from her group and children from other groups regardless of their age and gender. Litsa showed her interest by looking and smiling at other children but also by following and moving close or next to them in an attempt to show her interest in them and possibly to indirectly communicate that she wanted to be included in their play.

6.1.4. Engaging with Familiar and less Familiar Children

When considering all of the children's actions discussed so far, which demonstrated how children took an interest in others, by approaching and following other children, it seemed that these actions showed children's eagerness to engage in play with other children but that they hesitated to do so. For example Georgios hesitated to join in the play of children of his group (See Observation No 26) and the other children were mostly hesitant to join in the play of children from other groups. One factor in this seemed to be that the other children did not recognise the case study children's interest or that they may have shown reluctance to include them in order to protect their play. Even though the study's children were trying to show their interest by approaching and/or following other children, it seemed that they had not yet devised alternative strategies to use in response to the other children failing to realise their intentions to engage in play with them.

The discussion in this section focuses on Dimitris (2.5) and Stathoula (2.10), two of the case study children of the Blue class, who were not only showing a generalised interest in other children but were taking this interest a step further by engaging either in conversations or in play with these children.

The first case to be presented, that of Dimitris, is used as a link between this and the previous section to demonstrate how Dimitris used the same actions of looking and following children from his group and children from other groups to show his interest in other children. However, Dimitris additionally took these actions a step further by engaging either in play or communicating verbally with other children. In the extract below, we see Dimitris joining in the play of a child

from his group and the opportunity given to him to engage in verbal interaction with a girl from another group.

Observation No:30

Fieldnotes: Dimitris (2.5)

Area of Provision: Outdoors space of the 4 to 5 years old group

Other Children: Children of the 4 to 5 years old group, Steve (3years old from the Blue Class)

Other Adults:

Extract from a 20min observation

We are at the nursery's biggest outdoors space that the 4 to 5 years old children's group usually uses. Approximately ten of the older children sing nursery rhymes by standing in front of the slide and Dimitris who is sat nearby claps his hands. He looks at two older boys who are sat down and when they stand up and start walking Dimitris follows them for a few metres. When he reaches the outdoor play house he gets inside and when he comes out of it he starts following Steve heading towards the other side of the yard. Steve decides to run up and down the yard and after a short period of hesitation Dimitris joins him. They both go and hide behind some flowers at the corner of the yard [...] An older girl approaches them and Dimitris starts talking to her. The girl sits down on the stone bench in front of the flowers chatting with Dimitris for a while before she decides to leave.

From the observational extract it seems that Dimitris found it was easier to engage in play with children of his group (Steve) but he hesitated to initiate interaction with children of other groups. However, Dimitris was trying to make his interest about the older children apparent by clapping his hands when they were singing. He also followed two of the older children to show his interest in them but his 'following' strategy proved more successful with a child from his group, Steve. Probably Dimitris' familiarity with Steve made him feel more confident that Steve would allow him enter into his play. When, however, an older girl approached him, Dimitris took the opportunity to chat back to her. Dimitris' actions showed that he was clearly interested in interacting both with children of his group as well as with children of other groups.

Nikos, his father, said that Dimitris '*doesn't like playing alone, he always wants company*' and his practitioner Katerina highlighted that an ordinary day for Dimitris at nursery would include '*playing with cars, with the other children, with Steve and John and that's it! He wouldn't engage with something special*'. Thus,

it seemed that, for Dimitris, the most important affordances of his setting were the opportunities the nursery offered for interaction with children from various age groups.

Another child from the Blue Class, Stathoula (2.10), seemed more determined than Dimitris to take actions such as approaching and initiating interaction with children whom she was interested in. Stathoula's case is presented below.

Observation No:31

Fieldnotes: Stathoula (2.10)

Area of Provision: Outdoors

Other Children: Cheryl, Tom, Christine (Children of the 3 to 4 year old group), Nicky (2.9), Manolis (2.10), [Blue Class Children]

Other Adults: --

Extract from a 20min observation

The children are outdoors with ten more children from the 3 to 4 years old group.

Stathoula talks to Cheryl and she looks at some boys, from both classrooms, who play together before she returns to her conversation with Cheryl. They both go and sit under the slide chatting but Stathoula stands up, runs towards Tom but she instantly decides to return back to the slide. Once again she returns to run alongside with Tom before she goes and climbs on the slide. There she starts chatting with Nicky who is sitting opposite her on top of the other slide. As Cheryl approaches her, Stathoula prompts her to use Nicky's slide and after she has done it Stathoula says to her in an excited tone:

Stathoula: We are too high!

Stathoula then looks at the children from her class who have gathered around the two slides. She steps down and goes to Cheryl's slide which is now used by Tom. She looks at him and smiles while Tom goes to play on a see-saw with another boy from his class. Stathoula observes them and decides to follow them around the yard until they are sat down on a different see-saw. She then approaches Manolis who chats with Christine near the slides. Alexander joins them too and says something, inaudible to me, that makes them laugh. Stathoula chats with Christine and Alexander leaves. She approaches a few girls from the other classroom. [...] The girls have taken off their rubber bands and Stathoula takes hers off as well and offers it to the girls.

In the above observational extract, we see that for Stathoula it is not enough to just look or follow the children she is interested in, as she used different ways to engage in play with them. For example, she talked to Cheryl and tried to include her in her play by inviting her to get onto the slide. Stathoula also approached Tom and started to run alongside him to show her interest in him; finally she offered her rubber band to the group of girls which might demonstrate her willingness to do whatever is necessary in order to be accepted by their group. Stathoula also showed an interest in what the other children of her group were engaged with and she looked at them at times but only chose to approach Manolis with whom she has a special relationship which is discussed in section 6.2.4.

Katerina, her practitioner, identified Manolis as Stathoula's only friend. She refrained from providing an interpretation on why Stathoula had taken photographs of other children of her class by stating '*this is something that only Stathoula knows*'. From the observational data analysis however, it transpired that even though Stathoula saw Manolis as a 'special friend' she was also interested in other children, the difference being that her interactions with them were not as persistent and repetitive as with Manolis.

Voula, her mum, mentioned that Stathoula talked at home about some of her class's children and that she named the children whose photographs were included in her photo album, despite the fact that most of the children's faces were blurred. Unfortunately, I did not ask the adults, during the interviews, if the children were talking about children from other classes both at home and in the nursery. Also, I did not give children the opportunity to take photographs when other groups of children were in the same space, to avoid creating conflicts over the cameras. If I had done these, it might have provided me with additional evidence about children's interest in children from other groups.

6.2. Developing Friendships

The previous section discussed children's strategies to indicate their interest in other children. This section discusses how children used objects as an intermediary, to facilitate their approach to other children and to show their

friendly feelings for them. Then the discussion moves on to demonstrate how some children tried to be friends with everyone and how some of them had specific playmates. The section continues with examples of children who had formed special relationships with other children and it concludes with examples which highlight children's desire to be part of a group identity.

6.2.1. Being Friendly

In this section, observational extracts are used from across the case study children to show how those children employed objects to attract other children's attention, to approach them, and/or to include them in their play and show friendly feelings towards them. Children were observed offering, receiving, sharing, or exchanging objects, asking their peers for assistance with tasks, and also using food in different ways during their pretend play. Other children's availability or willingness to engage in reciprocal interaction was demonstrated by the way they responded to such invitations to play.

Giving and Accepting Toys and Objects

Giving objects was one of the main strategies used by children to show their friendly feelings and to approach other children. When other children accepted an object it seemed to be a confirmation they wanted to engage in peer play. An indicative example provided so far was Stathoula's offer of her rubber band to a group of older girls in what seemed to be an attempt to be accepted in their group (See Observation No 31). It is notable that even the youngest children, from the Green Class, who had a limited number of toys available for play, were observed sharing their toys or offering them to other children. Below two episodes are presented where Green Class children offered toys to other children to attract their attention and include them in their play, or to establish communication with them.

Observation No:32

Fieldnotes: Episode 1: Litsa (1.6) / **Episode 2:** Filio (2.4)

Area of Provision: Green Classroom

Other Children: Aspa (2.4), Jen (2.2), Christos (2.4)

Other Adults: -

Extracts from 10min observations.

Episode 1:

Litsa takes toys one at a time from the toy box and places them in Aspa's hand.

Episode 2:

Jen gives a car to Filio and at the same time invites Filio to follow her, saying:

Jen: Come!

Filio ignores her and continues playing with her own toys. Filio glances around the class and waves at Christos with one of the toys that she is holding. Christos says to her:

Christos: Mine!

Filio places the toy on the classroom table, answering him:

Filio: Here!

From these two observational extracts, we see children using objects to assist them in their interactions with other children. Litsa managed to sustain the interaction by handing over toys one by one, whilst Jen's repeated efforts, first giving a toy and then verbally inviting Filio to play, was ignored. However Filio seemed persistent in her attempts to attract other children to play with her through the use of objects. Her persistence was rewarded in Christos' case where not only did she successfully attract his attention but she even managed to set her own rules. By saying '*Here*', Filio seemed to indicate that if Christos wanted to make the toy his, he would have to approach the table.

In the following observation, Kostas' (2.9) strategy of giving Henry a toy led to a sequence of transferring toys and offering them to him and Evan (both aged 2.6) and engaging in verbal interaction with these boys.

Observation No:33**Fieldnotes:** Kostas (2.9)**Area of Provision:** Orange Classroom**Other Children:** Henry (2.6), Evan (2.6)**Other Adults:****Extract from a 20min observation**

It is early afternoon and all children and their practitioners are in the setting's Orange Classroom. Kostas picks up a toy plate from the floor and, as he approaches Henry and hands it to him, he says:

Kostas: Here's the plate.

Evan asserts: I want one too!

Kostas goes to one corner of the room where there are toys on the floor, he picks up a truck's carrier and takes it to Evan. Once again Kostas goes to the grocery shop area and brings Evan the lid of a feta cheese tin. Then he returns to walk towards the bookcase where there are some small construction bricks. He picks up a construction brick and gives it to Henry along with a toy fish. Kostas and Evan stand in front of Henry, who is seated down on the floor by the mattress, and they all chat. Kostas leaves again only to pick up some more toys which he offers to Evan when he returns.

The programme structure of the two settings, where children could choose their own activities and playmates throughout the day, provided many opportunities for peer interaction as the above observational extracts indicate. This freedom, arising from the very lightly structured programme, also offered multiple opportunities for children to try out different strategies to interact with their peers or to invite them to join their play.

Exchanging Objects

Alongside the offering of objects, children also used the strategy of exchanging objects to demonstrate their willingness to interact with their peers. Children from both classes were observed exchanging toys and objects with each other as demonstrated in the following observational extracts featuring Aspa (2.4) from the Green Class and Dimitris (2.5) from the Blue Class (See Observations No 34 and No 35 respectively).

Observation No:34**Fieldnotes:** Aspa (2.4)**Area of Provision:** Green Classroom**Other Children:** Jen (2.2)**Other Adults:****Extract from a 20min observation**

Aspa takes the plastic toy elephant that Jen is dragging and Jen asks for Aspa's laptop. Aspa gives it to her and as she extends her hand towards Jen she says:

Aspa: Let's go!

On this occasion, the children's exchange of toys provided an indication that they were both interested in engaging in reciprocal interaction. This interpretation is reinforced as the observation continued and both children could be seen moving together in space, even though this did not last for long. Aspa, as one of the children who was observed trying to interact with other children more frequently than others, seemed to be more confident in trying out ways to prolong this interaction. Another child who was observed trying to interact with other children, both verbally and by exchanging toys, was Dimitris (2.5) from the Blue Class. One of Dimitris' attempts at interaction is presented below.

Observation No:35**Fieldnotes:** Dimitris (2.5)**Area of Provision:** Blue Classroom**Other Children:** Craig (3.1), Paul (3), Brian (2.6)**Other Adults:** E.K**Extract from a 20min observation**

Dimitris is playing with the puzzle that Craig gave him while Craig is standing next to him.

Dimitris picks up a piece of the puzzle and gives it to Craig, saying in a complaining tone:

Dimitris: I can't put it!

Craig gives the piece to me and I place it in the puzzle. Dimitris sings a nursery rhyme as he tries to place some more pieces by shifting them around. When he has finished with the puzzle he approaches Paul and exchanges puzzles with him. [...]

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 35 Continued)

When Dimitris has finished with Paul's puzzle as well he says:

Dimitris: I did it! Who should I swap with?

Dimitris looks across the table and says:

Dimitris: Him!

He takes his puzzle and, by moving around the table, approaches Brian.

Dimitris hands out the puzzle to Brian and says:

Dimitris: Will you take this?

In both of these extracts, alongside verbal invitations, Aspa and Dimitris used the strategy of exchanging objects and toys in order to interact with their peers. Once again the environment seemed to encourage children to use different strategies. For example, Aspa's actions occurred during free play where children could choose their activity and playmates. In the Blue Class the activity of playing with puzzles was adult-initiated; however, as demonstrated in the observation, children could freely move around the tables and exchange their completed puzzles with someone who had also finished theirs. Also, they could simply stand and observe how their peers were getting on with their puzzles. All these factors indicate that the classroom environment allowed children freedom to choose who they would interact with as well as the time to try out different strategies to achieve peer interaction without adult intervention.

Sharing Toys and Objects

This section moves from exchanging toys to a focus on sharing toys as a part of the findings relating to children's use of objects to facilitate interaction among themselves and their peers. Dimitris (2.5) and Aspa (2.4) were two case study children who were rarely observed playing alone. However, they were not the only children who, even during primarily solitary activities, such as 'reading' a book or playing with puzzles, would choose to be next to other children and exchange or share their toys with their peers. For example, in the following photograph (See Figure 6.1), which was taken during a period of free play,

Dimitris was 'reading' a book with Stathoula (2.10) and, at that particular time, almost all the Blue Class children chose to 'read' books or sit alongside their peers who were 'reading' books.



Figure 6.1: *EK's photograph of Dimitris (2.5) and Stathoula (2.10) 'reading' a book*

The younger children in Green Class also seemed to prefer 'reading' books in the company of peers instead of doing it alone (See Appendix 8, Figure 30). In the observational extract below Christos did not seem to mind when Litsa took one of his books and he seemed happy to engage in verbal interaction with Aspa when she indicated she wanted to make 'reading a book' a shared activity.

Observation No:36

Fieldnotes: Christos (2:4)

Area of Provision: Green Classroom

Other Children: Litsa (1.6), Aspa (2.4)

Other Adults:

Extract from a 20min observation

Five children are sat at the table 'reading' books.

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 36 Continued)

Christos has two books and Litsa takes one away from him without creating a dispute. A few minutes after Christos leaves the table, for changing his diaper, he returns to sit next to Aspa who is the only one left at the table reading books. Aspa says to him:

Aspa: Christos, look!

Aspa starts babbling to him. Then she starts tapping Christos's hand saying 'Next' every time she wants him to turn the book's page and Christos follows her instruction. At one point Christos stops and pointing at the page he says to her:

Christos: Look!

Aspa, in a tone of surprise, replies:

Aspa: Ohhhh!

Aspa takes a turn in turning over the book's pages. Christos points at the page that Aspa is looking at saying:

Christos: This!

Aspa: No!

Aspa forcibly closes the book. Christos picks up a car that is next to him but when Aspa takes it from his hand, he turns his attention back to the book. He then takes his own book and leaves the table but within seconds he returns to sit next to Aspa. Aspa leaves the table and Christos is sat there alone looking at his own book.

Christos indicated his willingness to interact with Aspa by moving next to her, something that was picked up by Aspa who shared her book with him, prompting him to 'Look' at it. Both children scaffolded on each other's actions but, when Christos seemed to attempt to take the lead from her, Aspa closed the book. However, her intention did not seem to be to end the interaction in a final way. When Christos turned his attention to the car, she took it from him and this resulted in him turning his attention back to the book. On the other hand, Christos also seemed unwilling to end the interaction and, even though he took the book and left the table, he instantly decided to return to be close to Aspa. However, he was eventually left alone when Aspa decided to leave.

Asking for Assistance with Tasks

From the two observational extracts above it seems that sharing a toy or an object is a strategy used by children to mediate interactions with peers. It also seems that children try out different strategies to tempt other children to take part in such interactions. As shown in the following observational extracts, including Manolis and Yiannis (both aged 2.11), children used additional strategies, for example offering their toys, as discussed earlier, and asking other children for assistance with tasks.

Observation No:37

Fieldnotes: Manolis (2.11)

Area of Provision: Classroom of the 3 to 4 year old group

Other Children: Abigail (from the 3 to 4 year old group)

Other Adults:

Extract from a 20min observation

Nine children are sat around the table, including children from the three to four year old age group, playing with playdough. Abigail stands in front of Manolis and they chat. Abigail takes Manolis' playdough in her hands and starts shaping it.

Manolis: I want a really long one.

Abigail: I can't do it.

Manolis: I can!

Abigail passes him the playdough and Manolis starts making a snake.

As with Manolis, Yiannis in the Observation No 38 below tried to engage in dialogue with Gregory (2.10) and when Gregory did not respond he tried a different strategy, giving him his toy.

Observation No:38

Fieldnotes: Yiannis (2.11)

Area of Provision: Classroom of the 3 to 4 year old group

Other Children: Gregory (2:10), Liza (2.11)

Other Adults:

Extract from a 20min observation

Children are in the classroom of the three to four year old group and they are sat at the table playing with the small construction material and the domestic animal toys.

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 38 Continued)

Yiannis has a horse in front of him and he looks at the tower that Gregory made saying:

Yiannis: I want you to make me a beautiful house.

Gregory does not respond and then, Yiannis, pointing at a plastic toy chicken asks Gregory:

Yiannis: What is this?

Gregory who is not looking replies:

Gregory: Horse.

Gregory is referring to the horse he is holding in his own hands. Yiannis looks at the other children who are sat at the table. He stands up and sits down again handing out his horse to Gregory who accepts it. Yiannis then asks for Liza's horse. Liza gives it to Gregory who passes it to Yiannis.

From the observational extracts it appeared that children chose to share or give toys to other children to engage in reciprocal interaction with them. Other children's responses to these attempts indicated their availability or willingness to participate in such interactions. This was sometimes picked up and responded to by children, for example in the case of Manolis who allowed Abigail to use his playdough and even instructed her on what kind of snake she should make for him, even though it appeared he could do it himself.

At other times the children did not realise their peers' intentions, as, for example, in Yiannis' observation where he tried to engage both in dialogue and in play with Gregory. It is not clear if Yiannis could make '*a beautiful house*' on his own but asking Gregory '*what is this?*' about the chicken, seemed to be more than a straightforward question. This is because observational and interview data suggests that the animals were of great interest to Yiannis and that he could name a wide range of them. Also, Yiannis had chosen to photograph animal toys with the children's camera (See Appendix 7, Figure 2). However, Gregory, who seemed absorbed in his own play, did not seem to understand Yiannis' attempts at interaction. A final effort from Yiannis was to offer his horse to Gregory. When that attempt at interaction failed, Yiannis

showed persistence by changing his focus of attention and trying to engage in reciprocal interaction with a different child, Liza. Unfortunately this was something that Liza also failed to understand and act upon.

Peer Interactions around 'Food'

Alongside the strategies of giving and accepting, exchanging and sharing various toys and objects the children were also observed participating in reciprocal interactions around 'food'. This section explores the different uses of food among younger and older children during pretend play and its role in initiating and sustaining peer interactions.

Trying to approach other children by feeding them was mostly observed in children from the Green Class. One reason for that might be that feeding was something that most children from the Green Class were still doing, with the assistance of adults, whilst children in the Blue Class were generally eating by themselves. Thus, the younger children were more familiar with someone approaching to feed them and they seemed to perceive feeding as a caring one-to-one process. This interpretation is also supported by the way they incorporated feeding into their pretend play. For example, in Figure 6.2, Aspa used a rattle as a spoon to 'feed' Louise (2.2) and then Georgios (1.4), while Filio (2.4) and Christos (2.4) were close by observing their peers' pretend play.



Figure 6.2: *EKs photograph of Aspa feeding Louise and Georgios*

Figure 6.2 indicates that children model how to interact with other children on familiar intimate adult-child relationships. This caring and nurturing interaction modelled on caring and nurturing interactions between children and adults, at home and in the setting, seemed to be used by children as a strategy to show their friendly feelings for others and it was one that allowed them to approach and interact with others. It also seemed that when other children accepted this approach, it was a confirmation that they wanted to be part of this reciprocal interaction. Some of these 'feeding' episodes are presented below.

Observation No:39

Fieldnotes: Litsa (1.5)

Area of Provision: Green Classroom

Other Children: Children from the 4 to 5 year old group, Louise (2.2), Georgios (1.4).

Other Adults: Eleni

Extract from a 10min observation

Litsa is playing with some children from the four to five years old group who are in the green classroom. Louise approaches and hugs Litsa and then she leaves. Litsa picks up a toy car and comes and sits next to me. Louise approaches us both holding a cup and a spoon. Litsa looks at her and says:

Litsa: Mamà mam! [Mum, food!]

Louise responds by feeding Litsa with the spoon with Litsa pretending she is eating the 'food' she is given. Georgios joins us too and Louise feeds him as well. Georgios responds by pretending he is eating the 'food' that Louise offers to him.

Louise also appears in Aspa's observations 'feeding' Aspa. Aspa was one of the case study children who was observed many times incorporating feeding others into her pretend play as is demonstrated in Figure 6.2 above and in the following observational extract.

Observation No:40**Fieldnotes:** Aspa (2.4)**Area of Provision:** Green Classroom**Other Children:** Filio (2.4), Christos (2.4)**Other Adults:** Eleni**Extract from a 20min observation**

Aspa returned to the nursery after a week of absence. She looks at me and smiles as she enters the room. She picks up a plastic spoon and approaches me extending the hand she is holding the spoon with, indicating that she wants me to 'eat' from her spoon. I respond by pretending I'm eating the food she is offering. Then Aspa moves on to feed Filio, who is sat next to me 'reading' a book, and Christos who is also sitting with us.

However, children were not always accepting of the invitation to be fed. For example, in one of Georgios' (1.4) observations I wrote:

Georgios tries to feed Litsa with his spoon, she is not eating, and he leaves.

This episode provides further evidence that when a child did not accept the caring and nurturing invitation of being fed this was an indication that they did not wish to participate in the interaction. It also provides an indication that even the younger children, such as Georgios, could decode their peers' body language, including a recognition that the refusal to be fed meant refusal to participate in reciprocal interaction.

The observational data relating to the children in the Blue Class suggests that these, slightly older, children perceived 'dining' mostly as a group activity, rather than as a one-to-one caring and nurturing interaction. Thus, the examples of children feeding their peers in the Blue Class were limited both in range and number. For example, Stathoula (2.10) was observed once approaching Manolis (2.11), who was playing with another boy, and she 'fed' him using a toy as a spoon. Manolis responded positively by pretending to eat the imaginary food that Stathoula offered. Also, Dimitris (2.5) was observed accepting a small plastic lettuce from Paul (3) and pretending he was licking it, stating that it was

an 'Ice-cream'. These two episodes were the exception to the way in which the older children were observed using interactions around food.

Observation No 41 and Figure 6.3 below were taken when Blue Class children were playing in the home corner. In this episode it is probably clearer that older children perceived dining as a group activity using food for friendly play.

Observation No:41

Fieldnotes: Stathoula (2.10)

Area of Provision: Blue Classroom

Other Children: Steve (3), Kostas (2.9), John (3), Tina (2.6), Gregory (2.10), Dimitris (2.5)

Other Adults: Katerina (Class's practitioner)

Extract from a 20min observation

Stathoula joins Steve, Kostas, John, Tina, Gregory, and Dimitris who have transferred the table near the home corner and they are 'dining' (See Figure 6.3). Stathoula raises her cup to Dimitris and Tina saying:

Stathoula: 'Yamas!' [Cheers]

Stathoula pretends she eats using a plastic spoon that is right in front of her. Dimitris takes some peppers and fruits in his hands and he starts, with John, placing all the toys that are on the table into a toy box. Stathoula takes the toys that are in front of her and puts them in the toy box too. Katerina prompts the children to start tidying away the construction material. Stathoula starts taking the toys out of the toy box again and places them onto the table while she talks with Kostas.

Kostas: Well done Stathoula for bringing me food to eat!

Paul takes photographs of the children who are at the table and Tina is looking at them. Stathoula returns to her seat and leaves a spoon and a cup on the table in front of her and in an instructional tone she says:

Stathoula: Don't take these! They're mine, okay?

Stathoula then heads towards the home corner and brings more cutlery toys to the table, including a plastic pepper-pot toy that Kostas hands to her. As Kostas takes his place again at the table he asks:

Kostas: What should we eat now?

Tina says something, inaudible to me, back to Kostas and she continues by chatting privately with Stathoula.

Figure 6.3 below shows some of the Blue Class children dining in the home corner.



Figure 6.3: *EKs photograph of Blue Class children ‘dining’*

In the previous episode (See Observation No 41) seven children participated in a spontaneous group activity by setting the scene and by gradually building on each other’s pretend play around the theme of food and eating. The environment affordances enabled them to exercise their agency. For example, they were prompted by the practitioner to tidy up the construction material but she did not seem to insist. Thus, the children could continue uninterrupted with the activity they had chosen. Furthermore, they were allowed to transfer the furniture and toys from place to place in the classroom. Being allowed to do the things they liked seemed to be important in promoting the development of their play, the cooperation with their peers and the positive interaction with them. Also, it enabled children to create their own group activity by setting their own rules, as Stathoula did by instructing her peers not to take her toys. However, it also provided an indication that children perceived dining as a group, rather

than a one-to one, activity which resulted in every child building on the activity and promoting the whole group's pretend play.

Thus, the younger children's early attempts to establish relationships around food partly contrasted with the older children's use of food during pretend play. In particular, the younger children's use of food in play was mainly a one-to-one interaction modelled on familiar caring and nurturing experiences. However, there is some evidence of the shared interest of the group when the larger group stood around observing the feeding. For the older children, food was used in a different way ie. serving as the establishment of interaction across a larger group, and there is stronger evidence of the shared interest of the group in this context.

6.2.2. Being Friends with Everyone

Even though the different strategies used by children, with the assistance of toys, demonstrated children's intentions to establish interaction with their peers and their friendly feelings for other children, some children, like Dimitris (2.5), showed friendly feelings for other children throughout the day, trying to interact and be friends with everyone. Both Dimitris' father and his practitioner stated that Dimitris was interested in other children and the analysis of observational data revealed that he did indeed interact with most of the children at nursery.

'There aren't other children!'

During research activities, Dimitris only used the camera a few times, usually when Tina (2.6) was playing with it (See Appendix 7, Figure 3). Dimitris was also the only child who wanted to be accompanied by Stathoula (2.10) during the map-making activity. These examples suggest that Dimitris was only interested in doing something when other children were interested too or when other children were around him. Another indication of Dimitris' markedly friendly feelings for his peers comes from the twelve photographs he took, four showed other children, three showed his practitioner Antigoni, one showed Fotini (an ancillary staff member), and four showed either toys or the floor.

Dimitris seemed unhappy in situations where there were no other children to interact with. One morning, unusually, he started crying when he entered the classroom. Both the practitioner and I attributed his reaction to the fact that no other children had arrived at that time. The observational extract below is from that morning.

Observation No:42

Fieldnotes: Dimitris (2.5)

Area of Provision: Blue Classroom

Other Children: Steve (3)

Other Adults: Antigoni (Blue Class Practitioner)

Extract from a 20min observation

As more children start coming into the classroom, Dimitris engages in rough and tumble play with Steve. Both children run up and down the classroom, kick toys, and climb on and jump off of the sofa. At one point Antigoni says smilingly:

Antigoni: Let me ask you Dimitris, was this why you were crying? Because Steve wasn't here for you to do all these crazy things together?

Dimitris enthusiastically replies: Yes, Steve!

Dimitris would show his interest in other children by observing them and he would approach them, sit next to them, talk to them, follow them, and invite them to play with him. The following three observational extracts provide further indications of Dimitris' eagerness to interact with other children and the strategies he used to achieve this. Two observational extracts are from the outdoor provision.

Observation No:43

Fieldnotes: Dimitris (2.5)

Area of Provision: Outdoors

Other Children: John (3)

Other Adults: E.K.

Extracts from two 20min observations

Episode 1:

Children are outdoors and Dimitris invites John to play by saying:

Dimitris: Should we go and play?

John replies: Yes!

Both children go into the middle of the yard.

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 43 Continued)

Episode 2:

Dimitris is next to me and asks me as he points at two children from our class:

Dimitris: What are they doing?

E.K.: They are playing with the see-saw.

Dimitris decides to join them and heads towards the sea-saw.

These two extracts indicate that Dimitris would either invite other children verbally to play with him or he would observe peers from a distance and then approach them. However, Dimitris quite often used physical contact including kissing, stroking, hugging, or just touching other children to show his friendly feelings and to initiate interaction with other children (See Appendix 7, Figure 4).

Dimitris was also observed playing with Stathoula's hair and 'brushing' it with his fingers without her showing any signs of annoyance. In general, Dimitris used various strategies to show affectionate feelings towards his peers. When other children failed to show any signs of annoyance, for example by resisting physical contact, it seemed that they implicitly consented to this kind of interaction. This is exemplified in the following observational extract, where almost all children are seated on the floor in a circle playing with construction material.

Observation No:44

Fieldnotes: Dimitris

Area of Provision: Blue Classroom

Other Children: Craig (3.1)

Other Adults:

Extract from a 20min observation

Dimitris is sitting next to Craig and he pushes him with his shoulder, he pulls Craig towards him and hugs him. Dimitris strokes Craig's hair, then takes him by the shoulder and smiles at him. Craig smiles back at Dimitris.

This extract exemplifies how close physical contact can be used by children to show friendly feelings towards peers. Similarly a reciprocal facial expression such as smiling suggests that the other child is keen to be part of this interaction. Dimitris' father, Nikos, said that Dimitris would say to him '*I want to go to my friends*' when talking about nursery. Nikos attributed this to the fact that Dimitris had created friendships with same age children at nursery whereas at home he only had his brothers to play with. They were more than ten years older than Dimitris, while it seemed that nursery gave Dimitris the opportunity to interact with children close to his own age. This opportunity was embraced by Dimitris who not only seemed to enjoy this interaction but constantly tried out different ways to interact with his peers.

During the activity where I spread out photographs, taken by me and the children, on classroom tables for the children to look at, I observed how Dimitris seemed a little disappointed when he spotted one of his own photographs. This observation is presented below.

Observation No:45**Fieldnotes:** Dimitris**Area of Provision:** Blue Classroom**Other Children:** Liza (2.11), John (3)**Other Adults:****Extract from a 10min observation**

Dimitris is searching amongst the photos that are spread out on the table and says:

Dimitris: Where is Dimitris?

He finally spots one photograph of himself and comments in a disappointed way:

-There aren't other children!

He spots another photograph showing Liza and John and in an excited tone Dimitris says:

Dimitris: It is Liza and John!

Dimitris approaches John saying:

Dimitris: Where is John? I'll show you where John is!

Then he moves next to Liza saying:

Dimitris: I'll show you where Liza is!

In the above extract, Dimitris preferred to talk to John and Liza about their photographs than, for example, looking at his own picture or showing his picture to them. However, from all the observations of Dimitris, it appears that the nursery's opportunities for contact with other children were of most importance to him, shaping his views about his nursery experience. When his practitioner, Katerina, talked about Dimitris' friends at nursery she mentioned three particular boys but her conclusion was that he liked socialising '*with all children*'.

6.2.3. Having Activity Playmates

Dimitris was not the only child who was trying to interact with most of the children throughout the day. Actually, several of the children seemed to prefer to interact with many children. What might be noteworthy is that for specific activities children seemed to choose playmates that were also showing a particular interest in the activity, as they did.

For example, Aspa (2.4) who liked playing with her baby-doll, which included putting her to sleep, giving her a bath, cooking for her and 'feeding' her, was observed incorporating this in her pretend play when other children were taking an interest in Aspa's activities and wanted to be 'fed', as previously discussed. During child-led dancing activities, Aspa was observed having Jen (2.2) accompanying her. Also, Aspa liked pretending to be a 'teacher', as her father also noted. In the nursery, when Aspa pretended she was the 'teacher' she was usually singing nursery rhymes to the other children and especially to Litsa (1.5). Aspa would often be seated at a chair in front of Litsa who was usually sitting on the floor. One of these episodes is presented below.

Observation No:46**Fieldnotes:** Aspa (2.4)**Area of Provision:** Green Classroom**Other Children:** Litsa (1.5)**Other Adults:** -**Extract from a 20min observation**

Aspa asks Litsa to pick up all the toys from the floor and put them in the toy box. Aspa is seated at a chair pretending she is the practitioner.

(Observation Continued)

(Observation No 46 Continued)

When Litsa finishes tidying up all the toys, Aspa claps her hands and says to Litsa:

Aspa: Bravo!

Litsa goes to take the baby-doll but Aspa does not allow her to do this. She takes Litsa by the hand and sits her down on the carpet in front of her chair. Aspa sits on the chair again and starts singing a nursery rhyme. When she finishes singing Aspa claps her hands and excitedly says:

Aspa: Bravooo!

Litsa imitates Aspa by clapping her hands too.

In this observational extract Aspa seemed to take the role of the practitioner. She not only instructed Litsa to tidy up the toys but she also rewarded her by saying 'Bravo' when she finished. This is something the practitioners usually did. Then Aspa moved on to set up a child-initiated singing activity with herself leading it by taking the role of the practitioner and Litsa following by taking the role of the children. This is something the two girls were observed doing frequently in relation to child-initiated activities when Aspa was adopting the 'teacher's role'. Thus, it seemed that Litsa was, for Aspa, an activity playmate and the person that Aspa would choose to act out the adult role. This episode also provides indications about children's awareness of adults' and children's roles in the setting.

Dimitris (2.5) and Yiannis (2.11) from the Blue Class were two other children who liked singing too. Dimitris was observed singing nursery rhymes and also made-up songs throughout the day and regardless of what he was doing. Yiannis also liked singing nursery rhymes, even in situations where there was no music on. The following extracts are from observations of Dimitris and Yiannis.

Observation No:47**Fieldnotes: Episode 1:** Dimitris (2.5) / **Episode 2:** Yiannis (2.11)**Area of Provision:** Blue Classroom**Other Children: Episode 1:** Tina (2.6), John (3), Stathoula (2.10), / **Episode 2:** Dimitris (2.5), Liza (2.11), Kostas (2.9), Nicky (2.9)**Other Adults:****Extracts from two 20min observations****Episode 1:**

The children are seated at the table as they are waiting for their lunch to be served. Dimitris is singing a made-up song. Suddenly, Tina bangs her hand on the table shouting at Dimitris:

Tina: Stop it!

John and Stathoula instantly join Dimitris and they all start singing Dimitris' made-up song: Nah, nah, nah, naaah...

Episode 2:

Yiannis and Dimitris are sitting opposite each other at the table singing a nursery rhyme. Liza instructs Yiannis to stop singing. Yiannis stops and looks at Dimitris who keeps on singing. When Liza leaves, Yiannis starts singing again. Kostas is sat next to him and Yiannis presses Kostas' nose saying:

Yiannis: Beep, beep!

Dimitris: Should we sing it again?

Kostas and Yiannis both say: Yes!

They start singing the rhyme and Nicky joins them too. After they finish singing Yiannis starts singing a made up song for Kostas and then for Dimitris saying:

Yiannis: La la la la the car, my bicycle...Kostas! Deh, Deh, Dimitris!

Both of these extracts suggest that activities that were uninteresting or even irritating for some children were the ones that could bring other children together and encourage them to act as a team. However, perhaps the most important interpretation of these extracts is that only children who were interested in singing took part in these child-initiated activities. At the same time, those children who were not interested in singing were sufficiently confident to decline invitations to participate or could demonstrate their opposition as Tina and Liza did.

In general, a range of data in this study supports the interpretation that at times children chose to join another child's play because of the activity s/he had chosen. Kostas (2.9), for example, was interested in cars. Both Antigoni his practitioner, and his mum Vivi, mentioned this in their interviews. However, even other children, such as Yiannis, were aware of Kostas' interest in cars. This could be seen in the previous observation, with Yiannis' reference to the car and the fact that he stroked Kostas' nose saying '*Beep, beep*'. Therefore, children's accurate knowledge of their peers' preferences seemed to be one of the reasons why they chose them as playmates for specific activities.

I observed that Kostas would transform almost anything at nursery into a car-related activity; this ranged from books and chairs, used as obstacles for his cars to negotiate, to even the research project's map-making activity, where he placed photographs opposite each other and then asked me to draw roads so he could drive his car along and around them (See Appendix 7, Figure 5).

For Kostas, any child who was interested in cars would instantly 'qualify' as being suitable as his playmate. Also the other children seemed to have realised that, if they wanted to play with cars, Kostas would be the most 'appropriate' playmate. In Figure 6.4 Kostas is playing with cars with his peers on two different occasions. On the left *Kostas (with the striped t-shirt) plays with Steve and on the right Kostas (with the white t-shirt) plays with Aaron, Yiannis, and Manolis.*



Figure 6.4: EK's photograph of Kostas playing with cars with his peers on two different occasions

Kostas was observed sharing his 'expertise' with other children, either naming different brands of cars to others or helping them make functional cars with construction material. For example, he was observed 'correcting' Gregory who had placed all four wheels of his car to one side of his construction, telling him '*This is not how you make a car*'. He then took Gregory's car and started moving it up and down on the floor to show to him that it could not roll.

The dialogue below took place between me and Kostas during one of my observations; it started as Kostas approached me holding a plastic pepper from the home corner and I asked him what his favourite meal was. Then, I moved onto asking him about other things that he liked at nursery and the dialogue unfolded as set out in Observation 48.

Observation No:48

Fieldnotes: Kostas (2.9)

Area of Provision: Blue Classroom

Other Children: Aaron (2.6)

Other Adults: E.K.

Extract from a 20min observation

E.K: How about toys? Do you like playing with puzzles and the toy animals?

Kostas: No. The only thing I like is cars!

E.K: What do you like playing with in the outdoors?

Kostas: Nothing!

E.K: [When we are] in the Orange Classroom?

Kostas: With Aaron.

[...]

E.K: What does Aaron likes playing with?

Kostas: With cars.

E.K: What kind of cars?

Kostas: I like the Skoda ones!

Kostas had chosen not to use the children's camera to take photographs, and during the map-making activity Kostas took a car with him. At the activity we used photographs that I had taken of the nursery and of him when he was playing with other children and, after I explained to him that he could put the photos he wanted on the poster, I kept the following notes of the things he said and did:

Observation No:49**Fieldnotes:** Kostas (2.9)**Area of Provision:** An empty classroom of Setting B**Other Children:** -**Other Adults:** E.K.**Extract from a 20min observation**

Kostas places the photos to the right and left of the poster, leaving space between them. He moves his car through the empty space between the photos and says:

- This traffic light is red.*
- Where is the green one?*

Kostas comments by looking at the photographs:

- I like them all!*
- I don't want to put them in our classroom; I want to put them on the poster.*
- The car will go over all of them.*

He puts more photographs on the poster.

- I want to put this one with Steve too.*

Kostas takes the photograph which shows him and Steve and places it at one corner of the poster. Then he continues picking photographs and says:

- And this one with Aaron.*
- I will show you where we will put this one. Wait! I have to find one more that shows me!*

He chooses one photograph of him and Aaron and places it on the poster. After he finishes placing the photographs he hands me his photo album, which we had taken with us, and says to me:

Kostas: It's better if you read me the album.

Kostas showed a specific interest in playing with his cousin Aaron (2.6). However, the observations make clear that what was important for Kostas was to play with someone who shared his special interest in cars and it seemed that both Aaron and Steve shared this interest. Nonetheless, he was observed playing with cars and also sharing cars he had previously brought from his home with other children as well, whether Aaron and Steve were in the classroom or not. For example, on one occasion I observed the following:

Observation No:50**Fieldnotes:** Kostas (2.9)**Area of Provision:** Blue Classroom**Other Children:** Yiannis (2.11)**Other Adults:****Extract from a 20min observation**

Kostas gives a lorry to Yiannis but Yiannis returns it in order to play with a doll. Kostas looks at him and says:

Kostas: Put the doll down!

Yiannis ignores him and leaves with his doll.

Kostas seemed to insist on Yiannis putting the doll down to play with him and the cars because, alongside Steve and Aaron, Yiannis was one of his regular playmates in relation to this activity. For example, in Figure 6.5 below Kostas (with the white t-shirt) plays on the floor with cars with Yiannis and Aaron.



Figure 6.5: EK's photograph of Kostas playing with cars with his peers

6.2.4. Making Special Friends

While some children had activity playmates, other children had started developing special friendships. The term 'activity playmate' is used to describe children's focus on the activity and in playing with children with similar interests. The term 'special friend' is used to describe children's interest in particular children. Thus, particular children would be interested in playing together regardless of the activity that these children would choose. This distinction might become clearer to the reader in the following section where the relationship of four Blue Class children is discussed. First, the relationship of Dimitris (2.5) and Tina (2.6) is considered and then the relationship of Stathoula (2.10) and Manolis (2.11).

Developing an Interest in Particular Children

As discussed previously, Dimitris was one of the case study children who liked to socialise with most children in the class. However, the observational data shows that he had started developing a particular interest in Tina (2.6); this was evidenced by being next to her, being affectionate, and demonstrating his desire to interact and play with her. Tina appears in one of the photographs that Dimitris took and she is present in most observations of him. Additionally, as noted before, Dimitris was only interested in using the children's camera when Tina was using it. So, even though Dimitris attempted to make friends with all children, he showed a particular interest in Tina, as indicated in the following observational extract.

Observation No:51**Fieldnotes:** Dimitris (2.5)**Area of Provision:** Orange Classroom**Other Children:** Tina (2.6), Gregory (2.10)**Other Adults:****Extract from a 20min observation**

Dimitris is laid down on the mattress next to Tina. She goes to a practitioner to help her put on her shoes. Dimitris is looking at her as he is laid down and crawls towards her [...] Tina goes to the shop area and Dimitris follows her. She goes back to the mattress where Gregory is laid down and sits there and then Dimitris once again joins her.

Tina was not one of the case study children but from observations of Dimitris it appears that she had started developing an interest in him too, for example by approaching him while he was playing with other children and by talking to him. However, sometimes she seemed annoyed by Dimitris' persistence in interacting with her, although this was not long lasting as demonstrated in the following observational extract.

Observation No:52

Fieldnotes: Dimitris (2.5)

Area of Provision: Blue Classroom

Other Children: Tina (2.6)

Other Adults: Antigoni (Class' practitioner), E.K.

Extract from a 20min observation

Antigoni puts music on and most of the children dance in pairs. Dimitris dances with Tina until she decides she wants to dance with someone else and she leaves. Dimitris starts following her around the room and Tina comes and sits on the sofa right next to me. Dimitris transfers a chair near to us and sits down next to Tina. Behind us is the radiator which is covered by a cloth in the shape of a big butterfly. Dimitris lifts it up from one side and puts his head behind it. Tina angrily starts pushing him to get out of there and Dimitris starts laughing. Tina leaves and Dimitris, first goes to the other side of the room, and then returns near to Tina and takes her off to dance.

In this episode we see that, even though Tina seemed to be irritated by Dimitris' persistence in being close to her, she eventually concedes to his wish to dance again together. Dimitris seemed confident to pursue his wish to approach Tina again and again. The practitioners often used the practice of leading activities but did not insist on all children's participation and did not intervene when children made the decision to leave an activity. This appeared to enhance children's autonomy and facilitate their interactions with peers. In this case the practitioner's approach gave Dimitris, in particular, time to try out different approaches and to finally succeed in restoring his relationship with Tina.

Stathoula's and Manolis Special 'Bond'

As with Dimitris, Stathoula (2.10) seemed to enjoy interacting with all the children in her class but she also showed an interest in adults. Nonetheless, she seemed to demonstrate a preference for Manolis (2.11) over both other

children and adults, suggesting that he was a special friend for her in the nursery. Stathoula was observed going close to Manolis and talking to him, inviting him to join her play and asking him to sit next to her. Out of the forty two photos that she took, fourteen showed other children clearly and another nine showed the body parts of other children without it being clear who these children were. Four of the fourteen clear photographs were of Manolis (See Figure 6.6).



Figure 6.6: *Stathoula's (2.10) photograph of Manolis (2.11)*

Apart from Manolis, there were only two other boys who appeared twice in her photographs. During one of my observations I asked her who she was friends with and she replied '*Manolis*' and then left.

In the observational extract below Stathoula and Manolis are playing with the see-saws outdoors (also see Appendix 7, Figure 6).

Observation No:53**Fieldnotes:** Stathoula (2.10)**Area of Provision:** Outdoors**Other Children:** Manolis (2.11)**Other Adults:** Katerina (Blue Class Practitioner)**Extract from a 20min observation**

Children are in the outdoor space. Stathoula approaches Manolis, who is sitting on a see-saw, she sits on it and they start chatting. They both step down and holding hands they approach Katerina. Stathoula has a short dialogue with Katerina and then they return to the see-saws. They turn two see-saws upsidedown and sit on them but then decide to turn all five of them upside-down and they sit on a horse see-saw. Manolis turns it upright and sits on it. Stathoula takes it by the tail and drags it around the playground while Manolis is sitting on it. Antigoni tells them to go to the other side of the yard and Stathoula turns the horse around and drags it to the other side. They both turn the horse to the side and sit on it.

Stathoula was observed approaching Manolis many times when he was playing alone or with other children and talking to him, inviting him to join her play, or just sitting next to him. Manolis only rarely initiated such approaches.

In one of the observations, Stathoula moved close to Manolis who was sat at the table, playing with playdough. This episode is presented below.

Observation No:54**Fieldnotes:** Stathoula (2.10)**Area of Provision:** Blue Classroom**Other Children:** Manolis (2.11)**Other Adults:** -**Extract from a 10min observation**

Stathoula approaches Manolis and says to him:

Stathoula: Will you sit next to me?

Manolis uses body language to indicate that he doesn't want to go and sit next to her.

Stathoula answers him in a complaining tone: Why?

Manolis does not respond. Stathoula says something to him, inaudible to me, and leaves.

Although Manolis occasionally refused to join Stathoula in this way, he often accepted her invitations to play, even if it was for a limited time. In the observational extract below the children had just finished an adult-led dancing activity.

Observation No:55

Fieldnotes: Stathoula (2.10)

Area of Provision: Blue Classroom

Other Children: Manolis (2.11), Tina (2.6)

Other Adults: -

Extract from a 20min observation

Stathoula lies on the floor with Manolis and Tina. She stands up and gets Manolis's hands and they dance. Stathoula goes and lies on the sofa saying: Stathoula: Manolis!

Manolis does not seem to be listening to her.

Stathoula and Manolis were also observed dancing outdoors (See Figure 6.7 below).

Even though both children seemed to like to play and socialise with each other, Stathoula mainly initiated interactions, indicating that Manolis was a special person for her at nursery. She seemed sad when Manolis rejected the request to sit next to her and she tried to sustain the interaction with him after they had finished the adult-led dancing activity by taking him to dance with her and then by calling his name, probably inviting him to join her on the sofa.



Figure 6.7: *EK's photograph of Manolis and Stathoula dancing in the outdoors*

Manolis's mother said that the only person he talked about when they looked at the photo album at home was Stathoula. Also, during the activity where I left photographs on the table for children to look at, I observed the following (See Observation No 56):

Observation No:56

Fieldnotes: Manolis (2.11)

Area of Provision: Blue Classroom

Other Children: Gregory (2.10), Nicky (2.9), Stathoula (2.10)

Other Adults: Katerina (Class' practitioner), Fotini (ancillary staff member)

Extract from a 10min observation.

Manolis picks up one of Stathoula's photos and shows it to Katerina, Fotini, Gregory, and Nicky and he then goes on to show it to Stathoula too.

Manolis had also taken a photograph of Stathoula during our nursery tour, one out of seven children that he photographed that day. Manolis's actions suggest that Stathoula was a special person for him too. However, it seemed that Stathoula was more attached to Manolis than he to her. Both Stathoula's and

Manolis parents, as well as their practitioners, said that the children particularly liked and socialised with each other. Stathoula's mother, Voula, and her practitioner, Katerina, used the word '*bond*' when they talked about Stathoula's relationship with Manolis. There was a difference of view between the second practitioner in the classroom, Antigoni, and Stathoula's mother, Voula. While Antigoni believed, '*It would be a bad day for Stathoula if Manolis was not here*' Voula argued '*I don't think so. They are bonded but not to the extent that she wouldn't have a nice time if he wasn't there*'.

6.2.5. Being part of a Group Identity

The previous sections discussed children's interactions with their peers either from their group or from other groups and provided evidence for some children's preference for interacting with particular children. This section provides evidence of children's desire to be part of a larger group of children. In general, the children of both classes seemed to enjoy the company of other children. In both settings the main adult-led activities were usually group activities such as dancing, singing and storytelling and the children were prompted to participate but the practitioners did not insist on all children's participation. The practitioners' approach provides evidence that the children who did choose to participate in these activities probably did so because they wanted to be part of a larger group. Further evidence about children's motivation to be part of a larger group is provided by their actions during free play. During those periods where children could freely choose activities and playmates, some children chose to spend time with their peers in groups of different sizes. In this subsection I provide some examples of children's choices during free play which illustrate children's intentions to be part of a larger group.

I took the photograph below (See Figure 6.8) a few minutes after the practitioner has announced to children that it is free play time and she has asked them what they would like to play with. Some children asked to read books and they moved to the children's living room area. Gradually other children joined them. After a few minutes, almost all Blue Class children had chosen to read books or sit alongside their peers who were reading books.

It appeared that what adults usually call ‘solitary’ activities, such as reading, became more interesting for this group when they were undertaken in the company of other children. At the time of this photograph, fourteen out of the seventeen children in the class had chosen to sit with their peers during this spontaneous child-led activity and only six of them can actually be distinguished as having books in front of them. Thus, what might be important to note about this photograph is that eight children seemed to prefer sitting in the company of the children who are ‘reading’ books instead of choosing, for example, a different activity away from their peers.



Figure 6.8: *EK's photograph of Blue Class children 'reading' books during free play*

Blue Class children were also observed playing collectively when they were playing in the home corner, as well as with construction material (See Appendix 7, Figure 7) and in the outdoors. During these activities I included in my notes expressions such as '*the majority of the children*' or '*approximately all children*' which were expressions that I more regularly used when I was observing adult-led dancing (See Appendix 7, Figure 8) and storytelling activities (See Appendix 7, Figure 9).

The following observational extract is from the Blue Class during an adult-led dancing activity followed by free play with construction material. The children chose to participate in these activities, indicating that their choice was based on the other children's participation.

Observation No:57

Fieldnotes: Yiannis (2.11)

Area of Provision: Blue Classroom

Other Children: Liza (2.11), Gregory (2.10), Manolis (2.11), Stathoula (2.10), Brian (2.6), Craig (3.1) John (3)

Other Adults: Katerina (Blue Class Practitioner)

Extract from a 20min observation

Fourteen out of the seventeen children have come to the session today. The children are playing freely in the class. Yiannis is seated on a chair in the living room area playing with a toy shark. Liza is lying on the floor right in front of Yiannis. Gregory and Manolis are also seated in the living room.

Yiannis is babbling as he heads towards the sofa, next to the living room area, where Stathoula and Brian are lying down. Then he moves again towards the living room area. Almost all the children are gathered there now. Katerina prompts them to tidy up. She suggests putting some music on so that the children can dance. Yiannis keeps moving his shark up and down in the air. Katerina asks children to go one behind the other to make a train. She tries to catch Yiannis' attention in order for him to give her his toy by saying:

Katerina: Yiannis!

Yiannis looks at her but he does not approach to hand her his toy.

Katerina puts the music on and most children dance to a song that requires them to dance in pairs. Yiannis, who was looking for a few seconds from a distance, joins in and dances by floating his shark in the air. After a few seconds he withdraws to the living room where Liza is seated and also playing with a shark toy. Liza throws her toy down and goes to join the other children who dance. Yiannis stays there looking at them.

The children dance to one more song as Yiannis is now laid down on the floor looking at them. When the music stops Craig and Manolis join Yiannis on the floor and Katerina asks them if they want to play with construction material. The children reply positively and Katerina brings them the bricks. Yiannis is seated between John and Craig, making a horizontal line with the bricks. Stathoula and Manolis join them too. The five of them are seated on the floor in a circle. Liza gets in the middle of the circle and they all make vertical constructions with the bricks. Yiannis tries to take some bricks from Brian who is playing behind him but Brian protests and Yiannis leaves them. Yiannis decides to leave the group and goes to the home corner to join Liza who is now playing there.

In this episode children chose to be in the company of their peers at three different points of the day; free play, an adult-led dancing activity and free play with construction material. The children had already indicated with their actions that they wanted to be together as a group and it seemed that the practitioner picked up on the children's desire and provided opportunities to further strengthen their collective identity by suggesting group activities. The practitioner achieved this by first suggesting a group dancing activity and then by giving children the construction material.

Yiannis, the target child of this observation, initially did not seem to want to participate in the dancing activity, but by looking at his peers and then joining in, he seemed to indicate that what he was really interested in was being part of a larger group. The affordances of the environment seemed to give him the time he needed in order to join in and withdraw whenever he wished. A further indication that children sought to be part of a larger group was the fact that the children made a circle to play with the construction bricks instead of taking some bricks, for example, and going to play on their own or in pairs in another area. Instead, the children sat with their peers and they also accepted Liza joining the circle they had already made without protesting.

I have captured a moment (See Figure 6.9 below) where 11 Blue Class children have transferred the living room area's furniture to the home corner, and some others have transferred some more chairs and sit in the company of their peers. The children are not seen in the photograph as being engaged with items such as toy cutlery, books or construction material; they just seem to be sitting there. I do not have notes on how long this episode lasted, without the practitioner intervening to propose that children engage with something seen by an adult as more 'educationally constructive'; however, it seems likely that this was not for long because two of the children can be seen in the photograph climbing on top of the living room table. Thus, it seems possible that the practitioners would have taken the children down from the table due to health and safety issues.



Figure 6.9: *EK's photograph of 11 Blue Class children sitting around the class' living room table*

6.3. Understanding Peer Relationships

The previous sections presented findings relating to children's relationships with peers and the development of friendships in the nursery. The discussion in this section will focus on presenting the relevant literature in relation to peer interaction and the formation of peer cultures. More specifically, it focuses on the strategies that the case study children used to show their interest in children from their group (familiar) and children from other groups (less familiar) and how children started developing friendships in their settings. All these will be discussed in relation to previous international and Greek research findings, both from the field of developmental psychology and the fields of education and sociology.

6.3.1. Taking an Interest in Other Children

The research focus on children's agency in the context of peer relations is mainly a contribution of sociologists who employed more interpretative approaches in researching ECEC settings. Initially, as discussed in the previous chapter, the developmental psychologists of the 20th century focused their

research on adult-child interactions (Eckerman et al., 1975). This was followed by researching peer interactions, mainly during free play, with a focus on developmental stages in relation to children's social lives (Piaget 1932/1965; Parten, 1932). This thesis recognises the contribution of developmental psychologists to our understanding of peer relationships but adopts a more sociological perspective in investigating both child-adult and peer relationships, influenced by the new sociology of childhood and sociologists like Corsaro who researched, however, mainly older children's peer cultures.

In relation to peer interactions, researchers who represent the sociological perspective, including Corsaro (1985) and Singer (2002), recognised that young children spent a lot of time and effort to initiate and sustain interactions with their peers and that they rarely engaged in solitary play when they were in the company of their peers. However, Engdahl, (2012) argued that research concerning peer culture under the age of three is limited. Those few studies that do exist have identified children's desire to interact with peers, even from their very first day in the setting (Thyssen, 2000). This part of the discussion presents the relevant literature in relation to the findings of this thesis regarding the strategies of young children when showing their interest in other children in their settings.

Various researchers, including Lokken (2000), Thyssen (2000) and Engdahl (2012), found evidence of sociability from a very early age; however, this contradicted earlier findings from the developmental psychology field where it was argued that it is predominately children's ages that guide the type of social interaction the children engage in with their peers, regardless of the context they are playing in (Parten, 1932; Piaget, 1962; Maudry and Nekula, 1939). However, more recent findings have provided evidence that it is not only children's age but also the setting's playful, instead of task orientated, pedagogy that facilitated social and cooperative play (Broadhead, 2009). Furthermore, Whiting et al. (1992) argued that the cultural context also plays a role in shaping the nature of children's social exchanges, thereby assisting children to develop different interpersonal skills. These latter two findings could be the case for the Greek provision. This is because settings have historically emphasised sociability aspects and the lightly structured programme of the two case study

settings, which seemed to emphasise group activities over solitary ones, could be attributed to the settings' culture. It seems likely that all these aspects relating to the culture of the settings have assisted some of the case study children in being confident in their interactions, both with children from their group and from other groups, since they demonstrated high levels of social skills despite their young age.

Research evidence highlights young children's strategies to express positive feelings towards their peers in day-care settings. For example, Lokken (2000) and Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) pointed out that young children's strategies varied from smiling, touching, trying to get their peers attention, imitating their peers (Thyssen, 2000; Engdahl, 2012) to also, with older children, offering to assist their peers, as identified by Singer and De Haan (2010). Children in this study also used various strategies, including observation, smiling, close proximity and physical contact, to show their interest in other children, whilst they usually responded positively to other children's affectionate actions, including hugging and kissing, and to their invitations for play. Some researchers called these actions, performed by children, 'prosocial' behaviours (Singer and De Haan, 2010), others 'friendship' (Whaley and Rubenstein, 1994), and others actions that children use to create friendships (Engdahl, 2012). In this study such behaviours are considered to be indications of children taking an interest in other children and wanting to interact with their peers, rather than being labelled as 'friendship'. This is because these actions were either temporary or they were not reciprocal. Researchers who have studied peer relationships, including Corsaro (1988) and Hartup and Stevens (1999), agreed that reciprocity is a prerequisite in order to name an interaction as friendship.

Similarly to Corsaro's (1979) findings with older age groups, all children in this study used mainly indirect, non-verbal, strategies to indicate their desire to interact with other children, both those from their group and from other groups. Previous research findings indicated children's eagerness, even from the age of one, to engage in social play with unfamiliar children (Nash and Hay, 2003; Engdahl, 2012). The youngest child in this study, Georgios (1.4), engaged in short interactions with his peers, which has been found previously to be typical

for this age group by Bertran (2014), but at the same time he was persistent with his attempts to engage in interaction with his peers, as also identified in other contexts with similar age children by Thyssen (2000). Thus, this study replicates findings which were mainly reported in other cultural contexts with similar age children.

Georgios tried out different strategies, including watching other children close by, approaching them and using physical contact to show his interest in children from his group. Various researchers including De Haan and Singer (2001) agreed that touching their peers was a strategy used by young children to demonstrate relationships of togetherness in early years settings. However, Georgios (1.4) would physically follow peers from his own group to indicate his interest in them but would just look at less familiar children from other groups.

In contrast, children who were older than Georgios, including Aspa (2.4) and Yiannis (2.11), would more often follow children from other groups to indicate their interest in them and they would watch them in a more sustained way than they did with children from their own group. This finding contrasts with the findings of Skanfors et al. (2009), who considered children's actions of observing their peers without trying to join in, and acting in a detached way, as strategies for withdrawal. In this study Aspa and Yiannis used actions, including proximity, to communicate their willingness to join in with the activities of less familiar children but they did this hesitantly, providing indications that they lacked a confident strategy for joining in the play of less familiar children. Maybe the other children's desire to protect their play from intruders, as argued by Corsaro (2011), played a significant role in these children denying access, regardless of the case study's children's efforts to indicate their interest in entering the group's play.

Other children, like Litsa (1.5), showed a generalised interest in other children regardless of familiarity, age, gender or other characteristics. Litsa also used the same indirect strategies as her peers, including looking, smiling, following and approaching other children (going close or next to them), in order to express her interest in them. These findings support Katz's (1993) notion of dispositions which is further discussed below.

Early developmental psychology studies conducted by Parten (1932) have also noted that children observed their peers and used proximity and closeness during play. However, it seems that, from a developmental psychology perspective, the children who demonstrate these behaviours are too young to be able to interact with their peers in a socially meaningful way in play contexts. According to Parten, children between the ages of three and a half to five moved on from associative to cooperative play. In this study children like Dimitris (2.5) and Stathoula (2.10), two of the case study children who were very confident in their interactions with peers, were observed taking their interest in less familiar children a step further by not only looking at or following them but by trying to engage in play and verbal communication with children from other groups. This finding, similarly to findings related to younger children, including Litsa (1.5), suggests that it is not just children's age that determines children's actions developmentally but children's dispositions and how the environment provides opportunities for children to exercise agency and initiate such actions. Thus, findings from this study support the important idea of dispositions as argued by various authors including Katz (1993) and Carr (Carr et al., 1998; Carr and Claxton, 2002).

6.3.2. Developing Friendships

The previous sub-section discussed children exercising agency to indicate their interest in other children together with the strategies they used. This sub-section discusses children's agency regarding the development of friendships within their settings.

Even though there is no clear evidence about positive developmental outcomes for children from early friendships, some authors including Ladd (1990) and Hartup (1992) argued that friendship can support children's adaptation during normative transitions. The few studies that have focused on peer interaction during a child's first year of life highlighted an infant's ability to shape triadic interactions (Schaffer, 1971; Selby and Bradley, 2003; Nash and Hay, 2003), with more recent findings suggesting that young children made friends from their early years (Vaughn and Santos, 2009), and that even one year olds had

favourite playmates in day-care settings (Singer and De Haan, 2010). However, the topic of children's friendships within their settings is one that poses questions in relation to whether or not children define friendship as adults do (Hartup and Stevens, 1999; De Haan and Singer, 2001; Parker et al., 2006). It also raises debate on the necessary features of relationships in order for these to be described as friendships (Corsaro, 1988; Aydt and Corsaro, 2003; Corsaro, 2011; Rubin et al., 1994; Hartup and Stevens, 1999; Lokken, 2000; Thyssen, 2000; Hannikainen, 2001; De Haan and Singer, 2001; Singer and De Haan, 2010). Many researchers, including Corsaro (1988) and Dunn (2004) considered reciprocity one of the main characteristics of relationships amongst friends. In this study I identify four kinds of reciprocal interactions amongst peers which children use to show their friendly feelings for other children. These are: giving and accepting objects; exchanging objects; sharing toys and objects; and interacting around the theme of 'food'.

A significant finding of this study is that children were observed using objects and playthings to assist them in showing their friendly feelings towards their peers. For Sutton-Smith (1986) play was mainly about playing with others and not with objects but previous research findings highlighted the importance of toys in facilitating both the caregiver-child interactions (Trevvarthen, 1977; Bruner 1983; Thyssen, 2000) and peer interactions (Corsaro, 1979; Broadhead, 1997; Thyssen, 2000; Lokken, 2000; De Haan and Singer, 2001; 2010; Engdahl, 2012; Bertran, 2014).

The reasons why children offer objects varied across studies and across age groups. For example, De Haan and Singer (2001) found that older children seemed to use the strategy of offering objects in order to achieve cooperation and Corsaro (1979) for entering their peers' play, while Broadhead (1997) identified that the more relevant the toy on offer, in relation to the group's play, the more possibilities there were for the child who offered it to successfully enter their play. This study's findings on offering objects replicates the findings from other studies of this age group by Engdahl (2012) where it was found that offering objects to peers was an intentional act, intended as an invitation to play. There were cases where children seemed to use objects to mediate interactions with their peers, a strategy that was identified previously by De Haan and

Singer (2010) as well. Other children's responses to these attempts indicated their availability or willingness to participate in such interactions.

The findings of this study, on the use of objects to facilitate interaction with peers, supports previous research showing that young children also used the strategies of exchanging (Howes, 1983; Engdahl, 2012) and sharing playthings (Howes, 1983; Nash and Hay, 2003). For example, in Observation No 34 where Aspa (2.4) and Jen (2.2) exchange toys, and in Figure 6.1 and in Observation No 36 where children are observed sharing, with their peers, the book they 'read'.

To a lesser degree my findings support previous evidence by De Haan and Singer (2010) relating to the strategy of offering assistance, since only Kostas (2.9) was observed offering to help his peer to make a car with construction material. However, in this study more incidents are reported of children asking for their peers' assistance with tasks. This is considered a strategy to facilitate interaction amongst peers because, with Yiannis (2.11) for example, who asked for the assistance of an older girl to make a snake for him with playdough, it was found that he was able to make it independently (See Observation No 37).

Finally, the case study children appeared to use playthings imaginatively, to engage in reciprocal interaction with their peers, by incorporating replication of familiar experiences associated with food in their pretend play. In particular, the children were feeding their peers or they were dining with their peers. Previous evidence mainly concerning older children, by Corsaro (1998) and Brooker (2000), showed that children incorporated pretend activities from their family lives in their socio-dramatic role play. For Brooker (2000), the replication of such activities from their family lives, like cooking, assisted children's adjustment and play in home corner assisted the development of friendships between children who brought the same culture into the setting.

Fjellstrom, (2004) argued that even though the meal is a global experience and can be found in all societies, cultures and social classes, its symbolic meanings differ between individuals and across groups and that food could not be seen solely in terms of nutritional value, because it incorporates socio-cultural

features, beliefs and values. According to Wright et al. (2001) in less industrialised countries like Greece food had always been important. However, most Greek research in ECEC related to issues of quality in preschool children's diet (Manios et al., 2009), parents' misconceptions about their children's diet (Kourlaba et al., 2009), and overweight and obesity issues (Manios et al., 2007). This study indicates that the use of food by children during their pretend play seemed to be important for establishing positive interactions amongst peers and was used as a strategy to show their friendly feelings to others. This is an original contribution.

For example, the younger, Green Class, children seemed to perceive interactions around food, including feeding others and being fed by others, as a caring one-to-one process. Children frequently received adult assistance with their meals whether they had gained autonomy in that area or not and they also sought out such exclusive interactions (See discussion p.159). Since they had used an adult approaching to feed them, they incorporated this interaction into their pretend play with their peers. Thyssen (2003) has also found that young children used playthings to replicate previously experienced situations in relation to food. This study extends that literature by presenting evidence which shows that children were modelling interaction with other children on familiar caring and nurturing adult-child relationships they had previously experienced, at home and in the setting, rather than just trying to replicate these experiences. This caring and nurturing interaction seemed to be used by children as a strategy that allowed them to approach and interact with peers and also to show their friendly feelings for their peers. Other children's responsiveness to such invitations also indicated their availability for such an exclusive, one-to-one, interaction.

However, there was also some evidence of the shared interest of the group when other young children stood around observing the 'feeding' (See Figure 6.2). For the older Blue Class children, who could eat autonomously, food was used for friendly play and served the establishment of interaction across a larger group. Furthermore, there is stronger evidence of the shared interest of the group amongst these older children. Thus, this study replicates previous findings by various researchers including Hannikainen (1998; 1999) and Singer

and De Haan (2007; 2010) who argued that participation in group activities provided indications about young children's sense of belonging and togetherness. In conclusion, the findings of this study extend the existing literature by signifying that children's use of food related toys assisted their interaction with their peers. Children were trying to show their friendly feelings towards their peers by replicating interactions from their family and nursery lives; this is seen with the younger children replicating individualistic relationships and the older children more collectivistic ones.

6.3.3. Significant 'Others'

The previous discussion focused on the use of toys and how children used them as intermediaries to establish interaction with their peers and show their friendly feelings for other children. This section discusses different peer relationships which seemed significant for children. Research evidence provides indications that other children's presence was a crucial factor which shaped children's views on their setting (Armstrong and Sugawara, 1989; Huttunen, 1992; Langsted, 1994; Evans and Fuller, 1998). In this study probably Dimitris' (2.5) case is the most indicative in demonstrating not only how a child tried to show his friendly feelings towards his peers throughout the day but also that he tried to interact and be friends with everyone in his setting. Dimitris only took an interest in an activity based on other children's participation in it; this supported previous findings, with older children, by Rogers and Evans (2006) and Dunphy and Farrell (2011), on children's choices being influenced by who was involved in an activity, rather than on the activity itself. Dimitris also used various strategies to initiate interaction with his peers, which ranged from verbally inviting other children to join him in his play, to watching other children and then approaching them, wanting to be included in their play. However, most often Dimitris used physical contact including kissing, stroking, hugging, or just touching other children, to show his friendly feelings and to initiate interaction with them. Dimitris' case contrasts the case of Kostas' (2.9) who more often interacted with children who shared his interest in cars. Younger children, including Aspa (2.4), were observed having established activity playmates, something that was previously observed by Aydt and Corsaro (2003) with older

children. Singer and De Haan, (2010) suggested that the establishment of activity playmates was important for the development of peer friendships

Whilst Aspa and Kostas had activity playmates and interacted with their peers due to the activity they had chosen, other children chose to interact with particular children, regardless of the activity. This provides indications about these children's particular interest in playing with specific children. For example, despite Dimitris' general preference for interacting with all children, he was also observed developing an interest for a particular girl of his group, Tina, (2.6), indicating that she was a special person to him in the setting. Dimitris would seek to be next to her, and he would be affectionate and persistent in demonstrating his willingness to interact and play with her. Even though Tina was not always keen on such interactions at times she responded positively to his invitations and she also initiated interaction by approaching and talking to Dimitris. All these actions provide indications that these two children were developing a reciprocal and consistent relationship that could result in a friendship. My findings about reciprocity confirm previous evidence provided by Corsaro (1988) and Dunn (2004) who argued that this is the main characteristic of peer friendships.

De Haan and Singer (2001) argued that it is important for children to indicate their awareness and label their relationship as friendship. Findings from this study partly agree with De Haan and Singer's argument. For example, Stathoula (2.10), who was keen to interact with both adults and other children, explicitly labelled as friendship her relationship with Manolis, which shows awareness of the importance of friendship to her. Even though it was mainly Stathoula who was more persistent in initiating interactions with Manolis during the day, Manolis was also keen to interact with her and the findings indicated that she was a special person for him in the setting too. What is more, the children's 'bonding' was recognised both by their parents and their practitioners, providing further evidence that these children's relationship were consistent and reciprocal.

Many authors argue about the importance of reciprocity in peer friendships, both for children under the age of three (Engdahl, 2012; Bertran, 2014) and

those over the age of three (Corsaro, 1988; Howes, 1988; Hartup and Stevens, 1999). This study extends the literature regarding peer friendships for under threes by introducing the significance of persistence in order to achieve reciprocity and for a friendship to develop. Another element of friendship, as revealed by these four children's relationships, is the consistency in the interaction, regardless of the activity their preferred peer would participate in. In contrast to Dimitris and Tina, Stathoula's and Manolis' relationship had one more element that validated their relationship as a friendship. It had duration and this is probably why it was acknowledged as a special 'bond' by adults and labelled as 'friendship' by Stathoula.

The findings of this study indicate that the awareness of the importance of friendship on its own does not seem enough to name a relationship 'friendship' as argued by De Haan and Singer (2001). For example, Kostas (2.9) had also labelled his cousin Aaron as his 'friend' but what seemed to be important for Kostas was the activity (playing with cars), rather than the interaction with Aaron, regardless of the activity. Thus, Kostas' and Aaron's relationship was reciprocal but lacked the element of consistency (interacting with each other regardless of the activity) and this is why in this study they were characterised as 'activity playmates' rather than friends. According to the literature, it is possible that the two boys would move their relationship from 'activity playmates' to 'friends' due to the time they spent playing together, as argued by Singer and De Haan (2010), or because they shared the same play interests as argued by Brooker (2000) and Corsaro (2011). However, the data during my stay in the setting did not support an interpretation other than that they were activity playmates, based upon their relationship within the setting. Thus, this thesis extends knowledge by suggesting that, in order for two children to be called friends, three elements need to coexist in their relationship: reciprocity, consistency and duration and that the element of persistence is a prerequisite of reciprocity.

A final and significant finding of this study relates to children's willingness to be part of a group identity which has been identified previously, mainly in older children's interactions. For Corsaro (1988), in order for children to see themselves as peers, they first needed to see themselves as members of a

peer culture which developed over time and as children started doing things together. Both settings promoted group activities and group participation. The findings, which showed practitioners prompting but not insisting that all children participated in group activities, provided evidence that the children who eventually participated in group activities did so, either because they liked the activity, or because they wished to be part of a larger group. The latter interpretation is further strengthened by children's choices during free play time to spend time with their peers and because they, sometimes, did so regardless of the activity. This finding confirms findings from the Greek (Bitou, 2010) and international context (Rogers and Evans, 2006; Dunphy and Farrell, 2011) where it was also identified that children chose to participate in group activities based on other children's participation. In fact, the evidence of this study indicates that even young children wanted to be, and enjoyed being, in the company of their peers. Similar findings were had by Skanfors et al. (2009) in their study with two to five years old children. The evidence regarding the younger, Green Class, children who were aged sixteen months to two years four months old, extended the relevant literature to even younger age groups by providing indications about their desire to be part of a larger group, both when they participated in adult-initiated activities and during child-initiated play. Perhaps the most indicative example was when Aspa fed her peers and other children stood around observing (See Figure 6.2), indicating their desire for belonging to a group. However, the evidence is even stronger for the older, Blue Class, children who demonstrated, more evidently, their desire for being together by being observed on various occasions preferring to spend time with their peers in groups of different sizes, even when unengaged with their peers' activities, rather than doing something else away from their peers' company.

6.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides evidence which supports the finding that the case study children's interactions in terms of the development of peer friendships are similar to international findings relating to peer friendships for children under and over the age of three. In particular, Greek children took an interest in other children which they demonstrated by using prosocial actions but also actions such as watching, following, or being physically close to their

peers and they also used toys as means of showing their interest and friendly feelings towards their peers. Children were also observed incorporating cultural aspects associated with food in peer interactions. This finding has not been previously reported as a strategy used by children to show their friendly feelings and one that assists them to interact with their peers, either individually or as a group. However, it seems that, especially for the younger children who were less verbally skilled, this strategy is important in terms of conveying meaning through the use of toys and body language.

Chapter 7. Child-Environment Relationships: Spaces, Places, and the Positioning of Actors

Introduction

The previous chapter placed emphasis on the case study children's relationships with their peers. This chapter engages with children's relationship with their nursery environment. The broader theme of environment refers to the nursery's space which appeared to be constituted by three elements: the space marked by a room (or outside area), particularly the floor, walls and ceiling; the space defined by nursery toys and furniture; and the space defined by the positions of actors, the children and adults, within this space. The way the actors use and/or act upon the room's space and the nursery's equipment suggests that children can experience space as something which is multidimensional (in terms of affordances for play and exploration); that it can be used in many and diverse ways according to children's play purposes; and that children themselves and adults constitute part of this space.

7.1. Space Marked by a Room or an Outside Area: Floors, Walls and Ceilings.

This section presents findings regarding the use of the floor by children and the emphasis the children place on the wall displays and the ceilings of their settings. The majority of data in this section is photographic taken either by me or by the case study children when using the children's camera. Because I did not prompt children to photograph the things they liked and those they did not like in their setting, as suggested by Clark and Moss (2001), the generated photographic data are the result of children's free choices on what to photograph.

7.1.1. Children's Perspectives on the Floor

Children are people who are closest to the floor in terms of their height and, as my observations suggest, people who can instantly switch from standing to sitting, running, flipping, dancing, crawling, laying down, and intentionally falling on the floor. Taking this into account, it seems likely that they might value its

significance and the affordances for different kinds of play and exploration more than adults. The floor was not used by staff as a place for sitting. The adults usually used child-sized chairs or cushions on the floor when they were reading stories or singing songs to children. The children however, were expected to sit on the floor or the carpet during these adult-led activities. The only adults who used the floor, sitting down with the children at group and free play times, were two students who were doing their school placement once a week in the Green Class. In general, children used the floor in conventional ways, such as to sit, walk, or stand on it, but also in creative ways, including for exploration, and they also incorporated the floor's different uses into their pretend play. The floor seemed to attract the children's attention in a range of ways and for various reasons, for example, the youngest children chose to capture the shadows of the furniture or of the toys with the camera (See Appendix 8, Figure 1).

My initial interpretation was that the camera was too heavy for the children to use and thus, taking photographs of the floor was an easy thing to do. However, when the children also took photographs of the ceiling and the older children of the Blue Class photographed the floor too (See Appendix 8, Figures 2, 3 and 4) I considered it likely that the children's actions were in fact intentional.

I also had the opportunity to take photos of the oldest Blue Class children as they played on the floor, trying to step on the shadows or 'catch' them (See Appendix 8, Figure 5) and of the younger, Green Class, children who were trying to do heads over heels on the floor (See Appendix 8, Figure 6).

Further evidence of the younger children's interest in the floor, or objects on it, comes from Georgios (1.4), the youngest child of the study. Georgios usually did not engage in play with toys for long periods of time; however, for Georgios, scrutinizing a toy in close proximity to both him and the floor seemed to be important to him. His mum referred to it during the interview, expressing a concern that her child might have a problem with his eyes. Even though the child had not had an eye test and so one cannot be certain of his visual acuity, it seemed that what he was doing was trying to explore the object he was holding or the object that was lying on the floor (See Appendix 8, Figure 7).

Georgios also tried to take photographs by placing the camera really close to the floor (See Figure 7.1).



Figure 7.1: *EK's photograph of Georgios photographing the floor*

Additionally, I observed Georgios lying on the floor, crawling under the table (See Appendix 8, Figure 8) and around the room, and in general spending a lot of his time on the floor in spite of having been walking for six months.

Apart from photographing the floor, children also took photographs of the wall displays and the younger children in the Green Class especially also took photographs of the ceiling. This provides further evidence that photographing the floor was an intentional act since the younger children could also raise the camera up to photograph the ceiling, (See Figure 7.3). The combination of evidence relating to how children used the floor and also the equipment on it provides an indication that the floor might be seen by children as a resource with affordances for play and exploration. In particular, children seemed to interpret the floor as something which could support a range of exploratory and imaginative play. Using the furniture and more generally the nursery's equipment, not only in conventional ways but also in creative ways, was something that children did in both settings. This is discussed further in section 7.2. The word 'conventional' refers to how adults use equipment and furniture,

generally in line with the manufacturers' instructions. However, the floor seemed to be a dynamic and versatile environment with unintended affordances for the children. This was due to its relatively large and open spaces, especially in the Blue Classroom, as well as because of the light and shadows from the sun coming through windows in both settings, and through the balcony's glassed door in the Blue Classroom.

In the Blue Classroom children could play with the construction material either at the table or on the floor. This was dependent upon whether the practitioners suggested to children that they sit around the table (See Appendix 8, Figure 9) or, if it was free play time, allowed them to use other areas of the class and children would then usually choose the floor (See Appendix 8, Figure 10). When the children were visiting the Orange Classroom they would usually choose to play with construction material, again on the floor, even though there was a table with a few chairs available in one corner of the room.

One possible interpretation as to why children chose the floor to make their constructions is that the open space provided a bigger surface for them to use when creating different shapes or longer constructions. The children could also move more freely around their constructions or the materials on the floor. The extra space also allowed them to sit closer to their peers as well as to see things from different angles, since the furniture no longer acted as a barrier to these activities. When playing at the table, the children also experimented with vertical and horizontal trajectories, as Manolis (2.11) does with the construction material (See Appendix 8, Figure 9), or with size, by placing the construction bricks one on top of the other or one next to the other. They also experimented with different uses of the table as shown in Appendix 8, Figure 11 where Manolis (2.11) from the Blue Class placed his toy horses one on top of the other and then he lined them up by placing their front legs in the gap between two tables.

What seems important to note is that the simultaneous use of floor and other objects enabled children to experience space in these different ways. For example children used the toy boxes in a conventional way to store toys, but they also used the boxes in order to get inside (See Figure 7.2), as well as to

stand on them (See Appendix 8, Figure 12). Additionally, mattresses were used to lay down on, to place toys under, or for transporting from one side of the room to the other (See Appendix 8, Figures 13 and 24).



Figure 7.2: EK's photograph of Louise (2.2) from the Green Class 'giving a lift' to a 13 month old girl as Filio (2.4) watches them

A possible interpretation could be that since children were not able to move the floor they were using the equipment in creative ways to explore properties of the floor. For example, children transported large toys and equipment to create enclosures in order to make their own play spaces both indoors and outdoors (See discussion section 7.2).

Evidential data (observational and photographic), indicated that children under the age of three seemed motivated to explore the floor's properties as an important element of space. This may be because it was not so long ago that these children had spent much of their time crawling on the floor. It seemed, from the observations, that the floor, with the support of other objects or nursery equipment, gave children a variety of opportunities for play and exploration. For these reasons, further discussion about the floor as an element of space is incorporated throughout the discussion of the broader theme of space.

7.1.2. Children's Perspectives on the Wall Displays and the Ceiling

As stated in the sub-section relating to children's experiences regarding the floor, the children spent a considerable amount of time during their day on the floor and it seemed that this was an important element of the classroom or the outside area space for them. However, children also took photographs of the wall displays and the younger children in Green Class especially took photographs of the ceiling too. They seemed to be attracted to the mobiles hanging from the lights. The nursery's wall displays and the mobiles had been made by the practitioners and they had different drawings such as cartoons, animals, flowers, and fruits on them.

When Filio's (2.4) and Christos' (2.4) parents, and their practitioner, Fofo, were asked why they thought children took photographs of the lights, the mobiles, and the windows, they focused in their replies mostly on the way the brightness of the sun or the lights can attract children's attention. This could also be a possible interpretation of the interest shown by Manolis (2.11), from the Blue Class, who also took photos of the lights, as well as those of the Green Class children who photographed lights with no mobiles hanging from them.

However, the Green Class practitioner, Fofo, also referred to practitioners attempts at raising children's awareness about the natural world environment by having as a starting point the mobile figures. In particular, she stated that the children:

Often say that they like the mobiles and they look at them hanging from the ceiling. We tell them stories about the different animal pictures that are hanging from the mobiles.

Christos (2.4), one of the Green Class children who was not yet a very competent talker, took 66 clear photographs. He took more photographs than any other child who participated in the study. Some of his photographs related to the wall display, as presented below. Christos' parent commented on the photographs that Christos took of the children's coat hanger at nursery, which had drawings of flowers and animals on it (See Appendix 8, Figure 14).

Christos' mum confirmed that he liked flowers and animals, suggesting that this was probably the reason why he photographed them. However, Christos also photographed the walls displays and the ceiling (See Appendix 8, Figures 15 and 16).

While Christos took photographs of the hanger his bag was hanging on, other children, from both settings, took photographs of their personal belongings such as bags (See Appendix 8, Figure 17) and jackets (See Appendix 8, Figure 18). Filio's mother, Eirini, when talking about going through the album with her daughter at home, said that Filio named the different things she could see in the photographs such as '*bed, door, and lights*'. She did not provide me with an interpretation as to why Filio has photographed her jacket.

Manolis (2.11) from Blue Class, pointed the camera at the ceiling during the nursery tour, saying '*I took the lights*', probably attracted by their brightness. A further indication that the children were intentionally photographing the wall displays was that Manolis, for example, photographed the same wall on two different days of using the camera (See Appendix 8, Figure 19).

Georgios, from the Green Class, who was only sixteen months old, also tried to photograph the ceiling (See Figure 7.3), suggesting that even very young children were interested in the floors, wall displays, and ceilings of settings. In Figure 7.3 below there are two photographs of Georgios. On the left there is a photograph which I took of Georgios looking up just before he raises the camera to take a photograph of the ceiling and on the right is the photograph that Georgios took¹².

¹² The helmet on the photograph is the result of one of the many special effects the camera had, probably activated by Georgios accidentally.

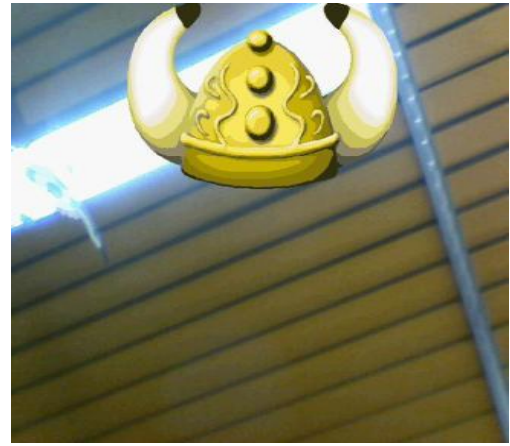


Figure 7.3: *Left: EK's photograph of Georgios. Right: Georgios' (1.4) photograph of the ceiling*

Once I observed Georgios looking at the mobiles hanging from the lights as he was walking around the room. Two other children from that class, Filio (2.4) and Christos (2.4), were also observed during diaper changing kicking or tapping the mobile which was placed above the diaper changing table, and Christos (2.4) and Aspa (2.4) tried to take a photo of that mobile while the practitioner was changing their diapers (See Appendix 8, Figure 20).

In general, Green Class children more commonly photographed the lights and the mobiles hanging from the lights compared to other aspects of the settings. In particular Filio (2.4) took eight photographs of the lights out of the twenty eight that she took in total. From her other photographs, five focused on the floor, five on the windows and three on the walls displays. Below are presented some photographs that she took of the lights, the wall displays and the mobiles (See Appendix 8, Figure 21).

Filio also took one photograph of her jacket (See Appendix 8, Figure 18) and the other six were of other children and adults. During one of the observations of Filio, she looked at a mobile hanging from one of the lights and said, referring to one of the drawings: '*The apple! Look, look!*' As for the mobiles, it may be that it was their movement, the drawings (or the colour of these drawings) that attracted children's attention. It also seems from Filio's comment, and from some of the parents' interviews that children like Litsa (1.5) and Aspa (2.4) could distinguish between the different drawings by looking at them from a

distance. For example, when I asked Aspa's father about his interpretation of why she might have photographed the ceiling he said:

She hasn't photographed the ceiling. You know what she tried to photograph? The flowers! You thought she photographed the ceiling right? No, she kept telling me [when she was looking] at the photograph 'Flowers, flowers'. [...] She's interested in things like the flowers and the birds; these are the things she's attracted to. She likes the natural environment.

In general, from the practitioners' but mostly from parents' comments, it seems that children were able to name the objects they saw, either in a photograph or on their nursery's displays. Even though one cannot be certain about the associations they made when they looked at or photographed the objects, it appears, from Litsa's (1.5) and Aspa's parents' interviews, that even younger children were able to distinguish the difference between a living animal or flower and a drawing of these. So, a possible interpretation is that the children were trying to communicate, by taking these photographs, that they liked the flowers and the animals, as parents seemed to suggest. However, it seemed that it was mostly the displays that attracted their attention. There could be various reasons as to why the mobiles also attracted children's attention. For example, it could be that children were interested in the movement of mobiles, or they were interested in the things that were portrayed on mobiles and walls, or even the fact that some of the children demonstrated the ability to name them so they were familiar with the objects and this reinforced their interest in them. The drawings' vivid colours could also be something that attracted the children's attention, and this could explain why they have taken photographs of the bright lights too.

Green Class children also took photographs of the windows and Filio took a photograph from the window showing the trees outside the classroom (See Figure 7.4).



Figure 7.4: *Filio's (2.4) photograph of the trees*

In general, all five children in Green Class were observed looking towards the windows during the day, climbing on beds or child-sized chairs to look outside, or looking towards other children who had climbed on chairs or beds to look outside (See Figures 7.5, 7.6 and 7.7 below).

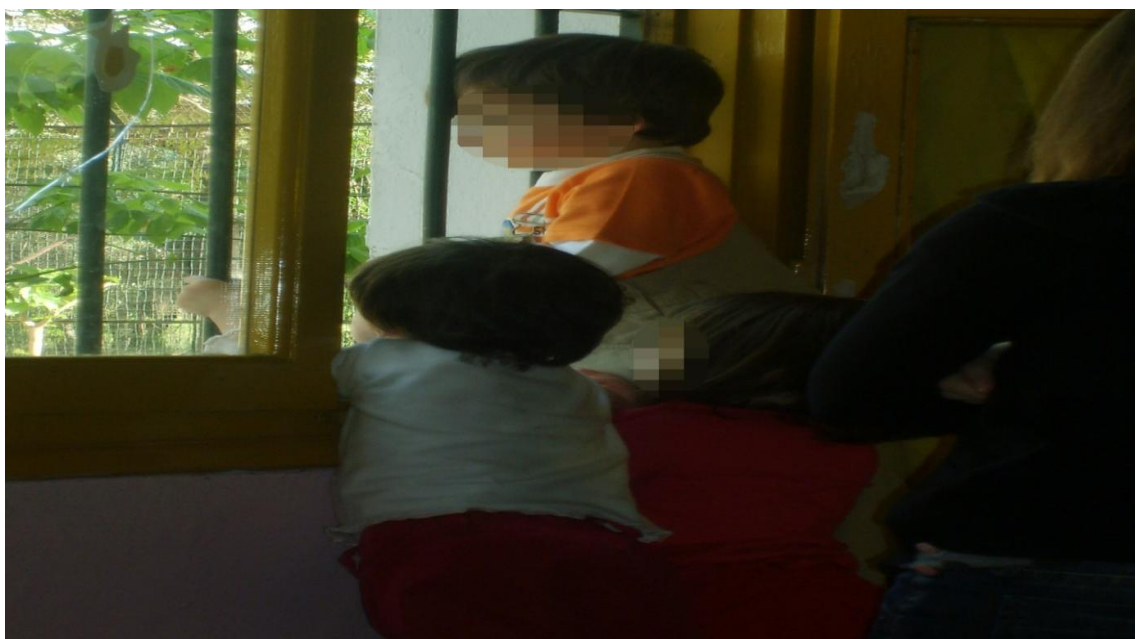


Figure 7.5: *EK's photograph of Fofu supervising Christos (2.4), Aspa (2.4) and Filio (2.4) who have climbed on child-sized chairs to look outside the window*



Figure 7.6: *EK's photograph of Aspa (2.4) climbing on a bed to look outside the window*



Figure 7.7: *EK's photograph of Georgios (1.4) and Aspa (2.4) climbing onto chairs to look outside the window*

Fofo, one of the Green Class practitioners, attributed the children's actions to the discussions she had during the day with the children about the things that were happening outdoors. This seemed connected to one of the practitioner's attempts to raise children's awareness about the natural environment, probably

because Green Class children did not have access to the setting's outdoor space. In particular Fofa stated:

When we sing songs about the trees and the birds I prompt them to look outside. We talk about what is happening outside in the winter when it's raining and what is happening in the summer such as the birds migrating, and how they sing. In general we look outside the window a lot. No matter which song I sing, I'll definitely refer to the things happening outside. Both the children and I are looking outside the window a lot during the day.

Nadia, their second practitioner, was also observed once prompting Georgios (1.4) to 'look at the birds' outside the window as she was cuddling him.

Filio's mother demonstrated her uncertainty about the reasons why her daughter had decided to photograph the windows by saying:

A bright light or a bright window attracts your attention but apart from that...I don't know.

After that she went on to describe how much Filio liked being outdoors and she concluded by stating:

I think all children want to be outdoors. I don't know what you think; is there a child that doesn't like it? My children are not one of those. Our main issue is how to keep them indoors, not how to make them go outdoors.

The responses of the rest of the Green Class parents were similar, describing how much their children liked playing either on the balcony of their apartments or being outdoors at places such as parks or playgrounds. One parent expressed feelings of guilt for having to leave her child at a setting that did not provide children with outdoor experiences. The staff described the outdoor space as unsuitable for this age group because the toys placed there were metallic and/or not well-maintained and intended to be used by older children. They also explained that the floor of the outside space was rough soil and not

synthetic carpet. Synthetic carpet is usually placed in Greek day-care settings outdoors to avoid children hurting themselves from falls. The Blue Class outdoor space had a carpet of this kind (See Appendix 5, Figure 6).

Overall, the results of a combination of interview, photographic and observational data gives an indication that children were trying to communicate their desire to go outdoors to experience the natural world. It seemed that for children it was not enough to observe the natural world from a distance or to have the practitioners prompt them to look outside, sing songs to them about the natural world, tell them stories or describe what was happening outside; it seems likely instead that they actually wanted to be outside.

On the other hand, there were also indications that children wanted to be able to see the natural world even when they had to be in the classroom. For example, Manolis (2.11), during the nursery tour activity approached the classroom window and said '*I want [to take a photograph of] the sky*'.

Manolis then raised his camera and took a photograph of the nursery wall which was right across from the classroom window (See Appendix 8, Figure 22). It was difficult for a child to be able to see the sky from that window because the window was too high for a three year old child to see through and because the walls of the nursery and another building were limiting the view of the sky from that side of the classroom. Thus, what children could see was the nursery wall that was opposite the window.

Blue Class children had an opportunity to use the outdoors on a regular basis for approximately an hour every day but only Manolis tried to photograph the flowers that were outdoors (See Appendix 8, Figure 23). Not all Blue Class children were so willing to undertake the nursery tour with me. This was something that only Manolis and Yiannis chose to do. When the children were using the camera on their own I was not able to observe them closely at all times. Therefore, I cannot state with certainty that the other children tried, but did not manage, to take photographs of their nursery's natural world environment from the windows for example. Because Blue Class children could experience the outdoor environment daily, in contrast to Green Class children, a

possible interpretation of the limited focus on photographing the outdoors or their classroom's windows, is that they did not value it in the same way as the younger children who did not have such experiences.

7.2. Space Defined by Nursery Toys and Furniture

The previous section focused on the floor, wall displays and ceiling. This section focuses primarily on the nursery toys and furniture. Children's different uses of the floor and the nursery's equipment in general (toys and furniture), suggests that where opportunities are provided and adults do not restrict children's spontaneous activities, children use their creative imagination to make their own games and play spaces within the setting. The children incorporated the different uses of the floor into their pretend play and, instead of just walking, sitting or dancing on the floor, they also crawled, lay down and did heads over heels, depending on what they were playing at any given time. Furthermore, as is demonstrated in the following figures and also in Observation No 58 below, the creative use of the toys in ways that served the narrative or the development of their play, showed that children do not perceive or label the objects as adults do or they do not do that at specific times such as when they are playing.

For example, children from Blue Class knew that the mattresses were intended for sitting or lying down on. However, for the purposes of their game and to create their own spaces, they worked together to transport them around the room (See Appendix 8, Figure 24) or placed toys under them as presented earlier (See Appendix 8, Figure 13).

Green Class children were also aware that during breakfast and lunch time the table was for sitting at but there were instances where they decided to use the classroom tables to sit under and to create an enclosure with the classroom's chairs (See Figure 7.8).



Figure 7.8: EK's photograph of Filio (2.4), Christos (2.4) and Louise (2.2) playing under the table

Similar to this 'unconventional' use of the tables and chairs, was the way in which children used the toy box in Green Class and the toy storage furniture in Blue Class during and as a part of their play, for example sitting in resources (See Appendix 8, Figure 25), creating an enclosure or, in the Green Class, transporting a 13 month old girl (See Figure 7.2).

However, children seemed aware that when tidy-up time came, this equipment would be used according to practitioners' instructions; to store the classroom toys. Children were also observed or photographed standing on toy boxes or sitting on them, placing the chairs one behind the other, pretending they were train wagons, and in general using the equipment in creative ways which were serving the development of their imaginative play and ability to 'build' constructions in imitation of what was familiar to them in real life.

The observation below is the last part of a 20 minute observation of Dimitris (2.5) where children can be seen using toys in a creative way that serves their play purposes.

Observation No:58**Fieldnotes:** Dimitris (2.5)**Area of Provision:** Orange Classroom**Other Children:** Tina (2.6), Liza (2.11)**Other Adults:****Extract from a 20min observation**

The practitioner had just finished reading a story to the children who were sitting on the floor listening to it.

Tina is on her knees pretending she is a dog. Dimitris stands in front of Tina stroking her head. Tina stands up and leaves, Dimitris lays down on the floor, he stands up and decides to go near the chair that Tina is now sitting on, 'reading' a book. Dimitris is standing on his knees in front of her and starts barking. They both go to the mattress where Liza is laid down. All three of them start barking. Liza goes to the greengrocery area, takes a plastic toy pepper and throws it to the other side of the room towards Dimitris and Tina who are seated on the floor. Dimitris and Tina crawl to go and get the toy. Liza, who walks towards it, reaches there first. She picks up the toy and throws it in the opposite direction from where the three children are. Dimitris and Tina once again crawl to go and get it. Liza repeats the action of throwing the toy many times, with Dimitris and Tina crawling in the direction of the object each time. However, Liza who runs instead of crawling like the other two always gets to the toy first. After approximately 5 minutes, Dimitris and Tina stop trying to get the toy and are sitting on the floor at the one side of the room with Liza in the opposite one. Liza decides to join them and now all three of them start crawling on the floor once again.

During this episode, children had, in the space of a few minutes, the opportunity to use the floor for their pretend play in many different ways, such as to stand, lay down, run, and crawl. The floor also allowed children to conceptualise space as something that could be seen from different perspectives, including standing, laying, crawling, and looking at it downwards or upwards, as for example Green Class children did when trying to do head over hills on the floor or Blue Class did when laid on the mattresses. Children's creative and sometimes unconventional use of toys also contributed to the children's play. For example, the toy pepper, which was a part of the greengrocery area equipment, became a bone, a toy dog, or just a pepper which, instead of being part of someone's imaginary salad, became a means to extend their pretend play and assisted children's transformation into 'dogs'.

During the interviews I had with the parents of Fillio and Christos in Green Class and their practitioner, Fofa, the practitioner's interpretation of why children chose to play under the table was that the children needed privacy, away from the eye or supervision of adults. One parent said:

I remember myself, when I was a child, that playing under the table was our favourite game. The table would become our home and we would take the cushions and place them around it, I think it's normal. Here [pointing at the photograph], they have thrown the chairs down..., are they using the chairs as walls?

The parent draws on her own experience as a child to interpret the children's actions, giving, however, a different interpretation to the practitioner as to children's intentions. Even though one cannot state with certainty the reasons why children chose to play under the table, it seems that using the equipment to create enclosure and containment, but also as a sociable experience with peers, seemed to be some of the dominant reasons. Being close to peers who share the same interests, such as exploring spaces and creatively using the nursery's equipment, seemed to be the case for children in both settings. It seemed that the place for this to happen was not important, especially for Blue Class children who had opportunities to use both indoor and outdoor space. This point is supported by photographs of Blue Class children using the equipment in creative ways, such as for creating enclosures, both indoors (See Figures 7.9 and 7.10) and outdoors (See Figure 7.11).



Figure 7.9: *EK's photograph of Kostas (2.9), on the right, creating enclosures indoors*



Figure 7.10: *EK's photograph of three Blue Class children playing behind the curtains*

In order to create private play spaces and enclosures outdoors, the children transported and used the plastic sea-saws (See Figure 7.11).



Figure 7.11: *EK's photograph of Blue Class children creating enclosures outdoors*

However, not only the equipment but also the bodies of peers were used for creating enclosures. In Figure 7.12 below, Blue Class children cooperate to create enclosures and their own play spaces during a spontaneous child-led dancing activity outdoors. Children take turns in relation to who will be inside the circle each time.



Figure 7.12: *EK's photograph of Blue Class children using the bodies of their peers to create enclosures outdoors*

Socialising with other children and sharing the same interests seemed to be two of the main reasons that brought children together. It seemed that for most of the time the equipment served as a means to invite other children to join their play. As peer interactions were discussed extensively earlier on chapter 6, at

this point the focus will be on how the equipment assisted in bringing together those children who shared the same interests.

A significant example, supporting an understanding of the environmental affordances that assisted children's relationships with peers, is Kostas' case. For Kostas, most activities and toys he engaged with were transformed into 'cars' or car related activities. For example, in the following photograph Kostas uses two books to make obstacles for his toy car to overcome (See Appendix 8, Figure 26).

As already stated in section 6.2.3, Kostas was observed being able to name a variety of car brands, constructing cars or pretending that different toys or furniture were cars, and he would make garages where he would take his car to be repaired. He would also share his spare car toys with other children and they would play together, either driving them on the edges of the chairs, on the floor, on walls, on other furniture, or on and around the classroom tables. This provided an opportunity for children who shared the same interest to explore space from different angles. I also took two photographs showing Kostas 'driving' his cars on the edge of the nursery's equipment (See Appendix 8, Figures 27 and 28). In Figure 27, Kostas is using the living room armchair to play with his car and two of his peers are observing him closely. Figure 28 shows Kostas and Aaron moving the cars they made with construction material on the furniture in the greengrocery area.

Observations but also data from Kostas' parent and his practitioner confirmed the child's interest in playing with cars. Sometimes this was the predominant interest for Kostas regardless of the activity (adult-initiated or child-initiated activities), the place (indoors or outdoors), or whom he was playing with. On one occasion the practitioner gave the children books to 'read'. Kostas took a puzzle book with pieces that were showing cars and he started mimicking the noise of the car's engine before he placed the pieces back on the book.

It seems that for Kostas playing with cars was his predominant interest and he used the equipment or whatever resources were available at that moment to develop this interest. Also, sharing his interest with children who were also

interested in making or playing with cars seemed to be important to him. In Figure 13 (Appendix 8), Kostas is playing with his 'car' (a construction brick) laid on the mattress and next to him two of his peers are doing the same, 'driving' their cars on the wall. This also gives children who share the same interest the opportunity to explore space from a different perspective such as being laid down.

Furthermore, the observational extract below demonstrates not only Kostas's creative use of toys and equipment, such as construction bricks and tables, in ways that serve his play but also his efforts to engage other children in his imaginary play. This provides further evidence of children's desire to engage in play with their peers but also of how classroom equipment assisted them to achieve this.

Observation No:59

Fieldnotes: Kostas (2.9)

Area of Provision: Blue Classroom

Other Children: Steve (3)

Other Adults:

Extract from a 20min observation.

Some children are seated at the tables playing with construction material. Kostas has his car on a construction brick and is moving the car up and down. He brings his chair closer to Steve and says to him while he makes sounds as if he has his car in a garage:

Kostas: I'm fixing it!

Next to Kostas, John and Manolis are standing and they look at what Kostas is doing.

Kostas says: It broke down.

Steve repeats it and both children place their cars on construction bricks moving them up and down. Kostas takes the car off of the brick and 'drives' it around, on the edge of the classroom's table twice. When he returns to his seat he places it on the brick again saying:

Kostas: Look! Where is the car? It's in the garage!

Then Kostas decides to stand up and invites Steve to join him by saying:

Kostas: Let's go!

It is important to note that children's actions of transporting the equipment and their imaginative use of the furniture and toys was mainly observed during free play time. Because of the practitioners' positioning in space in both settings, and, as observations indicate, their decision to intervene only in cases where there was a health and safety issue or during conflicts, children were able to choose activities and playmates freely and this enabled them to exercise their agency in order to promote and sustain their imaginative play and their interaction with peers. Thus, the affordances of the environment, in terms of equipment but also in terms of staff positioning, provided children with time and space to explore and experiment with the various elements of their nursery environment. Some examples of how staff positioning in space contributed to children's positive play and social experiences are discussed in the next section.

7.3. Space Defined by the Positions of Actors, the Children and Adults, within this Space

The positions of adults and children in space have been discussed throughout the findings chapter because this seemed to be a significant influence on children's actions or intentions regarding their relationships with other people. Thus, this sub-section will focus mostly on how this positioning provides further evidence about children understanding of adult roles and status, about rules, and about their own role and other children's roles in their settings.

Figure 7.13 below that shows Aspa (2.4) feeding her baby doll in the yellow baby chair probably exemplifies children's understanding of adult roles.



Figure 7.13: *EK's photograph of Aspa feeding her baby-doll*

These chairs were usually used by practitioners or ancillary staff members when feeding the younger children in the classroom (See Figure 7.14).



Figure 7.14: *EK's photograph of the Green Class practitioner feeding Georgios (1.4)*

However, in other cases Aspa used other children to make her pretend play more realistic; an example presented previously shows Aspa feeding two of her peers (See Figure 6.2). The process followed by practitioners and incorporated by Aspa into her pretend play makes clear to the children what roles they will have to adopt and how their pretend play will develop without having to use further explanations to their peers. In particular, Aspa's decision to sit at the

wooden child-sized chair and right in front of the yellow baby chairs implies that she will be the practitioner and thus, leading the play, that the other child will have to be the baby. However, in the case of Aspa feeding Georgios (1.4) by using a rattle as a spoon, we also see that the limited toys available in Green Class encouraged Aspa to be imaginative and creative with the use of other objects in order to allow her play ideas to develop. This is similar to Kostas' case, with Kostas using every resource available to turn activities he was participating in into car related activities, or the use of the floor by Dimitris and his peers to crawl and pretend they were dogs and the use of toys such as the plastic pepper pot, which were all employed by children in order to develop their play and probably make it more 'realistic'.

The evidence of the observational and photographic data indicate that children do not seem to see the floor, the furniture and the nursery equipment in general as separate pieces but as a cohesive whole which forms their nursery environment. They also seem to see themselves, the other children, and the adults as part of this environment and they seem to be able to use all the available resources in their play in a creative manner. Thus, apart from the floor and the equipment, children used other children to develop their pretend play into more realistic scenarios. The positions the children occupied in the space determined the role they would have during the play. For the younger Green Class children, who had relatively limited language skills, their knowledge about adult positioning in space assisted them to communicate their intentions using toys and equipment and without having to do it verbally.

All of the above indicates that children were familiar with the classroom rules and procedures. For example, Green Class children knew that specific activities were supposed to take place in specific designated places, such as reading books around the table (See Appendix 8, Figure 29) or in the carpet area. However, children were also observed choosing to read books on the floor, in an area where there was no carpet (See Appendix 8, Figure 30). This also indicates that children see the floor as a valid part of the setting's space for use as they see fit and as such they exercise their agency by using it, where

allowed, for sitting and for activities that were usually undertaken elsewhere in the classroom.

The issue of children's familiarity with adult rules about the use of space and equipment during specific activities came up during one of my observations. I was observing Christos and writing down that the practitioner asked the children to sit down on the carpet to sing songs. When I looked up I saw the practitioner sitting on a chair in front of the children and Aspa getting ready to sit down. I asked the practitioner if Aspa had brought her the chair and the practitioner replied positively. The practitioner did not ask Aspa to bring her the chair but the child was already familiar with the singing routine. As seen in Figure 31 (Appendix 8), at singing time the children would sit on the carpet, with the practitioner on a chair, and then they would all start singing songs.

Aspa's father stated that Aspa pretended at home to be the 'teacher' and I had previously observed her instructing Litsa (1.5) to tidy up the classroom, seated on a chair (See Observation No 46). When Litsa finished, Aspa praised her by saying '*Bravo!*' and then she made Litsa sit in front of her chair and Aspa started singing songs to her. In this observation Aspa had previously transferred the chair to the middle of the room, on the carpet, where the practitioner usually places it to sing songs to the children. However, the children do not always follow these procedures or, for various reasons, they choose to amend the routine. Aspa was observed a few days later sitting on a chair near the table and singing songs to two of her peers who were sitting on the floor in front of her (See Observation No 60).

Observation No:60**Fieldnotes:** Aspa (2.4)**Area of Provision:** Green Classroom**Other Children:** Litsa (1.5), Louise (2.2)**Other Adults:** Fofo (Classroom's practitioner)**Extract from a 5min observation**

Aspa is seated on a chair right next to the class table. Louise and Litsa are seated on the floor in front of Aspa. Aspa pretends she is the practitioner and sings nursery rhymes to them. Fofo takes a chair and joins them, sitting near Aspa. Fofo asks other children to come and sit down so that Aspa can sing songs to them because, as she says:

Fofo: Aspa is the teacher.

Five children move next to Fofo who now sings along, assisting Aspa. The children start leaving gradually and in front of Aspa only Louise remains. Louise decides to leave as well and Aspa is left alone singing the song that Fofo sings.

It seems that Aspa and her peers have an understanding of how a position in space represents differential roles. Furthermore, they seem to be aware of the symbolic meaning that the chair carries which assisted Aspa to communicate meaning very easily since the other children were also familiar with the rules and the process of the singing activity. Thus, since Aspa sat at the chair she would have the role of the practitioner, leading the activity, and the other children would take the children's role; the ones who would participate in the singing activity by singing along or by suggesting songs for singing.

When the adult intervenes the children start gradually leaving the activity. It is not clear if they would have done it anyway but the children's perspectives seem to be that the adult involvement made the activity less engaging, perhaps because it did not fit with their actual preoccupations. By combining both observations of Aspa, one could conclude that two elements are important for her, to sing songs and to do it for other children. Thus, the practitioner seems to misinterpret children's intentions and even though she tried to promote Aspa's pretend play and assist her, it seems that for the children she had removed the element of play, making it a more 'real' event, resulting in all children, but Aspa, leaving. At the end, we see Aspa shifting from someone who was singing the

songs and leading the activity in a pretend role to someone who was following the songs that the practitioner was singing.

It seems that the roles the children are adopting during their pretend play are subject to change as the actors move around and/or interact with each other within this space. What made Aspa follow the practitioner's singing and the other children come closer, when the practitioner asked, seems to have been her status as a practitioner and not the fact that she sat on the chair. This suggests that children can mark the difference in status and roles between adults and children. It also appears that children's perspective about their role in the setting is that, amongst other things, they have to follow the practitioner's instructions or activities. They also seem to see the practitioner's role as to give instructions or set activities for children to follow.

The older Blue Class children were not observed incorporating adult rules in their play or pretending to be the practitioners. I only observed prompts from some children, like Yiannis (2.11), towards his peers to stop arguing and cases where children were ignoring adults' prompts for tidying up for example. Some children were observed challenging adults authority verbally (See Observation No 20), indicating it with their body language (See Observation No 21), or ignoring adult prompts during tidying up, for example. The adults' positioning in space, their 'sit back' style, and the fact that they prompted children but did not insist that all children follow their prompts, probably gave children more opportunities to exercise their agency, make more autonomous decisions and challenge or ignore adult rules. Evading adult rules was only observed once with the group of older children (See Observation No 42) where Dimitris started running up and down in the class with Steve, something they knew was not allowed in the class. This incident provides indications that children could more confidently evade the rules with a peer rather than doing it on their own.

The only indication I had that younger children tried to evade adults' rules was towards the end of my research in the Green Class when it came to my attention that the practitioners were asking children almost every day to go under the beds and take the toys out of them during tidying up time. During the three months at the setting, the rule was that the children were not allowed to

go under the beds throughout the session. This was probably because the adults could not supervise them if they were under there, especially the beds on the right side of the classroom, which were placed one next to the other with no space in-between them. In fact the whole right side of the room was occupied with beds up to the changing table area (Green Class room plan, See Figure 4.1). The practitioners' positioning in space, where they were usually sitting in line with the beds, limited the practitioners' view under the beds. Furthermore, the space between the beds and the floor was small; thus, for an adult to see if a child was under there, she had to approach and get onto her knees. To get an understanding of how beds were placed on the right side of the room focus on Figure 31 (Appendix 8), at the space behind the practitioner who sings songs to the children and on Figure 7.15 below, taken by Christos (2.4).

During the last week in the Green Class, I observed that the adults more frequently requested that children go under the beds, from the right hand side, to get the toys out during tidying up time. The practitioners could not fit under the beds to take the toys out of there themselves and thus they asked children to do it. This, unless it was accidental, provides an indication that children had devised a different strategy to evade the adults' rule by throwing toys under the beds. However, because my observations were made towards the end of my stay there, I had not time to follow this up further to provide the readers with more observational and photographic data.



Figure 7.15: *Christos' (2.4) photograph of the beds to the right side of the classroom*

Children frequently evaded the adults' rule, mainly with the beds on the left side of the classroom (See Figure 7.16).



Figure 7.16: EK's photographs of Green Class children playing under the beds at the left side of the classroom

7.4. Understanding Children's Relationship with the Environment

This discussion focuses on children's agency in relation to their settings' space, providing evidence about the environment's affordances. The data-driven thematic analysis revealed a significant finding concerning children's perspectives on their setting's environment. This is that this environment is constituted by three elements: space marked by a room or outside area (floor, walls and ceiling), space defined by nursery toys and furniture and the space defined by the positions of actors. The way children, as active agents, used and/or acted upon the room's space and the nursery's equipment suggested that children could experience space as something which is multidimensional in terms of affordances for play and exploration; that it could be used in many and different ways according to children's play purposes; and that children themselves and adults constitute part of this space.

Spencer and Blades (2006) argue that nurseries' environments are mainly organised in ways that gives control to adults and conveys messages about

their views and values. Titman (1994) suggests that these, inevitably, influence the way children experience and act upon these spaces. However, researchers like Corsaro (2011) argued that children do not passively accept the way adults have organised this space but they attempt to take control over their lives in the settings they live in and act upon them by creating their own private spaces within their settings.

7.4.1. Affordances of the Indoor and Outdoor Environment

Several studies have also shown the insufficiency of Greek settings regarding structural aspects such as space and furnishing (Lambidi and Polemi-Todoulou, 1992; Petrogiannis, 1994; 2002; Mantziou, 2001; Rentzou and Sakellariou, 2010; 2012; Grammatikopoulos et al., 2012), and also in relation to outdoor space (Petrogiannis, 2010). The findings of this study confirm previous Greek studies regarding the lack of space and equipment in Greek settings. For example, the Blue Class children could use the outdoor space in their setting something that the Green Class children had no opportunity to experience. Furthermore, the Blue Class children had a spacious classroom and a wider variety of toys compared to the Green Class children; however, the majority of toys in both classes were plastic.

The Green Class children's limited variety of toys led children not only to improvise, for example Aspa used a rattle as a spoon. Also, despite the lack of toys, not many conflicts occurred over them. Bertram's (2014) findings for a same-age group of children identified that limited resources led to conflict episodes amongst peers, discouraging peer interactions. However my findings confirm Tobin et al.'s (2009) argument that limited toys encourage sharing. In this study, the children both exchanged and shared their toys and spent a lot of their time engaging in reciprocal interaction with their peers, providing indications that the low level of resources did not have a negative effect on peer interactions.

Furthermore, the children interacted with their peers in various areas of the settings but their choices during free play to spend a lot of their time on the floor indicated that children interpreted the floor as something which could support a

range of exploratory and imaginative play. Ghaziani (2008; 2010), who conducted her study with older age groups, has identified children's preference for the floor and the displays. Furthermore, Clark (2007, p.16) also identified young children's attention to '*close-up details and far-away spaces*'. This study extends the limited literature regarding the use of the indoor space by providing a detailed account of the emphasis that children under the age of three place on these elements of their nursery space. In particular, it provides evidence that younger children, in a similar way to older children, as identified by Clark (2007) and Ghaziani (2008; 2010), pay attention to the lights, the mobiles hanging from these and the wall displays, suggesting that they value such details, including a colourfully decorated environment.

Thyssen (200) identified that the mobiles provided opportunities for interaction with adults. This study replicates Thyssen's findings, since some adults used the mobiles for discussion with children about the natural world but my study also suggests that it seemed to be mostly the colour of the displays that attracted children's attention and also the movement, sound and shape of the mobiles. The combination of photographic, observational and interview data pointed towards children's awareness of the natural world since they seemed to be able to identify the difference between a living animal or flower and a representation of it on a mobile or wall. The children were also probably indicating that colourful settings matter for them, something which so far has been reported by Clark (2007) for children over the age of three. Clark and Moss (2001) and Corsaro (2011), who conducted their studies with older age groups, debated the significance for children of being able to experience the natural world and to be outdoors while Ghaziani (2010) also discussed the importance of children being able to see the outside when they are in the classroom. This study replicates these findings by extending the relevant literature to children under the age of three.

Even though Greek provision received Froebelian influences in its early years (Kyprianos, 2007; Dimitriadi, 2011), it seems that influences in relation to outdoor play were not long lasting since it has been previously reported that Greek settings placed little emphasis on the outdoor space (Petrogiannis, 2010). Petrogiannis' (2010) finding is supported by evidence in this study as

well where the younger, Green Class, children are concerned as they did not have the opportunity to visit the outdoors.

In relation to the indoor spaces, the floors' properties and possibilities offered opportunities for child-initiated play. There is little discussion in the literature concerning the uses of the floor by children although there are references in some literature (for example, Druin et al, 2007, and Tingari et al., 2010). Indeed, in some ways, it might seem unremarkable, if one takes for granted that playing on the floor is what children usually do. This assumption probably makes early years practitioners and researchers focus mostly on the people or the playthings that the children are involved with when playing on the floor, rather than floor itself as a versatile environment which is full of affordances for play and exploration.

It might not seem remarkable that children in this study used the floor in order to stand, sit, run, dance, crawl, lay down, and intentionally fall on the floor. This is because references to the majority of these actions can be found almost in every observation of young children when they play alone, with peers, with adults or toys. However, children as people who can instantly go through these actions and who are closer to the floor, because of their height, seem to interpret the floor as something which can support a range of exploratory, physical and imaginative play and they seem to value the floor's affordances more than adults. Children not only chose to play on the floor with their peers and the classroom toys but they also notice patterns and shadows on the floor which are starting points for various child-initiated play activities. It has been previously reported in Reggio Emilia's pedagogy that shadows and lights provided unique opportunities for play and exploration where projects, including projects regarding shadows, may last from several days to months (New, 1990). In this study, children's actions in relation to shadows occurred spontaneously and in collaboration with their peers. This provided indications that the indoor environment, the floor included, offers opportunities for play and socialisation and for the formation of peer cultures, as has been argued mainly for the outdoor environment, by Corsaro (2011).

7.4.2. Usage of Toys and Equipment

In chapter 6, I presented children's use of toys when interacting with their peers and the toys' contribution to the development of friendships. In this sub-section I discuss children's creative use of toys and equipment to make their own games and play spaces within the setting. Corsaro's (2011) evidence in this area concerned older children. In this study, the nursery's toys and equipment served the development of children's play and children used it accordingly and in collaboration with their peers.

An indicative example of how children express agency and use the environment's affordances is presented through the concept of schemas. According to Athey (1990, p.36) '*schemas are patterns of repeatable actions that lead to early categories and then to logical classifications*'. These repeatable actions do not only illustrate children's interests but also their thinking (Nutbrown, 1994) because, as children experiment by exploring the world around them and how things work, they use the same actions with various objects (Whalley, 2007). Arnold (1999) has identified 41 schemas but most of them were combinations or co-ordinations of the 10 most commonly observed ones (See Appendix 9).

The data-driven thematic analysis showed that children use, in their play, many of Arnold's (1999) schema categorisations. In particular, they were observed *going through a boundary*, by going under tables and emerging from the other side like Georgios (1.4) in Figure 8 (Appendix 8); *transporting* mattresses and other furniture and using the classroom tables (See Figure 7.8), the curtains (See Figure 7.10), the nursery's storage equipment (See Figure 7.2 and Figure 25, Appendix 8), and toys from the outdoors (See Figure 7.11) for creating *enclosure*, *containment* and for *transportation*. These actions occurred both indoors and outdoors. Furthermore, the children were also observed using their peers for creating enclosure in the outdoors (See Figure 7.12) whilst an original contribution of this study is that it highlights the floor's different uses by children and its incorporation into the different schemas. For example, the children used the floor along with a toy for *transformation* when, for example, children used the plastic pepper pot and they were crawling on the floor pretending they were

transformed into dogs. Children also used *vertical* and *horizontal trajectories*, mainly with the assistance of construction material, in various areas of the setting including on tables and on the floor (See Appendix 8, Figures 9, 10, 11). Some children were also observed using trajectories on or around the settings' furniture as, for example, Kostas (2.9) did by moving his cars on furniture, on books or up the setting's wall.

My findings regarding the use of schema by the case study children are original for the Greek context, because children's schemas have not been researched before. Furthermore, they provide evidence both about the universality of schemas, as argued by Arnold (2007), and about schemas' contribution to peer interactions, as Bruce (2011) suggested. This latter interpretation is supported by findings of this study showing that children use schema collaboratively and in the company of their peers by highlighting once more the high level of social interaction amongst the children in these two settings. The findings also extend the schema literature by including, apart from toys and furniture and the floor within the classroom, all the resources that children use to exhibit the various schemas.

7.4.3. The Actors Positioning

This study provides evidence which indicates that children do not seem to see the floor, the furniture and the nursery equipment in general as separate pieces but as a whole entity which forms their nursery environment. In addition, they also seem to see themselves, the other children and the adults as part of this environment and they exercise agency to creatively use all of the available resources in their play. Perhaps an important element, enabling children to be able to use the environment's affordances, was the practitioners' sit-back style which seemed to enable peer interaction and child-initiated free play. This style is mainly used within the Steiner approach which supports children's engagement in child-initiated free play (Hale and MacLean, 2004; Education, 2009). However, the history of Greek provision does not provide evidence that settings have been influenced by Steiner's approach. Nonetheless, findings indicate that the environment's affordances, in terms of equipment but also in

terms of staff positioning, provided children with the time and space to explore and experiment with the various elements of their nursery environment.

Furthermore, adults' position in space also indicated their status and role in the setting. For Corsaro (2011) children adopted adult roles because they desired to express the power one has when adopting this role. In this study, the way the younger, Green Class, children incorporated adult roles into their pretend play provides evidence about children's awareness of the difference between an adult's role and status and their own role and status within the setting. In particular, for the younger children, who had relatively limited language skills, their knowledge about adult positioning in space during specific activities assisted them to communicate their intentions during pretend play by using toys and equipment and without necessarily having to do it verbally. The most indicative example is the one of Aspa who would use the equipment to act out her favourite activity of being a 'teacher' but she would also use every available resource, including other children, in order for this play to develop and become more realistic. Children's awareness of adults' positioning in space enabled them to put meaning across without having to do it verbally. This is because the positions the children took up in the space determined the role they would have during the play. For example, the child seated on the chair would be the teacher and the other children should sit on the floor to listen to songs (See Observations No 46 and 60) or in the baby chair to be fed (See Figure 6.2). These examples indicate that children have an understanding of how the participants' positioning in space represents differential roles and that some pieces of furniture such as the practitioner's chair or the baby chair carry symbolic meaning. All these assist children to communicate meaning very easily since their peers are also familiar with the classroom rules and processes. These findings contribute significantly to the literature concerning very young children's awareness of adults' roles and status within their ECEC setting.

There were also indications that the roles the children adopted during pretend play were subject to change as the actors moved around and interacted with each other within this space. An example is when, in Observation No 60, the Green Class practitioner tried to promote Aspa's (2.4) singing activity; her

presence seemed to transform this pretend child-initiated activity into a more 'real' one, resulting in children losing interest. This episode provides evidence that children can mark the difference in status and roles between adults and children and that the practitioners have the control in the settings, as was initially identified by Corsaro (1979; 2011). However, this study extends these findings to even younger age groups. A further indication derives from the way children seemed to identify my role in the setting, not as an '*unusual type of adult*' (Christensen, 2004, p.174) but as an adult student with limited power. Children had prior knowledge of students whose positioning in space was similar to mine. For example, I was physically closer to children than the other adults and I was also following them on the floor as well. Even though children did not seem to identify me as one of their practitioners, however, they were also seeking comforting playful interactions, as they did with other adults, but at the same time they seemed aware of my limited power to enforce things by approaching me only when initial attempts with their practitioners had failed (See Observation No 25).

In general, children seemed to identify a practitioners' role as to give instructions and set activities for children to follow and one aspect of a child's role, amongst others, being to follow the practitioners' instructions. However, children were observed trying to evade adult rules and instructions. What is important in this section to note is that adults' positioning in space seemed to encourage even the younger children to exercise agency and also to challenge adults' authority and evade their rules as, for example, Georgios (1.4) did in observation No 21. There were also indications that children were using collaboration to evade adult rules, which was predominately observed in older age groups by Ebrahim (2011) and Corsaro (2011). For example, Dimitris (2.5) started running up and down the room with one of his peers (See Observation No 42), although both boys were aware that this was not allowed in the classroom. Also, Filio (2.4) and Christos (2.4) from the Green Class ignored a rule they were aware of, about reading taking place at the classroom tables or on the carpet, and they exercised their agency by choosing to read books on the floor, in an area with no carpet (See Appendix 8, Figure 30).

7.5. Summary

In conclusion, this chapter discussed children's relationships with their nursery environment. In particular, it demonstrated how the case study children used their agency and their creative imagination to explore the indoor and outdoor affordances of their setting. The children indicated the importance for them of a colourful setting along with the value they placed on experiencing the outdoors and also of being able to see the outdoors from their classroom. These findings extend the existing literature to younger age groups as well. The study provides evidence on the multidimensional affordances of the floor for play and exploration, suggesting that children value its significance more than adults. Furthermore it suggests that younger children create private play spaces in their settings; a finding observed mainly in older age groups. It also highlighted the use of various schemas by children, which is an original finding in relation to the Greek context, providing further evidence for the universality of schemas. However, this study also adds to previous research with the incorporation of the floor, apart from toys and furniture, in children's schemas. Finally, I contend that the case study children perceived their nursery environment as a whole entity and that they, their peers, the adults and the nursery's equipment constituted indissoluble parts of this environment. Children's understanding of their setting as a whole entity was probably the reason behind the children's choices to use all the available recourses, including their peers, according to their play purposes. This study also provides evidence about how the positioning of actors within this space assists children's understanding about their own and adults' roles and status in the setting. Further, the findings highlight how adults' positioning in space enables children to express their agency and evade adult authority and rules.

Part IV: Conclusion

Chapter 8. Conclusion

This chapter presents the main findings and contributions of the study in relation to each of three themes discussed in this thesis. Then I move on to summarize the methodological decisions made throughout the study and I reflect on ethical issues regarding my role as a researcher. I also present the theoretical and practical implications of the study and the implications for policy. Finally, I discuss the study's limitations alongside my suggestions for further research.

8.1. Introduction

In this ethnographic case study I explored children's experiences of Greek day-care. A further aim was to inform thinking about the future development of theory and practice in the Greek ECEC provision. Three research questions emerged at the stage of analysis in relation to the aim and were extensively explored in this thesis:

1. What are children's experiences in relation to adults?
2. What are children's experiences in relation to their peers?
3. What are children's experiences in relation to their nursery environment?

Two Greek settings participated in the study and these offered sessions to children both under and over the age of three. Ten children participated in the study, aged one year four months to two years eleven months. The various methods that enabled data generation included unstructured observations, photographs taken by me and the children and informal discussions with the children. These were undertaken during the day but also during organised activities such as tours within their setting and map making activities, informed by Clark and Moss's (2001) Mosaic Approach. I considered the views of significant adults and so undertook conversational interviews (Shuy, 2003), with children's parents, their four practitioners and three ancillary staff members. The research resulted in generating a significant amount of observational, interview and photographic data which was analysed using data-driven thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). The analysis assisted me to develop a holistic picture of children's perspectives on their experiences within their ECEC settings. I

categorised the generated data under three main themes: child-adult relationships, peer relationships, and child-environment relationships. In each theme various issues are discussed and children's agency highlighted by providing a detailed account of the strategies used by children to initiate and sustain interaction with adults and other children and in relation to their activity in the setting environments.

8.2. The Study's Contribution to Knowledge

This project contributes to the new sociology of childhood. It extends and adds to the literature with an education and care focus for children under the age of three by presenting children's experiences in relation to adults, peers and their nursery environment. Conducting research with children under the age of three and trying to explore their perspectives is a challenging task, not only for ethical reasons but also because it requires a lot of effort for eliciting young children's responses. This is probably why qualitative research with children under the age of three is limited both internationally and in the Greek context. This study has addressed this research gap.

Further, the study's findings about children's experiences in relation to adults extend the literature about the significant adults in children's lives in their setting by recognising that, in Greek settings, ancillary staff members also play an important role in children's education and care. Previous Greek researchers, including Petrogiannis (1994) and Rentzou and Sakellariou (2012), have identified that parents and practitioners valued interpersonal relationships and aspects of care. This project identifies that Greek children also value these aspects by actively seeking out comforting, playful and caring relationships with adults. Finally, some of the case-study children seemed to seek to replicate emotionally close and nurturing relationships from their family and community lives but also familiar domestic activities, within their settings. There are indications that these actions assisted children with horizontal transitions. The limited evidence in this area, from Brooker's (2000) study for example, indicate that some children choose to play in the home-corner and to replicate domestic activities such as 'cooking' during vertical transitions.

Previously, Greek researchers, including Petrogiannis (1994) and Rentzou and Sakellariou (2010), have criticized the effect of Greek practitioners' supervisory style, suggesting it has a negative effect on adult-child relationships. However, my research indicates the situation is more complex. The practitioners' physically remote style, which was also observed in this study, appeared to allow children to exercise their agency. Children made autonomous decisions about whether or not to interact with adults. The practitioners' style also allowed children time to interact with their peers at their own rate. On the other hand, the practitioners' style, along with their positioning in space, seemed to be an obstacle to the formation of close relationships between adults and children with limited language skills or with children who were not proactive in seeking interaction with adults like Christos (2.4).

As far as children's experiences in relation to their peers are concerned, the study highlighted young children's use of indirect and non-verbal strategies alongside the use of objects to indicate their interest in other children. These findings replicate evidence from other cultural contexts with same age and older children. However, the study is original in presenting children's interactions around the theme of 'food' along with the use of food related toys in their pretend play as a means of showing their friendly feelings towards other children and interacting with them. In general, research regarding children's incorporation of food into their pretend play is limited. Researchers like Thyssen (2003) and Brooker (2000), who discuss such episodes, interpret them as the means that children use to replicate, in the nursery, previously lived experiences, to assist them with transitions, or to set the basis for the development of peer friendships based on children's common interests. Adding to this, this study provides a further interpretation, suggesting that children use food as representing caring and nurturing relationships between a carer (parent) and a cared for person (child). It seems that children use these very familiar relationships from home experiences and they draw in these positive experiences to develop relationships with peers.

Most research with children older than three years underlines that reciprocity is the main characteristic of friendship. This is replicated by this study in addition to extending the literature to children under the age of three. This study also

makes an original contribution to discussion about peer friendships by suggesting that persistence is a prerequisite in order to achieve reciprocity and that, in order for two children to be named as 'friends', three elements need to coexist in their interaction: reciprocity, consistency, and duration.

A final significant finding which replicates previous research conducted in Greece, by Bitou (2010) with same age children, and identified by Corsaro (2011) in other contexts with older children, is children's desire to be part of a group identity. My study extends this literature by providing a detailed account of children's eagerness to be part of a larger group during free play time and also to spend time with their peers when playing, or by just enjoying their peers' company. The affordances of environments, including the lightly structured programmes with emphasis on group activities, alongside adults' style, seemed to encourage the formation of peer relationships by allowing children time and space to try out different strategies to interact with their peers. In this environment, children seemed confident to resolve conflicts on their own and were mainly observed seeking adult assistance for ongoing disputes. However, for less powerful children like Yiannis (2.11), who seemed to need adult assistance to facilitate peer interaction, this environment was not always supportive, for example, during free play.

Greek research has consistently identified that Greek ECEC provision does not meet international standards, not only in relation to adult engagement but also in relation to structural aspects, including space and furnishing. My study replicates these findings but, in regards to children's experiences in relation to their nursery environment, the findings are that children seemed to identify themselves, other adults and children, and the nursery's equipment and toys as a whole entity, forming their nursery environment, and not as distinct parts. The data-driven thematic analysis assisted me in identifying that children's perspectives regarding their nursery space was that it was constituted by the following three elements:

- 1) Space marked by a room or outside area (floor, walls and ceiling),
- 2) Space defined by nursery toys and furniture, and
- 3) Space defined by the positions of actors.

More specifically, this research supports previous findings, with older children, where it was identified that children pay attention to the details of their setting's environment, including displays, decoration, the lights and the floor. Especially for the younger Green Class children, findings highlight the lack of use of the outdoor space, as has been noted in other Greek settings. In particular, some Green Class children seemed very interested in viewing the outdoors, for example, through windows, even where this was difficult to do, suggesting that children seemed more drawn to the outdoors than adults. A significant contribution of this study is the evidence it provides in relation to young children's use of the floor for play and exploration, signifying that children value the floor's affordances more than adults do. Findings regarding the use of toys and furniture add to literature about the universality of early action schemas as repeated patterns of behaviour (Arnold, 2007). This finding is also original for Greek research because schemas have not been previously researched in this context. Once again, children's agency, and the use of the floor, alongside peer collaboration, is highlighted as children exhibit the various schemas.

A final significant finding in relation to the environment relates to the actors' (adults and children) positioning in space. Even though adults' style and their positioning in space enabled children to exercise agency, at the same time it assisted children to communicate meaning to peers without necessarily having to do it verbally when, for example, they were pretending they were the practitioners. Furthermore, the way the actors moved around demonstrated how changes in their positioning in space created changes in the rules of games they were playing. This highlights how space, particularly indoor space, contributed to children's awareness of not only their own role in the setting, but also about the adults' roles.

8.3. Discussing the Methodological Decisions

The ethnographic case study framework that I have employed in this study has been previously used in Greece with children over the age of two years five months by Bitou (2010). However, this study extends both the use of the ethnographic case study framework with younger children and also the use of the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2001) with children under the age of

two. The research raised various issues ranging from issues associated with the data generation methods to ethical issues. Addressing these issues underlined the importance of flexibility and reflexivity as the most important methodological elements.

An example of flexibility is the way I adapted the Mosaic Approach, instead of strictly following Clark and Moss' (2001) instructions on the use of the approach. Changes were made throughout the study regarding the use of methods which included letting the children use the cameras freely, without suggesting to children, for example, to photograph '*important things*' in their setting as Clark and Moss (2001, p.21) did. This allowed children to make autonomous decisions regarding the photographic data they would generate and provided me with powerful data regarding children's perspectives in relation to adults and children but also in relation to their nursery environment. Furthermore, digital cameras were easier to use, even by the younger children, than the disposable ones used by Clark and Moss, which proved difficult for all children to handle. However, amongst the most important benefits regarding the use of a camera is that it reveals the differences between perspectives on the world which is shown by photographs taken by children as opposed to adults. Thus, the use of cameras is a valid approach for researching the perspectives of children and with some adaptations it can be used with children under the age of three, including some one year olds.

Reflexivity was needed to address ethical dilemmas encountered in relation to adults and in particular on issues regarding their voluntary participation, the use of video recordings and in relation to interview transcripts. Furthermore, dilemmas were encountered in relation to other children who, for example, indicated that they wished to participate in the study but whose parents did not consent to their participation. Upon reflecting on the ethnographic framework of this study, the non-case study children were participants of the ethnographic study and these children's presence affected the project in various ways since they interacted with the case study children. This realisation highlights the problematic nature of gaining consent to conduct an ethnographic study because all the actors in a setting are implicitly participating in the project and they affect it as they move around and interact with others. But this realisation

leads to further ethical dilemmas. For example, is it enough in ethnography to just gain the main participants' consent or should a researcher seek to obtain the consent of all actors in a setting?

In general, I would agree with Cohen et al. (2007) that the consideration of ethical issues is an ongoing process which continues throughout the study but, in regards to this project, my conclusion is that I cannot claim with certainty that I conducted an ethical project. This is because I tried to conduct research *with* children and not *on* them by including children in the research process. However, my reflections on how the project was eventually conducted made me conclude that this project was conducted both *with* and *on* children.

In section 3.5, the discussion has concerned how one can conduct ethical research, including the issues that need to be addressed in order to avoid harming participants and researchers' moral obligations towards participants. It is evident that these obligations of the researcher are usually directed towards '*others*' and the success or the ethicality of a project is judged on the premise that one has managed to successfully solve these issues for the benefit of the participants. Patti Lather's (1986, p.263 in: Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p.93) concept of '*rape research*' refers to how the participants might feel when the researcher goes into a setting, gets the data she needs, and leaves. Even though this seems a rather strong statement, it works as a reminder for researchers' obligations towards '*others*' and for avoiding their exploitation. What might be overlooked is that the '*researcher*' is not just a role or an identity but a person who can also experience feelings of disappointment or sadness at having to leave the research site. Experienced researchers might be more aware of what to expect and how to overcome these issues but the inexperienced ones, like me, usually enter the research field with the naive impression that the only ethical dilemmas they will encounter will be associated with '*others*'.

Even though researchers' moral obligation towards '*others*' should be constantly kept in mind, one should not neglect researchers' moral obligations towards themselves when designing and putting into practice a research project. For example, during my last day in Setting A I tried to thank one of the parents for

her participation. Her response was *'You took advantage of us and now you abandon us!'* This shows how problematic it might be when, in ethnographic research, one has to build a relationship of trust with the participants. I did not share the feeling of 'abandonment' in exactly the same way as the parent because I was probably more aware, than her, that this process would end. However, this response made me feel guilty and raised more questions as to whether what I did was ethical. I also felt disappointment because, after all the effort I put into building relationships of trust, with so many people and in such a limited time, there would still be people who would remember me as someone who took advantage of them and then abandoned them. Because this incident occurred at the same time as I had withdrawn one of my case study children from the project due to safeguarding concerns (See page 107) and when I was moving to Setting B without a break I, unconsciously I believe, distanced myself from the participants of Setting B.

At the time, I did not realise why I was struggling to create similar relationships with participants in Setting B as I had experienced with children and adults from Setting A. This struggle and the emotional effort involved on a daily basis led me to conclude that in my research design and practice I had tried to be as ethical as possible for everyone else but me. For example, I did not consider whether building a relationship of trust with so many people and in so limited a time frame was a realistic task and whether it was an ethical practice to allow myself to experience this. Even though I realised early on that I probably would not be able to build the same quality of relationships in Setting B, I decided that the ethical thing to do was to stay and work on it. A possible withdrawal from the setting would have had more serious ethical implications than staying, not only for my research but also for the participants who would probably have had to provide explanations to their superiors, or who might have thought that they had done something wrong.

Thus, ethical issues require a researcher to be flexible, reflexive and reflective but, no matter how much researchers try, it is almost impossible to claim with certainty that they conducted an ethical project. This is because the moment they solve one ethical issue a new one appears. Furthermore, ethical issues start when the project starts but they do not seem to end when the project ends.

On the contrary, it seems that they can extend beyond field work and sometimes even after the write up has finished by creating issues concerning representation for participants for example.

8.4. Implications for Theory and Practice

Children's experiences of their relationships with adults, peers and the nursery environment have implications both at a theoretical and at a practical level. In particular, this thesis contributes to research by recognising the significant contribution of children aged under three to the formation of interpersonal relationships with adults in settings beyond the home. At a practical level, the findings suggest that practitioners and policy makers should place emphasis on child-adult relationships, not only by acknowledging and taking into account children's desires but also by providing further opportunities for children to exercise their agency in that area. An example would be to introduce the concept of 'pedagogos anaphoras'¹³ into Greek settings as was initially suggested by Roufidou (2008). However, this study suggests that children should be given the opportunity to choose the person they want to form a close relationship with, rather than having someone allocated to them. This latter suggestion could be applicable in other contexts where Elfer's concept of the key worker is used. Finally, in the Greek context, where ancillary staff members interact with children in a sustained way, children should be given further opportunities to sustain and promote these relationships. This is because data indicates that ancillary staff members remain significant for children's lives in the setting, even after they have fully adjusted to the nursery setting.

In relation to peer relationships, this study contributes to theory by highlighting the agency of children under the age of three in initiating interactions with their peers by using strategies that have previously been observed in studies with older children. It also adds to the literature about children's dispositions, suggesting that it is not only children's ages that guide their level of social interaction but also the cultural context, the setting's philosophy and the programme structure. In particular, in the Greek context there seemed to be

¹³ The practitioner that children can go/refer back to when they need emotional or physical closeness and to be cared for.

three elements that supported the development of peer relationships: the culture of the Greek ECEC provision, which traditionally emphasised the sociability aspect; the particular settings' culture with a lightly structured programme which emphasised group activities over solitary ones; and the practitioners' more detached style, in certain instances. At a practical level, this study provides evidence that these three elements, which have been criticized by previous Greek researchers, should be re-evaluated as they appeared to contribute significantly to the formation of peer relationships for many children. However, the study's findings also suggest that children in Greek settings should be allowed more time and given more opportunities to form a group identity at their own rate, as is the case with the formation of one-to-one interactions and friendships.

Finally, the findings regarding children's relationship with their nursery environment have theoretical implications because this study suggests that children's perspectives are influenced and shaped by the way they experience the following three elements of space: indoor and outdoor spaces, spaces defined by the toys and furniture and the spaces defined by the positions of actors within the settings. This categorisation is an original contribution of this study and has practical implications, suggesting that children value both indoor and outdoor spaces, taking up the opportunities both kinds of spaces give them for play and exploration. Furthermore, younger children also use toys and furniture to create their own private spaces within their settings, as has been observed for older children by Corsaro (2011). Thus, children should be given opportunities to use the equipment in conventional and unconventional ways but with attention to safety issues. Finally, study findings should contribute to adults' awareness on a practical level of how positioning in space provides indications about each actor's role and status within the setting, an awareness relevant to adult and child roles and status. However, the most important implication for practice of this study seems to arise from the limited opportunities offered to children in relation to experiencing the natural environment. Even though Greek provision has been shaped by Froebelian influences (Kyprianos, 2007) in the past, these influences, especially in relation to the use of outdoor spaces, it seems were not long lasting. Although there are

specific issues in Greece concerning climate, the opportunities for outdoor experience should be re-evaluated. Furthermore, at a practical level, this study also suggests that the indoor environment, and in particular the floor, offers significant opportunities to children for play and exploration and it suggests that these opportunities could be explicitly incorporated within the setting's daily programme.

8.5. Implications for Policy

Greek researchers including Petrogiannis (2002) and Laloumi-Vidali (1998) argue about the need for a national curriculum for children under the age of three. Within the arguments for such a framework as a priority for policy makers, researchers identify that this will contribute to eliminating the division between education and care which is evident in Greek ECEC settings. This thesis provides some possible interpretations as to why this division exists, interpretations which range from historic to cultural ones. At the same time, the study's findings suggest that different kinds of settings co-exist within the Greek model of ECEC provision, including family type settings and more educationally oriented ones. Therefore, it is probably not realistic to propose a framework under which all different types of settings should operate. This is because there would be the risk of undermining the distinct characteristics which contribute to each setting's unique identity and culture. Furthermore, not all children share the same interests or dispositions and at the same time these interests and dispositions are subject to change as children grow older and interact with adults, peers and the physical environment. Therefore, this study suggests that policy makers should devise a flexible framework that would recognise and value each setting's distinct culture and each child's interests and dispositions.

Previous researchers, including Laloumi-Vidali (1998), also suggest that any reforms in Greek ECEC settings should acknowledge parents' perspectives. This study suggests the necessity of recognising children as active agents by promoting children's participation in decision making and valuing children's perspectives alongside other ECEC stakeholders' perspectives. As has been identified in this study, there are three main areas of daily life that individual children valued and these shaped the way children experienced their settings:

relationships with adults, relationships with peers and relationships with the physical environment. Thus, policy makers should make sure that children, regardless of their age, are given the opportunity to express their perspectives on the opportunities settings offer for the formation of these kinds of relationships.

More specifically, in relation to child-adult relationships, it is imperative for policies and guidance to ensure that all children have access to emotionally available and responsive adults who will listen, care for and form emotionally close relationships with children. At the same time policies should explicitly recognise that children, as agents, contribute actively to the formation of these relationships. Therefore, there must be acknowledgement of children's right to reject interaction with adults at times, either playful interactions or requirements for children's participation in various adult-led activities. Additionally, specific emphasis should be given to the ways adults position themselves in space. This is because some children may find the ways adults position themselves encourages them to make autonomous decisions but for other, less confident children or those with limited language skills, this can be an obstacle to the formation of emotionally close relationships with adults. For example, in this study there were indications that some children, like Christos, found it easier to approach adults who had a more accessible positioning in space, such as by being physically close to children or by sitting on the floor. Therefore, future policies should acknowledge that children's dispositions vary and ensure that adults are aware of this and respect it.

Another area that was important for children in this study, with implications for policy, was children's relationships with their peers. Even though, children's dispositions varied in this area, all children seemed to value peer relationships. For that reason, future policies and guidance should place particular emphasis on creating environments which allow children the necessary time and space to build confidence and try out different strategies to approach and interact with their peers. Adults should facilitate peer interactions by organising group activities and at the same time allow children time and space to develop friendships and form their group identity at their own pace.

Finally, future policies and guidance should emphasise the importance of the settings' indoor and outdoor environments. Even though economic reasons militate against an increase in spending on furniture and equipment in Greek ECEC settings, policy makers should review guidance about the opportunities provided for children to experience a variety of materials. This is because there is an imbalance in environments between plastic toys and those made from other materials, for example wood or metal. Some inexpensive ideas for resources and toys would include everyday household objects, such as pans or toys made from natural world materials, such as wooden building bricks. Also, the case study children seemed to value a colourful and decorated environment. It also seemed important for children to be able to create their own play spaces within the setting. Thus, children need opportunities to move toys and furniture around and use the nursery's equipment imaginatively. Daily programmes should explicitly recognise and facilitate children's imaginative use of equipment, taking account of health and safety issues. They should also recognise the valuable opportunities the floor itself provides for play and exploration, including cooperative play. This suggests a need for relatively spacious classrooms with some unstructured space.

Finally, there is currently a lack of policy and explicit guidelines regarding the regular use of the outdoors and this leads to confusion for practitioners who have to decide whether or not a setting's outdoor environment is 'safe' for children's use and whether or not weather conditions permit the use of the outdoors. Undoubtedly, aspects of health and safety should be prioritised in ECEC settings but specific criteria should be provided to ensure that all children attending Greek day care settings have opportunities to visit the outdoors and experience the natural world. This is especially so because findings of this study suggest that children were attracted to and interested in the outdoors even where they rarely went outside.

8.6. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

The previous sections provided an account of the findings of the study and on methodological issues. In this section I present the limitations of the study alongside my suggestions for further research.

The framework and the methodology adopted for this study allowed interpretations of these ten children's perspectives on their experiences, but these also included limitations. One limitation is associated with the limited number of participants. The number of participants not only assisted in making this project feasible but also allowed me to study these children's perspectives and experiences in great detail. However, such a small number of participants do not allow for generalisations, not even amongst the ten children, and even less so in a wider context such as the Greek one or an international context. However, the findings of this study could provide possible interpretations to settings that face similar challenges, something that Bassey (2001) refers to as '*fuzzy generalisation*'. Furthermore, a possible replication of the study in other Greek or international contexts could provide further evidence about the aspects of the nursery that children of this age value. For example, in this study it was identified that all children valued aspects of relationships with adults, peers and the environment. However, the fact that the degree that children valued these aspects varied according to children's dispositions raises more questions, including: do children from other Greek settings, or from other cultural contexts, value these aspects as well and to what extent? This could be an area that future researchers focus upon.

Additionally the significant role of food in interactions both with adults and with peers was identified in this study. However, the study does not discuss in depth the socio-cultural meaning of food which seems to be embedded in the Greek culture. The concept of food seemed to be important for the case study children and served various purposes. For example, meal times were associated with caregiving whilst, when children incorporated it in their pretend play, they seemed to use it in order to invite their peers to play with them. Thus, future research could focus more on young children's pretend play and interactions

around the theme of food. A comparative study between Greek children and children from other cultural contexts could provide further evidence about the way children incorporate food in their play, since interactions around food were observed in other contexts as well. Thus, a more comprehensive study regarding the socio-cultural meaning of food and food related activities within the setting could be an interesting and important area for research in day-care and nursery settings.

A significant limitation of this study is that it focuses only on children's perspectives. This is an interesting area because children's perspectives are less frequently researched in relation to those of other groups, including parents and practitioners, particularly in the Greek context. However, some authors including Dahlberg et al. (1999) argue that, in order to make sense of the work that is happening in a setting, the perspectives of other people, who are associated with ECEC services including parents, practitioners, ECEC experts and so on, must be identified. Even though this study was originally planned with this wider focus, the plethora of data, including a vast amount of observational, interview and photographic data, made the completion of this task unrealistic. However, future researchers could probably focus on identifying how multiple individuals' perspectives might relate and interrelate.

8.7. Summary

This ethnographic case study presented ten children's relationships with adults, their peers and their nursery environment. It focused on children's agency in the formation of these relationships and demonstrated the various strategies children used to engage in various kinds of reciprocal interaction with adults and peers. The study's findings extend work concerning child-adult relationships in terms of highlighting children's agency in the formation of these relationships. Furthermore, it is original in terms of recognising ancillary staff members also as significant adults in a child's nursery life. The study also extends the literature regarding the strategies employed by children under the age of three to initiate interactions with their peers by highlighting the significant contribution of toys in peer relationships and children's interaction around the theme of food. It also presents findings regarding the development of early friendships suggesting

that three elements need to coexist in order for two children to be called friends: reciprocity, consistency and duration.

Finally, the study contributes to the understanding of children's perspectives regarding their nursery environment by presenting the three elements of space which constitutes this environment, as revealed by the data-driven thematic analysis. These elements are: space marked by a room or outside area (floor, ceiling and walls), space marked by the nursery's equipment (toys and furniture), and space marked by the positioning of actors (adults and children within this space). The thesis presents a detailed account of the affordances of the nursery environment and how these are used by children. In particular, it highlights the multidimensional use of the floor by children, highlighting its significant opportunities for play and exploration. It extends the existing research by presenting findings which show that children under the age of three also use the equipment imaginatively to create their own spaces in the setting and in order to explore different schemas. The study provides indications that the positioning of actors in space plays a significant role in young children's understanding about their own roles and status in the setting but also about the roles and status of adults. Additionally, there is evidence that the roles adopted by children during their pretend play are influenced and change as the setting's actors move around and interact with each other within this space.

The findings of this study could support the development of policy and practice in Greek ECEC provision. In particular, the findings suggest that young children value their relationships with various adults within settings as important. Therefore, settings could promote children's relationships with ancillary staff members in a more proactive way. Additionally, they could incorporate the 'pedagogos anaphoras' (or key-worker) concept into the pedagogy of ECEC settings, particularly for children under three. Recognising children's agency in their relationships with adults, they could be allowed, for example, to choose their key-worker. Another area which seems to be valued as significant by the children of this study is interaction with peers. Even though the findings indicate high levels of social interaction amongst peers, children could be given more opportunities, including through time and space, to form a group identity. A final aspect of Greek ECEC provision where study findings are relevant concerns the

opportunities offered to children for outdoor experiences. This is an area of ECEC provision which needs to be re-evaluated because the younger children in this study seemed to be drawn to the outdoors. However, they did not have the opportunity to experience the outdoor spaces of their setting. These are all important areas for improving practice in Greek ECEC provision.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: *Structure of daily activities at the four public-run settings*

Time of the day	Infant settings (Vrefiki stathmi) 6mths to 2 ½ years old	Day-care settings (vrefonipiaki stathmi) 6mths-5½ years old	Nurseries (paidiki stathmi) 2 ½ -5½ years old	Kindergarten (Nipiagogeio) 4-6 years old
7:00 – 8:30	-Children's arrival time -*	Children's arrival time		8:00-8:15 Children's arrival time 8:00-9:00 -Children spontaneously choose activities at the room's areas. -Grace
7:00 – 8:45	*	Free solitary or group play (construction and blocks, symbolic play)		
8:45 – 9:00	*	Tidying up the room		
9:00 – 9:30	*	Routine time (personal hygiene, breakfast)		-Discussion -Scheduling the daily activities
9:30 – 10:00	Breakfast and personal hygiene	Break		9:30-10:30 Interdisciplinary activities **
10:00 – 11:00	Resting (sleeping)	Children's solitary or group play in the room's different areas (corners), drawing, crafting, etc.		10:30-11:15 -Breakfast -Break
11:00 – 11:45	Personal hygiene and lunch	Tidying up. Music, singing, dancing, rhythmical games, free movement or gymnastics		11:15-12:00 -Spontaneous activities at the room's areas. -Educational games.
11:45 – 12:00	*	Break		12:00-12:30 -Interdisciplinary activities.
12:00 – 13:00	*	Personal hygiene, preparation for lunch, tidying up the room.		12:30-13:00 - Break
13:00 – 14:00	Resting (sleeping)	Relaxation, listening to music, teacher led activities, storytelling, reading books,		13:00-13:45 -Lunch

		the practitioner or the children playing the puppets, group games, theatrical games, folk games.	13:45-14:30 -Resting (sleeping)
14:00 – 16:30	*	Resting for the children who need it, free play or teacher-led activities/play. Group exchanges and opportunities to interact with older and younger children. -Leaving the setting.	14:30-15:15 -Interdisciplinary activities 15:15-15:45 -Discussion. -Evaluation of daily activities. -Organising next day's activities. -Preparation for children's departure 15:45-16:00 -Departure
*	<p>*During the non-routine times (meals, personal hygiene, and resting) children are recreated with children's songs, scrunching papers, seeing images of animals, flowers, and objects. Practitioners should pronounce the words clearly, using simple phrases and correct wording. Children can use the outdoors weather permitted.</p> <p>**Interdisciplinary activities refer to activities for developing children's skills in language, mathematics, science, arts, and IT. The kindergarten's aim is: to assist children's physical, emotional, cognitive and social development.</p>		

Note: Data was taken by AMC's (2005) inner regulation for the first three types of settings and data for the kindergartens were extracted from the new kindergartens' national curriculum (Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports, 2011).

Appendix 2: Consent Letters

Organisation Consent Letter

Date _____

Dear,

My name is Eleni Katsiada and I am currently studying for a Research Degree in Early Childhood Education at Sheffield Hallam University. I am a qualified early years' practitioner and I have been working for five years with children from birth to six years old at [.....]. I am writing to request your assistance in order to conduct my research project in your organisation.

The aim of the project is to explore the different participants', such as children's, parents', practitioners' and policy makers', experiences of day-care services. For the purposes of the project two day-care settings, for children under the age of three, will be the sample from which I would like to approach staff, parents, and children and ask for their voluntarily participation.

In order to explore children's experiences of day-care my sample will consist of approximately 8 children, their parents and practitioners. For the project purposes I would like to observe the children, and take video and photographs during their daily routine. The children would actively participate in the project and would have the opportunity to use digital cameras to take photographs or videos. I would also lead some activities with the children. Additionally, I would like to interview children's parents' and practitioners' to provide their perspectives on the children's experiences.

As well as exploring children's experiences, the project aims to explore adults' experiences of day-care services. For that reason I would like to interview four other parents, four other practitioners, and two policy makers.

As a further strand of the study, I would assess the quality of participating settings using the ITERS-R scale (Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale, Harms et al., 2003).

The organisation's name, the nurseries names and the participants' names will not be used in the thesis and pseudonyms will be used to ensure all participants' anonymity. The photographs and videos will be modified to ensure that participants will not be identifiable. In the final write up of the thesis I will present data in such a way that the participants and the organisation will not be easily identifiable. However, please note that other people from your organisation might be able to identify the settings. Therefore, all participants will be informed about their right to withhold information whenever they judge it is necessary, as well as their right to withdraw at any stage of the research by requesting possession of any unprocessed data.

Finally, the organisation and the participants will receive information about the main findings of the research project and a copy of the dissertation will be available at your request.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. My contact details are provided below. If you wish to speak to someone at the University about the project, I would be very happy to provide you with the contact details.

I allow Eleni Katsiada to undertake her research project at our organisation_____ for a PhD in Early Childhood Studies at Sheffield Hallam University.

Name_____

Signature_____

Date_____

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Eleni Katsiada

Contact details:

E-mail:

Telephone number:

(Please sign both copies of the consent paper provided and return one of them).

School Consent Letter

Date_____

Dear_____

I am writing to request your help to conduct my research project in your school. I am a qualified early years' practitioner and I have been working for five years with children from birth to six years old at the [.....]. The aim of the research will be to explore children's, parents' and practitioners' experiences of day-care services.

In order to explore children's experiences of day-care I would like to observe them, and I would like to use video equipment and take photographs during their daily routine. The children would actively participate in the project and would have the opportunity to use digital cameras to take photographs or videos. I would also lead some activities with the children.

Additionally, I would like to interview children's parents and practitioners to provide their perspectives on children's experiences. Furthermore, in order to identify parents' and practitioners' experiences of day-care services, I would like to interview two other parents and two other practitioners. Finally, I would like to use the ITERS-R rating scale in order to identify the setting's quality.

I would like to make clear that the names of the parents, practitioners and the nursery's name will not be used in the thesis. The children's names will be changed, and the photographs and videos will be modified to ensure that participants will not be identifiable.

Even though all measures will be taken into consideration to guarantee participants' anonymity, please note that your school, practitioners and parents might be identifiable by others in the organisation. Therefore, all participants have the right to withhold information whenever they judge it necessary, withdraw from the research project at any time, and request the possession of any unprocessed data.

If you wish to speak to someone at the University about my research, I would be very happy to give you the contact details. Additionally, the school, practitioners and parents will receive information about the main findings of the research project and a copy of the dissertation will be available if wanted.

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Eleni Katsiada

Contact details:

E-mail:

Telephone number:

*I allow Eleni Katsiada to undertake her research project at our school
_____ for a PhD in Early Childhood Studies at Sheffield Hallam
University.*

Name_____

Signature_____

Date_____

(Please sign both copies of the consent paper provided and return one of them).

Practitioner Consent Letter

Date _____

Dear Colleague,

My name is Eleni Katsiada and I am currently studying for a Research Degree in Early Childhood Education at Sheffield Hallam University. I am a qualified early years' practitioner and I have been working for five years with children from birth to six years old at the [.....]. I am writing to request your assistance in order to conduct interviews which constitute part of my degree.

I would like to conduct an interview with you to gain an understanding of your perspectives regarding children's experiences of day-care. During the interview I will be using a tape recorder along with hand written notes, and it should not take more than an hour for each child.

I would like to make clear that your name and the nursery's name will not be mentioned in the thesis and children's names will be changed to ensure all participants' anonymity. In the final write up I will try to ensure that no-one is recognisable. However, others in the setting may be able to identify you. Therefore, you have the right to withhold information whenever you judge it is necessary. Additionally, you have the right to withdraw at any stage of the research and request the possession of any unprocessed data.

If you agree to take part you will be able to see any transcribed notes to enable you to confirm the accuracy of the statements. I would appreciate any comments you have about the transcript because extracts or a discussion of these might be used in the thesis.

You may also receive information about the main findings of the research project at your request.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. My contact details are provided below. If you wish to speak to someone at the University

about the interview and its purpose, I would be very happy to provide you with the contact details. Also, if wanted, I am happy to provide information about the main findings of the research.

I agree to participate in the interview and I give permission for Eleni Katsiada to include data collected from the interview(s), in her thesis for a PhD in Early Childhood Education at Sheffield Hallam University.

Name_____

Signature_____

Date_____

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Eleni Katsiada

Contact details:

E-mail: [

Telephone number:

(Please sign both copies of the consent paper provided and return one of them).

Parent Consent Letter

Date _____

Dear Parent,

My name is Eleni Katsiada and I am currently studying for a Research Degree in Early Childhood Education at Sheffield Hallam University. I am a qualified early years' practitioner and I have been working for five years with children from birth to six years old at the [.....]. I am writing to request your assistance with my research project. The aim of the project is to explore your child's experiences of day-care.

For this project I would like to observe your child, and take video and photographs during his/her daily routine. Your child would actively participate in the project and would have the opportunity to use digital cameras to take photographs or videos. I would also lead some activities with the children.

I would also like to interview you to gain an understanding of your perspectives regarding your child's experiences. During the interview I would use a tape recorder along with hand written notes, and it should not take more than an hour of your time.

I would also like to interview the child's practitioner to provide his/her perspectives on the child's experiences.

I would like to make clear that your name and the nursery's name will not be used in the thesis, your child's name will be changed and the photographs and videos will be modified to ensure that the participants will not be identifiable.

In the final write up I will try to ensure that no-one is recognisable. However, others in the setting may be able to identify you. Therefore, you have the right to withhold information whenever you judge it is necessary. Additionally, you have the right to withdraw at any stage of the research and request the possession of any unprocessed data.

If you agree to take part you will be able to see any transcribed notes to enable you to confirm the accuracy of the statements. I would appreciate any

comments you have about the transcript because extracts or a discussion of these might be used in the thesis.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. My contact details are provided below. If you wish to speak to someone at the University about the interview and its purpose, I would be very happy to provide you with the contact details. Also, if wanted, I am happy to provide information about the main findings of the research.

I agree to participate in the research project and I give permission for Eleni Katsiada to observe my child and to include her observations and data collected from the interviews in her thesis for a PhD in Early Childhood Studies at Sheffield Hallam University.

Name_____

Signature_____

Date_____

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Eleni Katsiada

Contact details:

E-mail:

Telephone number:

(Please sign both copies of the consent paper provided and return one of them).

Appendix 3: *Piloting the Methods*

Piloting methods prior to using them can provide valuable insights about their advantages and disadvantages and inform the ways that they will be used during the main study (Maruyama and Deno, 1992; Gillham, 2000; Balnaves and Caputi, 2001; McQueen and Knussen, 2002). Piloting was considered appropriate for this study even though most ethnographic and qualitative projects do not emphasise the piloting of methods and reporting of results (Sampson, 2004). Sampson (2004) attributes this mainly to the researchers' assumption that piloting is relevant to positivist approaches. However, piloting assisted me to become familiar with the methods I was planning to employ and to decide about their appropriateness in answering the research questions. Also, piloting led to small changes to recording methods such as using a notepad to undertake unstructured observations rather than using printed sheets. The more structured format, with printed lines and rows for noting the time, the target child's name, and any other children and adults who were present during the observation, appeared to be limiting the available space for keeping notes rather than assisting with the recording.

Piloting the Interviews

All methods used in this study were piloted in a setting in the suburbs of a large Greek city after gaining access to it with the assistance of a former colleague (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). One of the interviews was piloted earlier in England with a parent. The pilot setting was different from the main study settings in order to avoid losing potential main study participants (Maruyama and Deno, 1992; Gillham, 2000; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), but also to maximise the use of time as I was waiting for permission to access the case study settings. Piloting lasted approximately a month and allowed me, amongst other things, to clarify the advantages of using interviews with the participants. It appeared that interviews could provide rich data (Cohen et al., 2007), and allow me to engage in in-depth discussions, provided that I had gained the participants' trust (Rubin and Rubin, 1995), and that I had a sufficient degree of familiarity with the setting and the child we were discussing.

Piloting the Observations

In relation to piloting the observational method, it appeared that the unstructured observation allowed me to record children's actions in more detail in comparison, for example, to the use of a checklist (Hobart and Frankel, 2005; Palaiologou, 2008) for identifying children's likes and dislikes within the setting. It also appeared that this kind of observation would allow themes and categorisations to emerge from data and would give me an overview of children's daily experiences. In the initial planning I envisaged 30 minutes for every observation but as a result of piloting I decided that 20 minutes was enough time for generating a sufficient amount of data. At the same time, it was not as tiring for me as a researcher as focusing on one child for 30 minutes, which could have had negative results on the quality of the generated data. However, the main disadvantage of the unstructured observational approach was that it was difficult to write everything down and so it became imperative to think of shorthand and codes (Hobart and Frankel, 2004). For example, I decided that 'L.→P1' would be used to code the observation that the child whose name started with L. said something/interacted with Practitioner 1 while the opposite 'P1→L.' would be used to code the observation that the practitioner initiated interaction with the child. The main problem that I encountered, during observations, resulted from my previous background in developmental psychology. When observing children, I tended to note children's developmental characteristics, such as their fine and gross motor skills, rather than focusing, for example, on the things they said or did during that time. However, once I noticed this I consciously tried to reduce a developmental approach by keeping in mind, for example, that it was more important for the purposes of the study to note down who the child was interacting with during meals time rather than how s/he held the spoon.

Piloting the Cameras

The piloting of the use of cameras (disposable cameras and a digital camera) showed that children did not face significant problems in using the digital camera. However, they needed adult assistance to turn the disposable camera's dial in order to take more than one photograph. Thus, it was decided

to use only the digital cameras to avoid discouraging children. Also, piloting showed that instead of introducing the camera to the children (Clark and Moss, 2001) by demonstrating to them how it worked, it would be better to let children explore it for themselves. By activating children's curiosity, children would probably be more willing to explore and use it rather than introducing the camera to them which could make them think of it as another adult-led activity. Therefore, in the main study, the camera was placed near children's toys and when they picked it up and started exploring it, I then approached and showed them how to use it. The problem of identifying which child took which picture was solved by introducing one rule during the demonstration: before a child used the camera they had to come to me to take their photo and then they could freely use it for as long as they wanted. This rule worked well with the majority of the case study children during the main study. Only a few reminders were needed, mainly on occasions where children were passing the camera to each other during play.

Finally, I decided, as a result of the pilot, to avoid limiting the children as to the number of photographs they could take and to avoid instructing them to photograph their likes and dislikes as suggested by Clark and Moss (2011). I followed this approach in order to avoid misunderstandings and unconsciously leading the children to take photographs just to please me by selecting, for example, to photograph things that they think adults like or dislike. This ensured that children would be empowered because they would have the control (Lancaster, 2003) and it would provide me with authentic data. This decision was made because the photographs were just a part of each child's mosaic and by 'triangulating' these with observational and interview data I considered that it would provide me with enough information about each child's experience in the setting.

The use of the video camera by the children was not popular during the piloting since children preferred taking photographs with the smaller camera. This continued during the main study as well and the only reason I kept the video camera in the study was to avoid conflicts among children, by providing it as an alternative solution for taking photographs when another child was using the most popular camera. Also, the initial planning included the use of video by me

to take moving images of children's daily routine and interactions. The intention was that these would be played back to children to stimulate informal discussions with toddlers and to note down younger children's reactions to the recorded voices, images, people and activities. However, the piloting indicated that some children found it disturbing. For example, during the piloting I took a video of an adult-led activity and right after the activity had finished I played the video back to the children using my laptop. The children seemed bewildered by looking at the laptop's screen and then at the door where their practitioner was standing. This incident, along with concerns raised by the staff during the main study about the future use of the audiovisual data (See page 105), led me to discard the use of the video camera in this project. However, I used my camera to photograph the children during structured and unstructured activities and to take photographs of the different areas in the setting.

Appendix 4: *Initial Stage of Analysing the Observations (Social Interactions Theme)*

Children's actions that indicate sociability: smile, laugh, hug, kiss, physical contact, dialogue, asking-replying to questions, playing with other children/adults, adjust play/rules to play with someone else, helping adults (practitioners and ancillary staff), following instructions/denying to follow instructions, cooperates with other children and adults to achieve a purpose, participate to group activities, making jokes, adjust his/her vocabulary and/or use body language/gestures to put meaning across, the use of objects in order to approach someone, imitation, observe what is happening in the room and comment on that or in other children's actions/play, ask practitioner about children who are absent.

Appendix 5: Chapter 4 Photographs



Figure 1: *Christos' (2.4) photograph of the toy box*



Figure 2: *EK's photograph of Filio (2.4) as she is taking a photograph of the toy box during the nursery tour activity.*



Figure 3: *Filio's (2.4) photograph of the shelf for large toys*



Figure 4: *EK's photograph of the child-sized living room and toy boxes*



Figure 5: Left: Manolis' (2.11) photograph of the plastic toy boxes. Right: Yiannis' (2.11) photograph of the plastic animals in their toy box



Figure 6: EK's photograph of the Blue Class outdoor space



Figure 7: Left: Stathoula's (2.10) photograph of a plastic slide outdoors. Right: Yiannis' (2.11) photograph of a plastic see-saw outdoors

Appendix 6: The structure of a typical day in the Green and Blue Classes

Time	Green Class	Blue Class
7:00-9:00	<u>Arrival time:</u> Child-led free play, including opportunities for interaction with older children, practitioners from other classes, and ancillary staff members.	<u>Arrival time:</u> Child-led free play.
9:00-10:00	<u>Breakfast:</u> Diaper changing before breakfast. Adults assisting children with their breakfast. Opportunities for interaction with ancillary staff members.	<u>Breakfast:</u> Adults assisting children with their breakfast at children's request. Opportunities for interaction with ancillary staff members.
10:00-12:00	<u>Child-led and adult-led activities:</u> Opportunities for free play.	<u>Child-led and adult-led activities:</u> Opportunities for free play indoors. Opportunity to use the outdoor space and interact with ancillary staff members.
12:00-13:00:	<u>Lunch time:</u> Diaper changing before lunch. Adults assist children to eat their lunch. Opportunities for interaction with ancillary staff members.	<u>Lunch time:</u> Adults assist children to eat their lunch. Opportunities for interaction with ancillary staff members.
13:00	<u>Departure time:</u> For some of the children.	<u>Departure time:</u> For some of the children.
13:00-15:00	<u>Sleeping time:</u> All remaining children have a nap. Children from the toddlers' classroom also come to sleep in the Green Class. Children who wake up before 3pm usually engage in child-led free play activities or 'read' books. Opportunities for interaction with older	Free play time within the class.

	children, practitioners from other classes, and ancillary staff members.	
15:00-16:00	<u>Departure time:</u> Child-led free play. Opportunities for interaction with older children, practitioners from other classes, and ancillary staff members	<u>Departure time:</u> Child-led free play in the Orange Classroom, Opportunities for interaction with ancillary staff members.

Appendix 7: Chapter 6 Photographs



Figure 1: EK's sequential photographs of Georgios being approached, pulled and followed on the floor by Nicole (1.4)



Figure 2: *Yannis' (2.11) photographs of toy animals*



Figure 3: *EK's photograph of Dimitris (2.5) taking an interest in the camera when Tina (2.6) uses it*



Figure 4: *EK's photograph of Dimitris hugging Tina*



Figure 5: *EKs photograph of Kostas (2.9) during the map-making activity*



Figure 6: EK's photograph of Manolis and Stathoula playing outdoors



Figure 7: EK's photograph of Blue Class children playing, physically close with each other, with construction material



Figure 8: *EK's photograph of the majority of Blue Class children participating in an adult-led dancing activity*



Figure 9: *EK's photograph of the majority of Blue Class children participating in storytelling*

Appendix 8: Chapter 7 Photographs



Figure 1: *Litsa's (1.5) photograph of the shadows of chair legs*

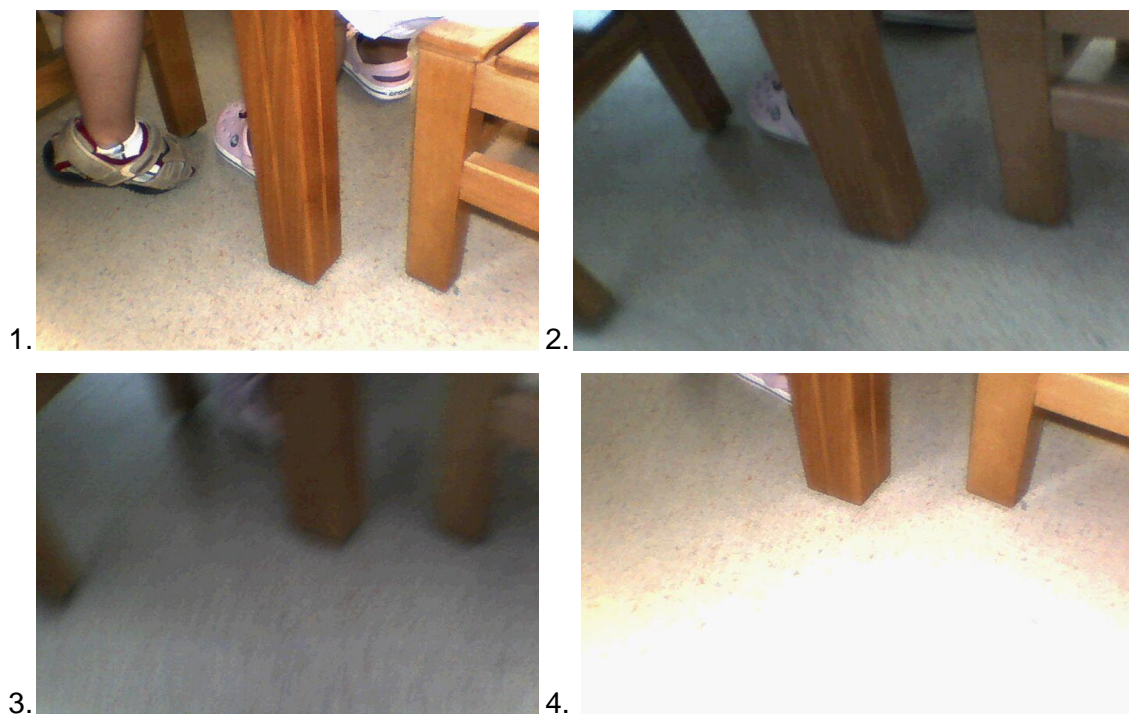


Figure 2: *Stathoula's (2.10) sequence of four photographs of table and chair legs*



Figure 3: *Dimitris' (2.5) photograph of a floor covered in construction materials*

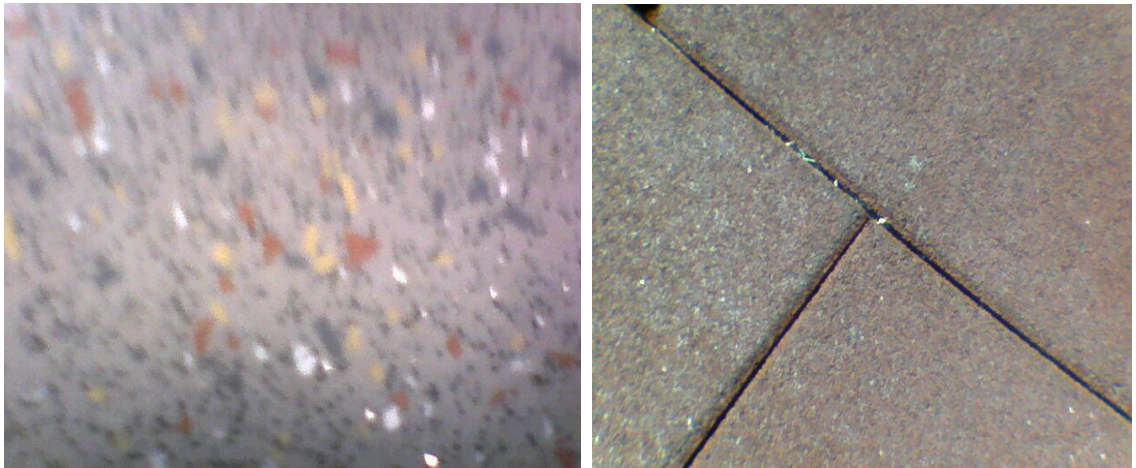


Figure 4: *Yiannis' (2.11) photographs of patterns on the marble floor indoors and lines on the synthetic carpet outdoors*



Figure 5: *EK's photograph of Blue Class children playing with the shadows*



Figure 6: *EK's photograph of Green Class children doing heads over heels on the floor*



Figure 7: *EK's photograph of Georgios (1.4) exploring a toy train*



Figure 8: *EK's photograph of Georgios crawling under the table*



Figure 9: *EK's photograph of Manolis (2.11), of the Blue Class, playing with construction material at the table on two different occasions*



Figure 10: *EK's photograph of Blue Class children playing with construction material on the floor*



Figure 11: *EK's photographs of Manolis playing with some toy horses*



Figure 12: *EK's photograph of Manolis (2.11) balancing himself on the toy box*



Figure 13: *EK's photograph of Blue Class children who lie on the mattresses while some other children at the right corner place toys under them*

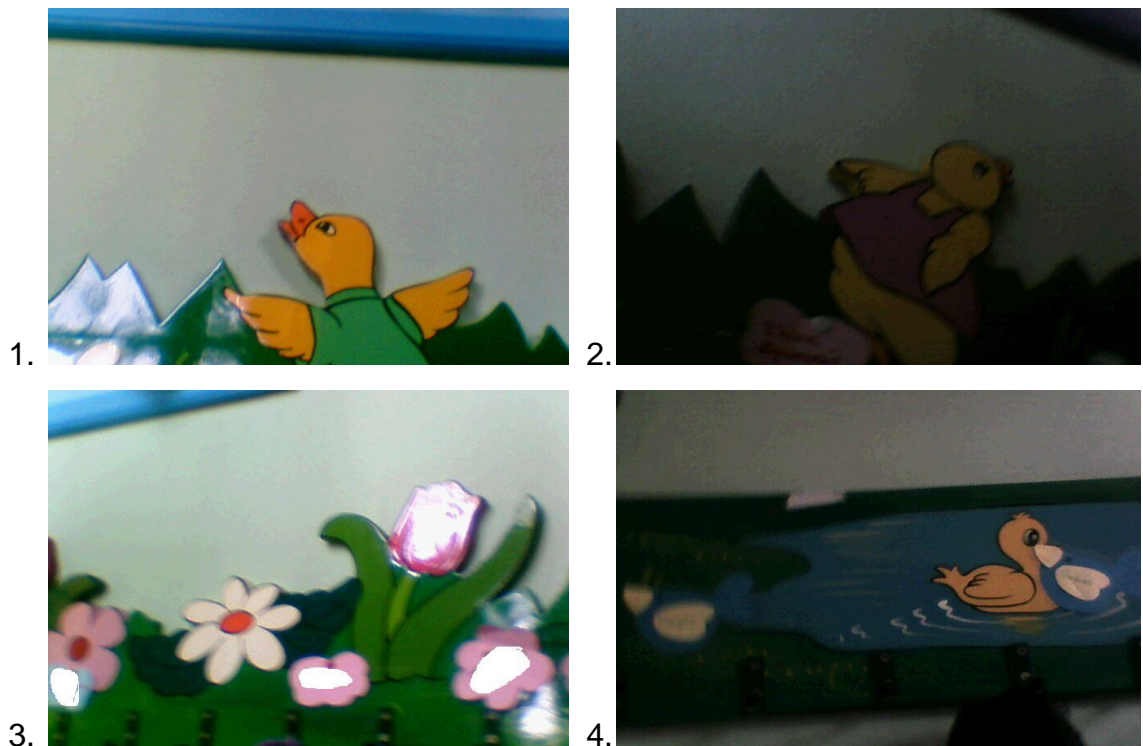
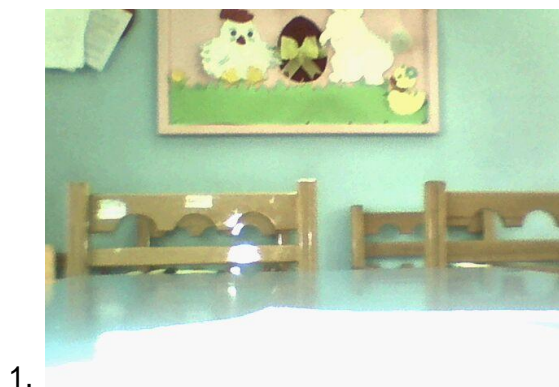


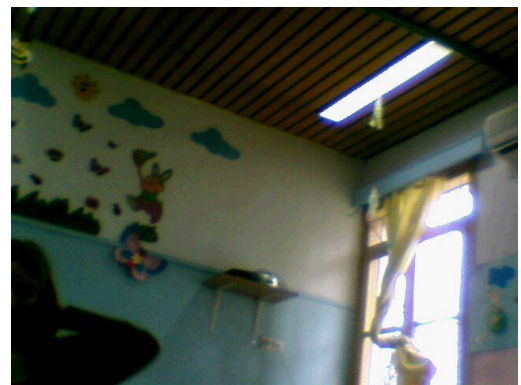
Figure 14: *Christos' (2.4) sequential photographs of the coat hanger*



Figure 15: Christos' (2.4) photograph of the wall display opposite the changing table area



1.



2.



3.



4.

Figure 16: Some of Christos' (2.4) photographs of the classroom's wall displays



Figure 17: *Manolis' (2.11) photograph of his bag*

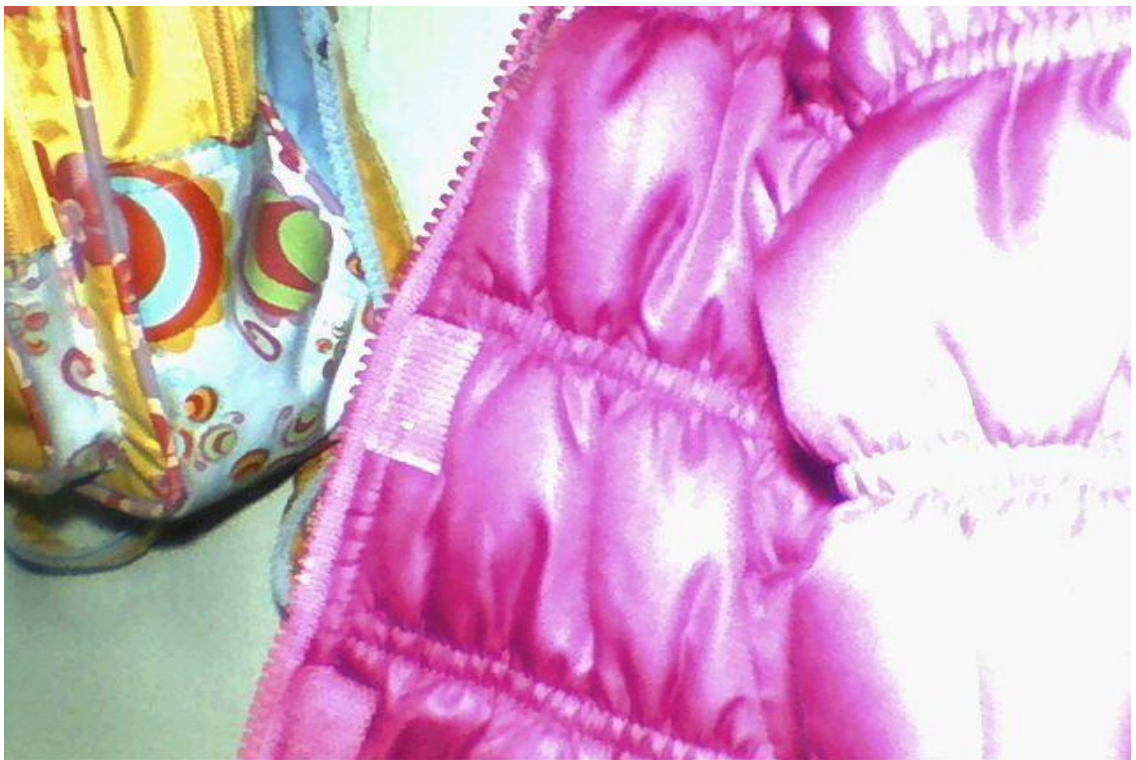


Figure 18: *Filio's (2.4) photograph of her jacket*



Figure 19: Manolis' (2.11) photographs of the wall's display



Figure 20: Left: EK's photograph of Aspa (2.4) on the changing table holding the camera. Right: Aspa's photograph of the mobile hanging over the changing table

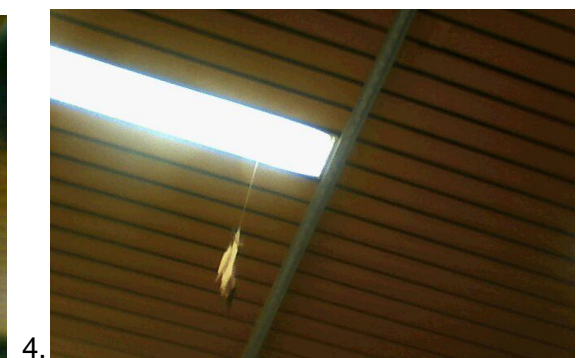
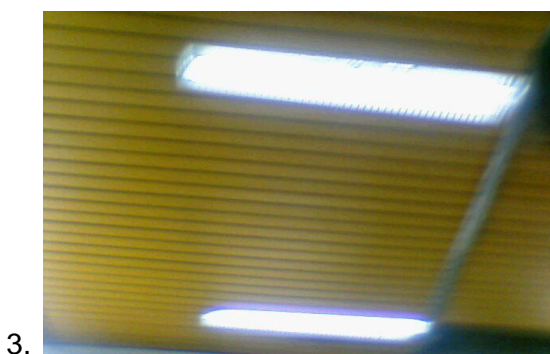
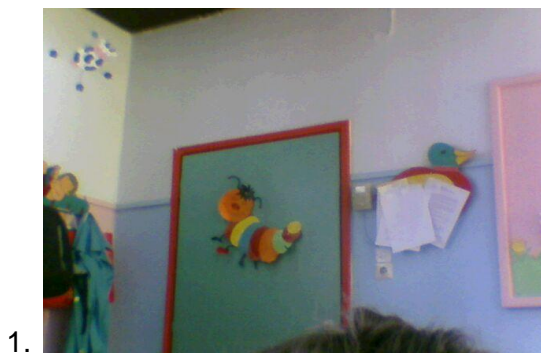


Figure 21: Filio's photographs of the walls displays, the lights and the mobiles hanging from the lights

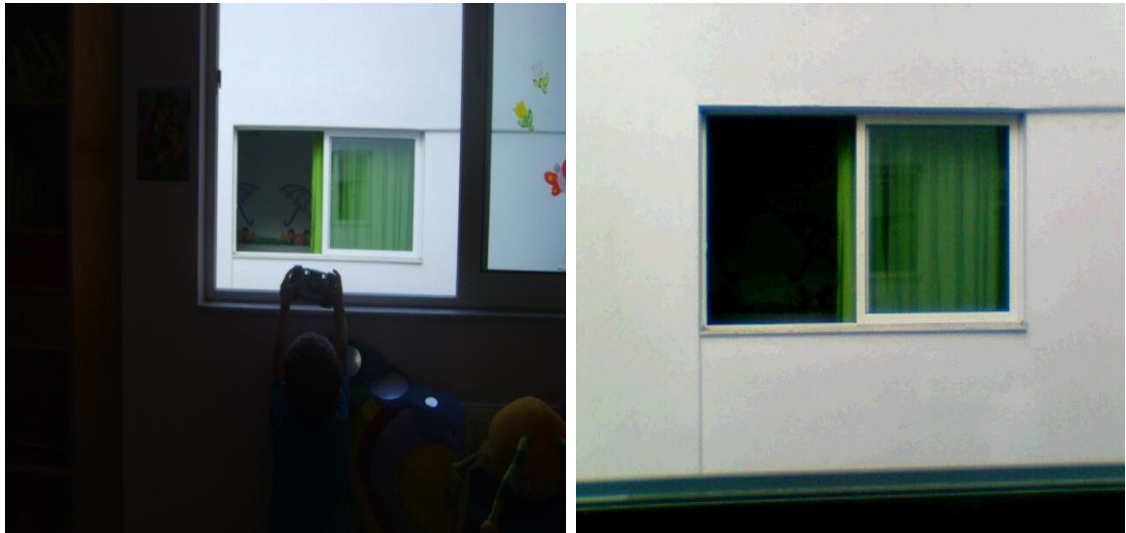


Figure 22: *Left: EK's photograph of Manolis trying to take a photograph of the sky. Right: Manolis' (2.11) photograph*



Figure 23: *EK's photograph of Manolis (2.11) photographing the flowers in the outdoors*



Figure 24: *EK's photographs of Blue Class children moving the mattress around the Orange Classroom*



Figure 25: *EK's photograph of Stathoula (2.10) and Tina (2.6) from Blue Class seated in the toy storage drawer*



Figure 26: EK's photograph of Kostas using books as obstacles for his car toy



Figure 27: EK's photograph of Kostas using the equipment to drive his car



Figure 28: EK's photograph of Kostas (2.6) and Aaron (2.6) playing with cars in the greengrocery area



Figure 29: EK's photograph of Green Class children 'reading' books at the classroom tables on two different occasions



Figure 30: *EK's photograph of Christos and Filio (both aged 2.4) 'reading' books on the floor*



Figure 31: *EK's photograph of the Green Class practitioner singing songs with some children*

Appendix 9: Table on Schema Adapted by Arnold (2002, p.22)

Schema	Description of child's action
<i>Envelopment</i>	<i>Enveloping, covering or surrounding oneself, an object or space.</i>
<i>Trajectory (which according to Whalley (2007) can be either vertical or horizontal)</i>	<i>Moving in or representing straight lines, arcs or curves.</i>
<i>Enclosure</i>	<i>Enclosing oneself, an object or space</i>
<i>Transporting</i>	<i>Carrying objects or being carried from one place to another.</i>
<i>Connection</i>	<i>An interest in connecting themselves to objects and objects to each other.</i>
<i>Rotation</i>	<i>Turning, twisting or rolling oneself or objects in the environment around.</i>
<i>Going through a boundary</i>	<i>Causing oneself or material or an object to go through a boundary and emerge at the other side.</i>
<i>Oblique trajectory</i>	<i>Moving in, using or drawing oblique lines.</i>
<i>Containment</i>	<i>Putting materials inside an object which is capable of containment.</i>
<i>Transformation</i>	<i>Transforming oneself by dressing differently or being interested in changes in state.</i>