Northumbria Research Link

A STUDY OF CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE QUALITY OF THEIR EXPERIENCES IN EARLY YEARS PROVISION

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A study of children's perspectives on the quality of their experiences in early years provision

Abstract

This thesis presents a study of three and four year old children attending preschool at a time of rapid expansion of this phase of education. There is strong evidence that the quality of the experience is the determining factor in the long term effectiveness of early years provision. However, quality is a contested concept with a range of viewpoints, defined by different stakeholders including children. The study builds on previous research and aims to clarify children's perspectives on the quality of their preschool experiences and to consider how their viewpoint might influence policy and practice.

The study examines successive policy initiatives in relation to children and families including the development of quality frameworks for early years practice. It considers policies that promote children's participation based on children's rights, and related theories of children as social agents, active in their own lives. The study discusses different approaches to quality early years provision, identifying two main positions, 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. The study explores alternative, co-constructed approaches to quality that involve children assessing their learning together with trusted adults, to prepare for future learning.

This is a qualitative study using an ethnographic approach. Data were collected employing an adapted version of the Mosaic Approach which combines multiple methods. The study takes a case study approach to present the research stories of six children by detailing their perspectives on quality. These findings are presented as a taxonomy of viewpoints, focussed around a common framework of re-occurring categories. This represents the contribution to knowledge of the study. The taxonomy is presented both in the language of children and that of adults in order to emphasise the extent to which the voice of children is currently absent from discourses on quality. Children's responses are presented as indicators of quality that could inform day to day practice and policy.

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other awards and that it is all my own work.

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Introduction

Background to the study

In England, most three and four year old children attend some form of preschool provision following the rapid expansion of state funded early education places since 1996, and a corresponding growth in subsidised childcare places (National Childcare Strategy, DfEE,1998). The result has been a daily migration of the majority of young children from their homes to preschool settings, on a part or full-time basis, for much of the year.

The researcher worked within an early years service as this expansion took place. She welcomed the opportunities the free entitlement afforded to many children. She recognised the value of introducing young children to group learning in order to improve their long term educational outcomes. She was aware of the research evidence linking quality of provision and the educational advantage of an early start with success in future life.

However, these are adult judgements and understandings. The researcher was interested to know more of what children themselves understood about being in preschool. She conducted a small scale study of children attending their local playgroup as part of a wider evaluation of wraparound care. This acted as a pilot project for the main study. The findings demonstrated children had clear views about their preschool, revealing their expertise in their own lives (Langsted, 1994). Some of the views held by children on what was important to them in preschool reflected adult perspectives of quality, such as routines and adults who care; others were clearly from a child's view, such as thinking about home and enjoying creating rhymes and songs with peers.

The impact of an understanding of children's right to be heard, stemming from the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2000) and an awareness of children's agency, has fuelled considerable research interest in the lives lived by young children. There is a developing literature on children's views and perspectives emerging from all disciplines related to children's lives. Alongside is another body of literature on researching children's perspectives, developing techniques and methodologies that take into account children's immaturity and experience (Aubrey et al,2000). There is a greater understanding of children's competence to be research participants and to be researched *with* rather than *on* (Christensen, 2004). The use of cameras and observations enable

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the inclusion of children who can not or do not wish to articulate their thoughts verbally (Clark and Moss, 2001). However, researchers also understand that children are able to engage in conversations to express their ideas. Ethical considerations are paramount in research with children (Alderson and Morrow, 2004).Traditional power relations could lead to coercive practices. Children's informed consent must be gained before they take part in any research activities (BERA, 2004) and they must be made aware of their right to withdraw or join in.

These were all considerations that foreshadowed this research study and influenced the framing of the research questions and the research design.

The research questions

On the basis of the researcher's reflection on children's experiences in preschool provision, the primary research question asks:

- What perspectives do young children have on the quality of early education and childcare?

Implicated in this question are supplementary questions that relate to the analysis and interpretation of the data, and the methods used to collect the data:

- How do children give meaning to the activities and relationships within their preschool settings? Can the meaning(s) children give be interpreted as quality indicators, to demonstrate an understanding of quality?
- What methods can be used to elicit the views of young children which will provide reliable and replicable data in relation to their responses to their preschool provision

The study seeks to place the enquiry into a wider policy context, with a final question regarding children's participation and influence, which asks:

- As the New Labour government has developed policies to consult with children of all ages in relation to provision they receive, what use is the government making of the results of these consultations at national policy level?

The aims and objectives of the research study

Following from the research questions, the primary aim of the study is;

- to identify the characteristics of quality as perceived by a group of young children, as they experience education and care.

This has been achieved through engaging with a group of children within their preschool settings in an extended research project.

To position the enquiry in the wider political context there is a secondary aim:

- to critically analyse policy development over the past ten years in relation to meeting the individual needs of children, and to demonstrate how young children's views on quality are absent from the formulation of current government policy.

This has been achieved through a more limited process of reviewing the progress of government thinking and strategy in relation to provision for young children and seeking to identify policies and initiatives that invite children's participation.

The four objectives of the research study are:

1. To elicit the meaning that children give to their presence in early education and childcare settings, to their activity there and to their role in the social context of the settings.

The empirical study uses a naturalistic, ethnographic approach, involving a prolonged period of fieldwork, in order to gain an understanding of the meaning made by children in their preschool. The data are presented in case studies, which are designed to explore specific meanings and reveal insights into children's understanding of attending preschool.

2. To identify and implement a range of methodological approaches to elicit the views of children within the age range three to five years, and to explore and report on their use with young children, at two research sites.

The study employs a multi- method, mixed-media approach, using participative techniques to engage children in the research. These are reported on in depth in the methodology chapter, and the children's responses are illustrated in the research stories.

3. To propose characteristics of quality as perceived by children receiving early education and childcare and to draw down from the data analysis a taxonomy of those characteristics, as determined by children in this research.

A complex pattern of categories and themes emerged from the data analysis in regard to children's perspectives on the quality of their experiences. This formed the basis of a matrix display of the data, classifying themes and subthemes under eleven distinct categories of meaning. From this, a taxonomy was drawn up that interprets the experiences of preschool from the children's standpoint.

4. To exemplify characteristics of quality in the words and actions of children, as a basis for informing early years policy and practice beyond the life of this thesis.

Characteristics of quality are exemplified in the research stories and through the taxonomy. These are available for further interpretation and to inform policy and practice of the capability of children to critically understand their experiences.

Terminology used in the study

Due to the various settings and services for young children in England, a range of terms is in common use to signify specific types of provision. However, the study uses the terms 'preschool' and 'early years' provision interchangeably in the text, partly to provide some stylistic variety, but also because they are terms used generically in the literature to denote both the variety of settings and the experiences of learning and development that take place in the settings. At times, other terms are used to specify a setting, for example, 'day nursery' is used in relation to the research sites; or an aspect of provision, for example 'early education' and 'childcare' are differentiated when necessary. The study is limited in its scope to aspects of provision for three and four year old children.

The Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One provides an outline of recent government strategies and policies for children and their families. It explains the motivation behind the expansion of funded early education for all three and four year olds. It describes the development of regulatory and inspection frameworks to ensure compliance with the policies and maintain and improve the quality of services. It considers the implications of these on early years practice. The chapter reviews government policy on children's participation and looks for evidence of any consideration for young children's views in the development of policies or practice. A final section of the chapter considers theories of childhood and children's agency, providing examples from the literature of children's ability to critically appraise the events in their lives.

Chapter Two considers 'quality' as a critical aspect of early years provision. Having proposed that quality is a 'slippery' concept, with multiple- meanings, it explores the different discourses and debates that have arisen in relation to preschool practice. It is suggested that there are two main positions. An 'outsider' perspective of those responsible for policy and inspection, which is characterised

by structure, formal processes and outcomes; and an 'insider' perspective of those working in settings, including children, for whom the daily lived experience informs a process of relationships and events with their own consequences.

From an 'outsider' perspective, the chapter reviews a continuum approach to quality, where Quality Control represents the perspective of central government; Quality Assurance represents those of local government and sector agencies; and Total Quality acknowledges the principles of both these approaches, whilst improving service levels by engaging with all stakeholders, including children. It is proposed that the Early Years Foundation Stage operates a Total Quality approach.

It is followed by a section exploring an alternative, 'insider', post- modern view, that rejects the notion of quality, replacing it with a process of 'meaning making' (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence,1999), involving documentation and reflection by all. This leads to the next section of the chapter which reviews studies from the literature of children's views or how they make meaning of their preschool. From these a concept of 'quality early years provision' from the perspective of young children emerged.

The final section, drawing links between quality measures and assessment in early years, reviews a range of current approaches to assessing children's learning that utilise a constructivist paradigm (Anning, 2004: Carr, 2001; Laevers,1994). In working with the child, and often their families, practitioners seek to understand and promote individual children's learning through shared meaning. They also develop their own wider knowledge and understanding of conditions for learning in the early years.

Chapter Three presents the methodological approach of the study, including the research design and methods, the interpretation of the data, and conclusions drawn from the data. It describes the empirical research, a small scale qualitative study taking an ethnographic, naturalistic approach, investigating naturally occurring phenomena, on two research sites.

Core and opportunistic samples of children aged three and four were involved in the research. A multi-method mosaic approach, using participative techniques, was employed (Clark and Moss, 2001). It was intended that these would enable children to show how they give meaning to their experiences in nursery. The

children were viewed as active social agents and a methodological aim was to enlighten understanding from the perspective of children, and to give children 'voice' to articulate their views, acknowledging their rights to be heard. The research was carried out ethically and children gave their consent to join in the research activities and were aware of their right to withdraw.

Large amounts of data were collected in several data sets, over three periods of fieldwork. An interpretative and constructivist thematic approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) was adopted in the analysis of data, expanding on the categories found in previous studies of children's views, to construct a complex matrix of categories and themes. The data are presented and the themes illustrated in the form of five case studies written up as 'research stories' in Chapter Four. Case studies were used to provide insight into children's' perspectives on their experiences in nursery.

Chapter Four presents the research stories, which describe core sample children's experiences to illustrate their relationships with others, their play and learning, their response to routines and their awareness of rules and conventions of their nursery, on the basis of the research evidence. The individual response of each child to their experience of nursery emerges from short vignettes and longer verbatim passages. Photographs provide additional evidence of items, places and people the children chose to show that were important or significant to them. Each story ends with a summary of the child's experiences that relate to the themes identified in the analysis.

The Conclusion restates the aims and objectives of the research, including the research questions, in order to evaluate if and how these were achieved and answered. A summary of the findings is presented, firstly in the form of a taxonomy of characteristics of quality experiences from the point of view of young children and representing the factual conclusions. These are drawn from the stories and developed from the matrix of categories and themes that together represent the findings of the study, and indicators of quality from children's view point. Following on from this, reflections on the data from an adult perspective and the conceptual conclusions will be presented. These together constitute the original contribution to knowledge made by the research. The effectiveness of the methodology is considered and its limitations identified. Finally, the implications of the study are presented in relation to policy and practice.

Chapter One   *The development of early years policy and practice and the implications for identifying quality experiences for young children*

This chapter addresses the aim of the study '*to critically analyse policy development over the past ten years in relation to meeting the individual needs of children, and to demonstrate how young children's views on quality are absent from the formulation of current government policy'*. It describes the circumstances leading to the expansion of early years provision in England and details the current state of provision in order to provide the policy context for this study. It will explain how successive governments have been alert to quality as a critical factor in the effectiveness of pre-school programmes, which is of central interest to this study. It will trace the development of regulation and inspection frameworks designed to raise quality within early years provision and explain other policy initiatives aimed at raising quality. The chapter will also explain how it has been government policy to include children and young people in the evaluation and planning of services, and it will draw attention to the absence of children's perspectives in the most recent development of early years practice.

The exclusion of children's views will be questioned in the light of evidence of the competence of children to critically comment on their lives. The research question associated with the above aim asks:

> '*As the New Labour government has developed policies to consult with children of all ages in relation to provision they receive, what use is the government making of the results of these consultations at national policy level?'*

In response to this, the final sections of the chapter consider government intentions to involve young children's participation in decision making (CUPU, 2001; DfES, 2003b; Kirby et al, 2003; Kirby et al, 2003a; Great Britain. *Childcare Act, 2006*) and contrasts these with the lack of evidence that the views of children were taken into consideration when developing the practice of early years provision (QCA, 2000; DfES, 2003a; DfES, 2007; DCSF, 2008). In relation to both these issues, it explores the relevance of a view of children as social agents as seen from a sociological standpoint. It considers what the changes in government policy might mean to young children. It looks at ways that a children's 'standpoint' can be introduced into early years practice through understanding how children make sense of the provision and define quality from their perspective, which is the central interest of the study. In illustration of this it draws on the literature of studies of children in their early years settings.

The development of early education over sixty years

The ambitious early years policies that have been put in place in England in the last ten years are the culmination of changing attitudes and policy initiatives in relation to all children and their families. This first section explains the influences that have impinged on government and society to bring about an unprecedented investment of resources aimed at young children and their families. It presents a brief history of the expansion of universal early years provision that emerged from the separate traditions of care and education. It explains the rapid policy adjustments that have taken place during the ten years of the New Labour administration, which have now brought together these two traditions within one framework, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYSF) (DCSF,2008). The EYFS is part of the government's strategy to pursue their targets to reduce inequalities in education and take all children out of poverty by 2020, and aims to raise the long term attainments of all children (DfES, 2004; DfES, 2006; DCSF, 2007). An important aspect of the strategy is to develop the knowledge and skills of the sector workforce, including programmes leading to higher level qualifications (DfES, 2005). Whilst these policies also aim to engage parents in their children's early learning they aim to support them in work or training by providing sufficient childcare places (DfEE,1998a, DfEE, 1998b).

From the time of 1944 Education Act successive governments were under pressure to provide universal nursery education. Although day nurseries had expanded during war time, to meet the childcare needs of women recruited into employment, after the war many closed, and new education nurseries were low priority in the post-war re-building programme, when materials were in short supply (NUT,1964). Over the next thirty years, the government expanded nursery education places piecemeal (DES,1972;1973), the main expansion occurring in areas of social deprivation, in response to the Plowden Report (CACE,1967).

The value of a sound beginning

The benefits of preschool education for young children had been recognised through the work of Froebel, Montessori, the Macmillan sisters and Isaacs (Bruce, 1987; Moss and Penn, 1996). A general understanding of the beneficial effects of a period of early learning, play and care prior to starting full-time school was promoted by various pre-school projects and reports (CACE, 1967; NUT, 1977; Sylva, Roy and Painter,1986). The measured long term beneficial effects had been demonstrated in longitudinal studies in the United States of High Scope

(Schweinhart and Weikart, 1993), one of the Head Start early intervention programmes, and in the UK by Osborn and Milbank (1987). Despite the growing evidence, achieving universal state funded provision was a long time coming. This quote from the Education Enquiry Committee, 1929, reflects attitudes towards pre-school provision as a therapeutic or compensatory activity that prevailed for many years, and which, in relation to children perceived as disadvantaged, are still evident in policy developments, though worded differently:

> 'It is a great mistake to think of the Nursery School idea merely – or even mainly – in terms of health, to be satisfied with leaving its practical developments to a few enthusiasts, or to the provident Local Authorities, or to the mitigation of life in a slum. It belongs fundamentally to the question of whether a civilised community is possible or not.' (van der Eyken, 1967:11)

An acceptance of the final sentiments from this quote is now being realised, having been long promoted by those concerned for the welfare and advancement of young children in this country, represented by campaigning organisations such as National Children's Bureau, the Daycare Trust, the British Association of Early Childhood Education, the Early Childhood Education Forum (now the Early Childhood Forum) and the Pre-school Learning Alliance. The change in attitude towards providing age specific provision for very young children is also due to rigorous research over the past thirty years from academics and practitioners, revealing the skills and learning acquired by babies, toddlers and young children when exposed to a stimulating learning environment (amongst many others, Bruner, Jolly and Sylva, 1976; Donaldson, 1978; Tizard and Hughes, 1984; Pugh,1988; Athey, 1990).

Policies to expand early years places

The compelling evidence of the beneficial effects of a period of pre-school learning on the educational attainment of pupils was being presented to a national audience by the early 1990s. Three influential reports, the Rumbold Report (DES,1990), Learning to Succeed (NCE,1993) and in Start Right (RSA,1994) Ball argued the case for a period of state funded preschool education. The first advocated a broad, balanced curriculum to provide children with a successful bridge from home to school, promoting their all round development and preparing them for later learning. The second endorsed this approach and placed 'High-quality nursery education' for all 3 and 4 years olds as 'Goal No 1' in a strategy to raise educational attainment (NCE, 1993:7). Start Right had a slightly different emphasis in relation to the learning needs of young children, and was written in reaction to the proportion of four year olds being

educated in reception classes and the appropriateness or otherwise of the National Curriculum for these children. It reiterated the need for a distinct period of pre-school education, and went so far as recommending changing the statutory school age from five to six years, to delay formal learning for a further year.

From these documents a clear focus on aspects of quality was beginning to emerge as a fundamental part of provision, referenced here as a view on what counted as 'appropriate' provision for young children.

Parental demand generated different forms of provision

The gradual trend in the growth of pre-school provision for over half a century (Pugh,1988) also reflected the response to increased parental demand. Outside the maintained school system, the most extensive network of pre-school provision was established within the voluntary sector, through the pre-school playgroups movement. The development of this parent led group throughout Britain, establishing local pre-school groups in community buildings (often village and church halls) was evidence of a perceived need, on the part of parents, for group based play and learning opportunities for their children. Paradoxically, this provision, operating at low cost, may have obviated the need for the state to feel obliged to expand nursery education and reinforced the view that providing for pre-school children was the responsibility of parents not government (Pugh, 1992).

As greater numbers of women were recruited in to the workforce in the 1980s, parents were not only motivated by a wish for their children to access some form of pre-school play and learning outside the home, but also by the need for childcare to enable them to access work (Moss and Penn, 1996). With no national coordinated plan or policy for pre-school children, different types of provision for children below statutory school age (the term after a child's fifth birthday) had developed piecemeal over time, so that by 1997 there was a mixed economy of pre-school provision serving the needs of a significant proportion of children under-five.

In the early 90's, around 77% of four year olds were in funded places within maintained nursery schools and classes or reception classes (some full time); a further 19% attended voluntary play group or private nursery provision; whilst 4% did not have any pre-school place (Sewell,1995). The position for three year olds

was that up to 30% were receiving five sessions of free part-time early education in maintained nursery schools or classes, whilst around 30% were accessing places in fee paying playgroups, normally for just two or three sessions a week (Pugh, 2001). An increasing number of children were accessing full day care in private day nurseries, though no clear statistics exist for three year olds in this sector of provision, and the percentage of children remained small (Pugh, 2001:13). Voluntary playgroups typically offered morning sessional, preschool learning in term time, as did private nursery schools, with parents paying a modest fee per session. Private day nurseries, in contrast, offered play and learning for part-time or full-day care, for at least 50 weeks a year, charging market rates paid in full by parents.

In 1997, there was an acknowledged surplus of demand over supply of places (Audit Commission, 1996), with a minority of four year olds unable to access a preschool place, and many children attending less than five sessions a week in private and voluntary settings. The supply of places for three year olds in any form of provision was much less, and it was believed that demand was also suppressed by fee charging. This was the situation prior to February 1997, when the Conservative government introduced a short lived nursery voucher scheme offering free part-time education to all four year olds in a variety of settings.

Within the mix of providers, aside from the issue of relative costs (or no cost at all), there were significant differences in operating conditions including, premises and other material resources; staff: child ratios; staff qualifications; staff pay; governance and management arrangements; regulations and inspection regimes; ethos and objectives; and hours of opening. These issues had considerable relevance on future policy developments aimed at raising the quality of early education and care.

The introduction of universal free nursery places for four year olds
Coming into office in May 1997, the New Labour government outlined its plans for a 'sound beginning' for young children as part of an ambitious and comprehensive education programme (DfEE,1997). They planned to:

- Provide free high quality (part-time) education for all four year olds whose parents wanted it
- Set targets for (free) places for three year olds
- Aim for a comprehensive and integrated approach to early education and childcare
- Make local authorities responsible for setting up forums of representatives from all early years provider groups (private nurseries, voluntary pre-schools and

- playgroups and schools) to plan how, working co-operatively, they would provide integrated early education and childcare for children and families
- Raise quality and standards through training and qualifications
- Establish common standards of regulation and inspection
- Establish a programme of early excellence centres which would 'demonstrate good practice on education childcare and integrated services and providing training and focus on dissemination', identifying existing early centres

Over time each of these aims was realised. The voucher scheme was replaced by September 1997, when local education authorities (LEAs) were made responsible for planning the provision of sufficient part-time nursery education places for every four year old in their area. Places were funded by a Nursery Grant paid to providers for each four year old place offered (DfEE, 1997). A target was set for LEAs to have assured funded places for all four year olds in their area amongst a range of maintained, voluntary and private providers, by September 1998. There were plans to extend the entitlement to all three year olds over time. Planning was to involve representatives of all provider groups, working together with the LEA and colleagues from social services, in newly formed Early Years Development Partnerships (EYDPs). Responsibilities included identifying and planning existing and new pre-school places for all children, having regard to inclusion and special education needs, identifying and responding to workforce training needs associated with the expansion, considering quality assurance arrangements and inspection, and providing information for parents.

EYDPs were allocated significant budgets to enable them to meet targets for additional places, provide a training programme and develop their other activities. The partnerships' budget for 1999-2000 was £44 million, with subsequent spending increased year on year. Accountable to the local authority and the government, the partnerships represented a vanguard network to promote and champion the early years sector within education. For many early years professionals this was seen as a huge opportunity to implement long anticipated change for young children. However there remained a belief that this was only the beginning of realising an even more ambitious vision of integrated early years services (Pugh, 2001), that would combine education and childcare, with family support.

Funding for three year olds

The National Childcare Strategy (NCS) (DfEE,1998a) extended the duty of LEAs to oversee the expansion of free nursery education places for all three year olds in a gradual programme, prioritising children living in disadvantaged areas, so

that by September 2004 all three year olds would have access to up to five sessions of part time early education a week. The first phase of funding for three year olds began in 1999 (DfEE, 1998a). A national shortfall of places was addressed through an expansion programme for existing pre-school providers to extend the sessions they could offer, and through an unprecedented rise in private day nursery provision, nationwide, over the period to 2005. This included 140 settings opened under the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative (NNI), a subsidised scheme to create affordable full-day nursery provision in economically deprived communities (Pugh, 2006).

The expansion of childcare places

The NCS placed additional duties on the EYDP and local authorities to expand childcare place for all children up to the age of fourteen (sixteen for children with Special Educational Needs). EYDPs were required to increase the number of 'wraparound' care places for pre-school children to extend their nursery education hours to cover the working hours of parents, or to allow parents to return to education or training. With their additional remit the partnerships became Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs).

EYDCPs were required to submit annual Early Years Development and Childcare Plans (DfEE, 1998b: DfEE, 1999b) outlining progress in the expansion of both early education places and childcare places. They were required to conduct childcare audits to assess local need, which included consultations with children and young people on their views of childcare. EYDCP membership was extended to include representatives from adult training organisations, job centres, further and higher education, the health authority and primary health trusts. Through the work of the EYDCPs the relationship between children's and their families' needs in terms of education and childcare was beginning to take shape, linked directly with employment, training, health and social care.

Developing multiagency childcare centres

In 1997, most providers of early years care and education fell into the most common types of setting – maintained nursery schools or classes, voluntary pre-schools or private day nurseries or nursery schools. However, nationally, a small number of full day care, early years centres had been established, run by local authorities' early years services or non-government organisations, for children under-five (Makins,1997). In most cases, they were sited in areas of social disadvantage, and offered additional family support to parents, provided by a

range of services working together. They normally made some charge for childcare, but offered free education, often within a nursery class.

In that year, the government launched a pilot programme of Early Excellence Centres (EECs) to develop and promote models of high quality, integrated, early years services for young children and families, part of its Excellence in Schools initiative (DfEE, 1997). Generously funded to allow for complete refurbishment and enhanced resourcing where necessary, an initial evaluation of eight of the original EECs found they were providing:

- excellence in integrated education and care services
- access to extended day and holiday childcare for children from birth
- support for families, with links to other key services like community health services and the enhancement of parenting skills
- accessible and affordable adult training opportunities; and
- outreach through local partnerships to improve the quality of other early years services through training and practical support. (DfEE, 1999a)

Many of the EECs were existing full day care early years centres which had made successful bids to expand their services and their sphere of influence to offer high quality services according to government specifications. Despite the positive initial evaluation (DfEE, 1999a) the EEC programme was not extended beyond an initial 29, mainly due to the high costs involved (Pugh, 2006). However, though small in number this model of service delivery has become the template for the current national policy for integrated early years provision through children's centres. What is more significant for this study is the way the programme contributed to the characterisation and definition of 'quality' early years services for children.

A parallel initiative, Sure Start, was launched in 1999, aimed at tackling child poverty through early intervention. Emanating from a cross departmental review (HMT,1998) it was another integrated service model. Sure Start community based services brought together existing services for children under four and their families, to co-ordinate and streamline services on one site, for the convenience of families. In a first phase, Sure Start Local programmes (SSLP) were established initially in the 250 most disadvantaged communities, but subsequent expansion led to the funding of 500 programmes (www.surestart.gov.uk). The original SSLPs did not provide early education or childcare, however, later phases of the initiative offered day care and early education.

The emergence of an early years curriculum as a perceived framework for quality early years education

The expansion of places and the allocation of associated funding were not the only issues in terms of the delivery of universal nursery provision. The experiences of children varied according to the type of setting they attended.

Practice within preschool provision had evolved gradually before the1990's. A tradition of nursery school education was transferred to nursery classes and all followed an informal common curriculum. This had been established and defined incrementally through early childhood education studies departments in colleges and universities working with practitioners in nursery schools and nursery classes and other pre-school settings (Bruce,1987; Dowling,1988). The basis of this tradition was play based learning, which was child centred, where knowledge and understanding of children's learning was developed through systematic observations of children (Sylva, Roy and Painter,1986; Moyles,1989; Athey,1990). Debates regarding nursery practice were concerned with the quality of children's learning and the impact of pre-school on their general development (Abbott and Rodger,1994).

Pursuing an agenda of developing practice and the quality of provision, maintained nursery schools and classes followed local or regional curriculum guidance that was developed through advisory services, often influenced by research findings (for example, NAIEA,1985). In the voluntary sector, the Pre-school Playgroup Association (PPA), later the Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA), produced its own guidance on early learning, to promote a consistent approach within their sector for three and four year olds (PPA, 1990a; PPA, 1990b; PPA, 1993; PLA, 1996). Day nurseries, operating according to national childcare standards (DoH,1991), were also following local and national guidance documents on good practice in group day care (NCB, 1991).

The introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, applying to children of statutory school age, led to more urgent debates about the need for a national pre-school curriculum (DES, 1990), which was resisted by some and promoted by others (Bruce, 1987). The DES had produced guidance on the education of under-fives (DES,1989) to clarify the position. There were particular concerns about appropriate provision for the learning needs of four year olds (Sharp,1988; David,1990), many of whom had been admitted into reception classes following the introduction of local management of schools (LMS) (Great Britain. *Education*

Reform Act, 1988), in addition to the needs of children in nursery classes. The Rumbold Report (DES,1990) furthered the debate and recognised the importance of a national formal early years curriculum and set out principles for pre-school education. The government at the time did not act on the recommendations of the report, and it was not until six years later that the first national pre-school framework was launched to accompany the nursery voucher scheme, the *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education* (DLOs) (SCAA, 1996).

The purpose of the DLOs was to raise the quality of provision by informing curriculum planning. All pre-school settings offering funded early education received guidance to support their understanding of the 'desirable outcomes' (SCAA, 1997). Each setting was required to be inspected by Ofsted on the basis of their effective delivery of the outcomes. The guidance set out examples of good practice and provided descriptors of 'goals for learning', or the level of skill and learning expected of the majority of children as they started school. However, it was felt that the DLOs did not satisfy the need for clear and explicit direction that was required by those practitioners who were inexperienced in providing early education, particularly playgroup and day nursery staff. Early Ofsted reports identified certain weaknesses to provide an effective learning environment for children in these settings, citing lack of training and experience amongst other reasons for their lower performance (Ofsted,1998,1999).

Acting on concerns regarding the inconsistency of standards amongst providers of early education, the Qualification and Curriculum Authority consulted on and reviewed the DLOs. The *Early Learning Goals* (ELGs) (QCA, 1999) were introduced to provide clearer expectations for practitioners in regard to children's learning and with the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000), replaced the DLOs. They represented the first national curriculum for children aged three to five, based on the principles of:

- play based learning;
- equality and inclusion;
- the involvement of parents in their children's learning;
- high levels of competence and expertise of practitioners to be effective;
- well structured and planned activities that allow children to initiate their own activities, in addition to taking part in adult initiated activities;
- high-quality care and education to allow effective learning and development. (QCA, 2000:11-12).

The guidance detailed the stages or 'stepping stones' children pass through in six areas of learning. The guidance provided illustrations of good practice in the

six areas linked to the stepping stones, adding to the understanding of 'high-quality care and education'.

It was envisaged that the final year of the Foundation Stage (FS) would be completed by most children in school, thus addressing concerns about the inappropriateness of the National Curriculum schemes of work impinging on four year olds in reception classes.

Creating an integrated early years care and education inspection and regulatory framework

Coinciding with the development of the FS, the government instigated a review of day care regulations. This led to the introduction of new National Daycare Standards (DfEE, 2001) and established an Early Years Division of Ofsted with responsibility for the inspection and regulation of all early years settings, with reference to both the new FS curriculum and national standards frameworks. The Early Years Division took over day care inspection responsibilities from local authorities and for the first time early years care and education were accountable to the same regulatory body. Maintained nurseries were inspected against the Foundation Stage framework only.

In 2008, after considerable review and consultation, the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) (DfES, 2007, DCSF, 2008) has absorbed both regulatory processes in a single learning and development and inspection framework. It has also incorporated the *Birth to Three Matters* (DfES, 2003a) practice guidance for younger children. The EYFS applies to children from Birth to 5. It comprises a Statutory Framework, setting out the legal and regulatory requirements that settings must comply with, and Practice Guidance to children's learning and development. This is presented as a pack of materials to support and guide practitioners, containing a wide range of research evidence and other information to develop practitioners' knowledge of children's development and learning. The need for a further revision in guidance appears to have stemmed from continuing concern from Ofsted regarding the quality of early years provision (Ofsted, 2006: 2007). Positive correlations have been identified between quality of provision and children's attainment and the level of practitioner qualifications and knowledge (Sylva et al, 2004). The EYFS aims to provide clear direction to inexperienced practitioners.

The foundation stage principles have been revised to re-emphasise the need for play based learning, and to reflect evidence from most recent research, notably the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project (Sammons et al, 2004), a contemporary research study into the effectiveness of current provision as it was expanding to meet the needs of all children, and the related Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years project (REPEY) (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002; Siraj-Blachford and Sylva, 2004). The guiding principles of the EYFS are grouped into four main themes:

- A Unique Child
- Positive Relationships
- Enabling Environments
- Learning and Development
(DCSF, 2008b: 05)

The 'stepping stones' of progression in learning toward the Early Learning Goals (ELGs), presented in the curriculum guidance (QCA, 2000), have been reconfigured into 'detailed information on the six areas of Learning and Development' and comprise Development and Learning grids incorporating the 69 ELGs, against which children's progress and attainment are recorded in the Foundation Stage Profile (FSP).

A further change relates to the designation of the EYSF. In the first publication (DfES,2007) the Practice Guidance refers to 'curriculum' content. When the EYFS was re-published in May 2008 it was presented as a 'learning and development framework'. The change reflects the legal status of the EYFS. The 2002 Education Act had established the Foundation Stage as part of the National Curriculum (but not a Key Stage). This was repealed by the Childcare Act 2006 which established 'a single, high quality care, development and learning framework for children birth to five' in the EYFS, which is no longer part of the National Curriculum.

The EYFS represents a development of the original FS. As a support programme for new or inexperienced practitioners it is comprehensive and clear. It has created a continuous learning pathway for children from birth to their first terms in school and as such it has been welcomed (Early Education, 2008). However the introduction of Development and Learning grids is causing concern that inappropriate use of the grids will undermine the principles of the EYFS:

> 'Throughout the EYFS there is an emphasis on the 'unique' child who makes progress at his or her own individual rate and whom the educator needs to assess through sensitive observation. While it is not intended that the grids are used as sequential, linear steps of development with each child being expected to start at the first statement and progress through each regardless of individual

differences, there is concern that without appropriate training this is how some practitioners may use them. (Early Education, 2008)

Broadhead had previously voiced similar reservations regarding the impact of the FSP on assessment practices and called for 'a return to considerable emphasis on formative assessment in the early years, using observation, reflection and interaction as key tools for appropriately trained educators' (Broadhead, 2006:202). Where practitioners were inexperienced or lacked relevant training she was concerned 'that 'adults' preconceptions can cloud their understanding of young children's capabilities and potential' (ibid:202). In her view 'statutory guidelines are inevitably limited in their capacity for recognising the full extent of a young child's knowledge and understanding' (ibid:202).

Drummond echoed this view. Regarding the EYFS as a 'standards' model of education, employing the ELGs as 'attainment targets' for summative assessment, she believes the EYFS requires practitioners to concentrate on 'the wrong kinds of learning' which leads them 'to thinking about that learning in most unhelpful ways' (Drummond, 2008:4). An alternative approach would require practitioners to have a

> 'proper appreciation of what a child brings to collaborative learning…Infancy research shows that we need to build on or grow from motives for discovery and telling with others that are evident in playful activity from birth. These motives have a primary place in all discovery and learning', (Early Education, 2008).

The long held view that children's learning can best be understood through observation, reflection and interaction influenced the choice of a participative methodology for this study, as will be explained in Chapter Three.

Children's entitlement to early years provision

By 2008 all three and four year olds were entitled to a free period of early years provision, in a setting of their parent's choice. It is estimated that 96% of all three year olds, and 100% of four year olds take up some or all of their entitlement (McAuliffe, 2006:32). Whilst this provision does not require children to attend, the Childcare Act 2006 places a statutory duty on local authorities (LAs) to ensure sufficient pre-school places for all eligible children in their area. From 2007 under a 'Pathfinder' initiative children in selected LAs have been offered an additional two and a half-hours free entitlement, taking their total to fifteen hours a week. The Children's Plan (DCSF,2007) confirmed that this will be rolled out in stages to more LA areas, so that by the end of 2010 all three and four year olds in England will be entitled to fifteen hours free provision. The Plan also confirmed the intention to extend this to twenty hours over time. As a result of the increased entitlement a substantial number of young children will be away from their home

environment for extended periods. In these circumstances a high quality experience for them becomes paramount.

Under the Childcare Act 2006, there has been a significant change in the designation of preschool provision. In 1996 the nursery voucher scheme offered children free 'nursery places'; under New Labour they received 'early years education' (DfEE, 1997); the Childcare Act refers to free 'early years provision' defined (in Section 20 of the Act) as 'provision of childcare for a young child'. The Act defines a 'young child' as aged from birth to 1 September after his/her fifth birthday. Section18 of the act defines childcare as 'integrated childcare and early learning', which 'includes education and any other supervised activity' (McAuliffe et al, 2006:18). This creates some ambiguity, and while it satisfies the government's need to be seen to provide free 'childcare', it potentially places early education in a position where it is distanced once again from the mainstream educational system, with consequential loss of relative status. In view of the fact that preschool provision has only recently been regarded in higher esteem, through more realistic funding and the recognition of the importance of quality early learning experiences within in a foundation stage, the sudden loss of any prestige might harm all involved in the sector.

The wider context of children and family services and the revision of responsibility for children at government level

This section explains the continuing development of government programmes to improve the effectiveness of policies and to drive up the quality of services through an integrated approach to planning and delivery at all levels of government.

From its inception in the nineteenth century, publicly funded education had been the responsibility of successive ministries and departments of education. Childcare, as an aspect of child welfare, had been governed by ministries and departments of health. In 2002 a Children and Young Person's Unit had been formed within the DfES as part of a cross- government strategy to unite all aspects of service planning and delivery for children 0-18. The following year the Children, Young People and Families Directorate was established at the DfES and all responsibility for education and child welfare was brought under one departmental roof, under the direction of a Minister for Children, Young People and Families.

The *Every Child Matters* (ECM) Green Paper (DfES, 2003b) provided the opportunity to introduce a culture change in children's services. The Green Paper had been planned as a response to the Laming report, on the circumstances leading to the death of Victoria Climbié. Its remit was to have been children at risk, but following consultation with relevant professionals and reference to research in the field, the view was taken that children would be better protected through integrated universal children's services, working together to prevent harm (Pugh, 2006). The aim of ECM and the Children Act 2004 is to improve outcomes for all children and narrow the gap between those who succeed and those who are failing. To facilitate this, services at every level of government have been restructured to meet the needs of children and their families. The five themes of ECM, which all services for children and young people work to, are:

1. strong foundations in the early years
2. a stronger focus on parenting and families
3. earlier interventions and effective protection
4. better accountability and
5. integration locally, regionally and nationally

The corresponding outcomes for children within this framework are:

1. Being healthy – enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle
2. Staying safe – being protected from harm and neglect
3. Enjoying and achieving – getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood
4. Making a positive contribution – being involved in the community and not engaging in antisocial or offending behaviour
5. Economic well-being – not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential in life

These aspirational themes and outcomes also underpin the EYFS and set high expectations on practitioners to fulfil for children. They redefine 'quality' in a wider context that is then translated into practice through the EYFS framework.

The Children Act 2004, and the implementation paper, *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* (DfES, 2004), established the means through which this agenda is being realised. Within local authorities (LAs) integrated education, health and social care services have been established, planned and delivered through Children's Trusts, which includes representation from EYDCPs. Trusts act as strategic partnerships to lead local Children's Service Plans. The previous roles of directors of education and children's social services have been merged into that of Director of Children's Services (DCS), heading a single, integrated department, responsible for working with other agencies to establish holistic services for children and families under the auspices of the Children's Trusts. This change reflects the change at national level in departmental responsibility

referred to above. In effect new forms of bureaucracy are now in place to govern the continuing development of integrated services for families.

A Children's Centre in every neighbourhood

At neighbourhood level, integrated early years service models, Sure Start Local Projects and Early Excellence Centres are being restructured as Children's Centres, offering integrated education and childcare from 8am to 6pm, and improved services for families. There is the target of a Children's Centre in every neighbourhood by 2010 (HMT, 2004; HoC, 2005; DCSF,2007). These are universal services, intended to offer better support for parents, in addition to reducing inequalities between children. The EYSF will apply to children receiving early education and childcare within nurseries attached to Children's Centres.

At the same time, the skills of those working in this area are being developed through the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) (DfES, 2005). This is particularly relevant in the early years sector, where the Graduate Leader Fund (GLF) (formerly the Transformation Fund) has been allocated to develop the workforce, ensuring there will be at least one member of staff qualified to graduate level in all full day-care settings by 2015, and two in settings in areas of disadvantage. The GLF will pay for staff who are graduates, or have teacher status or equivalent qualifications in social work or nursing, to qualify as Early Years Professionals (EYPs) if they work in the private, voluntary or independent (PVI) sector. As noted above, there are established links between high quality early years provision and a highly qualified workforce (Sylva et al, 2004; Great Britain. *Childcare Act, 2006*; Owen, 2006).

Early years provision and parent employment

It is important to note the parallel to the policy to provide universal pre-school provision, in terms of its impact on families. This is the opportunity for parents, especially mothers and single parents, to return to work or training, bringing perceived benefits to the individual, their family and the economy. As described above, the EYDCPs included representation from employment and training organisations. The purpose was to involve them in maximising the effects of expanding early years provision to enable parents to return to work, particularly by creating affordable childcare and sustaining childcare places in areas of social disadvantage. The EECs, referred to above, were required to provide training opportunities for parents as part of their core activities.

The policy initiative *Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children: a Ten Year Strategy for Childcare* (HMT,2004) has built on previous strategies, and reiterates the relationship between childcare and employment, in particular the need to create sufficient affordable childcare to allow all parents to work. The Ten Year Strategy cites evidence based practice that 'children will benefit in the short and long run from at least one parent working and from not growing up in poverty' (HMT,2004:71).

Provision for children outside the home

The New Labour government has achieved universal provision for all three and four year olds to access early education in a mixed economy of settings. These include maintained school nursery classes, LA maintained or private nursery schools, day nurseries, integrated early years centres, playgroups and pre-schools, and also with accredited childminders who are part of a quality assured network.

Some children are attending preschool for an extended day, to cover parents working hours as explained above. This means that these children are being looked after outside their home for longer than ever before. However, for many children the entitlement represents an opportunity that was not available to their parents. The policy rationale for the expansion of places has been explained previously but, put briefly, there is much evidence that good quality early years provision has long term educational and social benefits, for the individual and society (DES,1990, NCE,1993, DfES, 2004, OECD,2006). However, it is also clear that there remain concerns about aspects of current provision in England. In particular the measurement of the success of early years policies, based on outcomes of children's attainment at the end of the EYFS, is seen to be having an adverse effect on the way practitioners approach teaching and learning, and thus on the quality of children's experiences.

The emergence of childhood and the view of children as social agents

The final sections of this chapter aim to explore a view of childhood which presents the competence of children and a possible autonomous position of children in terms of defining their own childhood, and their relationship to the institutions which adults construct around them. It considers the means by which children can give voice within the institutions of preschool settings. Through consultation and participation the meaning children make of their experiences

can be listened to and understood. These processes empower children as they gain respect for the contribution they make in shaping the setting and taking an active part in co-constructing their learning experiences in a small community of learners (Clark and Moss, 2001; Anning, Cullen and Fleer, 2004).

The emergence of an understanding of childhood

The emergence of the view of children as dependants in need of being protected and disciplined in order to shape them as moral and responsible individuals has been traced back to the seventeenth century. Ariès (1962, in Jenks, 1996) claimed that before and in the medieval period the lives of children were not differentiated from those of adults, in terms of activities, social status and occupying the same social spaces. Therefore the concept of 'childhood' as a distinct period in human lives, as opposed to adulthood or old age, was not developed.

However, in the seventeenth century Ariès identified attitudes to children changing. He noted explicit reference made to the customary 'coddling' (ibid:39) or spoiling of little children, to which there were strong moral reactions, so that:

> 'In the moralists and pedagogues of the seventeenth century, we see that fondness for childhood and its special nature was no longer found in expression of amusement…but in psychological and moral solicitude,' (ibid:39).

Ariès argued that those responsible for moral leadership, the church, and education, the teachers, began to perceive children differently and judgementally as 'fragile creatures of God who needed to be both safeguarded and reformed' (ibid:40). The pervading perception of the child was one of an incomplete adult, one who was becoming. Depending on the time and place, over the next three hundred years, the child was variously and ambivalently perceived as 'pure, bestial, innocent, corrupt' (Jenks,1996:3), but who was also 'charged with potential' a 'tabula rasa' (Locke,1693). Alternatively children were viewed as 'our adult selves' imbued with corresponding benign and malign natures.

The contradictory and ambivalent attitudes to children that were exposed in Ariès work, and the associated phenomenon of 'childhood', have been re-examined over the past thirty years within the field of sociology (Cosaro,1997;Jenks, James and Prout,1999; Mayall, 2002). James and Prout (1997) have argued for an 'emergent paradigm' of the social construction of childhood to be considered and developed across all disciplines where children and childhood are studied. By social construction the authors refer to the 'nature of the social institution of childhood; an actively negotiated set of social relationships within which the early years of human life are constituted.' (ibid;7). The primary feature of the paradigm explains childhood as:

> 'a social construction. As such it provides an interpretive frame for contextualizing the early years of human life. And childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural or universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies.' (James and Prout,1997:8).

The paradigm assumes that childhood is a variable of social analysis, subject to the influence of class, gender or ethnicity, which produce a range of 'childhoods' not a 'single universal phenomenon'. The paradigm asserts that 'Children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right', and that 'Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live' (ibid p.8).

This frame of reference challenges the previously held perceptions of children, constructed by adults, as passive recipients of an ambient culture and defined by the realisation of becoming an adult and a full member of society. By acknowledging the diversity of 'childhoods' the paradigm opens up a greater potential for understanding children and valuing their differences. It separates the biological development of children from the social significance of children within their particular culture, and this has the potential for a better understanding of children from minority or marginalized groups within all societies.

The paradigm acknowledges the extensive research into children and child development over the twentieth century, but cuts across attitudes which are still prevalent, where children are viewed for their redemptive potential for the next generation (Moss, 2006). By emphasising issues of diversity the paradigm offers more than the binary view of children as forces for either 'good' or 'bad', that still pervades policy and practice. It moves away from simple judgements and seeks to understand childhood from the point of view of children in the plural, many children, and many 'lives lived', in many places and spaces (James and Prout, 1997). It seeks to understand childhood and children not in relation to their adult selves, which assumes notions of immaturity, dependence and irrationality when defining children. Instead it concentrates on the meaning made of their lives by children of different ages and from different cultures (Cosaro, 1997).

The study of childhood has given recognition to a significant aspect of being a child, that of being a social actor. Associated with the definition of being a social actor is that of having agency to influence events and relationships. James and James (2004:4) have proposed 'a cultural politics of childhood' that 'comprises …both the many and different cultural determinants of childhood and children's behaviour, and the political mechanisms and processes by which these are put into practice at any given time', of which early years provision can be seen to be an example. In relation to children's social agency Mayall (2002:24) argues that 'children's interaction makes a difference – to a relationship, a decision, to the workings of a set of social assumptions or constraints'. Mayall defines an understanding of a 'child standpoint' as the perspective from the point of view of children in relation to other's perspectives. This is an oppositional relationship, but one which acknowledges the other point of view and is not necessarily contentious. It is a concept that is evidenced in the many studies of children's lives that have emerged from the field of the sociology of childhood, and it is a helpful concept when considering the meaning that children give to the experiences in their lives. It relates to children's agency and their role as social actors in the social places they find themselves.

In the context of early years provision, it can be argued that young children have been drawn into 'a cultural politics of childhood' through the developing policies of the New Labour government. Political processes have shaped an understanding of their needs in terms of ever lengthening entitlements to free childcare, a universal curriculum applying from birth to five, and an understanding that their lives will benefit from their parents being in employment. All these processes can be viewed as social constructions, with alternative multiple standpoints held by parents, politicians, practitioners, other educationalists and by the young children themselves. The standpoints of children in this context are central to the study.

Involving children in consultation and participation

The value of understanding and respecting multiple viewpoints is accepted by government, and the rights of children to make their views known have been accepted since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) by the UK Government in 1991 (Unicef, 2000). In 2005, as part of the ECM agenda, enacted through the Children Act 2004, a Children's Commissioner was appointed with the duty to promote the interests of children and champion their rights.

Government policies have sought to understand children's views. The right to be consulted is now set down in law in the Childcare Act 2006. It places a duty on local authorities, and by extension pre-school settings, for the views of young children to be heard and responded to, which is in accordance with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). From September 2008, the Ofsted inspections of early years settings have included the views of children as participants within the self-evaluation (SEF) process. Section 2 of the SEF requires settings to evidence how they know what children's views are and to give examples of any action taken to change the provision as a result of their views.

The last section of this chapter considers government action to elicit children's views and compares it with other accounts of children which demonstrate children's agency.

Children's participation and consultation

The Children Act (1989), acknowledging the UNCRC, gave statutory duties to local authorities and other bodies to consult with and elicit children's views in decisions regarding their welfare. The onus was on the part of LAs to approach children and apprise them of their rights, rather than giving children directly the right to represent their views. This aspect of the Act was slow to be implemented as the pubic perception of children was that they were neither competent nor reliable (Mayall, 2002).

In 1997, New Labour emphasised a culture of consultation and participation for all, setting up the Children's and Young Persons Unit to promote the interests of

this sector of the population. All levels of government were provided with a guidance document (CYPU, 2001) to support their work with children and young people, and encourage the involvement of all ages of children in decision making, consultating on policy and service development. Consulting with children and young people as service users has become standard practice in government to inform policy change, for example to inform the Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007). Anning, Chesworth and Spurling (2005) included the perspectives of children in the evaluation of Sure Start local programmes.

As has already been noted, the inclusion of a clause to listen to young children and recognise their right to give their views on matters that affect them, was introduced into the Childcare Bill as it passed through the House of Lords, and passed into legislation in Childcare Act 2006, to be enacted in 2008. (McAuliffe et al, 2006: 22-23). The decision reflects the recognition of the competence of young children to participate in decision making as a result of evidence from research and practice (Langsted, 1994, Nutbrown, 1996; Miller, 1997; Clark and Moss 2001, 2004; Landsdown and Lancaster, 2001; Christensen, 2004, Bryson, 2006). These studies amongst others, have demonstrated that children are knowledgeable about the situations they find themselves in and capable of making considered contributions to discussions about aspects of their immediate environment and places and spaces they know.

Interest from practitioners in young children participating in their preschools is growing, due partly to expectations from Ofsted that children's views will be elicited by early years settings in their self-evaluation (Ofsted, 2008). Hart's ladder of participation in Miller (1997:7) identifies a spectrum of practice that ranges from manipulation and tokenism, to child initiated projects where there are shared decisions with adults. The range of responses reflects not only attitudes to children's participation but also the experience of practitioners of listening to children (Shier, 2001; Rodd, 2005).

The portrayal of children's views in the literature
The interest in children's views and perspectives is not new, though it has been redefined in terms of concepts of participation, consultation and co-construction. Opie and Opie's (1967) study of children's cultures, through the collection of traditional rhymes, jokes and stories, revealed a knowing and established sense of childhood amongst primary school children, differentiated from the world of adults. Alcock's (2007) study of young children's subversive sub-culture at

mealtimes reveals the ability of children to accommodate rules and expectation whilst constructing their own parallel 'peer-culture'. Tough (1973) and Wells (1985) also demonstrated children's expressive competence in their studies of children's language when supported by sustained adult interaction, which revealed a level of articulateness and meaning making that had not been previously attributed to young children. Children's awareness and response to their home cultures in relation to their ethnicity (Brooker, 2002, 2006) and social position within their community (Connelly, 2004) have been studied as an aspect of their early school experiences. Cousins (1999) researched four year old children's experiences including reflecting on the frustrations of Sonny who felt constrained within his reception class. McAuliffe and Lane (2005) have revealed children's ability to clearly express their awareness of food choices in daycare settings.

Reifel (1988:62-63) identifies children's 'event knowledge' within their pre-schools, and suggests this can be seen as an 'index of the meaning that (the) experience has for them…(to) provide us with their understanding of the programmes and understandings we intend for them to have'. These accounts reveal the extent of children's agency within their own cultures and illustrate diverse childhoods. They reveal children's abilities to understand and interpret their own learning. This suggests that, with the right approach, young children could also define quality on their own terms.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has described how services for young children and their families have changed and developed most substantially over the last ten years under the New Labour government. It has tracked the progress of government policies that directly link childcare with parental employment, and early years provision with later school attainment. The chapter has also identified the government's view of the responsibilities of the state to offer support to children and their families from well trained and qualified practitioners, working together and with parents. The standards and quality of services has been identified as a significant factor in the success of recent policies.

The concept of multiply- framed childhoods and the social construction of our understanding of childhood has been introduced. It is proposed that children as social actors, or agents, have a perspective which is now evidenced in the literature and which should be taken into consideration by adults. The response

by government to the participation of children and young people is an acknowledgement of the deepening understanding of the competence of this age group to take part in decision making.

The following chapter will focus on quality and how it is being defined across these services. It will explore the diversity of perspectives in relation to quality in early years provision and it will consider the role of children in contributing to an understanding of quality from their own perspectives.

Chapter Two   **Quality in early years provision**

Chapter Two provides the context for a range of interpretations of the concept of 'quality' which has become a dominant and pervasive feature of early years provision in England. It is a preoccupation that is prevalent across the minority world of economically powerful states, and particularly within the English speaking nations of the United Kingdom, the United States and Australasia. Reviewing the literature on quality in early years provision, the chapter will report on the primary discourses and debates about what constitutes quality early years provision, and how it is defined and measured. Developing a distinction created by Stephen and Brown (2004) after Katz (1993), it will take the view that there are two main positions, that of 'outsiders' and that of 'insiders'.

Outsiders' perspectives are those contained in national frameworks and quality assurance schemes, often promoting a political agenda, informed by experts. They are implemented by advisers and consultants at a local level and will involve regulation and inspection or evaluation. Insiders' perspectives are more diverse and reflect processes rather than structures. They can be divided into those of practitioners, implementing and developing practice according to national directives, but mediated by their experiences and current circumstances; and those of children, the subjects of, and ultimately the arbiters of those policies and frameworks, whose views are the focus of this study.

The chapter will present and consider evidence from studies exploring children's perspectives on early education and childcare. It will compare the views and priorities for children with the criteria identified by adults, within quality frameworks and quality assurance schemes. The concept of 'quality early years provision from children's perspectives', will be developed using a process of concept analysis.

A final section will consider the role of assessment as a reflection of quality in relation to learning and teaching. It will look at participative practices that involve the understanding of children's learning dispositions in a co-constructed process with practitioners and parents. It will reflect on trust and respect for children's attainment and learning as the basis for practice.

What is a quality ?

According to Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) quality as an aspect of the provision of a service or product is a recent late twentieth century concept, constructed within the neoliberal market economy of the predominantly northern European and English speaking world, as a management tool to:

- standardise and bring uniformity to a product according to a minimum specification – which could be developed according to the market

- assure consumers of a reliable, consistent product
- differentiate between producers and providers
- shape consumer expectations and confidence
- respond to user expectations, based on market research, as consumers come to understand the related concepts

In the 1980's quality management systems - quality standards, quality assurance and quality control - were introduced to public services in England (Williams, 1995), not only to assess and evaluate services against standards, but also to develop services.

The concept of quality has therefore become a defining attribute of many public services as well as the basis for accountability of those services. Used in this way quality as a concept may give the appearance of objectivity and certainty, but it is argued that it is subjective and value laden (Moss and Pence, 1994; Williams,1995; Katz, 1993), so that 'quality is in the eye of the beholder' (Farquhar, 1991) with multiple view points. Some authors view it to be a 'slippery' concept (Pfiffer and Coote, 1991, in Williams, 1995:10) with many different meanings and usage. Its lack of precise meaning, including the political use of the term, suggests that it can be understood as a 'condensation symbol' (Endleman, 1985), that encapsulates a range of meanings that are taken for granted and are not questioned. According to Endleman (1985:6-7) 'Condensation symbols evoke the emotions associated with the situation'. The use of one 'evokes a quiescent or an aroused mass response because it symbolizes a threat or reassurance'. 'Quality' as a condensation symbol therefore can represent something good or better, and therefore desirable. When measured, high quality provides reassurance, low quality is a concern. However its meaning needs to be defined and clarified or 'mediated' (ibid:6) to be of use to service users.

Williams (1995:14) draws attention to the sensory aspect of quality as something that can be seen, heard or felt; it can be perceived. He points out that quality can be experienced and suggests that it can be assessed and compared, and 'perhaps even 'measured''. It is these aspects of quality that are most relevant to an understanding of quality from children's standpoint.

Searching for a literal meaning, synonyms for 'quality' include excellence, superiority, class, eminence, value, worth and feature. It can be further defined and classified into:

1. meanings associated with elevated status or position.
2. meanings associated with evaluation and measurement.

3. meanings associated with attributes.

Quality in early years provision

The use of the word quality in relation to early years provision reflects each of these three classifications. The literature on the quality of early years provision presents multiple perspectives, along with the justification for these perspectives from the point of view of different stakeholder groups (Moss and Pence, 1994; Sallis, 1996; Raban et al, 2003; Goodfellow, 2005). Stakeholders are those individuals or institutions that have a vested interest in early years provision. They are a large and disparate group. Outsider stakeholders, as defined previously, include policy makers and funders, i.e. central and local government, as well as the providers of education and childcare day nurseries, play groups and schools. Insider stakeholders are practitioners, teachers, nursery nurses and childcare professionals. Academics, early years consultants and parents can be seen to occupy an area in between, sometimes acting as outsiders, but also drawn into insider perspectives. Persistently overlooked are the children receiving early years provision who provide the key insider perspective for this study.

In the following sections, the perspective and potential influence of outsiders and insiders will be considered in relation to understandings of quality, within the context of changes over time, developing public policy, and shifting democratic practices. Taken for granted definitions of quality will be questioned and other definitions will be put forward.

Quality as seen by those outside the settings

Chapter One described how the New Labour Government has made significant and sustained investment in early years provision, spending large sums of public money on successive early years initiatives over a ten year period, with plans to extend funded provision over time (DfES,2005; DCSF,2007). It is inevitable that government wishes to justify and defend public spending and to ensure that the expectations of policies are realised, through improved long term outcomes in the areas of education, health and social adjustment, that also benefit society (Melhuish, 2004: Pugh, 2001;2006). Much is expected of the children in whom the investment is made as they pass through their schooling (DfEE,1998: Moss, 2006).

Whilst the government has a strategic understanding of the impact of quality early years provision, the maintained, private and voluntary sectors of early years providers are also motivated to define quality in order to establish sector specific standards and develop practice at setting level. Quality assurance frameworks have been developed by local authorities and national childcare organisations, to

enable settings to work towards accreditation of a quality award above minimum standards.

The next section will consider the evolution of 'quality' in relation to early years provision, and will review quality management frameworks that have been established alongside the development of early years services. Some of these frameworks take account of, or purposely seek, children's views on aspects of provision and where this occurs it will be reported to demonstrate approaches to quality management that are inclusive of children views.

The development of the discourse on quality early childhood education and care

Quality as an aspect of the effectiveness of early childhood provision is not a recent phenomenon. There has emerged a dominant discourse on quality early childhood education and care (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence,1999) that can be traced back to 'the origins of quality' (Williams,1995: 2). These began as 'good practice debates of the sixties, seventies and eighties' (ibid:1) which included contemporary studies of early years care and education in the UK and USA (Wood, McMahon and Cranstoun,1980; Sylva, Roy and Painter,1986). By the 1990's they had evolved into an 'emerging consensus…on the standards and values which early childhood services should embrace in order to provide a quality experience for young children' (Williams, 1995:2-3).

The consensus was made explicit in the Rumbold Report (DES,1990) on the education of three and four year olds. Its terms of reference had been to consider the quality of the educational experience which should be offered to 3 and 4 year olds, with particular reference to content, continuity and progression in learning, having regard to the requirements of the National Curriculum. The report aimed to provide government with an understanding of the characteristics of effective nursery education, in the context of an intention to develop a national educational framework for 3 to 16 year olds, and extend the existing National Curriculum to the youngest pupils. The report identified quality control as one of five 'issues' that needed 'to be addressed' (1990:30). Here the main concern was 'to ensure that all providers …know what constitutes quality provision, and are accountable to those who use their service for the standards they achieve' (para. 228). It identified action to be taken by the 'three main groups involved' - central government policy makers, local authority providers and practitioners (para. 223).

These three groups remain central to government strategies to maintain and develop quality. Adapting an exposition of different approaches to quality produced by the Department of Health in1992 (in Williams, 1995:6), in response

to implementing the 1989 Children Act , the next section describes three approaches. It demonstrates how each group develops 'quality provision' according to their respective responsibilities and functions, to correspond to the outcome needs of the relevant interest group:

- national performance through Quality Control (QC)
- local authority and/or sector wide performance through Quality Assurance (QA)
- providers and individual child performance through Total Quality Management (TQ)

What emerges is an overarching 'continuum' approach (Tanner, Welsh and Lewis, 2006:5) which reflects different levels of 'ownership' of quality issues that correspond with the responsibilities and function of management at each level.

The overall approach to quality in England is summarised in a model in Figure 2.1.. It illustrates the relative positions of the three groups towards quality and reflects systems that have seen rapid development over the past two decades. Each of these is examined in closer detail to illustrate their particular function in developing effective early years provision.

How Quality Control works

Quality Control (QC) can be deployed to create, maintain and regulate uniform services (Elfer and Wedge,1992; Moss and Pence, 1994; Sallis,1996).It is an outsider view. It uses a framework of fixed minimum standards, appraised externally by an inspectorate or dedicated QC service. The standards are based on the values of the determining organisation (Williams, 1995). Measuring individual providers against the standards, a level of service can be demonstrated, revealing higher and lower performers. It can expose non-compliance with regulations and standards, and inefficiencies in service delivery that must be remedied to conform to the standards framework, with progress monitored by the inspection process. It is flexible in other ways and can be reported at national level, according to local authority or service sector, or for individual providers. It generates data that can inform strategic planning and influence national policy changes but can also be used locally by users, for example within early years provision, by parents to influence their choice of childcare.

Figure 2.1: The continuum approach to quality in England developed from *Committed to Quality: Quality Assurance in Social Services Departments* (DoH,1992) in Williams (1995:6)

Characteristics	*Quality Control*	*Quality Assurance*	*Total Quality*
Works through	Standards	Systems	People
Purpose	Uniformity of standard	Efficiency and effectiveness of systems	To improve outcomes for user
Responsibility	Of DCSF,OFSTED Standards	Of each sector or each local authority	Of everyone but led by managers
View of quality	Problem - Outsider view	Preventative – Out and Insider view	Opportunity – Insider view

	Measurement of level of effectiveness including identification of failure	Co-ordination and uniformity of service delivery	Impact of service on users
Primary concern	Measurement of level of effectiveness including identification of failure	Co-ordination and uniformity of service delivery	Impact of service on users
Popular forms of expression	Inspection and regulation, Research, Assessment	Quality Assurance Systems	Total Quality Management, Continuous Improvement
Utilised by	Government - DCSF	Local authorities and sector bodies/ agencies	Providers and practitioners
Pirsig's (1974) 'dynamic/static dichotomy' in Williams (1995:11)	Static quality – set standards or procedures – can be open to influence of the dynamic approach. An assessment approach – measuring...and comparing against generic standards.	Static quality – policies, procedures, but can absorb practices developed by the dynamic approach. An assessment approach – measuring...and comparing against sector standards.	Dynamic quality - the 'feel good factor' - a positive physical difference – 'intrinsic' A development approach to quality – experiencing it, generating it, and improving it continuously
Approaches identified in Institute of Public Policy Research *Is quality good for you?* Pfeffer and Coote (1991), in Williams (1995:10)	The 'scientific' or expert approach – to conform to standards determined by experts Effectiveness demonstrated through research	The managerial or 'excellence' approach – to measure customer satisfaction, in pursuit of market advantage The traditional approach – to convey prestige and positional advantage	The consumerist approach – to empower the user i.e. parent and child The democratic approach – to achieve common goals in the interest of the community as a whole
Emphasis on:	Structure and outcomes of meeting targets/ maximizing attainment level	Structure and process	Process and outcomes of individual success
Accommodates the voice of the child	As a consultee – distanced from service delivery	As a consultee – close to service delivery	As a participant in consultations and focused discussions

Applying Quality Control systems in England

In England, a national framework of quality control in the childcare sector was first introduced in 1991, when the Children Act (1989) was implemented and placed responsibility with local authorities for the registration and inspection of childcare provision for children up to eight years. The Act 'provided a spur to the debate on quality services for young children' (Brophy and Statham,1994:62) instigating the reform of the regulations on childcare, the introduction of statutory annual inspections and an overhaul of standards (DoH, 1991).

In 1990 there was a distinction between childcare and early education and it was not until 1996 that early childhood education became subject to a national quality control approach. It was introduced to accompany the expansion of funded education for all four year olds, fifty percent of whom were attending voluntary

and private provision. The *Nursery Education Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on entering compulsory education* (SCAA, 1996) provided a framework of standards of attainment expected of children entering fulltime schooling at five years. For two years, all new and existing providers of funded nursery education were assessed against these outcomes, with newly created nursery inspectors examining provision and practice against planning documents and progress made by children in the settings. As a standards framework in the context of funded nursery education, it monitored both value for money and compliance with a centrally defined notion of learning priorities. The *Early Learning Goals* (ELGs) (QCA,1999) superseded the Desirable Learning Outcomes, and were soon embedded in the *Foundation Stage Curriculum* (QCA,2000). A new section of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) was established, the Early Years Division, to inspect providers of nursery education against the efficient delivery of the ELGs.

The Early Years Division also took over the responsibility for the regulation and inspection of childcare 0-8, replacing services run by local authorities, under revised National Standards (Ofsted, 2001). The two notional regimes of early education and care have been brought together as 'early years provision' (Children Act, 2006). A single curriculum and regulatory framework has been issued, known as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), 'to support the delivery of quality integrated education and childcare 0-5 years' (DfES, 2006), which has been implemented from September 2008.

The various QC measures introduced by government have a 'static' quality (Pirsig,1994, in Williams, 1995:11), despite some revision to fit changes in policy and political direction, in 1996, 1999 and again in 2006, the principle of assessment in relation to standards of attainment and provision remains. They are based on a 'scientific' approach, requiring conformity to standards determined by experts (Pfeffer and Coote,1991, in Williams, 1995: 10). They are characterised by a rigid structure, with target led outcomes for settings to achieve in the form of specified levels of children's attainment by the end of the EYSF. They require a better qualified workforce, more efficiently organised into integrated services.

The escalating expectations of governments are revealed in the language used in policy documents. 'Quality' was sufficient in 1996 in the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning; by 1999 the NCS called for services were to be of 'good quality' (DfEE, 1998). The Ten Year Strategy for Childcare, the Children's Plan and the EYSF call for services to be of 'high quality' (HMT, 2004; DCSF, 2007; DCSF,2008), and Ofsted is aiming for 'excellence' in practice (Ofsted, 2008).

The voices of children within the Quality Control system

Children's voices were not elicited in the evaluation of public services until very recently (Davie, Upton and Varma,1996; McAuliffe, 2003; Lancaster, 2006). Consequently it is unsurprising that children's perspectives are not prioritised in

quality control models. Where they do appear they are mediated through an adult conduit of consultation. Whilst the participation of children in service evaluation has not become widespread practice in settings in England, from 2005 Ofsted inspections (Section 10) have required maintained settings to consult with children as part of self evaluation framework criteria. From September 2008, the same duty has been required of all registered early years settings in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector. Providers are asked to 'gather the views of learners' and 'give an example of action taken based on the views of learners'. This is prompting providers to seek ways and methods to gather views and consult with 'learners', including the youngest children.

Reporting children's views via the inspection process should be welcomed as a demonstration of the recognition of children's perspectives by government. However, it is unlikely that these can have much more than a rhetorical influence on policy. At worst they might be used to stereotype children in public documents.

The next section considers Quality Assurance (QA). Instigated and supported by central government (Children Act, 1989) it has been further developed by other agencies, such as local authorities and sector providers of early education and childcare.

How Quality Assurance works

A QA system is not merely concerned with compliance to a set of minimum standards but works to develop services to a higher standard of delivery through improving all round performance (Williams, 1995). This is achieved through a process of developing or adopting standards and corresponding quality indicators, which represent increasing levels of service delivery and also reflect the values to be promoted by that service. These can be evidenced through structural indicators, for example, staffing ratios, facilities and resources; and process indicators, for example, policies and procedures. QA often involves a system of self-assessment allowing for continuous improvement, working up the levels. (However, a service can be re-evaluated following major changes – standards can go down as well as up). QA schemes are frequently developed by organisations needing to monitor their internal performance across several settings. It allows organisations to compare their results with competitors in the sector and demonstrate their superiority or market advantage. The emphasis of QA schemes is on structure and process, combining static and dynamic aspects of quality. QA is an outsider view as it is externally applied to settings; however,

at higher levels of QA schemes it appears to develop characteristics of an insider view.

Applying Quality Assurance systems in England

When, in 1991, local authorities were made responsible for the development of childcare services alongside their duties to regulate provision, under the Children Act 1989, it led to the growth of a multitude of QA schemes. *The Day Care and Educational Provision for Young Children Guidance* (DoH, 1991) described a registration process for new services as an 'enabling process which helps intending providers and childminders offer good quality services'. It instigated a discussion about the 'main factors which influence quality of care - structural and inter-actional features of services shown to be linked to child development outcomes; for example the nature of adult/child interaction, size of group and number of staff, and recognition of children's developmental needs' (Brophy and Statham,1994:63).

This discussion was at local authority level and at childcare sector level. It resulted in organisations, representing the childcare and early education sector, producing guidelines to quality, as a response to the need to define quality and establish standards within their sectors. These included the Preschool Playgroup Association (later the Preschool Learning Association, PLA) and the National Day Nursery Association (NCMA).

The guidelines were formalised into quality assurance schemes that would be internally assessed, but externally verified, often leading to the allocation of a quality award. At the same time local authorities developed quality guidelines for their nurseries and reception classes, as well as schemes to develop standards of childcare practice in preschool and afterschool provision.

An audit of these schemes (Jamieson, Cordeaux and Wilkinson, 2000) found a total of 290 QA documents being used in England at. Of these, 22 were from international and national sources and 268 from regional sources. The audit revealed that schemes typically concentrated on the perpetual concerns of policies and procedures, and also included hot topics such as equality and inclusion, reflecting current concerns, highlighted by government or within a region or authority.

The explosion in quality schemes was an indication of the concern within the providers and practitioners group about how they conduct their work with children, and the principles upon which they base their work. In 2003 an Investors in Children (IiC) award, sponsored by the Sure Start Unit, offered validation and

endorsement of QA schemes that promoted the highest quality standards. It had the effect of reducing the number of QA schemes in use, but there remain a number of different schemes. *Steps to Quality* (2003) is one of the IiC schemes. To gain a quality award, settings were required to provide evidence from their practice that they were reaching the standards. Each submission for an award would be externally evaluated to ensure consistency and maintain the standards set. In 2007, a new body and a fresh concept was established, the National Quality Improvement Network (NQIN). It reinforced the view that quality is a dynamic concept that is locally defined within a national framework of principles (NQIN, 2007). The concept of 'continuous quality improvement' has been incorporated into the EYFS framework (DCSF, 2008:8).

The voices of children within Quality Assurance

The views of children can be accommodated within a QA self-assessment process as part of a consultation on the provision offered. The views of children are more likely to be responded to at setting level. An inclusive approach to children's involvement in quality issues is demonstrated by the examples taken from the fifteen Common Quality Areas. The audit identified sixty-nine Common Quality Areas emerging from the documents, of which fifteen made some reference to involving children in the organisation of the setting (see Figure 2:2).

Figure 2.2. 15 Common Quality Areas reflecting children's involvement in pre-school (from Jamieson, Cordeaux and Wilkinson, 2000)

Active learning: Children should be included in planning and be facilitated to learn through first hand experiences rather than been told.

Aims and objectives: Underpinning values should be clearly stated and shared. These could include…respecting children as individuals…these values should be evident through policies and reflected in the view of parents and children

Alone: Children should have the opportunity to learn individually with and without an adult

Autonomy: Children make decisions, take responsibility, solve problems, take risks, develop self-help skills, direct their own learning, plan, initiate and reflect on their work

Building on learning: Children's ideas are the starting point for learning, focus on what children can do, not what they can't do

Children's rights: Children should know their rights and have their opinions taken into account in decisions affecting them.

Communication: Parents and children should be listened to; their need and rights considered…other means of communication, especially for children with special needs, should be recognised

Food: Children should be involved in menu planning and food can be used as part of the curriculum.

Group: Children should have the opportunity to participate in small and large group activity to encourage partnership and cooperation.

Learning and Teaching: …Observation and assessment should inform expectations for children…Children's discussion should be valued and community languages and

linguistic backgrounds supported. Children's communication with each other supports learning.

Observation and assessment: Children should be involved.

Records: Records should include the child's perspective..

Relationships: Children should be able to initiate talk, share thoughts and feelings with adults. Children should be listened to and spoken to with respect.

Safe and Secure: Children and adults should give and receive affection.

Self-esteem: (Children's) personal worth can be encouraged through conversation and practical activities.

A strong ethical, value base of respect and trust for children is evident through these examples which represent many aspects of provision. Practitioners can be seen to privilege the views of children in order to empower them. There is no indication of the level of inclusion of children's involvement across the QA schemes surveyed. However, there is unmistakable awareness of the importance of including children's perspectives from some practitioners and evidence that the QA approach can accommodate the views of children. It may be more accurate to reclassify certain schemes as having a Total Quality approach as the next section explores.

How Total Quality works

A Total Quality (TQ) approach is relatively dynamic in character, seeking to involve all stakeholder views to improve quality and be responsive to 'intrinsic' aspects of quality, as experienced by service users. It stresses the outcomes for staff and service users, as well as the process of achieving these. It offers a 'feel-good factor' through stakeholders making a positive physical difference to provision (Pirsig 1974, in Williams,1995:11). It seeks to empower stakeholders and takes a democratic approach for the benefit of the community, reflecting the values of the community. It is applied locally at setting level where innovative practice can be developed and 'specific standards' generated (Pfeffer and Coote, 1991, in Williams,1995:12) as evidenced in Fig. 2.2. It involves a continuous process, with frequent reappraisal and reflection, requiring 'commitment, involvement, consultation, talking, working in focus groups, feedback, training, learning' (ibid:12). It has explicit outcomes for all stakeholders, which are open to revision through a responsive process of continuous quality development and improvement (National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO),1993, in Williams, 1995:8).

Applying Total Quality systems in England

TQ approaches can be seen as a development within QA self-assessment schemes, where they operate at the higher levels. Where the first level of QA schemes require evidence of compliance to minimum standards, further levels (normally up to three) are increasingly rigorous and require a demonstration of reflective practice, innovation and self-review to inform planning for the promotion and maintenance of quality provision. There are expectations that the views of all those involved in the setting are considered.

TQ is a process of continuous evaluation and monitoring of performance in relation to quality indicators. The responsibility for maintaining standards and realising successful outcomes is shared by all staff at a setting. As noted above, in 2007 the DCSF endorsed Quality Improvement Principles as the approved framework for LAs and national organisations to improve quality outcomes for children and young people, led by NQIN. The re-issued EYFS Practice Guidance (DCSF, 2008) directs settings towards what is a TQ approach to continuously improve the setting. To improve practice leaders are recommended to employ a 'whole setting approach', to use outside consultants and quality improvement tools, and to lead and encourage reflective practice within a collaborative learning culture (DCSF, 2008). These are recognised principles of Total Quality Management (Williams, 1995:8).

A TQ approach represents an insider position but mostly from a practitioner standpoint. Though reflecting local practice at setting level this approach still works from a standardised framework, and aims to achieve service goals, against which practice is evidenced and evaluated. Service goals typically relate to an adult agenda of structure, process and outcomes.

The voices of children within Total Quality
TQ is potentially the most responsive approach to children's views as it is committed to use consultations and other methods of feedback, to ensure there is 'sound information about the real requirements of children and parents and carers' (NCVO, 1993, in Williams,1995:9). The original version of the EYFS Guidance (DfES, 2007) defined quality improvement as provision which improves all children's outcomes, supports children at risk and builds the foundations for future attainment, with reference to the Principles into Practice framework. It made specific mention of the consideration of children's views (DfES, 2007:8), which has been omitted from the re-issued version (DCSF, 2008).

The change of emphasis towards an adult led agenda of leadership and workforce development is not inappropriate. However it should not be

incompatible with promoting children's voices in their pre-school settings. Children's views are required for the Ofsted self-evaluation process, as has already been noted. It is concerning that a change of focus in the Practice Guidance, away from children's views, should be made at a time when more is known and understood about involving children in their learning and in decision making, as will be shown in the following sections.

Searching for a child centred approach to quality

None of the three approaches described above take account of the views of children as the basis of practice. Each one is designed to improve the outcomes of children, and that is an important objective. However they represent a discourse of quality that emphasises an adult view of children as dependent, in need of being protected and acquiring knowledge and skills through the mediation of well trained and experienced adults. The ultimate goal is children's high attainment at the end of the Foundation Stage. It is a construct that elevates the position of adults and diminishes that of children (Drummond, 2008).

The following section will illustrate the potential of young children to add another dimension to the discourse on quality. Using the existing literature, it will present alternative attributes of quality early education and care that derive from children. From these attributes it will interpret and construct an understanding of quality early years provision from children's perspectives. This will be compared to an adult view that is embedded in the three quality approaches explained above.

How children's views of quality might be defined and understood using a process of concept analysis

This section examines examples from the literature of children's perspectives of early years provision to begin to analyse the concept of quality from children's perspectives. While it is accepted that 'quality' is not a concept that is understood or used by young children, it is proposed that children are aware of and are critical of the events, activities and relationships in their pre-school. Their awareness of these experiences as found in the literature can be represented as a body of knowledge of children's expertise, that in turn forms the basis of an understanding of quality provision from the point of view of children.

Reviewing the literature provides a start to the process of analysis. A systematic approach has been used following Walker and Avant's (1988) guidance on concept analysis. Working from adult definitions of the concept of quality early years provision, presented above, it is possible to begin to define quality from the

point of view of children. The understanding of children's perspectives will be developed further through the analysis of data collected in the study, in Chapter Three, and illustrated in Research Stories, in Chapter Four.

Concept analysis

The purpose of concept analysis is to develop theory through the identification and explanation of key concepts that are considered as part of the theory. Walker and Avant recommend the use of concept analysis in the situation 'in which concepts are already available in the area of interest but they are unclear, outmoded or unhelpful' (1988:33). As demonstrated in the previous section, quality in early childhood education and care is a well established concept, but its meaning from the perspective of children is not clear and some of the existing meanings may well be inappropriate and irrelevant when applied to the views of children.

An essential aspect of clarifying an understanding of the concept of quality from children's perspectives is to compare the defining characteristics of this concept, to attributes of quality from other perspectives. 'Concept analysis is …a careful examination and description of a word (or a term) and its uses in language coupled with an explanation of how it is 'like' or 'not like' other related words (or terms) (Walker and Avant, 1988:36). This analysis will consider how colleagues in the field of early years research have defined quality from the point of view of young children, and the meanings and use they have made of the concept. The analysis exposes the difference between the concept 'quality from children's perspectives' and the related concept of 'quality from adults' perspectives'. This is an iterative process that is exploratory and tentative, but which aims to clarify the central concept of the thesis and to support the analytical framework for the study.

The process begins by selecting the concept for analysis, which is 'quality early years provision from the perspective of young children'. The next step is to determine the aim and purpose of analysis, which is to develop an understanding of quality from the perspective of children, with the purpose of identifying indicators of quality experiences from children's perspectives.

It is then necessary to identify the different uses of the concept 'quality early years provision'. The dominant discourse on quality from an adult, outsider position has been discussed in detail already and in some cases links with

children's perspectives have been offered, but these were minimal. This section introduces a children's insider position.

Including children's voices in the debate on quality

Children's perspectives have only recently been incorporated into the debate on quality. Moss, writing about developing new approaches to defining quality in early childhood services, proposes that quality, in the evaluative sense, is the performance of early childhood services in achieving their goals. The 'process of goal setting', according to Moss, is 'essential to defining quality' (1994:3). He proposes that children are stakeholders in this process, alongside more generally accepted stakeholders such as parents, practitioners and the state, with their own identifiable 'goals', which define quality from the perspective of children. Moss cites Meade (1988) who 'identified potential benefits' for children from early years services, in New Zealand, including:

- time out from intensive one -to-one relationships with parents;
- making friends with peers and other adults;
- learning a repertoire of social skills;
- (being) given the chance to be children and to play, have fun and learn;
- get opportunities to add a spiritual dimension to their lives.' (Moss, 1994:3).

Moss proposes that these might be considered as service goals from the point of view of children.

Children's views were recognised in a European Commission Childcare Network discussion paper (Balaguer, Mestres and Penn,1992) which expressed a perspective of quality in services for young children based on 'values', that are non-prescriptive but which emerge from discussions about the needs of children within local communities. 'Quality' in these terms is a relative phenomenon that will be defined by those involved in services, through discussion and debate, to explore implicit value judgements, acting on behalf of young children and their needs. This use of the term quality in early years provision recognises that children have a perspective on quality, along with their parents and professionals.

The discussion paper concentrated on quality from the perspective of children and their families, as users of services, and of professionals providing the services. It set criteria (or goals) for quality. It acknowledged the difficulty of defining quality within a diverse and ever changing scenario incorporating different 'social perceptions and values' (1991:6).

As a basis for further discussion the paper identified some basic aims of high quality services that reflect the needs of young children to:

- a healthy life
- spontaneous expression
- esteem as an individual
- dignity and autonomy
- self-confidence and zest in learning
- a stable learning and caring environment
- sociability, friendship, and co-operation with others
- equal opportunities irrespective of gender, race and disability
- cultural diversity
- support as part of a family and community
- happiness

From this list a clear difference can be seen in understanding quality from children's perspectives, an insider view, compared to outsider perspectives. This view considers personal feelings and aspirations. It is a 'bottom-up' perspective rather than 'top-down' (Katz, 1993). The following studies have involved children in defining the quality of early education and childcare. Common themes begin to emerge that influenced the methodology of the main study, at the research design stage and in the analysis of the data. These will be highlighted in the discussion.

The Danish BASUN study conducted by Langsted (1994) has been a major influence on subsequent research enquiry into children's perspectives on quality in childcare provision. He presents the case for consulting with children as a valid part of defining quality in a setting. In a study of five and six year old children in pre-school, comparing experiences at home and in childcare to find out what children regard as quality in each aspect of their lives, Langsted (1994) concludes that for young children the family is the quality standard against which other experiences are measured. But he reports that the childcare centre also represented quality. It was valued for:

- The friendship of other children, though the behaviour of some children modified this effect at times. Home however allowed for contact with particular children who were most liked.
- Activities, toys and 'nice' staff were rated equally as being of 'secondary importance'.
- Control over their activity was felt to be much greater at home than at the centre, even though in both places adults made the final decision. Children accepted and understood why this was the case. At the centre it was accepted that it was necessary due to the number of children and their different needs/views.

Children demonstrated strong and clear views on the differences between home and group care, they could comment on the different rules and accepted these differences. They were able to express what they enjoyed about group care. They had a perception of care that was about children's issues, and not

dependent upon the adult's agenda or understanding, though affected by these. Langsted concludes that 'it is an advantage to regard children as experts when it comes to their own lives to a far greater extent than has been the case until now" (1994:42).

An English study involved three and four year old children in the evaluation of their children's centre in London (Clark and Moss, 2001). The researchers developed a multi-method 'mosaic' approach which was participative, treating children as experts in their own lives; it was reflexive, including parents, practitioners and children in reflecting on and interpreting data; it focused on children's lived experiences, rather than measures of their learning; and was embedded in practice, aimed at informing planning for children, which might have implications for change in practice.

Children's place as stakeholders in the process of evaluation was made explicit as the purpose of the study, and a substantial amount of photographic documentation was created to reflect their views, as well as observational and conversational documentation. These provided the basis for identifying themes from the study, that in turn were the basis of what was perceived to be important to the sample children in the study. These themes include those that were general and others specific to individual children.

- Children talked of friendships and the change of friends over time, and offered comments on physical and material attributes of friends.
- Children included 'grown ups' amongst the people they liked, and talked about them keeping order and playing with children.
- Some children mentioned the kitchen and the cook and the space where fruit and milk were shared.
- Some activities were noted by children, including books and creative activities. Girls were more likely to mention these than boys.
- The majority of children described and drew maps of the outside play environment – including large trees that over hung the play area.
- Children voiced concern about perceived conflict between children and how it was resolved by adults "tell(ing) people off". Physical conflict was the main reason for not liking someone. No adults were on the list of people who were disliked.
- Children expressed feelings about the past and the future, sharing memories of friends and staff who had left, as well as projecting themselves into the future when they would move into the big children's lunch room or go on to school.

More than in the other studies, in Clark's account issues of gender emerged. Children showed an awareness of their own 'becoming', which parallels but is different from the government's expectations of the prospective benefit of and redemptive influence of preschool. It is personal and part of meaning making; these children are acquiring a sense of being themselves through time. The

significance of places, such as the tree and the kitchen were themes that were identified in the main study.

Dupree, Bertram and Pascal's (2001) study of reasons for involving young children in a participative evaluation framework, the Effective Early Learning Programme (EELP), reported on the views of children as stakeholders in evaluations. A large cohort of children was interviewed in a range of early years settings across the UK, including some Reception classes. EELP utilises a self-assessment approach involving practitioners, parents and children in order to inform practice and bring about change. Children were questioned using 'informal structured interviews' (Dupree, Bertram and Pascal, 2001:1) on five aspects of provision, three of which were reported on in the study - the aims and objectives of preschool; their learning experiences; and relationships and interactions. From their responses the researchers found that in relation to:

1. Aims and objectives; children's perceived reasons for coming to preschool varied, but they referred to:

- friends and play,
- needing to be taught and to learn letters and 'do everything',
- because parents were at work and because of their age.
- Some children felt they were obliged to come by their parents.

2. Learning experiences: children's response to what they liked doing, and what they didn't like, ranged from:

- liking everything, liking working and liking the food.
- dislike was expressed for painting as paint got on to clothes,
- children disliked getting a telling off,
- some children disliked sitting down,
- some children said they did not like being asked to stop their play
- and some children said they did not like being made to sit down and work.

3. Relationships and interactions; questions about the role of adults, their feelings about the children and about rules governing preschool demonstrated that:

- children understood that adults were there to keep order and keep children safe from one another.
- adults were there to help children, though one child questioned the need for adults who 'don't usually do anything.'
- adults who shout were not liked, and their propensity to 'get cross' was acknowledged.
- children who hit were not liked.
- people who were kind were valued
- one child appreciated a smart appearance in adults
- the majority of children believed that other people liked them.
- In relation to things that were not allowed most children were aware they were not allowed to do dangerous or harmful things, with many children naming something that is dangerous or harmful. Children identified running in this category and places where children are not allowed. Other children identified behaviour that was not allowed.

- children were aware of things they perceived they must do – including sharing, being obedient, learning and listening.
- children also mentioned tidying up, having a drink and washing hands.

The study concluded that 'children are able to express their opinions in ways that are very perceptive and that give practitioners real insight into the children's perspective of their early childhood setting' (2001:20). It was felt that the insights added another dimension to the evaluation process which could take a much fuller account of the ways children see, describe and understand the world around them.

In Swedish preschools it is mandatory for children to have their views heard on all matters that concern them, in accordance with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Sheridan and Samuel- Pramlington's (2001) study of pedagogical quality from the point of view of five year old children's understanding of their influence on decision making in their pre-schools, found that in the experience of children interviewed:

- In preschool children believed they can make decisions about their own play, their own activities and what happened to their own belongings to some extent themselves
- But they seldom influence the overall organisation, routines, content and activities that are teacher initiated
- They can decide more at home than at preschool
- They can influence the teacher when they ask for something and she says yes
- They can influence when they play games together, when they participate on equal grounds and take turns

The study found that children accepted both the rules and adults making many of the decisions. However, children were able to exercise more autonomy and influence over their activity, including timing of and place to play, in preschools that had been evaluated to be higher quality; whereas children, in provision evaluated as low quality, reported less autonomy and gave the reason that their personal freedom was curtailed due to the need to accommodate the majority. All children reported that they made more decisions at home.

These findings raise the common theme of 'control', and children's acceptance and rationalisation of their dependency on adults to take decisions. The correlation between settings rated of higher quality and children's perceived autonomy illustrates the complexity of discussions on quality. It is probable that more confident and better qualified practitioners allow children greater independence and perhaps supervise them less than their less confident colleagues.

Mooney and Blackburn's (2003) study reported on English children's views on childcare quality. It informed the development of the aforementioned Investors in

Children (IiC) initiative which, from 2003 – 2007, was to endorse childcare quality assurance schemes, until it was superseded by the National Quality Improvement Network.

The study recognised children and young people as stakeholders and consulted directly with children as users of childcare, including a number of children under five. The study involved a literature review and a survey of EYDCP childcare audit consultations with children and young people. In their findings the authors identify 'quality indicators' (2003:26) from children's perspectives. For younger children these included:

- Children's friendships are encouraged and supported
- There's a range of activities which are regularly reviewed and changed or modified to retain children's interest
- Children and staff appear to have a fun time
- Staff avoid raising their voices when speaking to children
- Staff show respect for children, are caring and take time to listen
- Being able to choose activities and space to play and use of own time
- Having access to outside play
- Sharing food together
- Staff who are caring, friendly, helpful and playful
- Feeling safe and secure
- Rules to keep safe
- Facilities include a range of spaces for different activities, including secret hiding places' out of the eye of adults

This study adds to an understanding of children as competent observers of their lives, with an awareness of the structural aspects of group care, the rules and the resources. They also demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of social behaviour and relationships. Their emotional needs were acknowledged. These findings were influential to the main study. The themes informed the framework for focused observations during the fieldwork, and also the initial categorisation of the data. The concept of 'quality indicators' used by Mooney and Blackburn has been utilised in one of the research questions *'Can the meaning(s) children give (to their presence in pre-school) be interpreted as quality indicators, to demonstrate an understanding of quality?'.* It provides a more appropriate terminology for the meaning children make of their experiences, that emanates from the discourse on quality, but which was not previously associated with children's standpoints.

An Icelandic study, by Einarsdottir (2005), of five and six year old children's perceptions of their playschools, sought to add children's voice for defining quality of early childhood programmes, to those of adults. The findings from the study 'suggest' that quality from children's perspectives depended upon:

- a good relationship with other children
- having a choice over what to do in pre-school
- playing
- the avoidance of activities that required them to sit still and be quiet.

Einarsdottir noted that children 'had strong opinions of their pre-school lives and expressed them clearly' and were 'specialists in their preschool lives' (2005:483). She also found that the children showed individual preferences for different aspects of materials and playthings, though open ended materials, such as blocks, were mentioned most often. Relationships, choice, play and control over own activity are themes that appear again from the findings of this study.

From these studies, two from the UK and the remainder from the Scandinavian countries (Iceland is included in this group) many of the same themes re-occur and can be viewed as attributes of quality from the point of view of children.

Comparing insider and outsider perspectives of early years provision

An aim of this chapter and the concept analysis has been to establish an understanding of quality from young children's perspectives. From the examples of children's perspectives it is possible to start to identify some 'defining attributes' of 'quality early years provision'. This use can be termed an 'insider' perspective from the point of view of children involved in a setting. Theirs is an intrinsic view, based on living the experiences day to day. The attributes have been selected from the findings as areas of quality that consistently appear in studies of children's perspectives, and are presented in Figure 2.3. The attributes reflect the value placed by children on aspects of preschool that make them 'feel-good'. They can be summarised as relating to relationships, food, resources, play, learning, rules, place, control and emotions. They are based on experiences that are situated and embedded in a setting, and are subjective and diverse.

It is worth considering the attributes relating to rules and learning. These might be seen to be influenced by an adult agenda, indicating the effect of the dominant discourse of quality based on 'outsider' values, and the hegemonic-global (Moss, 2006) effect of this discourse permeating children's understanding from an early age. They seem to reflect the effect of an adult created pre-school institution and a global trend of 'schoolification' (Bennett, 2006) of young children.

Fig 2.3. A comparison of defining attributes of quality in early years provision from two perspectives

Insider / children's perspective of quality
Relationships:To be with and have friends and to have adults who care for you
Food: Sharing food and snacks together

Place: To be in places where you feel comfortable and free from harm
Place: To have access to outside
Control:To have some influence on being able to choose or control your activity
Emotions: To recognise there are good and bad experiences
Rules:To understand the need for rules about conduct and behaviour and safety
Resources and play: To have things of interest to play with
Learning: To understand the need to learn things as, and for when, you get older
Outsider / adult perspective of quality
Is (often self evidently) something good
It is something to aspire to
It assumes a developmental view of children as incomplete persons
It is a measure of effectiveness, reliability, consistency
It applies minimum standards of structural conditions (staffing, accommodation, safety)
It implies an acceptable and better level of care and education that is subject to external inspection
It can be developed above minimum standards through self -evaluation
It reflects the relative status of setting against other setting
It reflects the child and their family's relative importance/status

When the children's 'insider' view is compared with the defining attributes of the 'outsider' perspective (Figure 2.3), the latter can be seen to aim towards objectivity through applying universal standards, employing a consistent, process orientated approach with implicit expectations of being a benefit to children. However, as such it is not open to the views of children. Thus children's views are absent from the primary aims of early years provision, though children may apply influence through self-evaluation processes at local level.

The analysis has exposed the significant distance between the two perspectives that derive from the respective view points in terms of the benefit to society or the benefit to children. It is not intended make a value judgement to place one perspective above the other, but to establish that there is a valid alternative to understanding quality from that which prevails in current policy and practice (Moss, 2005; Podmore, 2004; Tobin, 2005).

The aim of the study is to understand the perspective of children in relation to their experiences of early years provision. The final sections of this chapter present other perspectives on quality and pedagogical practice which are open to the influence of children, in a way that adult constructs of quality early years provision fail to be.

Post modern perspectives of quality

Post modern perspectives (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence,1999; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005) within early years studies have challenged and rejected the 'hegemonic global' (Moss, 2006:2) outsider definition of quality presented above. After Foucault they perceive this as socially constructed, representing a dominant 'discourse of quality', and characterised by them as a certain,

normative, universal, 'taken for granted' phenomenon. They claim the dominant discourse denies alternatives, and aims to control the understanding of the concept of quality from a single, globally narrow, static perspective that is resistant to change and unrepresentative, evidenced in the Total Control approach. They characterise quality standards and assurance systems as criterion led, based on objective 'truths'.

These authors have sought to 'problematize' the concept of quality in early years provision (Dahlberg Moss and Pence, 1999:17). Their post modern perceptions are seeking other perspectives (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). They contest the notion of quality, proposing an alternative 'discourse of meaning making', explained as an evaluative activity which is diverse globally and locally, that changes over time and within different contexts, and is open to dialogue amongst multiple stakeholders. It is dynamic and responsive to change from within. It is characterised by 'judgements of value' based on the production of 'documentation' of the children's activity and adult responses. It involves dialogue between stakeholders, based on 'documentation', which creates uncertainty and provisionality, and the possibility of change, through deconstruction and reconstruction.

The post-modernist perspective eschews the notion of a single criterion referenced quality assurance 'discourse of quality' and instead:

- It looks for meaning making within a discourse of multiple perspectives and diversity over time and space.
- It seeks documentation of the activity and relationships as a basis for reflective meaning making which can bring about change for individuals and the group.
- It aims towards good practice.

Several of the studies into children's perspectives on quality cited in the previous section were influenced directly or indirectly by the post-modernist position. Clark and Moss's (2001) study applied post-modern influences to their methodology, documenting children's experiences and interpreting the data using a reflexive process involving parents and children alongside practitioners. Clark and Moss's approach to methodology had significant influence on the research design for the main study.

Amongst the theoretical perspectives that informed the Mosaic approach were those developed in Reggio Emilia,Italy. There the 'pedagogy of listening' and the 'pedagogy of relationships' foreground 'competent' children who with practitioners, parents and researchers develop meaning and understanding of

their preschool (Clark, 2005:30). Reggio Emilia preschools have developed a unique system of dialogue between the children, their pedagogistas (practitioners), their parents and others, which informs the process of learning through listening, documentation and participation of all involved, resulting in 'transformation' within 'continuity' (Rinaldi, 2006:104). If quality improvement is about change, in Reggio, 'we talk about the right to change: change is both a right and a value. It is a quality of life and of living which requires awareness to give oneself direction' (Rinaldi, 2006:105). She argues that it is necessary to give change meaning and accompany change for children:

> 'Children ask that of us, too, that we accompany their changes and their search for new identities, their search for the meaning of growth and for identity within change, their search for the meaning of change. It is a matter of seeing, reading, interpreting change through the eyes of other children and adults in order to understand it, appraise it and appreciate it.' (ibid:105)

Rinaldi refers to adults supporting change in continuity and transformation in children's lives through a shared process of meaning making and understanding. Influenced by this approach, Clark and Moss (2001) developed a participative, multiple- perspective methodology for the evaluation of integrated services for young children and their families that centered on the expertise of children to inform change, referred to previously. The use of this approach has since been developed to involve children in the planning of outdoor play provision with the purpose of improving provision using the experience of young children (Clark, 2004a; Clark and Moss, 2005).

The approach has been introduced to a wider audience of practitioners to support them in involving children in participation and decision making in early years settings (Clark, McQuail and Moss, 2003; McAuliffe, 2003). Clark, McAuliffe and others developed a series of detailed guides to good practice in the area of participation and consultation involving very young children in evaluating a wide range of services they use and are part of (Clark, 2004b; McAuliffe and Williams, 2004, 2008). Using case studies they demonstrate the contributions children make to develop the quality of pre-school provision.

Chapter One presented some examples from the literature of young children's competence to comment on aspects of their lives. This chapter has added further examples of children's clearly expressed views on the quality of their preschool experiences. The final section will discuss different pedagogical practices that involve children in the assessment of their learning and relate this to children's perspectives on quality.

Quality, assessment and pedagogical practice

During the course of the study it became apparent that the assessment of children's learning, as an outcome measure, was an element of pedagogical practice that had relevance to the debate and discourse on quality in the early years.

Carr, Jones and Lee (2005) acknowledge the influence of practices from Reggio when new assessment practices were created in New Zealand that included the child's point of view. Using 'Learning Stories' as a method of assessment, practitioners document a learning episode based on a close observation of a child. The documentation may be written or may include photographs of the child or something they have made. Parents are asked to review the documentation, as are the children, to inform 'what next?' in the children's learning. It is an active and reflective process. Carr asserts that learning stories give voice to the child and reveal a previously disregarded perspective of learning that has proved insightful. She highlights the rebalance of power that the Learning Stories serve to engineer for children:

> When children are listened to, the power balance tips towards the child. Assessment practice…implies that the adult has a pre-set agenda, in which case the power balance tips dramatically the other way – towards the adult. Assessment practices are usually associated with normalization, classification and categorization….If we redefine the purpose of assessment as being to notice, recognise and respond to competent and confident learners and communicators, then children's voices will have a large part to play in defining and communicating that learning (Carr, Jones and Lee, 2005:129-130).

Children's voices illuminate assessment and inform practitioners whose understanding of children's learning is taken beyond the static measurements of standardised scales of development. They provide a fresh vision of what is attainable by children that comes from children.

Assessment through listening and observation is an empowerment of the child, which contrasts with the disempowerment of the child inherent in assessment based on a learning outcomes profile. While the explicit purpose of a profile is to measure attainment, implicit in the process is a deficit of skills still to be attained. The profile implies certainty in the form of boxes ticked, with power vested in the practitioner. But in fact the results are not certain. The next stages of learning are determined by the list of skills still to be attained, without regard to the child's interests and wishes. These are the concerns that were raised in the previous chapter regarding the possible misuse of the EYFS grids.

In contrast, a learning story might reveal a child to be interested in shadows, taking photographs, tracking movement of the shadows, noticing the changes of shape and size as time passes. The process highlights the qualities of the child as a

learner, with a personal significance or disposition for learning. A profile checklist would be able to list skills and levels from this encounter, which would demonstrate the level of learning attained, with a statistical significance.

Carr had been influenced by Drummond's view of assessment as

> 'a process that must enrich (children's) lives, their learning and development …and the way in which, in our everyday practice, we observe children's learning, strive to understand it, and then put our understanding to good use... Assessment is part of our daily practice in striving for quality'. (Drummond, 2003:13)

Drummond in turn recognises the potential for practitioners in early years to learn from the New Zealand model of placing narrative at the centre of the assessment of learning and development. This model rejects the:

> 'product-based metaphors…in which learning is described in terms of targets, levels, outcomes and goals …(which) suggest learning is time-bound, momentary and discontinuous: …(so that) learning is something that children *have…*rather than something they *do.* (Drummond, 2003:186. Emphasis in original)

In comparison, Drummond sees Carr's approach to learning as a 'moving event, dynamic and changeful, practically synonymous with living' (ibid:186).

This 'watchful' and 'listening' model of assessment is a respectful process (Nutbrown, 1996). Drummond (2003) sees effective assessment as recognising the disparity of power between adults and children in early years settings, which might otherwise have negative connotations of coercion. However adults can employ 'the loving use of power' (Smail, in Drummond,2003:176) so that assessment can be 'transformed' through educating '*lovingly* as well as effectively' (ibid:176). These approaches seem to illustrate the attribute of quality as 'adults who care for you' that was defined by children in the studies above.

Pedagogical practices that involve the social co-construction of learning
Jordan (2004) describes the practice of working with parents, children and practitioners as the 'co-construction' of learning. Within an early educational context, she defines it as a socio-cultural process that:

> 'involves both children and teachers working together towards the upper ends of their zones of proximal development (ZPDs), as they co-construct meanings in activities that involve higher order thinking' (Jordan, 2004:32).

The ZPD represents the distance between the level of development that a child is actually at and the potential level of development that s/he is capable of under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygostsky,1978). It is acknowledged that both adults and more expert peers can support or 'scaffold' a

child's learning to the level that they are capable of working (Greenfield, 1984, in Jordan, 2004:32). Jordan explains that through co-construction the child becomes a 'powerful figure in his/her own learning' (ibid:33). She evokes the image of a 'child rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, and, most of all, connected to adults and to other children' described by Malaguzzi (1993:10) as a central tenet of the Reggio Emilia construction of the child. Through co-construction the emphasis in learning is on children and their teachers 'studying meanings in favour of acquiring facts' in a process of interaction (Jordan, 2004:33).

Prior to the introduction of the Foundation Stage Curriculum, Anning and Edwards took part in a project to develop an early years curriculum through methods of co-construction. The project involved a group of practitioners from a range of pre-school settings, bringing together different training, experiences and pedagogical traditions from their separate backgrounds (Anning and Edwards,1999). The aim of the project was 'to create an informed community of practice among a group of practitioners through their involvement with action research' (Anning, 2004:57). Also influenced by Reggio Emilia, the methodology required practitioners to collect extensive data of 'logs, field notes, accounts of conversations with colleagues and parents and children's drawings/paintings/models' (ibid:63). Anning summarised the outcomes of the process of synthesising the experiences and understanding of parents and practitioners from different settings to create a curriculum model which:

- Values the everyday as a source for learning rather than trivialising it
- Recognises the importance of physicality in a curriculum for young children
- Acknowledges the importance of the need for intimacy and emotional engagement in the quality of interactions between young learners and their teachers
- Exemplifies the importance of adults working diagnostically from the documented evidence of what children do rather than what policy-makers or politicians think they ought to do and know
- Places playful interactions between children and children and adults (parents and professionals) and children at the heart of effective teaching and learning
- Acknowledges the importance of the social and situated nature of learning.
- The construct of childhood underpinning the model is of active young learners connected to other children and to the adults in early learning settings.
  (Anning, 2004:67)

In Anning's summary of outcomes, some attributes of quality from children's perspectives identified previously can be identified, such as caring relationships between children and adults and playful interactions.

Pedagogical practice that involves cognitive constructivist approaches to learning

There are two further associations between learning and quality that have relevance to the study. Laevers (1994) has identified two quality indicators as part of the Experiential Education (EXE) project that he claims can be regarded as 'conclusive indicators for the quality of education, whatever the context'. The concepts of 'involvement' and 'emotional well-being' are 'process variables' within a quality of learning framework that inform 'on what is going on in the child'. Involvement refers to a quality process in the child where 'the involved person finds him/herself in a special state characterized by concentration, intense experience, intrinsic motivation, a flow of energy and a high level of satisfaction connected with the fulfilment of the exploratory process'. (1994:5). Involvement is assessed by adults to indicate the quality of learning in the child, from a total lack of activity, to maximum activity, with the implication that practitioners can intervene and alter the learning environment to increase an individual's involvement.

Well-being 'shows us how much the educational environment succeeds in helping the child to feel at home, to be him/herself, to remain in contact with him/herself and have his/her emotional needs (the needs for attention, recognition, competence) fulfilled' (1994:5). Similarly, well-being as a feature of a child's adjustment to a setting can be promoted through intervention by practitioners, who take the experience of the child as the point of reference for learning and care.

The concepts of involvement and well-being are related to a cognitive constructivist paradigm of learning. They are helpful for the study and are referred to in the methodology to describe the level of children's engagement observed during the fieldwork, and again in the research stories.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to situate the position of children's perspectives of quality and the meaning made by children of their experience of early years provision, within a wider context of an understanding of quality. The nature of quality as it is applied in England at the present time has been explored in some detail. It appears that whilst each of the three approaches to quality management presented can accommodate the views of children, a Quality Control model can only do so at arms length. Quality Assurance models rely on the value afforded by individual schemes to the inclusion of children as part of the evaluation of a service. The means and the processes through which children

might be able to voice their views have been identified within an approach to Total Quality, which is particularly responsive to all stakeholder views.

As the concept of quality has started to be unpicked an understanding of what the concept of quality means for children has been proposed, based on existing studies. From the concept analysis, it appears that the defining attributes, based on values, of the 'outsider' adult perspective are different to those of children. The former are concerned with structure (frameworks, standards, criteria), and characterised by certainty and the authority to inspect and direct change. This is a 'top down' perspective. In contrast a 'bottom up' perspective is concerned with process and relationships, and the ability to make choices and take some control. The studies revealed children's awareness that they had more control and autonomy to decide on what they do can at home than they had in their preschool setting. However children's responses also reflected the influence of the outsider perspective in terms of rules and order, the discourse of learning and the role of adults in children's lives. Whilst adults were seen to control their activity children also voiced their liking for 'grown ups', and saw them as being there to help them. This was an empowering aspect of child/adult relations.

Direct links can be made between Laevers' (1994) definition of well-being and those studies which found children identifying issues of personal autonomy and empowerment as aspects of quality provision (Sheridan and Samuel - Pramlington, 2001 and Einarsdottir, 2005). It appears to be important to children that they are able to influence events and have some control over their activity in their preschool in order to 'feel at home…and have…the needs for attention, recognition, [and] competence' realised (Laevers, 1994:5).

Another perspective on the practice of early years provision referred to in this chapter is that of the post modern thinkers, who seek to redefine the way early years provision is constructed and understood, away from a discourse on quality towards a discourse on meaning making, central to which is the concept of children as social agents within their pre-schools. Initially, it might be seen to be similar to Total Quality, as it is open to children's views, but it is based on different social constructs. It seeks to deconstruct existing practice and to reconstruct practice through the active reflection of all involved in a setting. It is within this construct of quality that the study sits.

The final section, drawing links between quality measures and assessment in early years, reviewed a range of current approaches to assessing children's learning that utilise a constructivist paradigm. In working with the child, and often their families, practitioners seek to understand and promote individual children's

learning through shared meaning. They also develop their own wider knowledge and understanding of conditions for learning in the early years.

The next chapter presents the methodology, which involved working closely with children, observing and talking, with the aim of eliciting the views of a sample group of children on the quality of their pre-school experiences, including those of learning. Chapter Three explains the ethnographic methodological approach utilised in the study. It describes the research sites, sampling and data collection methods, and details and justifies the analysis and interpretation of the data. This takes as its starting point existing categories identified in the literature review in order to develop a deeper understanding of children's perspectives on the quality of their experiences in early years provision.

Chapter Three   Methodology

The purpose of this research study is to identify the characteristics of quality from the perspective of a group of young children as they experience early education and care. Children were involved in a series of research activities to study the effect on them of their nursery experiences. Children's views and understandings were elicited using different participative methods over three periods of field work conducted at two separate sites. Using these methods it was possible to answer the following research questions:

- What perspectives do young children have on the quality of early education and childcare?

- How do children give meaning to the activities and relationships within their preschool settings?

- Can the meaning(s) children give be interpreted as quality indicators, to demonstrate an understanding of quality?

This chapter presents the methodological approach of the study, including the research design and the methods used, the interpretation of the data and conclusions drawn from the data. This is a small scale qualitative study taking an ethnographic, naturalistic approach, studying naturally occurring phenomena. In order to research with children, participative techniques were used to understand how children give meaning to their time in nursery. The children were viewed as active social agents and a methodological aim was to enlighten understanding from the perspective of children, and to give children 'voice' to articulate their views, acknowledging their rights to be heard (UNCRC, 2000, Great Britain. *Children Act 1989*,: Great Britain. *Childcare Act 2006*).

An interpretative and constructivist approach was adopted in the analysis of data, expanding on previous studies of children's views. The research contributes to the broader knowledge base of children's perspectives on quality and aims to inform policy and practice through the framing of a taxonomy of quality experiences from children's viewpoint. This is presented in the concluding chapter. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest that to be of value 'ethnographic research should be concerned not simply with understanding the world but with applying its findings to bring about change…rendering research more relevant to national policy-making or to …professional practice' (1995:15). The data are presented in the form of five case studies written up as 'research stories' in Chapter Four. Case studies are used in research to provide insight into an issue or case (Stake, 2000).

Qualitative enquiry

Within the social research tradition qualitative enquiry is concerned with meanings and the way people understand what they encounter in their lives and the associated patterns of behaviour (Denscombe, 2003). The initial research design sought a methodology which would make it possible for young children to convey their points of view through methods appropriate to their age within a natural and familiar context. The research proposal acknowledged that:

'The nature of the research, enquiring into the perspectives of children, will require a methodology that is flexible and open to recognising, and responding to, many different aspects of child behaviour. To be able to interpret children's actions and words it will require deep immersion in all aspects of the setting on the part of the researcher…In order to achieve the level of understanding required, a qualitative, ethnographic approach is planned for the research programme, to provide 'thick descriptions' of the day to day experiences of the children within their early education and childcare setting.' *Initial Project Proposal, June 2004*

An ethnographic approach to the study of children and childhood

From the outset it was accepted that ethnography is a recognised approach to researching the perspectives of individuals within educational settings (James, 2001; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). According to James (2001) 'ethnography as a research method …has enabled children to be recognised as people who can be studied in their own right within the social sciences 'permitting' children to become seen as research participants and … ethnography …is fast becoming a new orthodoxy in childhood research' (2001:245). Children are subjects and participants rather than objects within the research. James asserts that 'what ethnography permits is a view of children as competent interpreters of the social world' (2001:246). The study of childhood acknowledges the contribution children can make to understand their experiences and 'represents a shift in perspective – research with rather than on children' (James, 2001:246). She describes further changes in the perspective of children's social status and position recognising that:

> 'although children are members of an age category nominally called 'the child' to which particular expectations and values are ascribed, they participate and share in a cultural space called 'childhood' which varies extensively across time and in social space…through their participation as members of this particular generational space, through occupying an articulate position in the life course, children themselves can be said to help constitute that space in culturally and historically distinctive forms. And it is through the use of ethnography that the everyday articulation of some of these latter processes have been able to be described and, later, theoretically accounted for (James et al, 1998)'. (James, 2001:246)

Implementing an ethnographic approach

Traditionally ethnographers spent time living amongst the social group under study, often for extended periods. It is now accepted that a less intense approach can be utilised that does not involve the researcher living amongst their participants but retains an element of prolonged fieldwork (Jeffrey and Troman, 2004). This was the approach used to study two groups of children in their nursery settings in order to understand how they viewed their experiences over time. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) 'human behaviour is continually constructed and reconstructed, on the basis of people's interpretations of the situation they are in' (1995:8). As previously stated, the project aimed to use naturalistic methods to study naturally occurring phenomena. However it needs to be acknowledged that the institution of the 'nursery' is a socially constructed phenomenon, as are the concepts of 'quality' or 'nursery experiences' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). The study aimed to elicit the children's perspectives on these experiences.

Within the naturalistic paradigm Woods (1996) traces the development of symbolic interactionism as part of the ethnographic tradition. Symbolic interactionism researches the significance of events, values and beliefs and the emergence of shared meanings. It occurs within specific social contexts, in which the perspectives of individual participants and the reactive perspectives of the researcher are both explored reflectively. Typically studies employing symbolic interactionist methodology are 'small-scale, (of) everyday life, seeking to understand processes, relationships, group life, motivations, adaptations and so on' (Woods,1996:48). Travers (2001) cites Blumer (1969):

> 'We can…look upon human group life as chiefly a vast interpretive process in which people singly and collectively guide themselves by defining the objects, events and situations which they encounter' (2001:23-4)

According to Travers this view of the social world 'sees meaning not as residing in the heads of individuals, but as shared by members of a society, or by particular social groups (having) an intersubjective rather than a subjective character'. Travers (2001) makes links to Mead's theory that 'individuals are influenced by other people, but they are also active in interpreting, and responding to, the people and objects they encounter in the world', where objects include 'material and temporal and social/emotional phenomena' (2001:24).

This research project utilised a symbolic interactionist paradigm. The research involved working at close hand with selected children in a core sample group, in order to understand their interpretation of the 'people and objects' within their

nurseries. Punch (2002) acknowledges that an ethnographic approach offers 'prolonged… periods… in order to get to know (children)…and gain a greater understanding' (2002:322). However she cautions that as it relies on participant observation there is the inherent difficulty that adults 'are unable to be full participants in children's social worlds because they can never truly be children again' (2002:322). The study would therefore employ a range of complementary methods to elicit children's perspectives.

Generational implications

The problem of 'adultness' and generational considerations were factors that had influenced the choice of methodology. It was recognised that research with children could be prejudiced by the effect of personal childhood experiences on researcher perspectives (Davis, 1998). Adult perspectives are inevitably different from those of children, informed by the adult's own childhood as well their experiences in adulthood. Childhood as a social phenomenon changes with each generation within any culture. The researcher's pre-school had been different from the experiences of the current generation of three and four year olds. In the past a majority of children stayed at home until they started school. The educational significance of a period of pre-school was not widely recognised nor were places available for many children.

From both a professional and parental perspective the researcher was familiar with the range of pre-school settings that had developed in recent years. She had the view that a period of pre-school education in a group setting had many benefits for children. Before starting the research project she been involved in implementing policies, including the National Childcare Strategy DfEE,1998), which expanded the preschool sector, bringing many more children into non-parental care beyond the home. Within this role she was part of an older generation that had handed down to a younger one social and educational policies based on values, ideologies and imperatives that are meaningful to adults but not to children (Mayall,2002:30-31,35). Children's understandings of why they attended pre-school might be different from those of the researcher and needed to be acknowledged in the research design. Using an ethnographic approach the researcher aims to render 'the familiar strange and the strange familiar' and to understand the view points of participants through close observations over time. The researcher needed to put aside personal assumptions and opinions and gain insights from children's perspectives.

Power relationships between adults and children

Aside from this conceptual gap, it is important to recognise inherent unequal power relationships between young children and adults within the pre-school research setting (Morrow, 1998; Robinson and Kellett, 2004). James points out the 'additional responsibility' (2001:252) placed on the researcher due to differential power relations. Citing Mayall (2000) she explains that the children do not perceive the researcher as a ''normal' kind of adult' and 'children may not see the researcher as occupying an adult position of power' (ibid: 252). She refers to Cosaro 's discussion on the power implications of the difference in size between the young children and the researcher. The researcher is required to 'negotiate a new relationship with children – from children's point of view' (ibid: 252). James challenges Mandell's notion of the researcher as 'least adult', who takes part alongside children. It is important to accept the inescapable differences between adults and children which 'least adult' denies:

> Only when it is openly acknowledged that, however friendly we are, childhood researchers can only ever have a semi-participatory role in children's lives, can the power differentials which separate children from adults begin to be effectively addressed – in this sense ethnography is powerfully placed to initiate this process. (James, 2001::252)

Therefore, researchers can take 'seriously' the power differentials between children and themselves and seek to 'address these in the design, implementation and dissemination of their work' (Robinson and Kellett, 2004: 93).

Methods which recognise children as experts in their own lives

Methods were sought which enabled children to influence the outcome of the research by fully involving them in the research process and by allowing them to control their levels of participation in the project. The intention was to redress the balance of power away from the researcher and towards the children. It was important to select methods which enabled children to project their lives as lived and which would enable them to 'speak differently from adults in relation to the issue of the time' (Jenks, 2000:69).

A basic premise of the research, which influenced the choice of methods, had been that children are 'competent respondents, social actors' (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:32), who are experts on their activities and encounters within the provision they attend. Langsted reports on projects in Denmark involving children of different ages commenting on aspects of quality in their childcare provision. He asserts, 'It is an advantage to regard children as experts when it comes to their own lives to a far greater extent than has been the case until now' (1994:41). When enquiring into younger children's lives, Langsted advocates using a

mixture of methods that are contextually appropriate, and ones which allow an 'open and listening approach' (ibid:41). Christensen and James (2000) remind researchers that 'Children are not adults' and that when selecting methods they (researchers) need to 'adopt practices which resonate with children's own concerns and routines... paying attention to the ways in which they communicate with us' (2000:7).

In two research projects in England, Clark and Moss (2001; 2005) developed a multi-method approach to involve children as research participants, termed by them as the 'Mosaic approach'. It 'is a way of listening which acknowledges children and adults as co-constructors of meaning' (2001:1) through visual methods, using children's photographs, tours of the setting and maps made with the children combined with adult observations and talking to children 'to gain deeper understanding of children's lives' (2001:3). The Mosaic approach offers children a range of methods in which they can voice their views verbally and non-verbally. It was designed as a model approach that could be replicated by other researchers, and was adopted in modified form for the present study following an earlier pilot project.

Pilot work developing the research methods

The researcher was involved in an evaluation of the implementation of a local authority wraparound care and education initiative. As part of this she conducted a short study to look at the way children perceive their experiences of childcare and early learning. The study provided the opportunity to pilot ways of researching with young children, to test and appraise methods for the study proper.

The purpose of the pilot was to gain an understanding of what children value in their preschool provision (Appendix i: Pilot proposal). It aimed to find what it is that children 'consider as indicators of quality' from their point of view within their early years setting:

- what it is that they like or value about being there
- what they may not like about being there
- why they think they're there
- what they think about the things they do and the other people who are there

The study aimed to elicit what meaning the children give to their presence in preschool, to their activity there and to their role. It was intended to compare data produced from different methods, in terms both of children's participation and their responses, to inform data collection methods for further research.

The pilot research site

The pilot study was carried out at a voluntary preschool playgroup, sited in a commuter village of a northern city, in England. The playgroup was situated in the school grounds in a portable classroom building. It offered full day care and was registered to provide morning and afternoon early education and childcare, with a separately registered lunch club, to bridge the gap between the playgroup sessions. To this children brought their own pack-up meal and continued to be cared for by playgroup staff. The research took place one day a week for six weeks.

The pilot sample group

The sample group comprised six children attending the playgroup. The manager had been asked to select six four year old children who each attended both morning and afternoon pre-school sessions, and also used the lunch club. Four girls and two boys satisfied those criteria. Effectively these children were receiving full day early education and childcare. Though the sample children were the focus, it was anticipated that other children would also contribute their views along the way, forming an opportunistic sample of children.

Methods for the pilot study

The methods that were planned to encourage responses and children's participation were:

- A 'conversational approach' (Cousins,1999:7) to listen and talk to children, where 'shared meanings and understandings are checked as the conversation proceeded'
- Using taped and un-taped methods, to catch children's responses in active sessions, and to allow for some comparison between a more or less formal approach, a field notebook would be used to record observations.
- Child 'tours' (Clark and Moss, 2001) – where children led the adult around the setting to explain how it works in their own words
- Supplementing conversations with children's photographs
- Supplementing conversations with picture drawing by the children and model making – to allow children to express their thoughts and demonstrate meaning in non-verbal expression
- The provision of small world play items to allow the children to create their own play nursery

Emerging themes from the pilot study

The themes that emerged from the data were consistent with the findings of previous research into children perspectives of group settings (Langsted,1994; Dupree et al, 2001;Mooney and Blackburn, 2003; Einarsdottir,2005). From the analysis of the conversations, observations and photographs it was noted that:

- **friendships** figured very highly in the children's talk and actions. This study observed passionate and strong feelings towards other children which were evidenced in talk as well as actions. For example, feelings of attraction were demonstrated through children kissing, hugging and placing themselves close to others. Those of rejection were seen where children pushed or pulled or moved to avoid others.

- **gender** in relation to friendships emerged as a significant factor in choice of friendships and choice of activity or co –activists – so that boys mostly played with boys and girls usually chose girls to play with.

- **being cared for** was important to children and there were recurring references to the adults, invoking staff names as organisers and providers of help, reflecting other important relationships for the children

- **home and family** relationships were important and referred to often. Parents and siblings were talked about as were material items in the home and activities and events.

Other themes that emerged were:

- **rules** were important to the children, with indirect and direct references to the way preschool was organized – such as queuing to go outside, or the number of children allowed to play in one area of provision at a time.

- **processes and routines** were valued by children and they could talk about them, for example over lunch children were planning their afternoon activity based on what they had done in the morning session.

- **food and snacks** were important and appeared to help children to understand different tastes. Children noticed when they had brought similar or identical food items which "snapped". They helped one another open packets and also relied on adults to help them.

- **chatting and singing** were also a major part of feeling confident and having a feeling of well being, for example spontaneous rhymes were made up by the children at lunch club.

- **having fun outside** was important. Activities that were slightly different from the ordinary added to this sense of fun.

What was learnt from the pilot to influence the main study?

One purpose of the pilot had been to inform the development of research methods to elicit children's views. The main lessons learned from this exploratory research project were:

- The time scale of six days allowed for methods to be aired but not thoroughly explored. No 'tours' took place and there were no drawings
- Children were initially shy but with familiarity trust grew; building relationships takes time; some children worked with the researcher more than others over the six days
- The pilot revealed the potential of two methods in particular to elicit children's perspectives – written observations and the use of cameras
- Listening to children's spontaneous comments and allowing them to inform the researcher was more productive than using direct questions for eliciting a child's perspective
- The photographs were shown (back) to all the children at a circle time. This did not allow for any discussion or reflection.
- An opportunity to reflect on photographs with those children who had taken the photographs would be built in to any future research project
- The children had no prior information about the research project which may have accounted for an initial reticence to work with the researcher
- Methods needed to be developed to help children understand the purpose the research and of their role in it.

The experience of the preliminary pilot influenced the research design for this study. Observation was seen to be a productive method and the potential for children to use cameras to record events and capture aspects of pre-school had been demonstrated. Though not commented upon in the evaluation above, the play nursery activity had engaged the children and whilst the outcomes recorded by the camera were not well understood at this time, the lively and purposeful response of the pilot children justified its inclusion as a further research tool. There had been no 'children's tours'. However it was decided to pursue this method in the main study in the light of the positive evaluation of the experience of listening to children's spontaneous comments compared to asking direct

questions. It was felt that the 'tour' would offer children the opportunity to talk about their setting as children in the pilot study had shown a willingness to do. Reflection on the lack of information for children in the pilot, where only parental consent had been sought, influenced the decision to provide information for children involved in the main study and to consider much more substantially a consent process to provide them with control over their participation in the research.

The main study: research design

Influenced by the experience of the pilot, and following Langsted (1994) and Clark and Moss (2001), the research design for the main study combined methods that appeared to be meaningful to young children to elicit a range of responses. This 'mosaic' of methods comprised:

- Observations by the researcher of target children's play and relationships, at different times over the period of the nursery day, sometimes elaborated through conversations with the children and illustrated by photographs taken by the children, and children's drawings
- 'Child tours' of each setting, for children to show and tell what was important about their nursery
- Photographs taken by and later discussed with children – in the context of both the observations and the tours
- Creating an individual 'play' nursery, from small world play items, observed by and in interaction with the researcher

Each method provided the opportunity for many conversations (Cousins, 1999) between the children and the researcher. It was believed that the conversations or dialogues were critical to allow children to elaborate on or clarify the meaning of their actions or comment on photographs. Christensen identifies a 'dialogical research process' (2004:166) where children can 'introduce their own themes and conclude an interview on their own terms' (ibid:168). From the experience of the pilot it was not intended to interview children; however the researcher had responded to children's approaches to share information about nursery or other aspects of their lives. These encounters were not overtly solicited, but occurred naturally when the children 'knew and trusted' (ibid:168) the researcher, and a dialogical process became part of each of the methods, with exchanges recorded in the field notebook. Through conversations with the children their 'construction of their world and the depth of their thinking' were 'exposed' (Cousins, 1999:9). It was believed that using a range of methods allowed children to 'give voice' using a variety of media. James notes:

'that ethnographic research with children is beginning to embrace…different kinds of research techniques designed to both engage children's interests and to exploit their particular talents and abilities e.g. 'task-centred activities' adapted from those commonly used in development work for participatory rural appraisals…techniques involve children in using media other than talk to reveal in visual and concrete form their thoughts and ideas about a particular research question' (James, 2001:252-253).

Selecting a mixed method approach provided methodological triangulation, using 'different…sources to corroborate each other' (Mason, in Silverman, 2005:121) offering some reliability or trustworthiness to the study.

Having identified the methods to be used, the research design also needed to consider where, in what settings and for how long the field work would be conducted.

The main study: choosing the research sites

An aspect of the research was to consider the potential impact of the two 'regimes' of early education and childcare that were current at the start of the study, and were identified in Chapter One. Consequently an important prerequisite for any research setting was that it would be offering integrated early education and childcare. Two contrasting areas for research were identified. These were:-

- A unitary authority, comprising a city with several satellite villages, where a recent initiative had brought together local 'early years partnerships' based around primary schools. These included the providers of early education and childcare, nursery classes, playgroups, day nurseries, and childminders.

- A metropolitan authority, comprising a core town surrounded by extensive and densely populated suburban areas, including areas of regeneration, where an Early Excellence Centre (EEC) provided integrated early education and childcare along with other family support services.

Factors that were considered were the level of integration of childcare and early education at a potential setting, the number of children receiving full-day care, and the opportunity to have access to a core sample group of children over two years of funded early education. In addition there were issues relating to culture, ethnicity and family income that needed to be considered in selecting the final sample and settings, to recruit as representative a sample as possible. However

it had to be acknowledged that a relatively small sample could not encompass all variables.

Convenience of access influenced the pragmatic decision to seek to site the main body of research within the unitary authority. In addition the researcher was familiar with this authority and was able to identify nurseries serving families from a mixed socio-economic background. A nursery attached to a college of further education was approached. The nursery mainly provided for students and college staff, but also offered places to local families. The researcher had previous working relationships with the childcare manager. It is likely that this had an influence in negotiating access within a short period, which was an advantage to the research timetable. The first phase of field work started within two months of the initial approach being made. This setting is named High Trees.

Research at High Trees took place over two phases of three months in consecutive years, with contact being maintained between times. The core sample comprised six children who were studied as three year olds, and the research protocols were repeated when they were four years old. The longitudinal element enabled understanding and trust to develop through 'prolonged engagement' (Aubrey et al, 2000:57), potentially contributing to the trustworthiness of the study. The children were accessing funded early education for up to five half-day sessions a week, with additional childcare wrapped round to allow their parents to work or study. They were amongst the first national cohort of three year old children to experience the expansion of free early education within a day care setting. The changing perspectives of the sample group over the period of study were the focus of one line of enquiry, possibly reflecting their maturity and extended knowledge of the setting.

The criteria for selecting a second field work site revolved around the absence of any core sample children who attended High Trees fulltime i.e. for ten sessions a week, term time and in the holidays. Children attending their setting full-time might have perspectives on nursery that could be significant and possibly different. In addition, a second site would provide comparison and contrast with the primary site and thus triangulate the evidence between the settings. It would reflect an alternative model of early years provision created by government policy. Time constraints within the study period allowed for one period of data

collection at the second site for four weeks. At this site there would not be a
longitudinal element.

An early excellence centre in a northern town was approached and agreed to
become the second site. It will be known as Skies Lane. The nursery is
recognised for its high standard of provision. It is in an economically deprived
community, and provided a different socio-economic profile from High Trees.
However both nurseries are publically funded and are associated with training
establishments set in the context of a larger institution. Skies Lane is used
predominantly by local families and students attending for training. Staffing was
enhanced to enable the inclusion of children with additional needs. Skies Lane
had a more socially and ethnically diverse intake than High Trees.
Table 3.1 sets out the periods of fieldwork, with details of time spent at the
respective sites.

Table 3.1 The three fieldwork periods

Period of fieldwork	First period of fieldwork: At High Trees (Phase1)	Second period of fieldwork: At Skies Lane (Single phase)	Third period of fieldwork: At High Trees (Phase2)
Dates	Jun – July 2004/Sept – Nov 2004 with additional days to February 2005	January- February 2005 (returned July 2005 for two days)	May – July 2005, with additional days August-November 2005
Number of visits	Two or three days a week for 12 weeks, with an additional eleven days Total: 42 days	Three days a week for four weeks; two additional days Total: 14 days	Average of three days a week over 9 weeks, with an additional four days Total: 30 days

The research sample

Qualitative research tends not to use statistical sampling (Delamont,1993),
however it is considered orthodox to identify a purposive sample as part of the
research design, providing explicit reasons for sampling which can be
demonstrated to be necessary to fulfil the research aims. Within ethnographic
studies it is usual to identify key informants who will contribute significant
information or data to the research. For these reasons, two sample groups were
identified, one securing 'core information' and the other one providing data from
an 'opportunistic' sample.

Recruitment of the core sample at High Trees

At High Trees, the researcher sought a purposive core sample of six children, three boys and three girls, who would be aged three at the start of the fieldwork. Each child would be using funded early education and childcare. The research design specified working with the same group of children in the first and second periods of fieldwork, over consecutive years. The longitudinal element coincided with the two years of funded education core sample children were entitled to as a result of government policies. Potentially children's perspectives might change over the two periods of research with maturity and familiarity in the setting.

In the event it proved impossible to recruit a balanced group of girls and boys to fulfil the criteria according to the original research design. Initially it was only possible to identify six boys and one girl who would still attend nursery the following year. Two of these children (who were twins) were under three at the start of the first fieldwork period and attended one day a week. All the children attended on a part-time basis, for up to three days a week; no children attended High Trees full-time.

The difficulty recruiting children to match the criteria of the research design reflects attendance patterns in the pre-school sector, including turnover of children on roll. This effect is exacerbated in a college nursery where students may only require a place for the duration of their course. Staff using the nursery also leave to change jobs. Children occupying community places sometimes left to attend their local preschool provision before starting full-time school. These factors affected the composition of the core sample over the research period and were problematic. The details of the final core sample children of four boys and two girls is summarised in Table 3.2. The children's names are 'research' names that they chose themselves for their research stories.

Table 3.2 Core sample at High Trees (HT)

Core child	Sex	Age at start of field work Phase 1	Age at start of field work Phase 2	Category of place -Student -Staff -Community/ parents' working status	Number of half day sessions and days attended per week Phase 1	Number of half day sessions and days attended per week Phase 2	Siblings and details of any other pre-school attendance
Alan Tracy	boy	3.10	4.9	Grandparent non-teaching staff/ mother single parent working part time (PT)	5 Mon, Thurs ½ day, Fri	5 Mon, Thurs ½ day, Fri	Singleton
Batman	boy	3.4	4.3	Community place/ both parents work. One full time (FT) one PT	6 Mon Tues Thurs	6 Mon Tues Thurs	Younger brother, Robin, in nursery.
Carl	boy	3.4	4.3	Parent non-teaching staff PT/ other working FT	4 Tues Wed	4 Tues Wed	Younger sister, Alice, in nursery; attended his local playgroup for 1 session
Lauren	girl	2.10	3.9	Community place/ both parents working – one PT	2	2	Older brother at school and twin

					Tues	Tues	brother Ben at HT; attended school nursery for 4 sessions
Ben	boy	2.10	3.9	Community place/ both parents working – one PT	2 Tues	2 Tues	Older brother and twin sister Lauren at HT; attended school nursery for 4 sessions
Zoë	girl	3.8** joined Sept 04	4.5	Student/ other parent working FT	6 Mon, Tues, Thurs	4 Mon, Fri	Older sister at school

Problems of attrition

The initial period of field work started in mid-summer. Within the first weeks notice was given that two of the boys would be leaving as they had been offered places in school nursery classes. Following a break in fieldwork during August 2004 (the college holiday) two more girls were recruited, one of whom had attended the previous term but had not been identified within the initial group, and one who was new to the nursery, who left High Trees before the start of the second period of fieldwork when her father changed his job. The initial period of field work was extended from eight to twelve weeks to accommodate the new members of the core sample, with some additional days to complete data collection. Table 3.3 summarises the affect of sample attrition at High Trees.

Table 3.3 Core sample changes at High Trees

Core sample history at High Trees and effect of attrition	Phase 1 Yr 1	Phase 2 Yr 2	Other factors affecting data collection from core and opportunistic samples
	June 2004 six boys and one girl: Loss through attrition of two boys by July 2004 Recruit two more girls September 2004	May 2005 retain four boys and one girl from original group, and one of the girls recruited in September 2004, creating a stable final core sample of 6 children	The attendance of children of students typically decreased as courses came to an end in June/July

The effect of attendance pattern of the core sample

Data collection was also affected by the pattern of attendance of the core sample (see Table 3.2). The research design employed a range of methods and a systematic approach was used to record the data sets for each child (Appendix xii). Fieldwork visits were arranged to fit round the attendance pattern (see Table3.2) in order to involve all the children with each method. It took the length of the fieldwork period to gather the required data due to the need to accommodate the children's desire to take part, the number of children present on any day and general nursery routines. A skewing of the quantity of data collected per child occurred over time on account of a 'bunching' effect of attendance on Tuesdays. The core sample children who attended for fewer sessions but alongside others in the core sample were relatively less researched. Correspondingly those children who attended most frequently and on days when

they were part of a smaller core sample were the most researched. Additional days were added to every phase of fieldwork to include children who had not completed certain research activities. In spite of these efforts two children did not complete every research activity during the first phase of fieldwork. This will be explained as part of the research stories in Chapter Four.

Recruitment of the core sample at Skies Lane

The decision to include a second research site into the study, where data collection would take place within a shorter time frame, had implications for the criteria for selecting the core sample. Contact with these children would be restricted to just four weeks. Experience from the pilot study and the first phase of field work led the researcher to realise that with the constraints of time both a smaller core sample and selecting older, potentially more confident and fluent children would be a necessary requirement when deciding criteria. At Skies Lane four children, aged four years, each attending fulltime and funded partly through nursery grant, were sought to make up the core sample. Only three children met all the criteria, with a child aged three years nine months making up the sample. Each child attended fulltime therefore the researcher could see the children and work with some of them every day over the four weeks. One purpose of arranging two additional days at Skies Lane (see Table 3.1) was to approach the youngest child to complete research activities that had not been achieved earlier. Table 3.4 summarises the Skies Lane core sample.

Table 3.4 Core sample at Skies Lane

Core child	Sex	Age at start of fieldwork	Category of place	Number of half day sessions attended each week	Siblings
Tom	boy	4.1	Community/respite due to health of one parent/ partner working	10	singleton
Rose	girl	4.1	Student/ partner working	10	older brother at school
Bill	boy	4.1	Community/both parents working	10	singleton
Pascal	boy	3.9	Community/both parents working	10	older brother at school.

A total of ten children from both sites comprised the combined core sample. Criteria for inclusion in the core sample are summarised below in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 Core sample criteria

At High Trees – Fieldwork in two phases – Yr1 and Yr2	At Skies Lane – Fieldwork in one phase

1 Children aged three in Yr 1, qualifying for nursery education grant	1 Children aged four, qualifying for nursery education grant
2 Using nursery for early education and childcare	2 Using nursery for early education and childcare
3 Parents planning for child to attend for further year ie Yr2	3 Attending fulltime ie ten sessions a week

The opportunistic sample

A further sample grouping was designated an opportunistic sample, defined as any child who presented him or herself to be part of the research during the data collection period. From the pilot study it was realised it was necessary to balance the demands made upon the core sample with interest from and contact with other children. The ethnographic approach enabled all children to say or show something to the researcher that might become data. Children were considered to be part of the opportunistic sample if they wished to be involved and if their parents had consented to their participation.

This dual approach to sampling aimed to facilitate respectful relationships with all the children in both nurseries. It was ethically fair, as it did not discriminate between children, enabling all to contribute to the research. In doing so it placed agency to in the hands of children to influence the research but also allowed the researcher to gather in depth material from particular children.

The data collection methods

This section reports in detail on the methods and research tools and how data were collected.

Observing, listening and talking

Observations form the basis of an ethnographic methodology and they should be prolonged and repeated (Aubrey et al, 2000:137). They provide 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1975, in Aubrey at al, 2000) of human behaviour that offer a detailed account of an event or relationship, providing context and narrative. From the preliminary study it was evident that observations where meanings are checked with the children had produced rich data, from which clear themes emerged. This had been more successful than a direct method of asking children pre-prepared questions (Christensen, 2004). The research study aimed to place participants in a position of control over data they were providing and the researcher sought methods that allowed children to influence what was recorded. Three types of observation were used.

Observations of general group activity. Unstructured observations were made of children and daily events, noting down context, activity and what was said, at times asking children or practitioners for clarification. This method was employed at the outset of each fieldwork phase, as an orientation and induction process. It served as a means of gaining familiarity with the nursery routines and rhythms of the day (arrival, play, eating, sleeping or resting, engaging with others and departing) as well as with practitioners and children. Throughout the fieldwork general observations continued to be made recording changes in routines, events and activity over time. Recognising that a naturalistic approach can lead to the collection of a plethora of unmanageable data (Hammersely and Atkinson,1995) other forms of observation were employed to introduce a systematic and structured approach (Aubrey et al, 2000).

The methodology included a series of planned and *focused observations* (Christensen, 2004) of the core sample children. The foci for observations were critical points in the day and critical relationships, identified with reference to the literature and the pilot study, and included arrival and departures, meal times and children playing and working with friends and practitioners, using event sampling as a framework for studying these relationships. Elements noted included the level of engagement, obvious excitement or distress and expressed emotions. If the play was difficult to interpret or contextualise the researcher asked for clarification from the child. A camera was offered to the children to photograph items they had been playing with and these photographs were placed in an album to stimulate recall.

From the general observations and focused observations there *evolved additional observations of the play of both core and opportunistic group children.* These took the form of 'vignettes' where the quality of the activity reflected a level of engagement or involvement or well-being (Laevers, 1994) that was literally noteworthy and had drawn the attention of the researcher away from the general activity of nursery. Vignettes involved individual or groups of children, and sometimes were related to a new experience or event in the nursery. Some of these observations are reported in detail in the research stories in Chapter Four.

Photography

The use of photographs as data has developed in ethnographic and educational research in recent years (Walker, 1993; Prosser, 1998; Pink, 2001). Providing children with cameras is also recognised as an effective method to give children

voice, where they might not be able to express their views in words (Miller, 1997; Clark, 2003). Photography was a major aspect of the methodology for this study, and integrated into each of the methods, as noted above. All photographs used in the research were taken by children, initially using disposable cameras. Later a digital camera was introduced, which provided more scope for children to take photographs and greater flexibility for storing and displaying the images. Children were able make considered choices about what to photograph. Their choice of subject was personal to them and reflected a child's view of nursery.

The camera was used to offer children the opportunity to photograph aspects of nursery arising from general observations. The photographs could stand alone as data or be used to give children the opportunity to tell the researcher more details of an event or person or object through stimulated recall. Initially children were asked by the researcher if they wished to use the camera, but as children became familiar with the research activity children would ask to take photographs. One method, child tours, uses the camera as a central part of the methodology.

Child tours

This method was directly influenced by Clark and Moss (2001) and chosen because it put control over the creation of data in the hands of children. The method is based on participatory rural appraisal techniques, originally developed for use to engage non-literate research populations in research (James,2001; Punch, 2004). As has been explained previously, it had not been possible to trial the child tour method during the pilot study. However children had been eager to tell the researcher about the nursery and to show her around. This suggested that child tours could provide another framework for data collection that would contribute to understanding children's views of their nursery.

The tours involved children being asked 'to show' the researcher around and 'to tell' the researcher about what was important to them in nursery. The camera was available and the researcher took notes of the children's explanations, actions and comments as they moved round. At High Trees children were asked to take the researcher on a tour of nursery in both phases of fieldwork, as three year olds and as four year olds. Children were able to add to their original tour to show different aspects of nursery at a later session. The length of time taken by children varied from a few minutes to over an hour to complete. Children from the opportunistic sample took part in child tours if they requested to be involved or if they were accompanying a friend in the core sample.

At Skies Lane several children showed interest in taking part in a tour, particularly wanting to take photographs. It seemed that using the camera was their primary motivation rather than demonstrating their perspective of the nursery. The researcher felt that more structure could be incorporated into the method as a means of focussing their response. Therefore before setting off around nursery, children were asked to take time to think about what they wanted to show and photograph. A list was written in the notebook which formed the starting point of the tour. This change introduced some adult interference into the method, but it proved effective in asserting the purpose of the method without detracting from a child's personal 'agenda'. This adaptation was incorporated in the second phase of fieldwork at High Trees.

Play nursery

The fourth research tool was an experimental method developed by the researcher. It was play based relating to both theories of play therapy (Axline, 1990) and those of creative play, demonstrating that from the view point of children 'play is nothing less than Truth and Life' (Paley, 1991:17). A collection of 'small world' furniture, dolls and toy items representing aspects of a typical nursery was provided. Each of the core sample children were asked to create their own 'play nursery'. The choices that the children made from the collection of items might reveal preferences for play of a certain type or awareness of particular places. Secondly this activity might lead to elaborated play where children created a dramatic scenario which could also be revealing of relationships and emotions. Either of these outcomes could contribute to understanding what children value from their nursery experiences.

The play nurseries took place in the open nursery creating challenges to manage and record the activity. Initially children's voices were recorded on audiotape and actions were noted down as children played. Photographs were taken of the 'play nursery' once children had decided they had finished playing. This combination led to some problems controlling the play items. It was difficult for the researcher to take notes, monitor the tape recorder and discourage other children from touching or moving the play items before finally photographing the 'play nursery'. In addition the audio recordings were not very clear due to background noise. The method was reviewed before the final period of fieldwork at High Trees, when consent was gained from parents to use a video camera to record this activity. Recording in this way proved more successful, enabling the researcher to supervise the activity more positively as she was free to support the child as they played, and manage the interest of other children.

At both sites the core sample children were the focus of the fieldwork activities. They were each invited to take part in the research activities described above. Other children from the setting could choose to take part in the research activities creating an opportunistic sample. These children were often, but not exclusively, friends of the core sample children. Tables 3.6 and 3.7 present a summary of data collected in the three field work periods for each core sample child.

Table 3.6 Data collected for each core sample child

Data sets	Observations of each child	Tour of nursery	Photographs X 3 methods	Play nursery
Data collected and participating children	- arriving/departing - at meal times - with staff - with other child(ren)/inside/ outdoors -at story time	x2 for children at High Trees (Phase 1 & Phase 2) x1 for children at Skies Lane	• during tour of nursery • solicited by child • prompted by researcher during observation	x 2 for children at HT ** x 1 for children at SL* *Noted and photographed ** Phase 2 Video taped

Table 3.7 Additional data sets

From opportunistic sample of children aged three and four				Joint observations of core sample children (explained in next section)	
Data sets	Observations	Photographs	Tours	Play nursery	At Skies Lane with supervisor	At High Trees with key worker
	General play Mealtimes Arrival and departure With adult With other child(ren)	Solicited by child A number of children took one or more photographs at each site	Solicited by child X 6 at High Trees X 4 at Skies Lane	Solicited by child X 8 at High Trees X 1 at Skies Lane	X 2	X 5

As the fieldwork progressed it appeared that an 'emancipatory impetus' (Lewis and Kellett, 2004:203) was emerging as a part of the research in practice, drawing out the views of children, using methods that were open to being influenced by the children themselves, which aimed to privilege children's voices and self-advocacy, and promote uncoerced participation. Dahlberg and Moss (2005: 156) describe the 'politics of emancipation', a process that leads to a 'world of our own making'. The research methods, which aimed to foreground children's perspectives and understanding of their nursery, would arguably lead to a nursery of the children's 'own making', both literally in the play nursery, and virtually, through photographs and words and actions.

Validating the data collection through joint observations

The methods used in this study rely on the skills and judgement of the researcher. The data collected and its analysis would be subject to bias and a subjectivity which might not be acknowledged (Woods,1996). At the end of the first phase of fieldwork, reflection on the need to validate the research process led to a decision being made to plan joint observations involving the researcher and another observer. Both would observe a child for an agreed period. A comparison would be made between their written notes and the interpretation of what they had observed in order to find consistency and overlap in both the events recorded and in the initial analysis of children's actions and meanings. A high level of agreement would demonstrate a level of trustworthiness and authenticity of the data (Woods, 1996; Aubrey et al, 2000). Joint observations were undertaken in the two subsequent periods of fieldwork. The researcher observed two core sample children alongside her research supervisor at Skies Lane. At High Trees each core child was observed jointly with the practitioner who was key worker for the core sample children (see Table 3.7), providing a further data set. A proforma was prepared for these observations for guidance (Appendix ii).

Ethical considerations

As the study involved research with children, the initial research proposal was required to be submitted to and approved by the University Ethics Committee. In addition to comply with the Children Act 1989 and university policy (Northumbria University Ethics Committee, 2004) the researcher had been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau.

There were further ethical issues to address. Documents were developed to introduce the research to relevant audiences to prepare for informed consent. These aimed to be clear, non coercive, and written in plain English. They included a letter of request to managers and their staff to take part in the project. An accompanying leaflet explained the aims of the research describing what it would involve for all those taking part. This was amended for parents to provide them with details of the project and to explain how they and their child(ren) would be involved (Appendix iii).

The manager at High Trees Nursery was approached with a request to take part in the research project, and was able to give permission for the project. The researcher met with nursery staff to answer questions, discuss her role and set up the necessary arrangements. Information was sent to all parents, with an

accompanying letter and a consent form. The parents of children identified as the core sample received an extended letter explaining what would be required of their children (Appendix iv). All parents of the core sample children consented to their child's inclusion in the research. Not every parent returned the form. One parent commented that as her child was leaving nursery at the end of term she had not felt it was necessary. This may have been typical of other parents in the same situation. Reminders were sent out and several more returns were made. In all 17 forms were returned. A meeting was offered to parents to discuss the research project. Two parents of children in the core sample and one parent of a younger child came to the meeting, along with the key worker for the core sample children.

The same procedures were used at Skies Lane to provide information to practitioners and parents. A meeting was offered to parents at the start of the fieldwork to which two parents came. Letters were sent out, with consent forms, and a reply was received from every parent. All but two parents gave consent.

Child Consents

From the pilot study it was realised that a barrier to children's informed participation had been that they had had no prior information about the research. They did not understand the purpose the research or their role in it. For the main study the professional code of practice for educational research was complied with when developing fieldwork procedures. The British Educational Research Association Revised Ethical Guidelines (2004) require children to be informed and consulted if they are to be involved in any research. Researchers are advised to comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) Article 3, where the best interests of the child must be the primary consideration; and with Article 12 requiring 'that children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them' (BERA, 2004:6). The guidelines also state, 'Children should therefore be facilitated to give fully informed consent' (ibid: 6). Voluntary informed consent is considered 'to be the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress prior to the research getting underway'. Researchers are advised to 'ensure all participants understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how it will be reported' (ibid:5). The research complied with Northumbria University ethical guidelines which require that all participants in research give their informed consent. Gaining some form of 'formal' consent from children is an aspect of research practice that is emerging independently from different early years projects,

though its nature is not well established (Flewitt, 2005; Harcourt and Conroy, 2005). Some question the ethical implications of gaining 'informed consent' within educational settings due to the difficulty for children to 'opt out' of research where the power relations lead to children's acquiescence (David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001). In this study a 'formal' information booklet was devised which explained the research process to gain informed consent from children, entitled *Finding things out* (Appendix v).

Approaching children to gain informed consent

Before children were approached to give their consent they had had contact with the researcher. At High Trees two visits were made to the nursery in order to gain familiarity with nursery routines. These visits served as an induction period and introduced the presence of the researcher to the children before research began. On these visits the researcher made notes, recording the nursery routines, the layout of the nursery and any significant events. She avoided making any approaches to the children. They took little notice of the new face, with only one child asking the researcher why she was there.

Parental consent was gained before eliciting children's consent, which was a gradual process. Masson (2004) argues that children can give consent when they can distinguish 'between research and other intervention…and understand the impact on them of them participating' (2004: 50). Singly or in pairs core sample children were read the *Finding Things Out* booklet. Using pictures, photographs and simple sentences it described why the researcher was in nursery and explained the research activities. Formal consent to 'join in' was sought using a child consent form (Figure.3.3) which was read to the children.

CHILDREN'S CONSENT FORM

My name is…………………..

I have seen this book and I know what it says

Finding things out

and I want to join in the research ☺

and I don't want to join in the research ☹

Fig 3.3 Finding things out consent form

The form provided two options, for consenting or withdrawing consent to 'join in'. Though no core child chose to withdraw at this stage, it was made clear to children that they could say no at any time. Other children who showed interest in the research, becoming part of the opportunistic sample, were also invited to give consent in this way. The consent process was reviewed, reflecting on the initial responses, before fieldwork at Skies Lane. It was felt that the booklet could be made clearer by adding more photographs to illustrate children's involvement. It was also decided to show children the research tools of note book, camera and audiotape recorder to support their understanding.

Consent was reiterated as the fieldwork progressed. The researcher asked children if they were 'Ok' and ready to take part. They were able to withdraw consent to be observed or to have a conversation recorded. They were able to decline to take part in a research activity. When taking photographs children were guided to ask children if they could take a photograph and not to do so if consent was not given. If a photograph was taken without consent children were shown how to delete the image. The procedure to reiterate consent at each stage of the research allowed children to withdraw consent, which at different times all the children in the core sample did, saying no or in one case showing thumbs down. It was aimed at protecting children from coercive practices.

The methods used in the research were chosen to maximise children's participation, taking into account their young age and their varying abilities to express themselves verbally. The research process enabled the methods to be adapted in response to the children's needs.

Data collection using consensual participative methods

As explained above, methods were chosen which directly involved children in data collection and data generation. Sample draft research stories at appendix vi and the research stories presented in Chapter Four will illustrate the response and level of involvement of the core sample children. When recording observations the researcher checked permissions to take notes. She checked details and read back to the children what she had written. The children were aware of what the researcher was doing. They asked what she was writing or if they could write or draw in the notebook, which they did. They asked her to, "Write this down". In this way the book was perceived as common property, though the children referred to it as "your book".

In the use of the camera the methodology allowed children to choose what to photograph. Images were printed off to make a series of albums, and presented back to the children, who were invited to add comments if they wished. Due to the potential fragility of the camera the researcher controlled access to its use and supervised children who had not used a camera before. Some children were particularly interested and competent and took multiple photographs. Typically children made their own decision to stop photographing, either because there was nothing else they wanted to photograph or because they were distracted by another activity. Some children took only one or two photographs whilst others took up to twenty at any one time. As children became familiar with the camera they used it more selectively.

The child tours and the 'play nursery' activity also allowed children influence over the research process, both in terms of the length of time they chose to be involved and also how they responded to and interpreted their involvement in either activity. Each tour was different. Children decided where to take the researcher and what to show her. This included places, people and playthings. Some children took one or two photographs, others a series of photographs. The average tour took twenty minutes; the longest tour took fifty minutes, and continued the next day

The 'play nursery' activity elicited a similarly idiosyncratic response. Presented with two collections of 'inside' and 'outside' nursery furniture and play equipment, children were able to choose what and how to arrange items. These differences will be illustrated in the research stories in Chapter Four.

Field relations, the role of the researcher, and reactivity
Children's involvement in the research
The researcher did not attempt to hide the purpose of her presence at either site. She made the children aware that she was interested in what they did and that she was writing about them in the notebooks. She recognised that her presence and children's interest in the research would present some disruption but she aimed to minimise this as far as possible. At both sites children were used to visitors and she was soon accepted as just another adult. It was also clear that not all children wished to approach or be approached by the researcher and their feelings were respected.

Over the weeks of fieldwork, trust was established between the researcher and children from both the core and opportunistic samples. They took part in the research activities but they were just as likely to call upon her help, for example, to tie a lace or find a name tag. Between the two phases of fieldwork at High Trees the research relationship was maintained through occasional visits. At the beginning of the second phase trust was not assumed. It was re-established with the children through reminding them of the purpose of research in order to re-engage them in the active research process.

Reactivity or the influence of the researcher's presence needs to be acknowledged. Throughout the fieldwork period the researcher examined her own role and relationship vis à vis the children. The researcher aimed to intervene as little as possible. However on occasions her position as responsible researcher was challenged and she was required to consider her practice. The core sample children were particularly sensitive to the presence of the researcher and aware of their participation, which allowed them some latitude in terms of their behaviour when involved in research activities. The possible effect of this is demonstrated in this sequence involving a core sample child and his younger brother.

The boys were playing noisily in the construction area, observed by the researcher. They pulled the blocks off the shelves covering the floor. Another younger boy approached, possibly wanting to join in. Instead of including him in their game they sided against him, cornering him against a wall, and threatened to push him. All the boys were standing on the blocks. The researcher recognised both the physical hazard and the implications of the brothers' behaviour and felt it necessary to intervene to protect the younger child. Keddie (2000) writes about the 'voyeuristic aspect...of collecting 'good data' through observing conflicts and… risky or distressing situations' (2000:74) when researching with children. She points out the 'paradoxical nature of research and the tension between raising awareness of these situations and the suppression of data through intervention' (2000:74). It is important that researchers recognise their responsibility in such situations, both to protect children from harm but also to understand the effect their presence may have on participants.

It has already been acknowledged that adults can only be semi-participants in research with children. The participant observer role adopted was not of 'least adult', attempting to experience the settings as a child (Warming,2005). Whilst

the researcher did not assert authority over the children she helped out in the nursery, for example, tidying up after play or at lunch times (when staff ratios were low as staff took their lunch breaks) and responded to children's requests for help as noted above. When children commented on her role it was clear that they acknowledged a different adult status to the practitioners'. At Skies Lane a child identified the researcher as "a student"; another at High Trees asserted she was "not a teacher".

An ethical consideration involves the personal relationships that inevitably develop between the researcher and the researched. Within an ethnographic study the researcher, as participant observer, is perceived as 'not an adult' in the conventional (nursery) sense of one who organises and sets rules and imposes discipline. The research activities can be fun and offer attention (Christensen, 2004; Cook and Hess, 2007), which may be ethically problematic. Some of the research tools such as the camera or the small world play items, might be seen to offer enticement to young children, and are potentially coercive. In early years settings some children may be attracted to join in to gain adult attention. The researcher needs to be sensitive to ensure a respectful response to children's interest in the research, and that they understand the implications of participation.

Practitioners and the research

The relationship with practitioners merits consideration. They were not the subject of the research but their co-operation was essential for the success of the fieldwork. The researcher was open about her professional knowledge and the level of her study. Potentially this could present a threat to the practitioners, perceiving the researcher's presence as another form of surveillance of their practice, in addition to that of managers, parents and OFSTED. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995:91) cite Beynon (1983) who noted the 'common resentment on the part of some occupational practitioners...of detached, often invisible 'experts'. It was important to present as a neutral observer, emphasising 'mutuality' of interest in early years practice and being open to their everyday views and interpretations. Occasionally these did not coincide with the researcher's views. Hammersley and Atkinson advise that researchers may need to employ 'self-conscious impression management' (ibid:91) in order to maintain tactful and courteous relationships. They must decide how much self -disclosure to reveal, bearing in mind that they 'can't expect honesty and frankness if not frank and honest oneself ' (ibid:91).

The researcher aimed to be open about all aspects of the research. Informal discussions arose naturally at both sites with practitioners, typically commenting briefly on the children's actions and behaviours to confirm an interpretation or have it qualified. The researcher had introduced herself and the research at initial meetings with staff at both settings. At High Trees the researcher was invited to give more formal feed back sessions at three staff meetings and two parent meetings when longer discussions took place about the progress of the research. This did not happen at Skies Lane due to the shorter length of time spent there. At both sites trust built up between the researcher and the practitioners, with closer working relationships developing with core sample children's key workers. When the fieldwork came to an end short case studies were written summarising and presenting the provisional findings in relation to quality experiences for each core child. (Three sample are found at Appendix vi). These were discussed with the children's key workers to validate the interim findings and emerging hypotheses. One practitioner at Skies Lane commented on the lack of reference to the children's response to adult led foundation stage activities which led to a discussion about the children's awareness or otherwise that they were being 'taught'. Otherwise there was an acceptance of the researcher's interpretation of the data, possibly because the researcher had already 'sounded' out the practitioners informally with her interpretations as data were collected. The perceived expertise of the researcher might have inhibited the practitioners to amend the accounts, a reactive effect referred to previously.

On a practical level, the researcher aimed to blend in amongst the staff. At High Trees the researcher did not adopt the informal uniform of staff, but she wore plain clothes that reflected the dress code. Skies Lane had no uniform but the researcher dressed in a similar style to the nursery practitioners.

The practitioners were not the focus of the research but their trust in the process was crucial. The researcher aimed to minimise the impact of her presence and fitted the research activities around nursery routines. As explained above, she did not supervise the children but might reinforce others' instructions and directions. The ambiguity of the researcher's adult role was at times ethically problematic. An incident at High Trees illustrates the dilemma and its consequences. The researcher was observing a girl from the core sample playing with one of the toddlers. Both children went into the bathroom, where the core child attempted to pick up the toddler but dropped her, prompting immediate action from a practitioner, who was herself watching the two children. The girl was normally

discouraged from playing with younger children but the researcher's interest in her on this occasion overruled the practitioner's instinct to separate the children. The researcher felt responsible for the incident, which caused distress to all concerned, and the following day discussed what had happened with the practitioner, agreeing that children's safety was paramount. This example highlights once again the 'ethical difficulties concerning responsibility and trust' when working in preschool settings 'and tensions between research intentions and researcher responsibilities' (Keddie, 2000:72).

Parents and the research

The relationships with parents were another important part of the fieldwork. Core sample children's parents were approached formally at the start of each fieldwork period to introduce the research, with occasional informal contact being made during the course of the fieldwork. At High Trees the researcher was invited to discuss progress at parent meetings during both phases of fieldwork. Parents of core sample children were asked to comment on draft case studies written at the end of the fieldwork period, presenting provisional findings (see Appendix vi). This served ethical requirements to report on the outcomes of the research as well as providing some validation of the interpretation of the data. Parents were invited to meet the researcher and the ensuing discussions provided useful insights into the concerns of parents. Generally parents accepted the researcher's view of their child; it appeared that their main interest was that their child was settled in nursery. They offered comparisons between their child's behaviour at home and what they read in the research stories, mostly in relation to food preferences, independence and interests. One parent did not come to the meeting. At High Trees parents of core sample children were sent copies of the final research stories, together with photographs and video copied onto a memory stick. They were asked for their comments; for their consent to use the photographs in dissemination, and to confirm or nominate the children's research names (see letter, Appendix vii). Four of the five parents replied, none chose to comment on the research stories. It was decided not to use the photographs of the child whose parent did not reply in any dissemination of the research.

The next section presents the approach to data analysis and the conclusions drawn from the analysis.

Data analysis
An overview of the analysis

This section describes the process of analysis in order to present a clear explanation of decisions taken to demonstrate the reliability of the research. Despite generating large amounts of data, computer package software was not used to aid the analysis. However digital images from still and video cameras were stored on a computer, as were transcripts of the data in the form of coded segments and coded transcriptions of observations and research activities of core sample children. A process of reflexivity was applied throughout the writing up of field notes, the analysis of photographs and video, and in compiling initial case studies of the core sample children. An inductive procedure was used to interpret the meanings made by children of their experience to construct an understanding of 'quality' from children's perspectives.

Eleven primary concepts emerged in relation to quality experiences, referred to as analytical categories. These were assigned to the data and compared across the data sets. From these concepts, or categories, further themes were identified to refine meaning reflecting common and individual view points. The fieldnotes were tagged to identify the experiences of core sample children and reveal their personal perspectives. Examples of the concepts in action were collected and transcripts were written in relation to core sample children to illustrate the concepts. Extended accounts of the core sample children at High Trees were written to present the data as five 'research stories' in Chapter Five.

Each data set contributed to the development of the eleven categories. Photographs were analysed in the context of the observations and tours, and understood to provide what Walker (1993) termed the 'silent voice' in research, making 'visible the invisible' (Schratz and Steiner-Loffler,1998:250). The photographs presented literally a different perspective, the world from the height of three and four year olds, as well as revealing individual preferences and feelings about the settings. Common interests were also demonstrated through the photographs and the data set contributed to the conceptual analysis complementing and confirming observational data. Examples of core sample children's photographs from High Trees are presented within the research stories.

The video recordings allowed the researcher to reflect on the significance of the play nursery as a research technique to the aims of the study. Watching the video sequences allowed a comparison to be made between children's responses. The children made personal choices and played in a distinctive style that mirrored

their approach to the real nursery. These play episodes could be claimed to provide an insight into what was important to the children, or what represented quality to them. As a research tool they appeared to provide an encapsulation of each core child's response to the phenomenon of a 'nursery'. Reflecting on the method it seemed that some children approached the toys systematically to replicate a nursery; other children selected a few items and reflected their own patterns of play; another response was to create an imaginary nursery. These diverse responses will be illustrated and commented upon in the research stories. In analysing visual data Pink (2001) advises:

> 'A reflexive approach to analysis should concentrate on how the content of visual images is the result of the specific context of their production and on the diversity of ways that video and photographs are interpreted…they are always representations of the subjective standpoints of the image producer and other viewers, including informants'.(Pink 2001:114)

As the still-image producers were children the images were interpreted through an inter-subjective process involving the children and researcher that was informed by the context in which the images were produced, and subsequently by comments made by children when looking at the printed photographs. However, the children were not given the chance to view the video recordings. Had they been asked to comment a deeper understanding of the play nursery technique might have been elicited.

A record of the progress of the study was made in papers written for research conferences, where reflections on the methodology and the data were presented for comment and criticism (Armistead, 2004; 2005; 2006). The papers document the stages of the research over the initial two years and reflect the development in the understanding of researching children's perspectives of quality.

The process of analysis

Qualitative research generates large data sets that require time and a clear framework to analyse and condense to produce valid conclusions. The study generated a group of distinct data sets comprising:

- 5 field notebooks – providing a record of the three phases of fieldwork and a context for the research including reflections on the methodology and the research instruments in the form of reflexive notes
- observations – representing much of the content of the fieldnotes, recording three forms of observation, involving core and opportunistic samples
- photographs – generated as part of observations, 24 'child tours' or volunteered by children from the core and opportunistic samples

- video – 6 video recordings of the 'play nurseries' created by the core sample at High Trees
- draft case studies - 10 short, summative narratives written for the core sample children at Skies Lane and High Trees

Miles and Huberman (1994) identify three components of qualitative data analysis *data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification*. They define data reduction as the 'process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions…(It) occurs continuously throughout the life of any qualitatively oriented project' (1994:10). Anticipatory data reduction is occurring before data are collected 'as the researcher decides which conceptual framework, which cases, which research questions, and which data collection approaches to use' (1994:10). Data reduction continues during the period of data collection through such processes as identifying concepts; coding and clustering categories and themes; segmenting and discarding data; writing summaries and memos. It is completed with the writing of the final report. Figure 3.4 illustrates the stages of data analysis of this study, moving from large, raw data sets to condensed conclusions on the meaning of the data.

Fig.3.4 Components of qualitative data analysis: based on flow model from Miles and Huberman (1994:10)
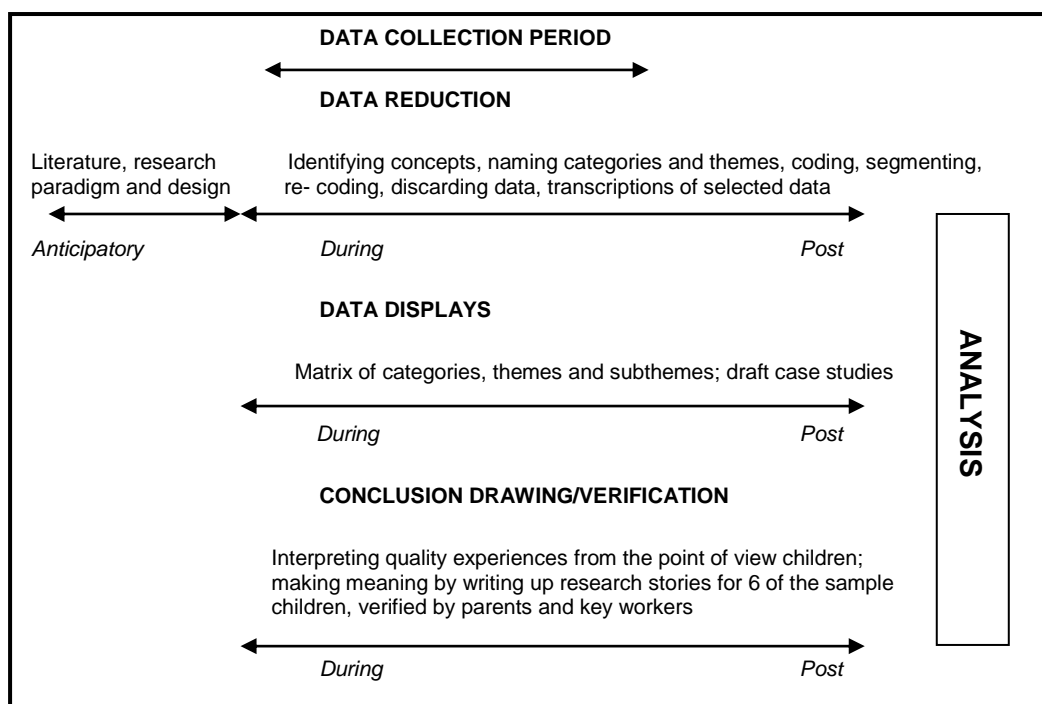
Hammersley and Atkinson reinforce the view that in ethnographic research 'analysis is not a distinct stage of the research…it begins in the pre-fieldwork phase, in the formulation and clarification of research problems' (1995:205). They acknowledge the influence of the 'existing ideas of the' researcher and relevant literature in shaping the analysis; however they warn these may lead to 'prejudgements, forcing interpretation of the data into their mould' rather than being used 'as resources to make sense of the data.' (1995:210).

In this study anticipatory data reduction occurred as choices were made in the research design, for example, the basis for the focused observations was existing concepts relating to children and quality from the literature and the pilot study. They provided a 'powerful conceptual grid' (Atkinson, in Silverman, 2005:67) for an initial understanding of the data and the starting point to generate further categories, however there was the risk they might mask uncategorised activities (Silverman, 2005). Figure 3.4 sets out the categories identified in the study together with definitions assigned by the researcher, which guided the data analysis. The first six categories were evident in the literature, providing a 'conceptual grid' which was extended by categories arising from the empirical research.

Fig 3.4 Categories and their definitions as they were applied to the data

Initial categories derived from the literature and pilot study:
1 Personal relationships: interactions between individuals
2 Routines: activities and organisation throughout the day
3 Play (resources):
1. the activity of playing and being playful
2. the items children make use of for their play that are provided by adults or found by the children
3. the places and spaces chosen to play in or at
4 Food (resources): provided by nursery or parents
5 Rules: expressed and acknowledged ways of behaving, staying safe, use and care of play areas and play resources
6 Learning: formal and informal acquisition of new knowledge or skills, adult led, other child led and child led
Additional categories that were identified during the study:
7 Emotions: feelings expressed and behaviour observed in response to people, resources or events or incidents
8 Life outside: home, people, places and events in children's lives
9 Places: 'child defined' spaces and places used by the children for play, socialisation and solitude, not necessarily sanctioned by adults
10 Time: time taken and time passing that has particular significance for children
11 Control: aspects of nursery open to the influence of children or under their influence

Generating categories and themes to code the data

As data were collected analysis was applied using the initial six categories as the basis of a system of coding the data, and identifying further concepts or

categories that 'helped to make sense of the data' with the aim 'not just to make the data intelligible but to do so in an *analytical* way that provides a novel perspective on the phenomena' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:210). Meaning was refined as 'themes' emerged representing aspects of the categories. From the themes further meaning was extracted identifying specific attributes or features that had significance for children's experiences. It gradually became evident across data sets that the categories and themes were applicable across the lived experiences of all the core sample children and within those of the opportunistic sample.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) explain the importance of generating concepts to understand the data and of attaching codes to data:

> 'analyses of qualitative data begin with the identification of key themes and patterns. The segmenting and coding of data are often taken for granted parts of the qualitative research process… what we are doing is condensing the bulk of our data sets into analyzable units by creating categories with and from our data. This process is usually referred to a coding…..We prefer to think in terms of generating concepts from and with our data, using coding as a means of achieving this' (1996:26)

They quote Miles and Huberman for whom coding is the '"stuff of analysis"' which allows the researcher to 'differentiate and combine data…retrieved' and make reflections 'about this information' (Coffey and Atkinson,1996:27) leading to the identification of meaningful data which can be interpreted and from which conclusions can be drawn. Codes are 'tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study….attached to "chunks" of varying size – words, phrases, sentences, whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996:28). Coding is a 'heuristic' process 'providing the researcher with ways of interacting with and thinking about the data' and this reflection is more important than the 'procedures and representations …employed' (Coffey and Atkinson,1996:29).

In the study this process began during the initial fieldwork at High Trees. The researcher was forming an understanding of the setting, becoming aware of 'how they do things round here', the actions of the children and how the participants made sense of their activities within the day. As field notes were written units of data were annotated with the researcher's first representations of meaning. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) identify these as 'sensitizing concepts (Blumer,1954)… emerging concepts that are not well defined' giving 'the user a general sense of reference and guidelines in approaching empirical instances'.

Whilst some are discarded others become 'definitive concepts (which) refer precisely to what is common to a class of objects, by the aid of the clear definition of attributes' (Hammersley and Atkinson,1995:212). Sensitizing concepts are important starting points, occurring as data is collected and then again later as the data sets are examined generating further categories. The process moves from 'often relatively mundane categories to more analytically significant' ones, aiming ultimately 'for a stable set of categories'. This mostly inductive process is informed by 'theoretical ideas, common sense expectations and stereotypes which allow the analyst to pick out surprising, interesting, and important features' (ibid:213).

This process highlights the influence of the researcher on the compilation and interpretation of the fieldnotes. Miles and Huberman (1994) cite Atkinson who 'points out (the fieldnotes) are really texts constructed by the fieldworker on the basis of observation and participation' (1994:9). Analysis is a reductive and interpretive process, but also one which is constructing meaning at the same time, in order to draw conclusions from the data. In the compilation and recording of data from a range of participative methods, the views of the insiders (children) are construed by an outsider (the researcher) introducing bias which might jeopardize the reliability and validity of the research. The effect is minimised by building in tests of reliability of the data as it is collected and of validity of claims to understand the participants' perspectives, as described previously. Bias can be reduced by a reflexive approach to interpreting the data during and post fieldwork always keeping in mind the aims of the research.

Summative reflections were written at the end of the day in the notebook, which referred to the initial categories and which also began to identify themes within the categories. Hammersely and Atkinson describe two aspects of the process of analysis 'formally it starts to take shape in analytic notes and memoranda; informally it is embodied in the ethnographer's ideas and hunches' (1995:205). In this study the purpose and focus of the analysis was to identify quality experiences from children's perspective. The following three examples from early observations illustrate the coding process:

- a boy smiling when sandwiches from his lunch box were placed in front of him
- two girls snuggling together on the settee to listen to a story
- a solitary boy playing an elaborate game outside.

Each of the situations were interpreted as possible indicators of quality experiences to be coded in the fieldnotes as representing initial categories of 'food', 'relationships' and 'play' respectively. On later reflection further meaning was given to the data by identifying the themes of 'food from home', 'close friendship' and 'autonomous play' to code the data. Themes became stable and attained a saliency through recurrence over time, across a range of individual cases. They provided the basis for refined meaning as sub-themes emerged and were coded. Coffey and Atkinson identify 'three levels of generality' in coding; the 'most general categories… intermediate categories…(the) most specific level of category' (1996:32). These were termed categories, themes and sub-themes in this study. Figure 3.11 illustrates the organisation and relationships of analytic concepts and terms. The final matrix of eleven categories is presented at Appendix viii.

Fig 3.11 Refinement of themes and sub-themes from the category

Categories and definitions reflecting aspects of preschool identified from the literature and analysis and confirmed by continued comparison between cases	Themes emerging from the data and further explored during data analysis	Sub themes emerging from the data and further explored during analysis, identifying cross- and inter-case phenomena
Food/resources – provided by nursery or parents *Underlying values: reliability/ respect/relationships*	Food provided by nursery	• choice/ no choice • delicious, gagging, love, hate
	Food brought from home	• special food eg. birthday food • same (matching) food as other child **Relationships**
	Mealtimes	• **Time** to eat • children's culture • anticipation and enjoyment for both home and nursery food **Emotions**

The researcher compared the broad categories and themes recurring at both research sites and in each period of fieldwork, and across core and opportunistic data sets, but remained open to new themes. Some were commonly occurring themes, for example, home and family, missing parents, the excitement of outdoor play, the enjoyment of singing in a group, whilst others were recognisable as idiosyncratic, an example 'hating' nursery food. Potential themes and sub-themes were marked in the fieldwork note books as notes were written, and when the day's notes were reviewed.

Contradictory or counter cases occurred, for example, some children found nursery food 'delicious', whilst it made others 'gag'. Quality was defined through positive values and through negative values. The coding reflected individual children's responses to their nursery experience, from observations, from conversations with children, and from photographs taken by the children. This

was an iterative and grounded process. It captured common experiences but crucially it aimed to retain the individuality of each core child's experience in subsequently presenting the data.

The next step was to identify the concepts that were to become central to the analysis and the aims of the study. A 'constant comparative method' (Glaser and Strauss, in Hammersely and Atkinson, 1995:213) was used across the data sets to create more specific meanings and to develop an understanding how the concepts related to one another leading 'to the mutual relationships and internal structures of categories (being) more clearly displayed' (ibid:213).

Data display

Miles and Huberman (1994:10) explain that 'generically a display is an organised, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action'. Conventionally these have taken the form of an '*extended text'* of transcribed data often extending to many pages of fieldnotes. According to Miles and Huberman these have considerable drawbacks being unwieldy to process for analysis and therefore unreliable. They advocate better displays*,* for example, types of matrices, graphs, charts and networks which can be designed 'to assemble organized information into an immediately accessible, compact form so that the analyst can see what is happening and either draw justified conclusions or move onto the next step of analysis'. They urge a 'more inventive, self-conscious, iterative stance toward their generation and use' (ibid:11).

This study made use of a matrix display of categories and themes referred to above (Appendix viii). As previously explained, the matrix developed over time. An initial table was compiled from fieldnote codings at the end of the period of fieldwork at Skies Lane, as codes attained some saliency from comparison across the two sites. This was developed throughout the second phase of data collection at High Trees and amended further once data collection was complete. By this time cross and inter- case themes were being established through writing transcriptions of the field notes. As part of this process, segments of data were isolated and assigned to codes to provide examples of the concepts in action and definitions for the emerging categories and themes. In this way data was condensed in order for the meaning of quality to be explored through 'progressive focussing' (Hammersely and Atkinson, 1995;207) moving away from the fieldnote descriptions of social events and processes towards developing and testing an understanding of the concept of quality from the point of view of children.

Transcriptions were made of sections of the data, not the full field notes. Data collected from and with the core sample children were selected for transcription. This process enabled the coding to be tested and developed further. An example of the transcription of coded data, reflecting emerging categories and themes, is found at Appendix ix.

From the transcriptions short draft case studies were written for each core sample child. They were structured in relation to the separate research methods, reporting on the data elicited from each of these techniques and interpreting quality experiences from the point of view of individual children based on the categories and themes. They presented preliminary findings which were discussed with parents and keyworkers to check for reliability and validate the interpretation made. Three draft preliminary case studies are presented at Appendix vi; two are from core sample children at Skies Lane, a third is from a child at High Trees. At this stage the analysis had produced two representations of the data - the matrix of categories and themes representing conceptual codes to label the experiences of the core sample children and descriptive draft case studies of the children. Both of these informed the next stage of the analysis, that of drawing final conclusions and verification of the data.

Conclusion drawing and verification

From the beginning of data collection judgments were made to decide how the children in the study gave meaning to their experiences that represented aspects of quality. Regularities and patterns in the data were noted as described above. Miles and Huberman (1995) write that initially these are 'held lightly, maintaining openness and skepticism', however they maintain that conclusions are there, 'vague… then increasingly explicit and grounded'. The final conclusions may not appear until data collection is over, but often they are 'prefigured from the beginning'. Conclusions *are 'verified* as the analyst proceeds' and 'meanings emerging from the data have to be *tested* for their plausibility…sturdiness… "confirmability" – that is their *validity'* (1995:11,original emphasis) to provide findings that are truthful, useful and trustworthy (Woods, 1996). Processes to verify the data have been described in the previous sections. The presentation of the data, in the following chapter, will be the final test of trustworthiness of the research. The conclusions drawn will be presented in the research stories and these aim to demonstrate plausible and credible accounts of what quality means from children's perspectives.

Research stories

The draft case studies were developed into extended narratives for the six core sample children at High Trees. They are called 'research stories'. Case studies are used in research to provide insight into an issue or case (Stake, 2000). The case of this research is 'quality experiences of young children' and it has been studied through the standpoint of a number of children. The use of the term 'research stories' derives from Carr's 'Learning Stories' (Carr, 2001) which were developed as an alternative method of assessing children's learning experiences and presenting children's learning dispositions. A 'learning stories' approach provides a relevant model for presenting children's perspectives as the stories are 'observations in everyday settings designed to provide a cumulative series of snapshots or written vignettes of individual children' (Carr, 2001:96). Carr's stories included context, relationships with adults and peers. They described activities and included interpretations from an adult who knew the child well. According to Carr the stories 'were part of a sequence over time' which can 'capture complexity of situated learning strategies'. The stories 'can incorporate the child's voice'. They 'emphasise participation and culture' and provide a 'framework for understanding children' (Carr, 2001:95). The research stories followed the same basic principles, presenting the children's dispositions towards the quality of their experiences as the focus of interest. They endeavored to re-contextualise the lived experiences of the children as previously represented within the thematic exploration of the multiple data-sets.

The six children at High Trees had been purposively selected to be the focus of study over two phases of data collection and a large body of data were collected in relation to them. This larger data set with a longitudinal element therefore seemed appropriate as the more substantive means of conveying the perspectives of children as lived experiences in the research stories. However, the Skies Lane data from four children were written up into draft research stories (or case studies as they were referred to at this point) and shared with the parents and key workers (later the same process was repeated at High Trees).

Data were used from both sites in the development of the matrix in order to identify the categories and the thematic detail presented earlier in this chapter. In drawing the data together at this stage of analysis, it seemed important to make some reference to the experiences of full-time children and these were only in attendance at Skies Lane. In the event it was not possible to identify any effect of full-time attendance on quality experiences. Therefore, whilst data from both sites contributed to the development of the matrix, the decision was made to only

develop extended research story/case studies for the core sample children at High Trees. These children had been involved in the research for a period of fifteen months, compared to the four weeks of research at Skies Lane. Consequently the extent of data to draw upon for case studies/research stories was both richer and potentially more reliable. All the data from Skies Lane in the form of field note books, photographs and corresponding transcriptions is available. A limited amount of analysed data from Skies Lane is available in two of the draft case studies at Appendix vi.

The forthcoming research stories present the data in order to:

- Evidence the categories and themes identified as underpinning quality, as they relate to individual children's perspectives
- Compare the quality of experience for each child to illustrate diverse as well as common perspectives
- Provide triangulation across cases (Stake, 2000) which adds robustness to the data classification
- Demonstrate the expertise and knowledge that children have about their nursery experience and the places and spaces where they spend considerable amounts of their day and the meanings they apply to those places and spaces
- Expose the authoritative voice of the child on quality that can extend adult perspectives arising from and prevalent in the literature
- Propose quality indicators from the child's perspective

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the empirical research. The use of a naturalistic, ethnographic approach was intended to empower children's participation as active social agents, in order to gain an understanding of the meaning they gave to their experiences in nursery. The methods used were inclusive and attracted children's responses, providing a range of rich data sets. The researcher's semi-participant role allowed for some objectivity; but it appeared she was perceived by the children to be someone they could rely on for help, and someone who was interested in *them.* The research was carried out ethically. Children gave their consent to join in the research activities and were aware of their right to withdraw.

A full and comprehensive explanation has been given of the stages of analysis. An interpretive and constructivist approach was used as data were sorted across

different data sets and allocated to emerging categories and themes. These represent characteristics of quality from children's perspective. A matrix was drawn up as a summary of the analysis. The research stories provide the context for understanding children's standpoint and are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter Four   The Research Stories

The research stories present the data and represent the nursery experiences of the core sample children at High Trees. The stories are structured in relation to the research methods and tasks. The research stories aim to provide a 'real time' situated context in which to exemplify the quality of the children's experiences.

The core sample

The children whose research stories are told here are Alan, Batman, Zoë, Carl, Lauren and Ben. There are five research stories. There are individual stories for Alan, Batman, Carl and Zoë. However, Lauren and Ben are twins, and their experiences are presented as a single research story. A decision was made to combine their experiences when, in analysing the field notes, it was seen that each research method reflected their close, mutually referenced play. Their research story highlights the significance of having a sibling at the same stage of life and the complementary experience that involves. It is felt that the joint story does justice to both Lauren and Ben's voices.

Table 4.1 presents basic information about the six core sample children. It shows the patterns of attendance over the week and over the year, and the days when children's presence in nursery coincided. It lists children's dates of birth, with Alan being the oldest child in the sample, almost a year older than the youngest children, Lauren and Ben. Zoë was the only child whose attendance changed over the two phases of field work.

Table 4.1 Core sample children data

Core sample child	Date of birth	Type of place and attendance	Attended Mon	Attended Tues	Attended Wed	Attended Thurs	Attended Fri
Alan Tracy	05.09.2000	Community – all year				'short day'	
Zoë	15.01.2001	Student – term time		1st phase		1st phase	2nd phase
Batman	29.03.2001	Community – all year			occasional	sometimes only half day	
Carl	14.04.2001	Staff – all year					
Lauren	09.08.2001	Community – all year					
Ben	09.08.2001	Community – all year					

Details of attendance have been described in Chapter Three. Some additional information is relevant. When students enrolled for two year courses their children attended nursery for less than twenty months. Staff children often attended over several years, entering nursery as babies and leaving at school

age, often attending in the holidays. Children from the local community tended to live closer to the nursery than the other children; often these children would attend from babyhood, over several years. As the nursery was used by their parents to cover working hours, they would also attend during the holidays. When describing the characteristics of the core sample children the terms 'student', 'staff' and 'community' have been used to categorise their attendance status. From the findings there appears to be some significance in relation to period of time spent in nursery and the quality of relationships with staff and other children.

Context of the nursery

High Trees was a well established nursery that had been operating for many years, under the auspices of the Child Studies department of a further education college. It pre-dated the period of expansion for day nurseries in the 1990s. It was registered as a 50 place nursery, including 6 children under two. It did not operate at full occupancy at any time during the fieldwork period.

The nursery staff

The nursery had a stable staff group, many of whom had worked at the nursery for several years. Some staff worked full-time all year round and others worked term time only. All of the permanent staff were qualified to Level Two, and one was studying for the Foundation Degree in Early Years and Childcare, a Level Four qualification. In addition to these staff, the nursery employed a young male student completing the Modern Apprenticeship route into childcare and early education. The nursery hosted a succession of child studies further education students during term time, on fortnightly placements. Occasionally work experience students also came to the nursery from the local secondary schools. The children therefore experienced the care and teaching of mature women with many years experience, in addition to younger staff who were less experienced, but whose youthfulness the children related to.

The nursery was the responsibility of Lorraine, the Childcare Manager for the college, with the nursery manager, Jane, in charge of the day to day running of the setting. The other permanent full-time staff were:
Judy, who was key worker for the three year old children (ie core sample children) in the first period of field work, had moved to be team leader in the baby room by the second period of fieldwork.
Ruth, who took over from Judy as key worker for the core sample children during he second period of field work, when they were older three year olds and four

year olds. Ruth was in her first year of studying for the Foundation Degree in Early Years.

Lily and Michael, the Modern Apprentice student, were the remaining full-time members of staff. Though not key workers for any of the core sample children at the time of the fieldwork, they had regular close contact with the children. Lily had been Carl and Batman's key worker when they were younger.

Val, Deborah, Gayle and Lorna were permanent members of staff who worked in college term time only. They were all observed having close relationships with the children. During the second period of research Val was responsible for planning for the Foundation Stage Curriculum and had regular contact with the core sample children. The pattern of shift work common to day nurseries meant all staff had contact with the children at some time, including planning and organising times when the whole group came together, or planning specific activities, as well as general supervisory duties for play sessions.

The layout of the nursery

In order to place the research stories in a physical and social context it is necessary to provide a brief description of High Trees. The nursery building was situated centrally within a college of further education, and students, staff and visitors passed close by along two sides of the nursery site. Children were able to watch traffic and people from within the building and from two outside play areas. One consequence of this was the chance to see parents or staff arriving, and also to watch and wave goodbye to friends as they left. Children were also able to see the car park, accommodating hundreds of cars, and some children believed they could point out the family car parked there.

The nursery itself was accessed along a path at the back of the outside play area. Children entered along a narrow corridor, passing the door to the office of the nursery manager and administrator. They hung their coats and bags on pegs along the corridor. Children's work, with annotated explanatory comments for parents, was displayed on the walls. The corridor led to the entrance to the nursery. By the door, there was a notice board with staff photographs, and information and notices for parents. Parents or children rang a bell to enter the room, and a staff member came to open the door. As parents arrived and collected their children throughout the day, this arrangement created the effect of the door bell ringing at the start of the day, at midday and in the mid- to late afternoon, lasting intermittently for up to two hours at certain times. Whilst

children could ignore the bell, and often did, it did provoke comments and a sense of anticipation that will be commented upon in the research stories. The door had a window and children would look towards the door to check who had to come to nursery or who's parent was arriving. The door was in a corner of the main nursery room. It was important for children's safety that the door was kept closed, other than to allow entry or exit. From the point of view of the children, the door was the point of coming to and going from nursery. It was also the place where children needed to queue to collect their outdoor clothes or sun protection from their pegs, or to go to another part of the campus, for example the garden area.

The nursery rooms

The nursery occupied a single large room. Two other rooms led from the main room, a smaller, 'baby' room and a space known to the children as the 'bathroom', where there were three toilet cubicles opposite three low hand basins, with mirrors above. The bathroom area included a place for changing children, and for potties. Just inside the doorway were some wire frames, for drying paintings and craft work. There was no door into this part of the nursery, so that children had free access to the bathroom area. The baby room had a stable door, the top half of which was normally open. Children were observed looking over the half-door to see their siblings.

On entry into the large nursery room was a small desk, with two chairs. Jane, the nursery manager, often sat here completing paperwork and answering the telephone. She was able to respond to parents and children as they came through the door. She was often approached by children during the day, whilst she worked at the desk, and she gave them her attention. On the days when Jane was not there other staff took her place. They too were approached by children and responded to them. Shelves above the desk held administrative files, curriculum documents and children's personal files. There was a second telephone fixed to the wall by the door to the baby room.

To the right of the entrance was a long, narrow storage cupboard for toys and equipment, which was used by staff. Children did not have access to this room. To the right again, was the baby room, with its stable door. Parents normally congregated in the space in front these two rooms when they brought their children or picked them up.

A kitchen area had been created at this end of the nursery where food was prepared. This area was delineated by a long counter, over which children could see staff prepare meals and snacks. Entry into this area was barred to the children by a half-height door. Parents also remained outside the kitchen area. If they provided food for their child, they passed over packed lunches and afternoon tea snacks to staff. Daily attendance sheets were left out on the counter for parents to sign their children in and out of nursery.

Another section of the counter was used for placing special items, such as comforters or soft toys brought in by children. There was no strict control over this collection, and children could remove and return items as and when they wished, sometimes standing on a chair or table to reach, sometimes asking an adult to help. Equally other children were seen taking and examining some article, replacing it once their curiosity was satisfied. This arrangement was never seen to be problematical, and it served a need for a place to put non-nursery objects that had significance for individual children, that was respected by all.

The remainder of the large nursery room was allocated to different curricular resource areas. During the periods of fieldwork the following provision and usage was observed. Permanent resource areas were sited along the four sides of the room and included:

- A table for play dough, and other malleable materials, with a collection of tools to shape and cut the dough; some small scale baking equipment and a play oven. Up to three children could work comfortably at the table, and this was a popular activity for both sexes and different ages, though was used most by three year olds.
- Dressing up clothes were available in a large open container, and were well used. The most popular items were firefighters and police tabards and helmets, and superman, and other imaginary character capes. Normally these were used by older three and four year old boys, but sometimes girls would choose to wear them, and younger children also showed some interest.
- An area of nursery, defined on 3 sides by shelf units, formed a space for block play. Blocks of different shapes and sizes were stored on open shelves to be freely available. There was a wooden garage in a corner, and vehicles of varying sizes and materials. This space was well used by all the children. Girls and boys used this area, although boys predominated. The older

children were most adept at building structures, but younger boys played with the garage. In the second phase of field work a large pictorial map of the world was displayed on the wall in this area. It illustrated activities associated with different geographical areas, and was scrutinised by the children, sometimes providing inspiration for imaginative play. A globe hung from the ceiling above, which also attracted attention and comment.

- A sofa at the far side of the large room (on the opposite wall to the entrance and kitchen area) marked out a space for children to be gathered together. Up to five children could sit on the sofa. Other children sat in front on the carpet, with a staff member sitting on a chair. This was also the book area where a selection of story picture books were displayed on a shelf unit. A higher shelf held a further row of books used by staff at story times. A computer and CD player, with accompanying discs, were also sited in this part of nursery, as was a box of musical instruments. Again all were available for children to use. The sofa was a place of quiet and comfort for children, and was a well used space.

- Known to the children as the 'office', there was a measuring and mark making area, providing pencils and crayons, a key board, paper, paper-clips, tape measure, stencils and stamps amongst other writing and mark-making tools. A life sized clock and telephone, together with old office diaries added to the sense of an 'office'. Older children created imaginative play scenarios here, and younger children played with the telephone and explored and examined the other resources.

- A shelved storage unit held a range of craft items providing resources for what children termed the 'messy table', including glue sticks, scissors, containers of cut paper, fabric pieces, and other natural and found materials. These resources were added to on a regular basis by staff and students providing an activity on the adjacent table, allowing small groups of children to take part. Typically these would be cutting, printing or gluing tasks, sometimes linked to a theme, which were popular with some of the children.

- Children were able to stand to paint at an easel, which was part of a shelf unit, one of several used to divide the room into the designated resource areas. The researcher only observed this area being used occasionally. Amongst the core group only Alan and Lauren were noted painting at the easel, at different times.

- A water trough was used frequently, although not on days when children played outside, when other water play experiences were offered. There was also a sand trough with moulding and shaping tools on a shelf close by.

Sometimes plastic dinosaurs or other animals were placed in the sand. The trough was used for other materials, for example cones and conkers.

- A final indoor resource area was changed in nature and purpose during the fieldwork period. A designated 'home' area (with small table and chairs, kitchen units, pots and pans and plastic 'food' items) was removed after the first months of research at High Trees, and replaced with a unit storing a range of open ended materials, including card tubes, ropes, drapes, baskets and boxes and small natural materials, such as feathers and stones. It was called the 'what ever you want it to be' corner.

- The indoor resource areas were supplemented by collections of small world toys. Popular items with all the children were plastic jungle and pre-historic animals, a wooden train set, and in the second phase of fieldwork, a large wooden fire station, with a collection of fire-personnel, fire engines and accessories. Other play sets included a hairdressing collection and a hospital collection, both containing relevant, often life size, items to create and enact a salon or a clinic.

- The nursery had a lone goldfish. A wormery was introduced for a period in the second phase of research, linked to explorations and excavations outside.

Outdoor play resources

High Trees had two outdoor play areas. The first was immediately outside the main nursery room. This area, which sloped down towards the nursery building, was partly paved, with an adjacent extensive grassy part sheltered by several established birch trees. The grass rose quite steeply from the paved area and was known as 'the hill'. The 'hill' had been fenced off for a time at the start of the fieldwork due to health and safety concerns over the hazard presented to the children from exposed tree roots. Following a safety inspection the children were allowed back to play on the hill towards the end of the first phase of fieldwork.

On the hill, under the trees, was a permanent structure, made from slatted wood, that combined a play house and a slide. It was a popular place to play in or around. In the second summer children were observed climbing onto the roof of the playhouse. There was a mixed response from the staff to the risk involved. Beyond the play house was more grass, which had been partly covered by a large piece of military camouflage for children to play under. The paved area was bounded by a brick wall on one side, with the remaining area fenced round by a paling fence, allowing children to peep through the gaps. There was a gate in the

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fence that was often used by staff when they came to and left work. It was also used when children were taken on trips.

A door led from the main nursery to access the play area, whist the baby room had patio doors leading to the outside. Older children could look in and see the babies, and the babies could watch what was happening outside. Outdoor play equipment was stored in two sheds. A play trampoline, a wooden bench and a small wooden slide had been placed under an overhang from the first floor of the building, providing some shelter. Over the period of the fieldwork this outdoor area was being developed and used more frequently by the nursery staff. Children were encouraged to bring wellington boots so that they could play out in all weathers. Resources such as the water trough were taken outside on fine days. New items were purchased including wheel barrows, child sized spades and trowels to allow the children to dig and move soil. The hill was landscaped in the last months of fieldwork, constructing paved steps up the hill and a paved path through the grass. Large tyres were installed for sand and soil play.

The second outdoor area, known as 'the garden', was sited less than a minute's walk from the nursery. A fenced play space had been formed within a larger, grassed concourse, to compensate for the loss of the 'hill' when there had been safety concerns. This area continued to be used by the nursery children when the hill was brought back to use, but less frequently than the main outdoor play area.

The garden had a collection of small tyres that were stacked up to form low towers by the children, or to play a game of jumping from one to another. There was a child sized plastic picnic table, where children chatted with peers and staff. Several trees provided shelter and children enjoyed running round them. There was sufficient space beneath the trees for staff to organise games involving the whole group, for example, parachute and ring games. In one corner a low, hazel tree provided a place to hide and climb. It was popular mainly with the boys. Some hid in the low branches but were put off from climbing for fear of getting stuck or because the branches scratched them. Other children enjoyed climbing higher and the feeling of relative danger if they did get stuck, calling for their friends to help them. A final feature of the garden area was a small patch of ground being developed for plants to grow. The garden was surrounded by a paling fence through which children could see students and staff.

The practice and ethos at High Trees

Table: 4.2 The nursery day

8 00	Nursery opens and children arrive. Apart from the youngest babies all the children play in the main room.
9.00	Most children have arrived by 9.00. A few arrive later. Free play continues.
9.30	Under-twos go to the baby room. Older children collect around the sofa, in the book corner, with staff. Children are greeted individually and make their responses. A practitioner might lead a discussion about the days of the week or the weather, with children contributing information. General announcements might be made about behaviour. Songs and rhymes might be sung /recited, with children taking part. Planned activities are explained and children are directed from the group with a member of staff, often their key worker. Free and directed play (ie a supervised focused activity) follows.
10.00	Snack is offered. Children find their names (often by trial and error) from a board and take it to the snack table. They take turns to sit at the table with a member of staff. Free and directed play follows. Children may play outside.
11.30	Tidy up time followed by hand washing. Story in three age related key worker groups.
12.00	Lunch time. The babies join the older children in the main room. They sit at a low table, or in a high chair. The older children sit in their key groups. Their names have been placed on the tables so that they know where to sit. Some staff leave for their lunch hour. The staff serve the packed lunches and then the nursery lunches. Some children arrive for lunch, others are picked up and go home or to another setting. Some arrive after lunch, after being at another setting.
12.30	Children are finishing their lunch and are allowed to leave the table and wash their hands and wipe their faces, and go to read in the book corner. Some children go to the baby room for a nap.
12.45	All the children gather for singing and rhymes around the sofa, in the book corner.
01.00	Children are directed from the group. Free play follows. Staff return from lunch and other staff members go for their break.
02.00	Afternoon drink is provided. Play continues often outdoors.
03.00	Parents begin to arrive to pick up their children.
03.45	Tidy up time. Many children have left.
04.00	Tea time. Some children bring their own packed tea. Other children are offered a snack.
04.30	Children return to play.
05.00	All children play together was staff reduced to three. Only a few children remain. Staff tidy up and sometimes organise games inside or out. Children continue to be picked up. Nursery closes 6.00.

The ethos of nursery staff and management was to provide a well resourced nursery that enabled children to develop their skills and interests in a supportive and caring environment. The nursery was registered to provide both early education and care. The Birth to Three Framework and the Foundation Stage Curriculum were the basis of planning. Three coordinators were responsible for planning and monitoring learning, and planning and organising resources, for three age groups, the under twos, the two to threes and the three to fours. The care needs of children were the responsibility of key workers, and the children were grouped by age.

Throughout the two phases of fieldwork, nursery resources were being developed to meet the expectations of the new curriculum frameworks. In particular an emphasis was placed on extending play and learning in the outdoor areas. The research stories record the response of children to the changes made to nursery practice at that time.

The intention of the research stories is to elevate the children's knowledge and expertise.

People at High Trees

Various people will be mentioned in the research stories. All names have been anonymised. To help to identify children and adults they are:

Children: Alan Tracy, Alice, Annie, Bart, Batman, Becca, Ben, Bob, Carl, Cathy, Cherry, Chris, Elizabeth, Eve, Fiona, Harry, Hazel, Henry, Hugh, Jim, Johnny, Lauren, Lisa, Lizzie, Laurie, Natalie, Naomi, Peter, Rachel, Ria, Robin, Simon, Stan, Ted, Wain, Zak, Zoë

Staff: Deborah, Gayle, Jane, Joy, Judy, Lily, Lorna, Michael, Ruth, Val

Students: Beverly, Julie, Lorraine.

Alan's Research Story

Background and personal context

Alan was one of the core sample children over two summers, covering a thirteen month period. He was the oldest child in the sample, and one of the oldest children in nursery during the second period of research. Alan was 3 years 9 months at the start of the fieldwork and 4 years 11 months when he left nursery, towards the end of the second period of field work. He attended nursery for two and a half days, and called his half day his "short day".

An only child, he lived with his mother and grandmother. His maternal uncle lived at home during college holidays. They were all significant adults in his life and he referred to them frequently in nursery. Alan related well to adults. He appeared to enjoy his days in nursery, however, sometimes circumstances upset him and he demonstrated his distress loudly and clearly as will be described below. He was able to tolerate disappointments more easily as he got older.

He was an articulate child, whose language echoed phrases and idiom from the media, particularly film, television and computer games. Over the thirteen month period he was being observed, his reading skills developed from the recognition of words in the environment, to fluent reading of simple texts, including the researcher's field notes. He was not taught to read at nursery. As a participant in the research he was receptive and enthusiastic. Of the core children he was the most consistently aware that he was contributing information. He took part in all the research activities offered but also volunteered additional material. He was aware of providing information and responded to the research tasks with competence and clarity. From the core children his attendance coincided with Batman and Zoë. He was amongst the more researched children as he was sometimes one of only a couple of core child in nursery when the researcher visited. He chose Alan Tracy as his research name.

Focused observations of:

Alan and his mother

Observations in both periods of fieldwork noted that Alan left his mother calmly when he arrived at nursery, recording that he would find something to interest him or someone to talk to. None of the observations record his being distressed on parting from his mother.

At the end of the session, however, anticipating and waiting for her arrival, it was normal for Alan to rush to his mother, when he was picked up and hugged by her; on the few times he was observed being collected by his maternal uncle, Alan ran to him, and was greeted by a hug. He often called out a greeting, "Mummy, mummy!", or other indication of his pleasure at being reunited with her.

Alan evoked his mother when he felt unhappy at nursery. As a three year old, he frequently claimed, 'I really miss my mummy' or 'I want my mummy'. Sometimes these comments were prompted by a situation where he felt excluded (from a game) or challenged by circumstances. Alan had his fourth birthday in the September of the first phase of fieldwork, making him one of the oldest children. From this time, a change in his behaviour was observed, with less incidence of frustrated behaviour. However, he continued to refer to missing his mother, usually when he was tired at the end of the day or when he had nothing to do or could not find anything to do. He told the researcher, in the context of a discussion about crying, "I'm four (showed four fingers) but I cry when I want my mummy".

Alan referred to his home in several conversations with the researcher. He spoke of his toys and playing "Rayman Three" on "my granny's computer". He knew his full address and identified his house "when you see a skateboard in the garden that's my house. Alan's sense of 'home', with its associated values and habits, never seemed far from his reflections.

Alan and other children

During the two periods of fieldwork, Alan had only a few close friends, boys and girls with whom he played regularly; however he was friendly with several children of his own age. The researcher was not aware that he saw any of these children outside nursery, as he never mentioned plans to play at other children's houses, or to invite them to his house. Alan lived in a village on the outskirts of the city, and was the only child in nursery from that village. However, the observations record a boy who is not socially isolated, who plays with children he likes and who is also content to play alone or seek adult company.

A possible constraint to developing relationships within nursery was the pattern of his part-time attendance. This meant that his friendships were fragmented, with the result that over the week, and during the passage of a day, he would play with a range of children. Alan knew about the effects of these different attendance patterns. Working at the computer one day he referred to a friend, adding "But (he) isn't coming today." Over his time in nursery he 'lost' several

friends who left, and he poignantly recalled, "I miss Peter Davies", several months after Peter had left nursery.

From the earliest observations revealed Alan's strong feelings for his friends as illustrated above. He spoke of his "love" of particular girls on two occasions, and also demonstrated caring behaviour towards others. He was sensitive about being liked and was upset when accused by a friend, who was a girl, of shouting and making her "headache". He claimed he was "a nice boy" and protested "I'm not shouting now".

He also spoke of friendships with certain boys, and most of his social play was with boys. He had differently strong feelings about younger children, particularly 'babies'. He explained, "I hate the babies …they touch me". However, he was also observed being kind to younger children.

Alan also developed his friendships in non-verbal, companionable ways. At different times, he was observed sitting close to friends on the sofa; squeezing into a large cardboard box with other children; sneaking out of a toilet cubical with a friend and book; and gathering in the outdoor play house with a group of friends. All of these were observed to be pleasurable experiences and provided unspoken friendly behaviour.

Alan could be competitive in his play with others. The rivalry was frequently over toys. He was observed swapping toys, brought from home, with Bart, both content with the arrangement and happily reversing the swap later in the day. The next day a problem arose when Alan wanted to play with Bart's toy, but had nothing to swap in exchange, and there was a struggle for the toy. He construed the situation negatively, crying," Bart won't be my friend!" However, within minutes he was sharing a noisy game with Bart, the two boys vying with one another to make the loudest noise.

Alan and the nursery practitioners.

Alan enjoyed contact with all the nursery staff but was particularly close to certain staff, a fondness that was reciprocated. He sometimes sought to be physically close to adults, placing himself so that he was touching practitioners, putting his arm round an adult who was sitting down or leaning against an adult. This was sometimes too close, invading personal space, and, if so, was gently discouraged. Alan talked of "loving" members of staff.

Alan also related well to the students who came on placement to the nursery. Sometimes they were willing to play boisterous games outside which he enjoyed,

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and they reciprocated his interest in them, as illustrated by this excerpt from notes from a joint observation conducted with Ruth, his key worker:

The children are playing in an outside play area, on a hot day. They have hand sprays to squirt water. Alan has a spray and has been spraying plants, trees and occasionally people for over 20 minutes. Two students, Beverly and Lorraine, are with the children alongside three staff members, Deborah, Val, and Ruth, who is completing a joint observation of Alan with the researcher.
Alan is chased by students, who tickle him.

Alan: I don't like it. Tickle Jo because she likes it. This is Jo
He points out the researcher. Alan is very excited and still spraying:
Alan: Get Beverly! Get Lorraine!.
Beverly: Get Ruth and get Val!
Alan is laughing and running – still with the spray. Alan is distracted by the offer of iced buns (another birthday) he stops and relinquishes the spray.
Alan: Beverly, I want to hold your hand
Batman: She's gone that way over there by the vegetables.
Beverly now has the spray
Alan: I don't like getting soaked
Beverly: Neither do I.
She gives it back to him. Lorraine moves to take it and grapples with Alan.
Alan gets it: I was playing with it. Mine… Follow me
Researcher is sprayed by Alan again.
Beverly has reclaimed the spray – she passes it to Lorraine who sprays Alan
Alan cries: I haven't got all day
Alan appeals to researcher: Jo, Lorraine sprayed me in the eye
With no response Alan appeals to Deborah:
Alan: Deborah, Lorraine sprayed me in the eye.
Alan: Please may I have that
He lunges and grabs spray. Alan and Batman watch the students spraying and chasing. In the excitement Alan and Batman pull at Lorraine, and lose the hand spray. Alan gets sprayed again and wants the spray back. He screams. Val gets it back by giving a direct instruction to the students to return it. Batman is given the hand spray which upsets Alan, and he goes to sit by another child. The researcher notes that Alan seems tired at this point. Soon afterwards he moves to Ruth who is still writing. He stands close to her, playing with her hair and reading what she has written over her shoulder. He smiles and then faces her with clenched fists and a threatening expression, feigning offence at the words she has written about him, before moving off to play a game under the branches in the hazel tree.

This vigorous play sequence with Batman and the two older girls, demonstrates Alan's confidence with others of all ages. Though he is not always comfortable, he pursues his interest in the play, relying on the students to allow him to be a dominant partner in their game. When this view is challenged, he seeks the support of the 'real' adults, the nursery staff, one of whom eventually comes to his rescue. Batman plays a less assertive role, but doggedly stays in the game and eventually gets what he wants, which is to hold the spray. Alan at this point gives up, tired after all the excitement and exertion.

A particularly important relationship for Alan was with a young male member of staff, Michael. Reflecting ruefully that he had no brother (unlike many other children who had siblings in nursery) he took up the offer from Michael to be his "nursery brother". He continued to refer to him as "my brother" whilst he was at nursery. Like the students, Michael was playful in his relationship with children, willing to rough and tumble with them and sharing an interest in and knowledge of children's media, including the latest DVDs and computer games. As these were Alan's interests, they had much common with one another as the basis of their relationship.

There was another aspect of his relationship with Michael. Michael was someone who sneezed frequently, probably more than most people. Ruth pointed out to the researcher that Alan had noticed this and had instigated a cry in response to Michael's sneeze, which spread through nursery like a Mexican wave, taken up in turn by individual children in sequence. The sneeze and its corresponding cry punctuated the nursery day causing no great disturbance, but becoming part of a subculture, led by children.

Alan could be demanding of adult time and attention. As a younger child his typical response to being thwarted in play or other situation was to shriek loudly to indicate his dissatisfaction. He gradually learned to modify his behaviour but at group times and when playing an adult led game he was impatient to tell news, or to answer a question and to have his go. Playing a circle game, he was observed becoming frustrated waiting for his turn. The game involved everyone sitting in a large circle whilst one person walked round and tapped each head saying 'duck', before changing this to 'goose', prompting this person to stand and chase the first person round the ring in a race to sit in the place vacated by the 'goose'. The last to the place started the process off again. Alan called out, "I want to be goose. I want to be goose again….Oh why doesn't he see…pick me

goose", appealing to other children to choose him. The adults normally ignored his entreaties but on this occasion, his frustration was noted by one practitioner, who decided to choose Alan to have his turn. Having waited so long, he exploited the situation by walking round 'ducking' everyone, resisting choosing a 'goose' until he had been twice around the group. The staff tolerated his behaviour, acknowledging the wit involved in stretching the boundaries of what is acceptable. It was imitated by some children afterwards, becoming part of the nursery 'culture' for a while.

It appeared that Alan could rely on adults to be indulgent towards him because they understood and accepted his needs. Alan was a child who could challenge the orthodox view of the nursery as a children's space defined by adults. He reclaimed the space and attempted to re-construct activities, developing a sub-culture that might be perceived as subversive. Issues of control over nursery emerge here and a sense of empowerment by the adults through trustful relationships. They respected and trusted him not to exploit their care, and were confident in their relationships with him.

Alan and food

Alan attended nursery for two and a half days. As a three year old he had nursery lunch. Most days, he refused to eat nursery food, but he understood that he had to try food, typically with the tip of his tongue, before it was taken away, or before he could eat a second course, that was a more palatable to him, such as fromage frais. When he was four he began to bring a packed lunch from home. Long after this he explained to the researcher that if his mother didn't pick him up by twelve on his 'short day', he would have to "eat nursery food. I hate nursery food. I don't like it". He explained that he had "home meals when it's not my short day".

Alan's distaste for nursery food extended to morning snacks, which were often fresh or dried fruit, and which he never ate. He also refused a drink at this time. From time to time, snack time would include birthday treats, brought in by parents on the special day. This would invariably be some cake or biscuit and Alan did not refuse "birthday food", as shown in the following extract from the field notes. Alan's final comments reflect his feelings of antipathy that extended to the nursery cups:

It was Val's birthday and she brought in some cake and biscuits.
Alan: I love birthday food – we're going to have birthday food. I love birthday cake.

He and Batman and another boy are getting excited – anticipating the goodies to come – sitting waiting. They are joking. "Do you like sugar paper?", triggers laughter. They pull faces.

Alan takes no part in this conversation; he seems preoccupied by the proximity of desirable food.

Alan: I wanted a biscuit…

He is getting very upset as the plate passes by – but then it comes to him and he takes one

Alan: Jam!

and there's relief. All the boys have a jammy dodger. Alan looks at the cups waiting on the table, and he studies them.

Alan: I hate old cups!

He refused a drink.

When Alan started to bring his own packed lunch, a few months into the fieldwork, he was observed to be much happier at lunch time. He asked to take a photograph of his lunch box, and named each food item inside. It seems that his preference was for food with 'attitude', that is, food sold in special packs designed for the lunch box market, such as cheese strings or dunking sticks. This is food that is media influenced and, at the time, was promoted in television advertising. Occasionally he was disappointed, and commented on one packet of crisps, "My crisps aren't smelly". For a short time he brought packs of crisps that coloured his tongue blue, and he allowed another child to photograph this effect.

Lunch times were busy for staff, delivering packed food from home as well as serving nursery meals. Staff lunches overlapped the children's lunch time and as excited and hungry children waited around the tables without a staff member, rules of behaviour would be challenged but also evoked by children. Alan was observed to both shout out and disrupt and to chide others for their unruly behaviour, reminding children to "sit down" or to "stop talking". Mealtimes were times children could claim for themselves, particularly older children. Alan enjoyed eating with others. He seemed aware of the rules to be conformed to or to be subverted, and the associated issues of power and control over his own and others behaviour.

Alan's play and learning

Alan's play interests centred on and were inspired by the computer, computer games, DVDs and videos of popular films. The interest bridged home and nursery. In the second phase of fieldwork Alan was the most competent child in nursery when working on the computer, and his skills were recognised and valued by children and practitioners. He was able to boot up the computer and

choose and load programmes, and was called upon by others to help. His reading skills developed through recognition of familiar pop-up messages that appeared on the screen.

Aside from, but linked to, technology, Alan played games with others that related to film and television. Alan was minimalist in his choice of play props. He showed passing interest in small world play items found in nursery, preferring to play with a 'signature' item, one or two defining play articles around which he developed a play sequence. He developed elaborate play sequences using plastic figures or 'power' devices, often acquired from visits to burger bars, which derived from films or television, or he used items from nursery.

When he was three he was observed incorporating the nursery toy police cars into a game of Ghostbusters, with a friend: a year later similar games were played without props and Alan led other boys in outdoor play on the theme of Ghostbusters and Power Ranges and other film and television characters, which carried on in episodes over weeks and months, with interchangeable leaders. Alan and his friends showed great excitement in their games, imagining themselves in dangerous situations but overcoming these by working together against a common enemy or situation.

As an older child, when he had no one to play with Alan would continue to occupy himself by creating a play scenario around a handheld item, for example a toy soldier, a character from Star Wars, and even a small world coke bottle. Alan's imaginative play was rich and eclectic, drawing from a range of media sources. It did not depend on others. His play involved all areas of provision, indoor and outdoor. Alan had different play partners, determined by who was available on the days he attended. He learnt to accept the ideas and contribution of others as he got older, although he still enjoyed leading play themes, and being in control.

In early observations, Alan appeared to avoid activities that involved hand/eye coordination and spatial relationships. When he played in the block play area he stood alongside and with other children who were constructing, but not taking part himself. His involvement consisted of making use of their constructions to place his hand held figures, cars or other items, in prominent positions, from where he would play out a small drama. As a three year old he talked of "being

rubbish at" building a car from blocks. At this time he also acknowledged that a jigsaw puzzle was "difficult".

A year later he showed no more enthusiasm for large construction, but he did tackle more complex puzzles successfully. Alan could write words using the computer keyboard. He asked regularly to 'write' in the research notebook, producing pictures that were general, free formed shapes, about which he could give an elaborate explanation. He could make a good attempt to read what was in the notebook and he could name the letters of the alphabet..

There were just two occasions when the researcher observed him taking part in activities that required fine motor skills, both towards the end of the second period of fieldwork. With other older children, he placed small shapes on a board, tapping in pins to secure the shape and to create a picture. Alan found the task engrossing and, having covered the board with many shapes, made "a machine". The next week he was "inventing" and asked "everyone to go away in case…". He made a "minigame console" from a plastic construction set of interlocking pieces. Over the next fifteen minutes, working quickly, pulling off and reconstructing the pieces, he continued "his secret invention", making a garage, then a "ray gun" which became the "Evil Emperor of Zugg" invention. This was "a missile" which he demonstrated against "the baddies". He continued to adapt the model, which by now was an H shaped structure. He needed "some more shorters and it will be done". Realising everyone else had gone outside he decided to join them, taking his "transformer" with him.

Alan enjoyed outdoor play and said he "hated the rain" as he could not play out. He was amongst the first to respond whenever the call was made to play outside, readily leaving an activity to line up quickly. Alan tended to play safe and avoid physical risks, and unusually amongst the group of boys, he chose not to climb into the hazel tree, a favourite of other boys, which was used to clamber and hide in. He explained that it scratched. The researcher did not see him climb up on the play house roof, which other children tried, though he played inside it and photographed it several times (see next section). When Alan had been given the opportunity to try to skip with a rope he commented, "It bothered me because I got really tangled up".

The outdoor play resources were being developed during the second phase of fieldwork, and the children were provided with a range of gardening items,

including wheel barrows, trowels and hand forks. Alan was interested in digging and rooting around using the garden tools. He enjoyed excavating, and "making a mess", though he didn't like getting mud on himself or his clothes. This play stimulated his imagination. Playing with water and soil he made thick mud which he said was "chocolate mousse". Other children were playing round him, washing the windows and spilling water which he used to mix with the soil. He was playing with Naomi. He deposited the mud around – putting small lumps on the slide, on paving slabs and filling buckets. His key worker intervened and reminded him that other children had made "concrete", prompting Alan to ask for water to mix "concrete" and to use a wheelbarrow. Together Naomi and Alan made cement, and Naomi explained, "I'm playing building houses

Observations of Alan over the two main phases of fieldwork do not record any direct teaching of skills by practitioners. However, his key worker and other practitioners intervened to take his play and thinking forward and his learning progressed over this period. He reflected on his wide knowledge of nursery, and the wider world, particularly media based knowledge. On the day after the London bombings, in July 2005, whilst eating lunch, his friend Naomi was talking about the event and people getting killed "because my dad lives in London". Alan announced, "I've got some special news, the stations are opening again". Naomi added, "I watched it last night."

Alan's reading also developed without any direct teaching in nursery. The field notes record him spending time looking at and 'engrossed in' books. By the time he left nursery he was reading story books fluently. He knew that, "When I'm at school I'm going to be reading". He had been reading a story on the sofa but his skill was doubted by one child, who declared, "Alan, can't read!", probably reflecting children's belief that you don't read until you go to school.

Stimulating items and ideas to play and work with were important to Alan. He made deliberate choices and was quite selective in his play. He integrated items from home with nursery items, and he drew inspiration from the media to inform his play. He used a syncretic process to bring his ideas together, mixing seemingly unrelated references and synthesising them in his play and learning.

Alan used the nursery practitioners as resources as well as resource providers. They found things for him, they provided information if asked, but significantly, for

his sense of being valued, they accepted his passionate and creative learning disposition. He was free to exploit the resources of nursery, within safe limits.

Over the period of the field work Alan's confidence and competence grew. His knowledge of his world was impressive, and important to him. He liked to display his skills and was eager to learn more skills. He was aware of what he could not do and labelled himself as 'rubbish' at some tasks. He combined his imaginative abilities with his physical competencies to produce a highly creative outcome for himself, which allowed him control over his play, on his terms. In his imagination he was able to experience strong emotions within a secure environment, alone or with his friends.

Alan and observations and photographs

Alan was competent with the camera and enjoyed being able to take photographs, understanding that they were a means to "show" about nursery. He took photographs of all aspects of nursery. His photographs reflected toys and other resources, indoor and outdoor provision, people, places and children's work. Alan was aware of being a participant in the process of research into things that children know about nursery, what they like and dislike, and consistently used the phrase 'I like…' to preface information to the researcher, and to suggest a subject for a photograph. He learnt how to delete images and was able to assess his photographs and decide whether to delete. He understood the need to ask permission before taking a photograph of other children.

Alan rarely restricted himself to one shot. The results were illuminating. He was able to take photographs from a child's perspective for example, those taken from the inside of the outdoor playhouse, where he has recorded details that might have been ignored by an adult (see below).
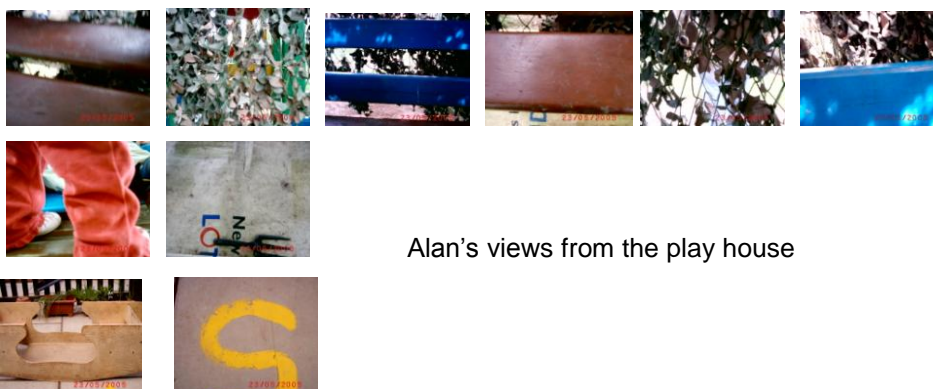
Alan's views from the play house

the see saw and the "end of the five"

His comments on this sequence of photographs were:

Alan: I got the see saw and the end of the five.

Researcher: Why are you taking these pictures? What are you choosing?

Alan: Stuff I like. I like the car and the slide (photographs not shown) and the house. The house is full of halloweeen horrors that might get in your hair – the spider and the gruffalo.

He had asked the researcher if he could take some photographs, and had decided what to photograph before using the camera. Alan used the camera to illustrate his perspective of nursery, capturing images of the resources that he valued, used and knew about. He developed his skills with technology by using the camera. He produced a personal but expert view of nursery.

Alan's tours - conversations and photographs

Alan was asked to take the researcher round nursery to show and tell about nursery. On the first tour, when he was three, Alan took the researcher round and showed her the parts of nursery used by the children, including the washroom and the places on the margins of nursery. He revealed that he liked to make a "big mess" and build a "humungus tower" which "went banged!". His tour also took in the water table, where he pointed out the aprons. Looking through the photographs he spoke of not liking to be splashed. His tour led through a space only wide enough for a child to squeeze through, between a book case and a window. Asked about places to hide he identified, "Behind the sofa. The teachers say, "No, get out! "". Leading the researcher into the washroom area, he further identified, "I like going… going in the toilet to hide with Becca. … Michael says, 'Hey get out!', because it's to wee in". (Alan had already been observed coming out of a toilet with Becca, with Alan carrying a story book). On Alan's original tour, he talked about the nursery and he took photographs of Batman in the toilet area; some dressing up clothes; and the computer. He ended his tour by telling the researcher:

Alan: Really I miss my mummy

She had just arrived, and Alan saw her.

Alan: Oh my mummy…" Alan ran off and was collected by his mum

A year later, Alan's tour was peremptory and had a surreal quality to it. Possibly he felt he had revealed much about nursery over the previous twelve months, as an active participant, but he restricted the second tour to a few photographs of relief templates that he took from a drawer, and a some other significant objects and people, as explained below. Alan described the templates as "transformers" so that an elephant was "the spaceship in Little Bill" and a tiger was "a chopper, an axe chopper".

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As noted above, on his second tour, Alan focused in on imaginary aspects of nursery, taking photographs of the templates that he transformed into other things, and the toy coke bottle, about which he said," It's very funny.. a coke squirter. It's very, very liquorish". More conventionally, reflecting his interest he chose the computer to photograph; as well as Batman with a box on his head; and Michael his "nursery brother". His final choices were of a toy brought from home; a wooden cupboard from a collection of small world furniture that he "transformed" into a "time machine"; a new trike, that was broken; and a rainbow canopy that "you can look at it." These were all items that Alan gave significance to.

the coke bottle   transformer templates – chopper and helicopter

the computer   Batman and box   my nursery brother

toy from home   a time machine   the broken new trike

rainbow canopy

From the tours, the importance of play emerges, and control of play through imagination. Friends and important adults are represented in the photographs Alan took, and he refers to his mother in his original tour. The theme of home is reflected in thoughts of his mother, as well as in his own toy that was in the second collection of photographs. The theme of places and spaces for children, which contribute to the child led sub-culture, and which appear in Alan's other photographs, also emerge from the data.

Alan's play nurseries

Alan's first play nursery

Alan was offered the chance to make a 'play nursery', using the small world play items provided by the researcher. Making his first nursery he carefully explored all the items in the bag. He had found the computer and placed it on the computer table. He explained that the people were "playing circus" on the computer. He placed the printer on top of some shelves "for the big children". With all the items he wanted on a table, he said "I want to play with it." He had placed a baby on the table and at one point he said, "The baby's got to go in the cot." He was particularly interested in the "hoover", and the telephone, saying "somebody's ringing on the phone". When he had finished playing, he was asked to talk about his nursery. Surveying the table he said, " I really love playing with these and the telephone keeps ringing…so..I love it so much. I love the hoover so much but I hate my hoover because it makes me turn the volume up so I can listen to games on my computer." He added, "I love the printer and the oven and I hate the babies…I love music but there's nothing in the box."

Alan's second play nursery.

The following year, he chose to make an 'outside' nursery, taking items from the 'outside' nursery bag, and immediately he started to play with the items, as opposed to arranging them. Alan brought his own Star Wars character to the table and integrated "Anakin" into the nursery. He took a range of items from the

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bag, but concentrated on playing with some planting beds, which he called "the garden", and vegetables to fill them. He also chose a box with various animals, cats, rabbits and guinea pigs, which initially, he placed in a row on the table, facing Anakin. His play with the cats was animated with cat like noises, fights and at one point placing a cat on a skateboard, and catapulting it into the air. Anakin also rode on the skateboard. Alan said his nursery scene was taking place at midnight, when the children were not there, and when the animals were busy playing in the nursery.

Both versions of his play nursery reflect Alan's pre-occupations at the time. As a younger child his interest was the computer, the hoover and the telephone, reflecting his interest in technology. A year later he was less involved in literal play, and created something more imaginative and surreal. His choice of making an outside nursery might have reflected an increased opportunity to play outdoors in the real nursery. He asserted his control over events by setting his alternative nursery at night, without children, an idea that was subversive and very different.

A summary of quality experiences in preschool from Alan's perspective:

- Understanding the continuity between home and nursery and making connections between these two places
- Developing his confidence in being with other children and making new friendships with his peers and the younger children as he has got older
- Leading other children in active and exciting play, based on common cultural references derived from television programmes and other media
- Having his strong feelings about nursery food recognised and being able to bring food he preferred; enjoying his food from home alongside other children, and "loving" birthday food
- Being able to trust adults to care for him and enjoying close relationships with members of staff particularly Michael and other young students; trusting that adults would be tolerant of his behaviour
- Being able to pursue his fascination in and expertise with technology through the provision and resources provided by nursery practitioners; exercising his curiosity and inventiveness alone or with a group of other children

- Having his technological skills appreciated by both practitioners and children and knowing he was the nursery expert on the computer and consultant to other children
- Learning new skills and becoming more competent as he grew older
- Being able to read and using this skill in nursery
- Feeling proud of his expertise in and knowledge of nursery - including what was there, who attended and when, and knowing the rules and routines of nursery.

Batman's Research Story

Batman was a core sample participant over two summers. Batman was 3 years 3 months at the start of the fieldwork in June 2004, and 4 years 2 months at the start of the second period of field work in May 2005.

Batman had a community place in nursery. He had been in nursery for 9 months at the start of the first fieldwork period. Robin, his younger brother, also attended nursery. In the first year Robin was in the under twos group, but in the second year both boys were in the main room. Their parents were teachers. Their mother worked part-time, and the boys attended for three days. Batman's attendance coincided with all the core children on at least one day.

Batman was popular with both adults and other children. He took part in nursery activities and showed enthusiasm for and appreciation of adult led activities, for example story time. He was self-motivated. He had a sense of curiosity and purpose in his play. He was highly inventive and playful. In the second year, he was a leader of other children, partnering Alan and others as the instigators of group play. He took pleasure in achieving, confident of his factual knowledge demonstrated at group times in the book corner or around the lunch table.

Batman was a good communicator. Though initially he was a reluctant participant in the research, and declined to be included, once he had observed other children take part he decided to join in and gave his verbal consent, becoming a competent and enthusiastic co-researcher. He demonstrated an understanding of the research process, as a provider of information, observing the practice of giving and withdrawing consent, and offering some independence from the process as a comment on the experience of being a research participant. He chose his research name and that of his brother.

Focused observations of:

Batman and his parents

Observing Batman at the start and end of his sessions in nursery, he was seen to part happily from his parents, without any apparent distress, and to be reunited with equal pleasure. Batman and his brother, Robin, were picked up together, typically running to one or other parent's open arms for a hug. Batman often held back to allow his brother to be hugged first, with no apparent resentment.
One afternoon Batman's mother arrived early to collect the boys. He was involved in play and was surprised to see her. Uncertain of the situation, he said,

"Mum's here. Mummy? Is mummy going to get *me*?", checking if he was going home with her. Reassured that he was, he abandoned what he was doing and went to her, ready to leave. This observation illustrates nursery as an institution, where routines, of parents as well as nursery, determine the order of events. Children are not prepared for the unexpected. Predictability of people and events seems important.

Towards the end of another day, Batman was making a birthday card for Carl, who was ill at home. When Robin came to tell him, "Our daddy's here", Batman replied, "I know. I'm just doing a card for Carl". He finished and tried, but failed, to find an envelope. He left on the understanding that he would find an envelope at home. For Batman there seemed to be continuity between nursery and home which he took for granted.

Batman evoked home in nursery from time to time, possibly as a means of coping with a situation he did not like. An example of this happened one lunch time when he realised the yoghurt that he had expected was not in his pack up box. His response was to say, "My daddy will be cross about that."

On two occasions the field notes report parental concern expressed about the Batman and Robin being bullied by other children. The concerns were based on comments made at home about other boys and their behaviour towards one or other of the brothers. In a conversation with their father, the researcher was told of past worries about Alan. Over time they were reassured by more positive feedback of the friendship that was developing between Alan and Batman. It is possible that Batman was reflecting his anxiety about Alan's loud behaviour, which was observed in the first weeks of the fieldwork. As Alan matured and he was able to control his outbursts, it is likely his presence was less threatening to Batman, and the friendship and mutual respect grew. Alan was never observed being aggressive towards Batman or any other children.

Batman and other children

As a three year old, Batman had some emerging friendships but his interaction with others tended to be characterised as associative, parallel play, with some emerging social play. An early observation records him sitting after lunch on the sofa, alongside two friends. They sang a series of action songs and children were invited to choose songs they knew, including Tommy Thumb. Over fifteen minutes, Batman was observed presenting a sequence of behaviours alternating

between engaging with the singing and accompanying actions and becoming distracted by a poke or touch from one of his friends, before re-engaging with the singing and copying the actions until he was distracted again by poking and licking play with the boys. Batman was noted 'looking tired and leaning against the arm of the sofa' and minutes later 'cuddling up to the others and burying himself in the sofa'. The observation illustrates the tension between wanting to interact with other children and trying to follow adult led activities, which competed for Batman's attention at a time in the middle of the day when he was tired.

Following the singing, Batman joined two friends in the block area. He continued to sing, "Here I am, here I am" (from the Tommy Thumb rhyme), and told a practitioner that he was "going to build a big motor bike." With the others he built a pile of long blocks that could be straddled like a bike, before pushing it over. A tower was built, Batman commented that it was "really high…really, really high" before it was pushed over by another child, a "cheeky monkey". Alone, he pulled more blocks off the shelves, tipping them on the floor until a practitioner intervened and redirected him to another activity. He roamed around the room and found a toy phone which he played with for a short time and then decided to drop it into the under twos room (where his brother was) over the half-door. He was caught doing this and again redirected. At the end of the observation he was sitting on the floor reading a book.

Observations of Batman a year later noted a popular boy, part of a group of five boys who played together cooperatively, in various permutations, depending on who was in nursery that day. These friendships had developed and consolidated themselves from the time (September 2004) when the children became part of the older group; some children were four years but most were still three. Girls were involved in the play scenarios that were developed, but normally it was boys' play. Within this group of boys, Batman had two particular friends, Alan and Carl. He did not see Alan out of nursery but he did see Carl and their two families knew one another. Carl also had a younger sibling, Annie, who was in the under twos room. Batman showed a particular fondness for her, and explained to the researcher that she was, "my friend. Annie's Carl's sister".
As he got older, and was aware of acquiring skills himself, Batman expressed an appreciation of other children's developing talents and expertise, and learning from them. He knew Alan could read, and an observation records the two boys together with a book. Batman told him to "Start from the second page", aware

that Alan could read the words and knew the alphabet. Another time, at the computer, he asked, "Alan, how did you switch this on?". Watching another friend, playing on the slide, he commented appreciatively, "Look at Laurie…going down on his knees...fast".

The sofa was an important place for close physical contact and for solidarity with others. At group times Batman liked to contribute when the children were asked questions or to tell their news, along with most of the older children. Occasionally, squashed together, Batman and Alan would take their contribution a step further and call out or raise their voices when singing, leading the other children on and subverting the session for a while.

Even as a four year old Batman was observed playing alone, reading on his own on the sofa, or roaming around inside or outside nursery, appearing to be content in his own company. One morning Batman was walking round the edge of the garden, poking the fence with a plastic knife. When asked what he was doing, he explained, "All I'm doing today is getting cobwebs". Robin, copying his brother, was poking a tree with another plastic knife.

Batman was comfortable in nursery and with his friends. He seemed confident in his relationships with others. He appreciated other children's skills and was aware that he could benefit from their learning.

Batman and Robin

When Robin was in the baby room Batman showed concern and affection for his younger brother, often smiling at him and cuddling him, as well as talking about him. He asked if he could take a photograph of Robin.

Robin before he joined Batman in the big room

During the second period of fieldwork, there were frequent notes made of their interactions, illustrating their mutual concern for one another. Soon after his brother joined him in the main room, Batman kissed and hugged him, confirming, "*Is* Robin a big one?". He expressed delight on the odd occasion when they sat at the same table at lunch times, once noting that their name cards were next to one another, and commenting, "Robin's *here*!"

Sometimes the brothers paired up and were once observed threatening Stan a younger child, in an act of brotherly solidarity. When they were 'caught' picking flowers "for our mummy", Batman passed the blame onto the same child saying, "Stan picked them".

Batman referred to the flowers incident in his play a few days later outside. He was playing "Red Riding Hood in the house" with Robin. Batman told Robin they had "got to hold hands because.. look at all those cars", and they stopped at "the green man", on the edge of the grass. Batman instructed Robin, "I'll let you pick some flowers here but not anything nursery" and they picked some imaginary flowers.

The field notes record the boys at other times, tussling with one another, playfully poking and pushing, never coming to any harm, and appearing to enjoy another aspect of close physical contact. Having Robin in nursery was comforting and fun. He felt responsible for Robin, defending him against danger and explaining the rules of nursery.

Batman and the nursery practitioners.
From observations, Batman's confidence in nursery suggests trusting relationships with adults. This was evidenced in his assumption that the nursery practitioners were there to help him and meet his needs. He asked questions knowing they would be answered; he requested activities or resources on the understanding they would be provided. During the observations he was rarely told off; when he was he showed no apparent resentment. He enjoyed the attention and approval of adults, and was pleased to demonstrate his knowledge of the days of the week, the seasons and counting, or answering questions about a story. He was close to his key worker, Ruth, but showed an interest in learning from all the practitioners. He also liked Michael, the male member of staff, particularly the rough and tumble play the boys played with him. Batman was always polite to adults, and showed interest and enthusiasm for adult led activities and games.

Batman was part of a group who were taken to sample activities organised by childcare students at the college. A large classroom had been divided into separate areas, each one offering a different learning experience for the children. Students were on hand to explain and support the children, none of whom they

had met before. The researcher and Ruth their key worker accompanied the children. Batman chose to dress up as his first activity, trying on a range of exotic garments and proudly admiring himself in the mirror. Having been very engaged in his play he suddenly looked around, asking, "Where's Ruth gone?". He could not see her and anxiously he left the dressing up area to search for her with one of the students. They were told she had taken two children back to nursery. He joined a group in the retelling of the three little pigs, using a story sack. When asked he agreed that he was having fun. Though Ruth had already returned it was only during the next task, which was painting, that he noticed her, calling out, "There's Ruth". For the remainder of the time Batman stayed with Ruth, finishing his painting and playing with Carl in the construction area.

Occasionally, usually at lunchtime, he could be deliberately mischievous, ignoring the rules about how to behave. Whilst Ruth was away from the table, he was observed joining other children by bubbling air into his water, licking his plate and opening his mouth to reveal the food he was chewing. He was aware of his defiant behaviour and told the researcher to write down, "Batman was being disgusting!", laughing as he spoke. When Ruth came back to the table he reverted to the quiet and calm behaviour that was expected. He was never seen to openly challenge staff and some days would uphold the rules, reminding other children how to behave. This extended to telling Alan, who had a cold, "You have to wipe your nose".

Batman was able to rely on practitioners to care for him and support his learning and social development.

Batman and food

Batman had a packed lunch of sandwiches and vegetables everyday and was clearly content with this. He ate his way through a pile of sandwiches, tomatoes, chunks of cucumber, and often a yoghurt. He watched other children, comparing packed lunch contents, commenting when they matched, and observing reactions to nursery food. His brother ate nursery food happily, but his friend Carl rarely finished his lunch. Batman quietly enjoyed his meal, usually eating everything. The food brought 'home' into the nursery along with the care of parents who had prepared it thoughtfully. It made a pleasurable experience that could be shared with others.

Batman liked the chat at meal times, when children made up chanting and rhyming games. The atmosphere was more relaxed and children seemed to feel that they could take control over what was said and done. One lunch time, Alan asked, "Where's - my - dinner?", chanting the words. This was picked up by others as a "Where's my…." chant. Batman joined in asking, "Where's my cucumber?" From food, the chanting game moved on to brothers, with Batman asking, "Where's my Robin?". The game died down when Ruth came back to the table, but moved on to a discussion of nephews and cousins. From there Alan turned the conversation again, to a rhyme related to the contents of his packed lunch, "Jaffa cakes, jaffa cakes bakers man". Batman picked up the rhyme, " bake me a cake as fast as you can...He's got a mouthful. He's got two in his mouth…Alan spit them out. Alan spit them out." He appealed to another adult, "Gayle, Alan's got two Jaffa cakes in his mouth", repeating this when there was no immediate response. As Alan replied, "Not anymore", the children were told there was too much shouting. The rhyme was continued by Zoë, who sang, "Pat it and prick it and mark it with B and put it in the oven for baby and me. I've ate up all my tea". These child led sequences are recounted elsewhere in the research stories, and were relished by the children developing their sub-culture.

Batman's play and learning

In the first period of fieldwork, when Batman was three years old, the observation notes comment on his solitary play on certain days. He demonstrated a general curiosity and exploratory interest in play, both on his own and with others. The observations record a little boy wondering round nursery, seemingly aimless initially, then noting him focussing down on particular objects and developing a play sequence, where the process of creating or interacting led to a clear outcome. This was illustrated in several ways.

An 'anything you want it to be ' area had been introduced to the nursery in September 2004, offering a diverse collection of natural materials, boxes, tubes and drapes and including some feathers. Whilst observing some other children, the researcher was approached by Batman, who told her "I need you to come over, I've got something to show you". He led her to the block area where he had created a display of carefully placed feathers, which he showed with pride and excitement and which he was prompted to photograph. He played with the feathers the following week, poking them into a plant pot, with the comment, "It will die if you don't give it a drink". Immediately afterwards he played a tickling game with the feathers, with Alan.
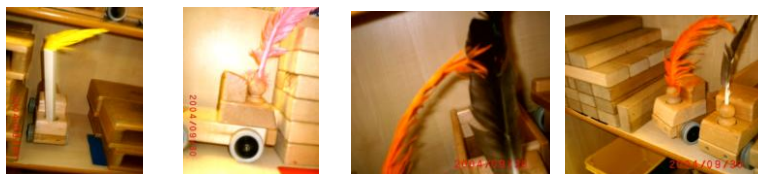
Batman's feather installation

The same day Batman was playing with dough, enjoying manipulating to make a "cake" on a blue plate. He took this round nursery proudly showing it to children, explaining there was "chocolate" in the cake. When Lorna returned from her lunch he exclaimed, "Lorna's here – I want to show her!" He rearranged the cake slightly, and responded to the suggestion to take a photograph. A week later, Batman made another cake, telling the researcher, "I like making it for people. I like…that's a cake, that's a candle".

Cake 1   Cake 2

The theme of food continued when he was playing with conkers with Alan. The play involved pouring conkers, collecting conkers, and using a spoon to eat the conkers, which had become "toffee" and "chocolate". There was some pushing and grabbing as the boys vied with each other for conkers, but it was generally amiable and playful, with Batman exhorting a slightly unwilling Alan to "eat all that and then you can have some more. I'll show you…I'll have to get a spoon". Alan agreed to "eat it", putting his hand to take a "chocolate". Batman returned with a spoon, ordering Alan to "Open wide. It's really delicious". Then he brought the game to a close by saying, "If you don't want it, I pour it", as he tipped the conkers out onto the floor.

Group adult led circle games were popular with all the children and Batman was an enthusiastic player. He was patient at waiting for his turn, though it was possible to observe his anxiety as he became aware that he was amongst the last few children to be chosen. As other more vocal children called out for a turn, Batman spoke his thoughts out loud, "Oh no. Bob had three turns. Alan's had three, four …five turns. I bet it's too late for that now". His relief when he had his turn was tangible. It seems important to be able to rely on adults to care fairly as well as playfully.

The nature of Batman's play changed when he became one the oldest children in the nursery, inheriting a leadership role from the boys who had moved on to school. Though most of the children were still three (only Alan at this time was four) they slipped into the positions of power and influence, aware of their greater experience and increasing confidence and verbal fluency. This could be exercised at group times, in the book corner, where Batman answered questions, and lunch times when the older children talked about food and home and friendships, with growing self –assurance.

Batman continued to develop elaborate games and play sequences with others as he got older. This involved play with Alan and his friend Carl, together with a group of children who had known each other over time. Child initiated thematic games were created that lasted several months. A pervasive theme of 'helping' was associated with a series of games involving being firemen, workmen, treasure hunters, princes, policemen and baddies and power rangers. These games relied on minimal but significant props, for example, dressing up clothes, tools such as drills, hammers and saws, and sticks and rulers. Places to climb were also incorporated in the play, with a play house and the hazel tree, with many branches and lots of leaves, being important play sites. Batman exploited all these resources to contribute to a rich and imaginative play culture. He took his turn to lead others in play. He was confident and able to rationalise and explain. He was articulate and talked things through.

Batman allowed Robin to join in with the older children, and was protective of him in the games. When Robin was hit by another boy, Batman was quick to rally everyone to "Get Jack!", leading the chase around nursery.

In the first phase of fieldwork, none of the observations of Batman included adult led, formal teaching situations, however his skills could be seen to develop over time. He recognized letters and names and was able to count competently, though he was also aware of his limitations, telling the researcher as he was sorting through a collection of stones and conkers, "I can't count all those!".

In the second phase of fieldwork he was observed in three adult led situations both in and out of nursery. During a music session, led by a visiting music specialist to nursery, Batman was engaged, following all the instructions and joining in. Visiting a local museum he responded to activities in the same way, answering factual questions, following directions and seeking reassurance from

Michael as he completed a craft activity, making a butterfly. He asked Michael, "Do you like mine?" and nodded when asked if he liked it himself, adding, "We need pictures". As previously reported, Batman also responded eagerly to the activities provided by the student group.

A joint observation of Batman, by the researcher and Ruth, his key worker, shows how he used his relationships with adults to shape his understanding, through seeking confirmation of his own ideas. Despite being willing to consent to the observation initially he appeared self-consciousness and hesitant. He was playing alone, exploring and visually checking with the observers, as he decided what to do next. He talked through his actions, describing what he was doing as the field notes illustrate:

Batman says, 'Throw ball down hill' and goes to do this. He has a little jump and throws the 'ball' up in the air – repeatedly (over and over)
Still very self conscious and runs to and fro at the top of the garden - Runs round and round the tables – looking at me and Ruth as he moves.

Later, he became more relaxed and was engaged to two interests, which were linked. A rabbit had been seen under a shed, and a hole in the ground, which he thought might be a rabbit hole, was being filled with water. The following extract from the field notes captures Batman's voice, and inquisitive and reflective approach to learning, making use of adults and involving other children in his play. Though he continued to talk to the observers he was clearly involved in his play and no longer self-conscious in his actions:

Lorna offers sun cream and he's happy to be covered.
Lorna says: That'll stop burning, won't it?
She offers to cover his face.
Batman points to his cap and says: This'll protect it
He goes inside to fill up the bottle, to the brim.
Outside again he pours the water into a hole, and then sees the rabbit
Batman: Rabbit again. The rabbit again! The rabbit is under the shed!
Ruth: Give him the carrot
Batman: And the rabbit will be surprised. Tell me when you see it. That one's under there. He goes to the back of the shed and crouches down to look for the rabbit.
Batman: I think he can get away that way. (He crouches and peers under shed) I can see the rabbit.
Batman: 'Down the rabbit..
He has abandoned the bottle.

Batman: Can we go under there and get it? How can we see when he pops all himself out? Can I stroke him? I can see him, can you?

He watches the rabbit under the shed

Batman: I know, shall we all go inside and the rabbit will come in and eat the carrot? Shall we go in now? Shall we go in?

He picks up a toy drill bit and places in mouth, thinking

Batman: Ruth do you know what? That rabbit…. (unclear)

Batman: Jo, Jo's got to get back so the rabbit can't see us.

Batman: He can smell the carrot can't he? Do you think he's going to eat it? Can we get it to come out?

Batman to Ruth: Do rabbits make a noise when they hop?

Ruth demonstrates rabbit hopping and Batman copies and hops like a rabbit. He goes to look at the hole, now filled with water. He fetches the rake and stirs the water - ? measuring the depth?

He goes inside for bucket and fills it at the big sink. Robin joins him and both stand on a stool. Batman lifts the bucket out and takes it outside – it has a small amount of water at the bottom which he pours into hole.

He returns to check on the rabbit under the shed.

Batman: Come and see this. He's eating it.

He goes to tell Deborah who has come out to look.

Batman: We've got water in the rabbit hole for it to drink. We're looking after it.

He tells Robin; He's eating the carrot.

He tells Judy: We've given it the water in the hole.'

Robin and Batman watch the rabbit.

Batman: We're looking after it.

They check again

Batman: Where has the carrot gone?' (The rabbit has pulled the carrot further under the shed)

Batman is stirring up the water in the hole.

Batman: If we all go inside he'll probably come out and eat it.

Batman goes to Deborah to talk about this, then goes off to run behind the 'fort'. He goes to tell the children there's a rabbit under the shed,

Batman: The one what has the bikes in, that one.

He leads them to the rabbit.

Batman: It's stopped eating it now.

He peers under, the rabbit has gone – can't be seen.

Alan says: I think I know where he is. Round this...

Batman talks about sharing his lunch cucumber with the rabbit then rethinks.

Batman: I really like cucumber. I think I'll eat the cucumber.

Play ends as it's lunch time.

Batman's play has a simplicity that belies the learning and understanding that is taking place. He seems to gain a sense of achievement from his play.

Batman's use of the camera

Prompted by the researcher, Batman learnt that he could use the camera to record aspects of nursery that were important to him. Some of these have been presented above. Throughout the fieldwork he asked to use the camera to take photographs of play items that he was interested in at the time, new and novel provision - a wormery and a map of the world, as well as familiar books. He also photographed his friends, Robin and nursery staff, and requested to be photographed himself. These photographs supplement the visual record he made in the more formal tour of nursery, and present a spontaneous response to nursery.

Batman's tours – conversations and photographs

Batman's first tour of nursery was short. Leading the researcher round he photographed the block area, and in the book corner his favourite book, *Not Now Bernard!* . He photographed a large cardboard box, which reflected his interest in playing with boxes. He seemed to find the process challenging at this stage, possibly as he did not fully understand what was expected of him.

A year later he was both more experienced in taking photographs for a purpose, and of explaining aspects of nursery to the researcher. He started by making a list of things he wanted to show and tell about nursery. He chose the rainbow canopy, "that café", "that swing", "the room where we are in", "the numbers". The list was numbered 1-5, and he was watching the researcher dictate his words. He told her, "That's all I want to do. I want to do five things." Asked if he wanted to take any people, he replied, "No because I don't think their mummy said they could", showing his knowledge of the consent process. He also declined to photograph any adults. He started taking photographs working his way down the list. With the camera in his hands he changed his mind and wanted to take more photographs, at least twenty more than planned. He was taking them so quickly some were not clear and were deleted on the spot. He expressed his frustration, "Oh dear, I'm cross." His second nursery tour reflected his interests and his friendships. His final photograph was of another large box, after which he handed back the camera and disappeared into it!

Looking through an album of his photographs to stimulate his recall, on two later dates, Batman was asked to explain why he had taken the photographs. His replies are recorded below. Not all the photographs are included, and Batman did not want to talk about each one. It seems that Batman used the tour to reveal his knowledge of nursery and the world, as well as people he liked and favourite play items.

 *Batman said he had taken this picture of the rainbow "*because it looked pretty because it's got all those colours on. It goes in the sky…and you know what ...when it's raining and sunny you know what happens?"

 "It's because it looks nice"*. The researcher asked if he knew his numbers, and he counted to 20*

 "It's because I like it" *The toys on the shelves are cars and larger vehicles.*

 " I took a picture of myself"

 "I have took a picture of Ria because she looks pretty". *Batman also took a photograph of his friends Alan, Lizzie and Elizabeth. He also photographed Ruth and the lady who cooked the lunches.*

 "I took a picture of the worlds. I love it cos it has nice pictures on"

 "The space rockets because I like them and want to blast up on the moon last night and I see one today, but not a real one"

 Batman chose not to comment about this photograph, which was one of five photographs he had taken of some new small world toys

 Batman jumped into the box at the end of his tour. He made no comment about this photograph when recalling his tour .

Batman's play nurseries

Batman's first play nursery

Batman's first play nursery had been recorded on audio tape. The transcription records him searching through the play items, putting his head "in this big bag", selecting one item at a time, naming it and deciding where to place it. When he

was unsure he sought clarification, asking, "What's that?" before placing an item on the table.

With everything in place, he developed a play scenario around a baby in the cot. He had stacked a fridge on a table and was warned that it might fall and hurt the baby. Batman acted upon the idea that the baby was in danger and let the fridge fall on the cot. The baby was then subject to further hazards. Batman found a toilet in the bag and chose to place it "here near the baby…oh now the baby's going to get flushed down" pushing the baby into the toilet. Batman "pulled him out" and decided to "put a bandage on" since the baby had "hurt himself. He's bleeding". Placing the baby back in his "pram", Batman found a watering can and "poured water all on the baby…I poured it everywhere on my nursery!"

Batman's playfulness was evident as he took part in this activity. He had an understanding that it was his nursery, and queried a suggestion that the cooker would be used by Joy, the nursery cook. "Joy? In here? In here?" rejecting the idea.

Batman's second play nurseries

Batman's second play nursery was recorded on videotape. His approach was still exploratory, with Batman choosing items from "this smelly old bag" and making sense of what he had found to create a garden with flowers and "more things to put in the garden…carrots and... plants". He made an outdoor and then an indoor nursery. Outdoors children played on the play equipment with swings, a sand pit and football. Finding a tent in the bag, Batman decided "they're camping. Some naughty cat's have jumped on the table….they're nice cats." He discovered more things in the "smelly old bag" including "oh wow! A wheel barrow...it's like mine at home". He admired his work, stating, "It's a nice nursery, isn't it?".

Robin watched him as he worked, and at one point Batman suggested, "I think it's Robin's turn next; he's good at it and he's youngest." Making the indoor part of the nursery Batman explained what was in the bag, creating a scenario with small dolls. There was a "mummy" who "looks after the children". There was also a "daddy" who did the "hoovering". Robin suggested, "The mummy's asleep so the daddy's hovering." Batman corrected him, "No, no…the mummy's feeding the baby." At this point Batman's nursery had changed. He was asked if it was nursery or a house and he replied, "This is my home". He had made a "lounge" with a sofa, a television and video. Batman found most items a place in his home/nursery, and announced he had "finished!" when the bag was empty.

Batman was aware that he was creating a nursery. His approach was typically playful and imaginative. He made links to home by involving Robin and acknowledged that the nursery had become a "home".

A summary of quality experiences in preschool from Batman's perspective

- Understanding the continuity between home and nursery and making connections between these two places
- Gaining confidence and security from his parents
- The presence of Robin offers a sense of security, solidarity and responsibility
- Having friendships over time with Alan and Carl, and other children, and learning with and from them
- Developing aspects of friendship including solidarity with other children on the sofa and sharing humour at lunch time – acts which can been seen to taking risks by subverting the rules and being 'cheeky'
- Gaining pleasure and confidence from the food brought from home and eating with friends
- Having trustful relationships with adults that have developed over time
- Having familiar resources eg the dressing up capes or plastic numbers, and novel experiences eg cardboard boxes, that have been respectfully planned and provided by adults believing they would stimulate and be enjoyed by children
- Being alone - to explore, sit with a book and to act autonomously
- Knowing things and sharing his knowledge and having it acknowledged and appreciated
- Finding his own actions lead to satisfaction and enjoyment

- Being aware that he is acquiring skills and being creative
- Being playful with other children and by himself
- Having time and space to do these things
- Having the resilience to persevere to overcome problems – by relying on trusted adults eg invoking his father or asking practitioners to help him

Carl's research story

Carl was aged 3 years 3 months and 4 years 2 months respectively, at the start of the two phases of research. He had a younger sister, Annie, who also attended nursery. He lived with his family in a village on the outskirts of the city. His mother was employed at the college and he came to nursery for two days a week, on Tuesday and Wednesday, throughout the year. He attended a local playgroup as well as attending nursery, which he called 'the creche'. In the final weeks of fieldwork he had started school part-time each morning, returning to nursery for two afternoon sessions. Carl had attended nursery for three and a half years by the time he left.

Carl was shown the Finding Things Out book and gave his informed consent to join in the research. In the first period of fieldwork, he developed a growing understanding of the different research activities, demonstrated by his interest in taking photographs. The field notes record frequent approaches to the researcher to check if she had brought the camera and to ask to take more photographs of specific items in nursery.

During the second phase of fieldwork Carl was not so interested in using the camera. He was a consensual but not such an innovatory participant. In both phases he consented to complete a tour of the nursery, when he took a series of photographs; to be observed by the researcher and for her to write down reports of his play; he also gave verbal consent to allow other children to photograph him in his play. He did not make a play nursery in the first phase but consented to take part in the second phase. Carl did not choose a research name.

Carl had a few good friends, particularly Batman and Ben. In both phases he was observed leading play. As a younger boy he sought to control his involvement in play tasks. A year later he was observed leading others in complex play scenarios, often superhero play or themed around helping or working.

Focused observations of:

Carl and his parents

At the time of the second phase of fieldwork, Carl had attended nursery part-time for almost three years. Normally, he was happy to part from his mother when he arrived in the morning, accompanied by his younger sister. However one morning he came into nursery in tears, slightly later than normal as he had been to the doctors. His mother left him with Jane, the nursery manager. Annie had been

dropped off earlier and she approached Carl, with Batman and Robin, holding dinosaurs, it seemed that each of them was aware of his distress and his need to be comforted. Though he was with Jane, Ruth, his key worker, moved close to Carl and told him, "They've brought things to help you feel better", referring to the children's 'gifts'. Although his mother had left him Carl was with people who cared for him in nursery.

Carl knew that his mother worked in the same building as the nursery. As part of his second tour of nursery, he took a photograph of the windows in the floor above the nursery, where she worked. 0ccasionally Carl saw his mother around the campus. One lunchtime he noticed her walking past nursery and commented that she was going to "Tesco" and that she was "walking because of her back". Seeing her did not upset Carl, but he wanted to give meaning to her intentions demonstrating his knowledge of her life and health.

At the end of the day, only a few children remained in nursery, waiting for their parents. Late one afternoon, Carl was lying on the floor, tired. Rubbing his ear, he declared, "I want my mummy and I want my daddy". He lay watching the other children, including Annie and an older girl, Sally, who were running around playing a ball game. After almost twenty minutes he decided to join them, saying, " You have to share it..oh she won't share it…I want a go". He was given the ball and threw it shouting, "Watch this go!". The door bell rang and Sally asked Carl, "Is that your mummy?". It wasn't and they played on. Carl then noticed that his mother had arrived, calling, "Mummy, mummy" he ran to the door, telling her, "I didn't have orange today", and asking, twice, "Mummy, mummy I want my drink". While his mother gathered up her children's belongings, Carl played with things on the manager's desk. His mother asked him a couple of questions about his day and he replied, "Let's go home". Parents' presence can be seen to be empowering, altering children's relative status in nursery. Carl felt he could make demands on his mother, for the drink, when she arrived, but he ignored her question and seemed to have had enough and just wanted to go.

When waiting to be collected from nursery, children would announce the arrival of another child's parents, as they appeared at the door. However, in a deviation from this practice, Carl was observed telling Ben that " your mummy and daddy are here at that door", adding, "Your daddy's here and he's gone into the bathroom…no he hasn't", playfully teasing him. This did not upset Ben and a game developed amongst the children based on the theme 'your daddy's here'.

Making a joke of a potentially stressful situation may have made it more bearable for the children, by acknowledging the tension inherent in waiting to see whose parent would arrive next.

Carl and other children

The nursery offered Carl many opportunities to play with other children. Over the two years of fieldwork, he was observed playing with older children and younger children, as well as friends of his own age. The two episodes described below illustrate Carl's involvement in play as a younger child, early in the first phase of fieldwork, and a year later in the second phase of fieldwork, when he was four.

In the first observation, playing with the train set, Carl demonstrates an understanding and knowledge of the "trains". He has trust in the adult, a student, to help him. He has a sense of 'ownership' over the train track, which he asserts and defends, having previously deferred to an older child's control. He creates several dramatic scenarios based on crashing and "danger". Breaking off for the snack, where he asserted his independence once again, he sustained an interest in the play for an hour.

Carl was playing on the floor with an extensive arrangement of Brio train track and a collection of engines, that the children called trains, with Julie a student and Jim an older child.

9.50

Carl: My train is in engine shed…Julie is it broken?

Julie: Yes.

Carl: My train has broken down after…

Julie: My train is very wobbly…my train is going backwards.

Jim had most of the trains but he left. Carl took an engine and passed it to Julie.

Carl   Diesel.

He left for the snack table, pointing his finger, and told Julie

Carl   Don't let someone touch my train.

Carl sat for his snack, taking pieces of apple which he counted. He refused a drink at this point. After eating the apple he chose a drink.

Carl   Milk. I want to put it in all by myself.

He poured and drank the milk

Carl: I was a bit thirsty.

He left to play with the cars, which were on a table next to the snack table. After five minutes he returned to the trains where Henry was now playing with some other boys.

Carl: You're not a steam engine. Nah nah de Nah nah.

He placed a block on the track as another boy pulled his train off the track.

Carl: Stop you! You're crashing mine!

Carl negotiated his engine on to another branch of the track where a boy was sitting on the track and collecting the trains.

Carl challenged him: My train is going to crash yours. Mine is going round this one.

He pulled at the other boy's t-shirt – who responded with an, "Ow!"

Johnny, a friend of Carl's, came up and pointed at the boy.

Johnny: You been in trouble now.

Carl agreed: Yes trouble.

The boy got up and left.

Carl took the piece of track he wanted and tried to adjust the track. Hugh, a younger boy, came over and picked up Carl's train. There was a tussle that established Carl's ownership. Deborah approached and warned the boys about not hitting.

Carl protested: Mine is on this track. Mine is on this track.

By this time there were five boys playing and it was quite a squash.

Carl: My need help. The train has crashed into the grass.

He placed his engine back on the track and returned in the other direction.

Carl pushed the train around. He looked at the researcher and pointing to the end of the track said, "Danger", before pushing the train off the track and then back on again, he had four engines on his train.

Carl placed a small block on the track and pointing to the broken track.

Carl: Stay (sic).. goes not on that track.

The second observation, a year later, illustrates Carl's play had become more confident and complex. He is seen leading the play. He incorporates the hand shower and the rainbow canopy creatively and imaginatively in his play; and he accommodates the nursery routines, as well as the need to visit the toilet, in the drama. Though he finds a door open to the outside play area, he acknowledges the rule that children wait to be 'allowed out' by adults. He also recognised his oversight of not taking his name to the snack table, as was expected. He is accepting of these conventions as he has been socialised into the institution of nursery.

Batman, Carl and Ben had been dressed up in tabards and hats all morning, two were firemen and one was a policeman. Batman checked his appearance in the mirror. They were playing inside, between the book area and the block area.

Carl: Someone's stuck on the roof. Batman, we need the ladder from the fire engine.

He moved away to a rainbow canopy, calling "Nee-naw, nee-na", where he climbed up onto a shelf unit.

Carl: Lots of people stuck on the roof!

He leant over the canopy and 'tackled' the fire - for a hose he used a hand shower from the hair salon play. He wobbled and realised that he was not very safe.

Carl: Got to get down now.

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He climbed down. Batman and Carl moved away making fire engine noises. They 'saw' a fire outside and wanted to put it out.

Carl: We got to get the hose (more fire engine noises).

Batman: We have to get outside and water the…

They tried the door to go outside. They opened it but shut it again when they were seen by Val.

Carl: I can't believe it – there's another…

The boys continued to run around.

Carl: Batman, you've dropped your hat. He picked it up and took it to Batman. Then the boys went to the toilet, leaving the hats outside and when Carl emerged he retrieved both hats.

It was now snack time and Carl went to sit at the table. He had forgotten to collect his name from a board before sitting down, as was required. Saying, "Oh, silly me" he got up to find it. He had his snack and returned to play.

This time he found inspiration in a wall map of the world.

Carl: Let's find the jungle scene – fire in the house.

Looking at the map he pointed

Carl: There's fire in the train track! We've got to get to our jobs. Ben, we've got two jobs to do, there's fire in the…

The boys ran round before being reminded to walk. They returned to the wall map and found more fire.

Batman: There's fire near the snow!

The boys were able to find inspiration in the resources provided; their roles were defined by their tabards and hats, but they made use of what was around them to enhance their play, and interpreted a wall map of the world imaginatively. Their play was co-operative and shared a purpose.

Continuing the fire play theme, a few weeks later Lauren initiated the play asking Carl if he wanted to "make a fire engine" in the block play area. The play soon moved outside, with Carl, Ben, Lauren and Chris, a younger boy, all playing firemen. The field notes record children 'rushing around' wearing tabards and helmets, and using long poles as hoses; at one point, standing in a line, they stopped to put out a fire together. A car was used as a fire engine, with Lauren riding on the back, holding onto the roof, and Chris driving. Lauren got off and Chris asked Carl to, "Push me! Push me!"; Carl checked with him, "Do you want to go fast?" and the boys rushed down a slope. At the bottom Chris called out, "I crashed, I did crash". Carl replied, "I'm driving him to hospital. He's stuck he couldn't get out." The fire fighter theme reoccurred in his play with his friends for the remainder of the summer. The importance of resources is demonstrates

again, as literal play items, helmets and tabards,, are combined in the children's imaginations with found items, the poles and the car, and use is made of the spaces to expand the scope of their play.

Carl and Annie

Annie was in the baby room during the first phase of fieldwork, but she had joined Carl in the main room during the second year. As a baby, Annie came into the main nursery room for lunch and remained there over the staff lunch period. Carl was observed giving her his attention when he saw her, and was gentle and caring towards her. In the second phase Carl included photographs of Annie in his tour of nursery and drew her into making his play nursery, as will be seen later.

The following short exchange from the field notes illustrates a sense of protection felt by Carl towards Annie. Ben went up to tell Carl, "Annie's in the bathroom". Carl replied, "No don't tell her off", to which Ben responded, "I'm not… just telling you", as Annie came out of the bathroom area. From this vignette a complex set of meanings can be inferred. Sequentially, Ben passed on information about a younger sibling to his friend, which led to Carl's suspicion that Ben might be being critical of his sister. Ben responded with mild indignation and defence that his meaning had been misconstrued. Annie remained ignorant of each of these nuanced meanings, which reflected some of the value bases of nursery from children's perspectives. These are the importance of siblings; the possible infringement of the rule that applied to unnecessary visits to the bathroom; the reluctance to be told off; and, from Ben's point of view, the solidarity expressed between children and their friends that was extended to siblings.

Carl's apparent sense of responsibility and love for Annie was demonstrated at a group time, when Michael was greeting the children individually. As they were named they called out that they were "fine thank you" or "super fine". When Annie's turn came, Carl spoke for her, saying, "Annie…Fine thank you", tenderly touching her ear. For those children with sibling in nursery it was a positive experience. Annie and Carl seemed to take comfort from one another's presence.

Carl and the nursery practitioners.
Ruth was Carl's key worker from September 2004, midway through the first phase of fieldwork. He had a good relationship with her and with all the staff.

From his interactions with staff it appeared that he was able to trust staff to provide for his differing care and learning needs whilst at nursery.

Like many of the boys, Carl related well to Michael. One of the first photographs he asked to take was one of duplo model Michael had made with the children,

 Carl requested, "I want to have a picture from this. Michael made it"

Carl sometimes challenged Michael's authority, for example, he protested when Michael had not included him in a group to sing Five Fat Frogs, "I want to be a frog…I want to!". He was not observed to openly challenge other members of staff who were women, all of them older than Michael.

Carl had asthma and used an inhaler from time to time, and he was aware of his need to use it. Even as a three year old, he was observed walking towards Ruth as she about to offer him the inhaler, without any verbal prompt. A year later his mother reported that Ruth had told her how Carl had decided that he did not need his inhaler. Both of these adults accepted his ability to choose for himself how much he would make use of the inhaler, taking responsibility for his own well-being.

There is one observation of Carl finding that adult behaviour could be unpredictable. The children had been gathered together to wish Jane, the nursery manager, happy birthday. Carl was asked to go and tell Jane that the children wanted to sing to her. He and Jane came to join the others and she was presented with a card. Jane read out the messages and was asked how old she was, a routine question asked on children's birthdays. She whispered her age to Carl, and he repeated it out loud. When the adults laughed, Carl looked down and was subdued by their reaction. The pleasure of having some responsibility, and being privy to an important piece of information, appeared to evaporate, as it seemed he interpreted the laughter to be at him, rather than with him.

Four months later, Carl was able to anticipate adult reactions more accurately. He was playing with Chris; both were wearing tabards and hard hats. They were using various tools, the most popular being the hammers, as their play was about building, and Chris was playing Bob the Builder. Carl had been climbing the previous day on the play house, where once again the play was taking place. Chris asked the researcher for help to climb onto the roof. She told him he was

too young. Carl claimed, "I'm very good at climbing. I can climb down". Taking a hammer from Chris he announced, "I need to climb up to the top and hammer those nails in". The researcher was aware that some staff were uncomfortable about children climbing onto the roof. She asked Carl, "Did Deborah say no climbing?" Carl looked over to Deborah who was standing a distance away, "I don't know…we won't tell her." He paused and added, "I'll just go up and hammer five hammers then I come down." He started to climb but Deborah had seen him and she came over to ask him to come down, which he did immediately.

Reflections on this episode suggest that Carl is sophisticated in his thinking. He was aware of the rules, and the risks involved in climbing, and that these made some staff anxious. He was also confident in his own ability to climb, as he had done it before, and he recognised that getting down might be more of a problem than getting up. He had considered the whole situation and sought a compromise solution by limiting himself to "five hammers", acknowledging Deborah's views and her authority over him. He then accepted her authority without challenge when directly confronted.

Carl and food

Carl's response to nursery food was mixed. Carl enjoyed the nursery snacks of fruit and milk; however, lunches were not so popular with him. There were some meals he liked and ate eagerly, but often the observations of mealtimes reflected an unhappy boy, who felt disgusted by the food and who gagged on small pieces of food he had been asked to try. In common with other children he enjoyed the social aspect of lunch times, talking freely with other children and reflecting on aspects of their own lives or commenting on some feature of nursery.

This observation was made at lunchtime when Carl was three.

He was sitting at the table with his friends. Lily had brought pasta for Carl and two other children. She warned that it was very hot and advised them to eat the accompanying garlic bread and peas first. Carl placed his finger on the hot pasta and pulled it away.
Carl: "I don't like pasta".
He ate his garlic bread slowly and touched the peas. Other children were eating their own lunches, nursery and home food. Carl played aeroplanes with his hands in the air.

After 15 minutes he was still lingering over the bread and had pushed his plate away. He was persuaded to try the food. He tried the peas and gagged. He tried the pasta and gagged again. He started to cry and his plate was taken away. He speculated on what the pudding would be.

Discussing favourite food, Carl told the researcher that, "I like Yorkshire pudding, chippies, sausages (and) yoghurt". The pudding was yoghurt that day and as Carl ate it he said, "I think it's raspberry".

The following observation was made ten months later:

Carl:	I'm enjoying my bread…I like that. I don't like my lettuce. Deborah I don't like lettuce.
Deborah:	What do you need to be strong?
Carl:	Food.
Deborah:	Do you like this dinner?
Carl:	I do like this chicken.

However, he ate slowly and when the plates were collected up he protested:

Carl: I've not finished yet. I've not finished Deborah.

Making conversation Carl talked about what he liked to eat at home.

Carl: I eat lots of sausages and I eat chicken with the skin. Deborah, my mummy

                         got a big piece of garlic bread.

With his thoughts now on home he described how to get to his house.

Carl: I've got a very, very big fence…follow the lines in the road.

Sometime later, struggling to finish the first course, and not wanting the pudding that the other children had finished eating, Carl offered his portion to a friend, "You can have mine". Carl was frequently the last to leave the table.

Carl and Annie were part of a small group of children who were picked up at the end of their parents' working day, between five and six o'clock. These children brought food for 'tea', which was eaten at around four o'clock each day. Carl and Annie brought a substantial meal of sandwiches, which they ate happily. One day when Carl had been on trip to a museum in the morning and had spent the afternoon playing outside, he was observed eagerly eating his tea, with a comment in the field notes that he appeared 'very hungry because of busy day.' Some staff felt that he picked at his lunch because he found sandwiches easier to eat. From the observations he found them more to his taste. Eventually staff and his parents responded to his ambivalence to nursery food and he brought a packed lunch. He was noticeably more comfortable eating familiar food, though Annie ate the nursery lunches without any problem. It is possible that food from home had an empowering effect on children, giving them greater control over their lives in nursery that was important, as well as feeding their tastes with food that their parents know they will eat.

Carl's play and learning

Carl was rarely observed doing nothing at nursery other than when he flagged at the end of a long day. Even then he would make an effort to respond to games or play initiated by adults or other children. He started to play from the moment he arrived at nursery and continued to engage with other children or alone in a range of play activities throughout the day. He showed a high level of involvement in all he did. At High Trees the staff aimed to encourage child initiated learning, within the different areas of provision, supported by adults. Carl's ability to learn and develop within a nursery organised in this way has been demonstrated above.

There were also points in the day when individual practitioners worked with smaller, age based, groups of children, one of which was story reading before lunch. Typically, Carl was observed listening carefully, looking closely at the pictures in the book and often making a comment or asking a question. When all the children were brought together in a larger group in the morning, or after lunch, once more Carl attended well, and took pride in showing off his knowledge of the world. He enjoyed singing and knew a selection of songs and rhymes.

The times when Carl was observed in more formal, adult directed activities his response was serious and he showed deep concentration. During a visit from a music specialist, Isabelle, the field notes record 'Batman and Carl taking it all very seriously'. At one point, Carl called out "Quiet" to the rest of the children. He was noted taking part in each activity, for example following a rhythm, and resisted the temptation to be influenced by one or two other children who were restless. When the session finished Carl went up to Isabelle, and said, "Thank you very much for coming". As the children went outside to play, hoping to capture some of his enthusiasm, the researcher asked Carl about the music session. He replied, "I don't know …shall we dig?"

Carl appeared to engage and become deeply involved in activities, as demonstrated throughout his research story. From his active response to nursery he seemed to enjoy all the experiences offered to him. While the observation of the music session suggested that taking part was meaningful to Carl, his silence when asked to comment on the visit possibly indicates that at this stage he was unable to put into words what he had experienced.

Carl's tours – conversations and photographs

On his first tour of nursery, when he was three, Carl chose to take the researcher around the nursery with another older boy, Henry. On this tour Carl pointed out bricks, cars and also the family car in the car park, which he attempted to photograph. He and Henry talked about the nursery and some of the spaces where they played. Their views were different, and from their own perspective. They told parallel stories of their nursery.

Carl and Henry were together in the construction area

Henry: We are in the brick area

Carl: Got dog on my teeshirt

Carl: It's got brick..we build something, we build jails to lock up everybody. We can build a castle

The researcher pointed to the garage

Henry: That's cars

Carl: I built a big space rocket – high up in the sky and Thomas the tank engine - a jet engine

Henry: We built that (points to a photo) you know what we built? We built that - a spaceship.

Henry, placing blocks on his arms: I be a robot!

Carl: Follow, follow me (goes to the window and looks out).

                      Look there my own car. My car is red and my own daddy's is blue

Carl took a photo of the car park from the window.

Carl: We see cars we see people

Henry: We like Michael. Can we take a picture of Michael? Can I take picture of Deborah?

Henry took a photograph. Moving to the 'house' area the researcher asks the boys to tell her about it:

Henry: We don't like this. Every single person comes in and…

Carl: Fantastic! I like sitting there…Food…

In a cupboard are plastic vegetables, pizza and cakes.

The tour ends as the children are called to join the group.

Over successive weeks, Carl took the researcher on further tours, adding to his photographs, justifying the need to take more photographs of things he had not photographed before, for example the sand or the dinosaurs. The field notes record regular direct requests by Carl to "take a picture from…" (sic) different aspects of the nursery. Two examples are included here, with Carl's comments.

I like building models   I like robots – like big scary robots …I like the monkey
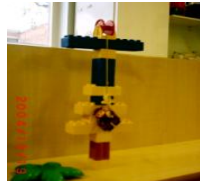
In the second phase of fieldwork, when he was four, Carl was less interested in the camera, and taking photographs. Though he no longer asked to take photographs, he consented to take part in a final tour, and took a total of 25 photographs of different parts of the nursery. He had been leading a group of younger boys in a Power Rangers game. Leaving the game, he began his tour by 'powering down' his Power Rangers wrist watch, in a deliberate stepping out of role, which he decided to photograph.

 The tour included a photograph of his Power Ranger wrist watch

On this tour his chosen subject matter was quite different from the earlier tour. He took photographs of his sister, close friends and Simon, a younger child. His other photographs were of spaces outside where he played, and items that enhanced his play – including the camouflage netting strung over part of the garden area, and the play house where he climbed outside and played inside.

He took a photograph of a window in the building above the nursery garden, where his mother worked.

Carl also took a series of photographs in the cloakroom area where he photographed the different shapes cut in the three lavatory doors, inside the cubicles, his legs and feet and a self portrait in the mirror. Carl giggled as he took these last photographs, suggesting he was aware that photographing the toilet area could be subversive of the activity. However, from the children's point of

view it was an important area of the nursery, and inside the toilet cubicle was a place known best to the children.

One of Carl's last photographs was of the computer. The tours took place twelve months apart, between which times Carl's interests had developed and his relationship with nursery had changed. At the time of the second tour he had started school part-time and came to nursery for two afternoons a week, for wraparound care. These last images were perhaps taken to show some appreciation for changes that had taken place in the outside area, illustrated by the tyres, alongside the playhouse, a familiar place to Carl. The pictures of the toilet area could be seen to be subversive, but might also reflect an awareness of the significance of the shapes. This may have developed from attending school where a more formal learning curriculum, one that emphasised classification and attributes, was influencing his perspective of nursery. The remaining photographs, of friends, his mother's workplace demonstrate the importance of relationships; his self-portrait and the Power Ranger watch possibly showed his developing sense of self, another important aspect of growing up in nursery.

Carl's play nursery

Carl had watched other children creating their play nurseries during the first phase of research. On the day the researcher had planned for him to make his play nursery, at the end of the first period of field work, he had been ill. Though

he was aware of the method he only took part in this research activity in the second period of fieldwork.

Carl made a play nursery with Annie joining him to play alongside. He showed greatest interest in creating an outside play area and looked into the bag of small world toys. He chose a "skateboard", a "tent", a "sandpit" and a "sun chair" as his first items, naming them as he took them from the bag. He requested the car and began to place some people in the car, starting to construct a scenario of a day out. He talked about "dad" and was reminded that it was his nursery that he was making. His play developed around the tent, the car, the skateboard, which were carried on the top of the car - and the people. Having put the people in the tent he chose some new items from the bag of toys.

The first was a see-saw and then a climbing frame and slide. He played with these, introducing a person to "play", going up and down the see saw and swinging from a tyre on the climbing frame, or going down the slide, accompanying the actions with appropriate noises of "whoo!" and "ahh!". He moved the person from the climbing frame saying, "He's going to play on the skateboard", placing him on it and pushing him along. Prompted to look in the bag again he found three matching "sun chairs", in three colours, commenting, "Green chair, this is my favourite colour", and lining up the chairs on the table. Referring back to the people, he added, "The other ones are still sleeping in the tent". His monitoring of the people reflected his monitoring of the role of friends when playing games he had instigated.

Though he discouraged other children from joining him, when Annie came to watch him he stated, "Annie can play with me". Together they took out more toys, including vegetables which Carl sorted and matched placing them in the vegetable beds. His play was thoughtful and exploratory, and when he spoke it was to ask for clarification, for example he asked how he could make a "man" swing on the climbing frame, or to explain what he had found "look, two white carrots". He slowly and deliberately set out items on the table.

After about thirty minutes, in the background a tape of the story of the Gruffallo was being played. Carl continued to select a few more items, but was distracted and became engaged in listening to the story. He carried on playing silently, choosing and handling different items, before asking to finish the outdoor nursery and start an indoor nursery. His interest in these items did not last long and he

asked the researcher if he could go. He had been playing for over forty minutes by this time. In his play Carl had reflected his own preference for playing outside. His play also reflected his ability to become absorbed in his activity. It was not always clear if he was creating a general play scenario rather than his 'play nursery', though from time to time he made references to suggest he was linking his play to the nursery, for example he suggested "this can be a shed" holding out a lidded box, making an association with the sheds outside.

A summary of quality experiences in preschool from Carl's perspective

- Gaining comfort from his mother working in the college, but waiting to be collected at the end of the day could be frustrating
- Having a sibling was also comforting and Carl took his responsibility as a big brother seriously
- Nursery snacks and packed up tea from home were enjoyed but nursery lunches were rarely good experiences
- Being with other children, some of whom were particular friends he had known over time; nursery provided children to revere and look up to when he was a younger child, and children to lead and influence when he was one of the oldest children in nursery
- Knowing staff over time and building strong and trustful relationships that were normally predictable
- Being able to rely on practitioners to provide resources to learn through exploration
- Finding deep satisfaction in self-initiated purposeful play, which often involved other children and pursued different themes that were sustained
- Asserting himself to influence his position in nursery and promote a feeling of well-being
- Knowing the rules and routines and having the confidence to challenge how things were done whilst accepting the authority of the staff
- Understanding that nursery was a place for children to play and learn

Zoë's Research Story

Zoë became part of the core sample, in September 2004, midway through the first phase of research at High Trees, when she was 3 years 7 months. She was 4 years 4 months at the start of the second phase of research. She lived with her parents and her older sister. Her mother was studying at the college. Zoë attended nursery for two years whilst her mother completed a pre-university course. She attended three days a week in the first phase, but only two days a week in the second phase, when her mother was in her final term of studies. This meant that Zoë had less contact with the research than other core children.

In September 2004, Zoë was amongst the oldest children. Her attendance coincided with Alan and Batman's. Zoë played with many children but had no close friend. She knew a younger girl, Cherry, as their mother's studied on the same course. Zoë lived several miles from the college, and her only contact with the other children was at nursery.

Zoë was exceptionally interested in the 'babies' (ie.children under two). Her fascination with this group is described in the research story. Perhaps inevitably her interest was not condoned by the staff or her mother. Zoë was aware of this but it did not inhibit her. When talking about the babies, often referring to "my baby", Zoë showed more than a superficial interest.

Zoë was shown the Finding Things Out book and gave her consent to join in the research by writing her name on the consent form. She was introduced to the notion of giving consent and withdrawing consent. She exercised both notions of consent, sometimes declining to join in before changing her mind later. Zoë understood that the research activities were different from other activities at nursery. In terms of being a participant, Zoë prioritised nursery activity over the research. However, she could be a responsive participant and provided information about herself and her feelings. She showed an interest in the notebooks and asked to draw or write in the book on several occasions.

Focused observations of:

Zoë and her mother

Zoë entered nursery eagerly and settled to play immediately, parting from her mother without any problem. She knew that her mother was studying at the college. Like other children of students she was collected from nursery mid-

afternoon, at the end of lectures, and was the only child in the core group to leave nursery before tea.

The field notes record that Zoë sometimes showed anxiety in the afternoon. She knew that children were collected at various times from midday onwards. She appeared to be confused about when *her* mother was due to arrive. Young children cannot assess the passing of time. As her mother was on the college site it is possible that once other children left Zoë expected her mother to turn up too. Until she did Zoë was unsettled, checking the door and speculating who had arrived. In the first phase of fieldwork, Zoë was sitting after lunch when the bell rang. Alerting to the bell, she announced, "It's my mummy", but it was another mother coming to pick up her son. In the second phase of fieldwork, noticing Cherry going home, Zoë approached her mother and asked, "Where's my mum?", to be told, "She's still doing her work." Persisting, Zoë asked, "Why?". Cherry's mum explained, "We've got a lot of work." Zoë accepted this and went back to play.

Sometime later the children were being taken to play in the garden when Zoë saw her mother turning into nursery to pick her up. The field notes record her uncharacteristic 'tense and anxious expression' as she believed her mother might leave without her as she was not there. Deborah reassured her that her mum would come over to collect her, which she did. These examples indicate how young children's perceptions of time and place can have an adverse effect on their wellbeing.

Zoë gave the impression of being a confident and assertive girl, who was happy and settled in nursery. However, the observations, above, and her own ability to say what she was thinking revealed some ambivalent feelings. Her distress when she thought she might be left at nursery was unexpected. It is possible that she understood nursery as a temporary place to play and be looked after. She didn't belong there in the way that she belonged at home.

A further link to home was her elder sister, who Zoë talked about. Zoë chose to take her sister's name as her research name, drawing on this close relationship.

Zoë and other children

As previously noted, Zoë did not have one particular friend in nursery. Typically she would play with different children throughout the day, as she moved from

activities of her own choosing or adult led group times. The earliest observations of Zoë record her playing with a group of children, who all attended on Tuesdays, including Lauren and Ben, but in the second phase of the fieldwork she no longer came on a Tuesday and her contact with many of these children ceased. There were fewer children of her own age on the days she now attended and apart from Alan and Batman she had no history of friendship with them.

Her relationship, with Alan, can be tracked chronologically through the fieldnotes:

October 2004: A box of tools included a life-like drill that was in great demand. The drill passed through the hands of several children, all of whom observed the rule of ownership of the person holding it at the time. To access it, it was either handed on to, or if put down, swiftly picked up, by children watching and waiting for their turn. Zoë had been tracking the progress of the drill. Approaching the researcher, she said, "I don't know where it is. He's finished with it. I don't know where it is." Zoë then asked Alan, who looked around. He walked up to a little boy and took the drill from him, passing it on to Zoë.

November 2004: A few weeks later, despite Alan's previous helpfulness, Zoë told the researcher, "I like Stan (a younger child) but I don't like Alan". When some chocolate was brought for snack, to celebrate a birthday, Zoë prompted Alan to say, "Thank you".

May 2005: During the morning group time, when the children were together in the book corner, Zoë and Alan sat together on the sofa and Zoë placed her arm round Alan.

June 2005: Playing outside, the children were offered buckets and spades to dig with in the soil. Deborah broke up some earth to help them get started. Zoë and Alan got involved straight away. They played as part of a group, finding a worm, and Zoë talked of growing "vegibles". Zoë was wearing a cape and a fireman's helmet as she played. The researcher had noted, 'Zoë is very enthusiastic – digging'. She requested of Deborah, "Can you dig another hole for us?". Zoë filled buckets with soil and announced, "It's a busy day for us", before deciding she wanted to stop digging, saying, "I don't want to Deborah." She played on the slide and in the playhouse, returning to watch the others and taking up a spade again for a short time. The field notes record how Zoë 'shoots in when her mum and big sister come to collect her. She emerges from the outside door and shouts, "Goodbye everybody!". Alan, Batman and Robin, stand at the fence waving and shout, "Zoë" and watch her go.'

These relationships have a companiable quality about them. The children are familiar with one another. They are happy to play together. It can be seen how the rules of behaviour and of sharing and 'etiquette' mediate children's relationships.

Another observation, early on in the fieldwork, recorded Zoë's ability to fall into easy companionship with other children. Ruth asked Zoë and Zak to tidy up the cars, and it was noted that they went 'hand in hand to do their job'. At lunch time, she and Zak sat 'companionably together eating their lunch'. They 'have a little cuddle' and swapped their name labels; their names had the same initial letter. After lunch Zoë sat with Batman both 'engrossed in a story' that was being read to them. When it was over, she rejoined Zak playing at the play dough table, telling him, "I'm not called mummy, I'm called daddy", as they developed a domestic theme in their play.

Zoë related to other children. She seemed to enjoy their company developing play and other activities alongside them. She was caring and affectionate in her relations with them and trusted others to help her in turn. This observation illustrates Zoë's easy friendship with children she didn't know well. She was amongst a group of children hiding in a large box, covering themselves with draped fabric and having a boisterous, playful time. The researcher asked Zoë what one of the boys was called. Zoë turned to the boy and asked, "What's your name?" He replied, "Harry". Zoë turned back to the researcher saying, "Harry".

Though without a close friend, her companionship with Alan was a reliable and dependable relationship, reflecting some ambivalence that characterises many friendships. There was a mutual and reciprocal element to their friendship which Zoë could resort to when needed, for example, to enlist help to access certain toys. However, her general amiability meant that she was able to make new friendships, using well established and understood play themes or routines to bond with others. She recognised that making connections, such as sharing the same initial letter in your name, could be the basis of a friendship.

Zoe and the babies

Zoë was attracted to the babies in nursery. The field notes make frequent references to her comments and actions in relation to being with the younger children. For example:

Zoë had been listening to a story in the group, appearing to be engaged in the book. At the end of the story she asked, "Is one baby out?", holding up one finger. She left to look for the baby. Soon crying was heard and Zoë was found trying to put the baby on her lap.

Another time, watching a baby in his high chair, Zoë claimed, "That's *my* baby, Wain,"

She also observed that, "The baby likes stroking".

Zoë admitted to the researcher that she liked the babies, but sometimes she got into trouble. She explained what had happened when she had tried to pick up the baby. "I got into trouble today…(the baby) cried, cried, but he didn't hurt nowhere."

The following observation, made early one morning when all the children were in the main room, illustrates Zoë's persistence to want to look after the babies, which was discouraged by staff:

Zoë found one of the babies, Fiona, and played with her. To begin with, Fiona enjoyed the attention, but after a couple of minutes became distressed and was rescued by Judy. Zoë protested, saying, "She's my baby", hanging on to Fiona's legs as Judy picked her up and took her to the baby room.

Zoë returned to the hairdressing play and writing appointments, before joining another child at the sand tray. Using the spoons they pretended to eat the sand. Meanwhile the door to the baby room had opened and Fiona was making her way into the big room. She walked past Zoë towards the bathroom area. Zoë followed her in and attempting to lift her, dropped her on the tiles, at which point Jane rushed in to pick her up. Zoë went to watch a boy waking up in his pushchair but Jane was there too and carried him away. Fiona was playing on the floor and Zoë found her and took a doll to interest her. She again attempted to lift her, but Fiona cried, and Zoë left her.

During the second phase of fieldwork, Zoë explained her feelings about the babies to the researcher, placing her behaviour within the realm of 'naughtiness'. She was sitting in a plastic car explaining to the researcher, "Sometimes I'm naughty and sometimes I'm not. I am sometimes. I hit babies sometimes because they hit me back. They don't cry when I hit them. If you hit them like that (*she banged the side of the car*) it hurts them. If you hit them like that (*she tapped the side of the car*) it doesn't hurt them." Zoë was never observed hitting younger children, but she was seen to approach them and touch them, normally wanting to pick them up and carry them. Her interest could be construed as malicious but nursery staff did not interpret it as such, though they did not encourage her to be with the babies.

A final example of Zoë's awareness of the younger children was evidenced when she and other older children were nailing wooden shapes onto a board. Five

children sat around a table sharing pots of nails. Val had warned them to be careful. They discussed the risk involved in using the nails with the younger children around:

Fiona was standing watching them.

Zoë: Fiona can't do this can she?

Lisa: She's too young isn't she

Zoë: If you do that (*pricks hand with point of nail*) she'll hurt herself.

Zoë and Bob placed a pot of nails on a chair, so no-one else could use them.

Zoë: Oh I did it again – I hurt my finger. Oh no, that's not very nice. These are very dangerous for babies. We need to keep these away from the babies.

Val found a nail on the floor.

Val: Look what I found on the floor, what shall we do?

Lisa: Yes babies will eat them and put them in their mouths

Zoë: They'll have to go to hospital.

Bob takes responsibility for placing all pots of nails on the table. Some nails spill as he gives some to one of the other children and they all realise the risk of nails being on the table and help to put back in pot.

Zoe: Babies eat those

An interest in 'the babies' was a distinct and pervasive aspect of Zoë's being in nursery. She became aware that her attention was not always welcomed by the babies themselves, nor approved of by adults, but it seemed that she could not help herself, she was drawn to the younger children. She understood that her behaviour could be classed as 'naughty' but she had her own distinction of degrees of naughtiness. She expressed her understanding of grades of touching, from stroking to hitting hard. Zoë possibly believed that the babies needed her help and attention. She sought out a role of responsibility even if it was not appreciated by the adults.

Zoë's passion for the babies is noteworthy due to the lack of interest in the babies by the other children, beyond the attention given to siblings. Generally, children were too busy playing to give the babies much consideration. The last observation reveals the older children acknowledging that they need to keep the babies safe and recognising that nails represented a hazard for the younger children. Significantly, it is Zoë who voices these concerns the most.

Zoë and the nursery practitioners

Zoë enjoyed good relations with the nursery staff, notwithstanding her attraction towards the babies, which was handled sensitively but firmly by the staff. She

trusted and showed a fondness towards all the practitioners, however she enjoyed the excitement when Michael or visiting students joined in with children's play. When Michael was 'attacked' by a group of boys in a play fight, and was 'hurt', Zoë watched what was happening and went up to hug him.

Zoë took photographs of practitioners on her tour of nursery, including one of a poster displaying photographs of all the staff. Reflecting on this picture afterwards, she commented that she wanted to write Michael's name down first. She realised she had taken a not very flattering photograph of Deborah and exclaimed, "Look at Deborah!". Another time, whilst busy playing, she heard Deborah's quite distinctive laugh, and noted, "Deborah's laugh's funny!"

Zoë had fixed ideas of what the adults should and should not do. When Val playfully began to sing a greeting song to herself, "Val Storey, Val Story where are you?", she told Val, "You don't sing!", wanting her to stop. Val's behaviour challenged Zoë's notions of the role of the adults. Predictability of adult behaviour was important to her.

These examples, and others elsewhere in her story, demonstrate that for Zoë the nursery staff were a source of support and reassurance. She took an interest in them as individuals and showed an awareness of them which was unusual amongst the children. The staff also guided her behaviour, particularly in relation to younger children, and she understood the boundaries established in nursery.

Zoë and food

Zoë enjoyed nursery snack and nursery lunches and generally ate what was put in front of her. But the following observations illustrate exceptions:

Zoë had come to the table after washing her hands. The meal that day was lasagne with garlic bread. Looking at the food she said, "I don't like it, they know I don't like peppers." To Lorna she repeated, "I don't like the peppers". Lorna replied, "Don't you?".
Zoë picked up the garlic bread and ate it, saying, "I like the tomato".
She got up and started to leave the table before being intercepted by Michael, asking, "Yes Zoë?" She went back to her seat. Lisa spoke up for Zoë, "Zoë doesn't like pepper."

Lorna commented on Batman tucking into his packed lunch, and eating tomatoes and cucumber. Zoë added, "I like cucumber as well". She continued to eat the garlic bread, dunking it into the pasta sauce. She pushed her plate towards Lorna asking for help, but

Lorna suggested Zoë should cut it herself. (The pasta sheets were quite hard from being baked and difficult for the children to manage).

Zoë was watching the babies waiting for their lunch, and Lorna commented that they were not happy. Zoë explained, "And Fiona, she's not crying. She just wants her dinner that's all".

After fifteen minutes, Zoë was still eating her bread, which the field notes described as 'crunchy'. She announced, "Father Christmas is watching if we be good." (It was June). She had some dry crust left, and the pasta, and was looking around and listening to what else was happening around her. She had difficulty cutting up the pasta and again asked Lorna for help. She did not eat the pasta, and left the table to get herself a mug.

Five minutes later, Zoë was distracted by a baby crying, and she had picked up the crust and chewing it again. Lorna checked with Zoë if she liked the lasagne and encouraged her to taste it. Zoë, unenthusiastically tried it, "Lasagne…I don't like it". Lorna took it away and returned with fruit salad, saying it looked delicious. Zoë looked at the bowl and tucked in.

Other children had left the table and she noticed, "Why is it time to read books?". She took her plate back to the kitchen area, and then returned for the water, clearing that too. Then she joined the others. She picked up a board book and went to sit by Fiona intending to read it to her.

The same lunch was offered two weeks later.

This time Zoë greeted the food saying, "I love mushrooms!" She talked about the recent weather of thunder and lightening, whilst Alan read out the jokes from his crisp packet.

Examining her lasagne with her fork, Zoë explained, "I don't like pepper. I don't like tomatoes anymore…I used to but I don't anymore. I love meat and cheese and pasta." This time Zoë picked out the "green pepper" from her lunch, and ate the rest.

Afterwards, Zoë enjoyed the pudding of bananas when she noticed Deborah giving out seconds. Shouting out, "I saw that Deborah, I saw that!" She was asked to clarify what she had seen and she pointed, "Doing that!", as Deborah scraped out the dish.

These episodes show that food could be a pleasure for Zoë although there were some textures and tastes that she did not like. The hardness and dryness of some of the food were unpalatable for her. She persevered as she recognised the expectations and rules of mealtimes, that children should at try something before rejecting it. There was in her language some suggestion that regular

items might be changed to accommodate her likes and dislikes ie the pepper. This could be understood as a valid criticism of the quality of nursery lunches from the child's perspective. Zoë's comment about scraping the dish seemed to express her disappointment at missing seconds. The social aspect of eating was appreciated by Zoë and she enjoyed joining in the chat around the table.

Zoë's play and learning

On a typical day, the observations, at different times, show Zoë playing with others, playing alone and seeking adult company. This extended observation of Zoë in the first phase of fieldwork, revealed several aspects of her self-image in relation to play and learning:

Zoë gave her consent, "Ok", for the observation

Zoë was playing at the sand tray with a group of younger children. She commented, "All that sand", and put some sand into her hand. She placed sand on the others' heads, they responded with indignant shouts. She noticed sand on her "new shoes" and pointed it out. She filled the holes in some duplo blocks with sand. She left the sand momentarily to go to pick up a little boy, but put him down as Gayle warned, "Zoë..".

She returned to the sand tray, where just two others, a boy and a girl, were still playing. Following an altercation with the boy Zoë moved away, crossing the room to the window. Here she found some conkers, pronouncing," These are cooked", she offered them to a younger girl, Rachel, who 'ate' one, whilst Zoë watched. Rachel returned to her play, and Zoë picked up the conkers and tried to put them in her pocket. She noticed Jane behind the counter and checked with her, "Are you making the dinner?" She moved on and told Michael she hadn't had a snack (*though she had been observed to have been to the snack table already)* and he directed her to the table where she ate a rice cake and drank milk. She played with the conkers on the table watching other children.

Zoë stood up and wandered round, visiting various places, including a momentary return to the sand. She showed interest in a long card tube, and with the conkers in her hand, she helped another child carry the tube. She stopped for an instant to put some paint on a picture as she passed, and they attempted to negotiate a shelf unit with the tube, but could not get through. They took the tube to a space where they could sit astride it. Zoë sat on the tube, still clutching the conkers, and put her arm down the tube – possibly putting conkers down too. Something distracted her and she got up to leave, but turned to claim, "That's mine!", as someone else showed interest in the tube. However, by now her attention had moved on and she went to look out of the window, where Val was coming in from the garden with a group of younger children. Zoë then joined the older group to queue up for her coat, before going outside too.

Later the same day Zoë was observed again, playing in the hairdressing salon. She was on the phone, making appointments and filling in appointment cards. She had already styled Jane's hair. She placed the phone back and was approached by Cherry, who tickled her. Zoë commented, "She keeps tickling me," and they played together. Zoë returned to enthusiastic writing, explaining, "That's an appointment for the mummies to come". She showed this to Jane, who commented on the time and price. Zoë left and picked up John and then Cherry, who she took to the hairdressing table. She was distracted when Val took a photograph of Alice, for her file. Zoë requested to be photographed too, and Val took her picture.

An observation two months later picked up the sand play theme, Zoë was still exploring its properties and she was still finding sharing the sand problematic:

First thing, on arrival, Zoë had played for a while in the sand exploring the properties of dry and wet sand and had made impressions of her hand in the sand, experimenting with the adhesive quality of packed sand but frustrated by the problems of moving a lump of sand, moulded by squeezing and patting, from the sand tray to the field note book, without it breaking up. She was playing side by side with a younger boy, and had tried to help him make a mound from the sand, but he resisted and told her, "I can do it all by myself!" There was a problem of having sufficient sand for both children to play, which was partly resolved by drawing a demarcation line in the middle of the sand tray. Zoë brought a small jug and filled it with sand, before tipping it on to the palm of her hand. She was frustrated as it fell apart. She complained that the boy was "taking all the sand away" and that contributed to her problems, "because I want more sand". The researcher suggested she try again and this time she pushed the sand down and packed it into the jug, with the result that when she turned it out, on to the researcher's note book, it held its shape. Zoë asked, "Can you do my play?" requesting to take a photograph to record her achievement.

She moved away and returned announcing, "I went on the drawing table." She was asked if she had drawn something nice and replied, "Nah. I can't draw something nice. I can draw my daddy though and my mummy and my friends." Zoë then said, "I'm not a boy now", and this was confirmed, "No you're a girl". She added, "but everyone says I'm a poo poo".

Later in the morning, following group singing, that she had enjoyed, she 'rushed to find her name' on a magnetic board. She picked up a name with the same initial letter as her own. She looked at it and put it back twice. She asked Val, "Can you find my name?" Val told her, "No you find it yourself". Zoë went to the board. Using trial and error, and some guidance from Val, she found her name. She put her thumbs up in triumph and Val said, "Well done".

These vignettes illustrate the exploratory features of Zoë's play, following her movements from one play area to another. Having examined the potential of each area, she sometimes moved back again within the same session to sample an activity a second or third time. There was an aspect of curiosity and a desire to learn and acquire skills in her play and through play, for example writing and recognising names. She was also seeking social contact and developed relationships as she played, though her dominant presence was not always welcomed by others. Zoë's lack of confidence was demonstrated poignantly in her reference to herself as a "poo poo" and her view of her drawing not being "nice". In other observations, Zoë was seen to need reassurance and a less confident girl was emerging in contrast to the impression she gave of a self-reliant child who was able to articulate her thoughts and assert her wishes.

There were times when Zoë was observed alone. Two places in nursery appeared to have some significance for Zoë. On several occasions the researcher noted Zoë gravitating towards Jane's desk, by the door, to either talk to Jane or to watch people coming and going. Zoë would also go to a play trampoline for a solitary bounce, often chatting to anyone sitting on a bench next to the trampoline. Both these places appeared to offer refuge to Zoë from the hustle and bustle of nursery. One day Zoë was on the trampoline when she told the researcher she could observe her. She enjoyed jumping vigorously, bouncing high in the air; typically she would return several times during a play time outside, suggesting a need to separate herself from the others, to watch them and decide what to do next.

She sometimes found it hard to accept or understand the boundaries between what adults could do and what children could do, wanting to assert her own agency. She had a sense of being 'wrong' but not necessarily in a moral sense, but doing the 'wrong' thing within the sub-culture of nursery. Her uncertainty in relation to what might be expected of her led to Zoe appearing, at times, to be afraid of failing, and she would opt out of an activity if she felt insecure. She sought reassurance and approval.

Zoë's tours - conversations and photographs

Zoë first used the camera when it was offered to her as part of a tour of nursery. Soon after joining the core group she was asked if she wanted to take some photographs to show what she liked about nursery. She chose to take a photograph of Alice," because I like Alice. She's a kind girl. No a sad girl. No

she's a good girl". She took one other picture of, "Michael and that little girl". When it was explained to her that she should ask consent from other people if she wanted to take their photograph, she replied, "Carl didn't liked being hugged but liked being stroked" indicating an emerging understanding of respecting other children's personal autonomy.

The following summer, Zoë was asked to plan her tour with the researcher, looking round the room to decide what and who she wished to photograph. She dictated a list of fourteen items. Zoë found this part of the process difficult, as she wanted to get on with taking the photographs. She was so eager to use the camera that the first images were blurred and she had to 'dump' and retake some. Discouraged, she told the researcher, "I don't want to take anymore", but was persuaded to continue after reviewing the images she had taken, and being told that they were good. She went on to take ten more photographs than listed, snapping away recklessly.

Her tour again involved people but this time included places and activities. Zoë had to be reminded to ask people before she took their photograph. She took photographs of Alice and Gayle, Natalie and Lisa, a group of babies and staff, one of Alan and "the man sorting the computer", one of Deborah, in addition to the photograph of all the staff and another of all the children. Zoë's remaining photographs were of places and toys, including "Jane's desk", the fire station, the baby room, the "making stuff place", the "looking thingy" (a globe), the dinosaurs, which she said she "like(d) best" and a pirate poster.

When the photographs had been printed out Zoë was asked if she wanted to say anything more about them. Her comments were copied down by the researcher under the relevant photograph. Zoë was the only child to 'write' her own captions, talking as she wrote. These are Zoë 'people' photographs and comments:

Natalie and the firestation   I want to write Michael first   Alan and the man…sorting the computer
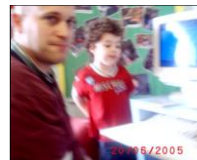
Alice and Gayle   Some of the babies   Look at Deborah   all of the children

The 'places' photographs:

The rainbow

construction set

dinosaurs…like best

pirate poster

making stuff place

The baby room

Jane's desk

the looking thingy

I didn't take that..I did do that

It appeared to the researcher that Zoë defined or made meaning of nursery through her relationships with people. She photographed children she liked. Michael and Deborah were both selected amongst the staff group to be photographed individually, though all the staff were chosen and neatly included in a single photograph. She did the same for the group picture of the children.

Places were also important to Zoë. She photographed activities she enjoyed including the 'making stuff' place, and the babies room (from across the room). Her photograph of Jane's desk might be significant as this was a place where she gravitated. The globe was popular with many of the older children as, in Zoë's word, for 'looking', offering many potentialities.

Zoë's play nurseries

Zoë's first play nursery

Zoë had watched Alan and Batman make their first play nursery before she was asked to take part. She was eager to play with the items and consented readily. She made an indoor nursery, placing furniture carefully and thoughtfully. She was attracted to the baby items and made a "babies' room", distinct from the other parts of the nursery. She found "the cot…..a chair for the babies…. a push

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chair", and though she was handling and arranging other items she concentrated on making her "baby nursery".

Zoë's second play nursery

When starting to make her second play nursery, eight months later, Zoë recalled the task. Initially she showed some hesitancy, deliberating over choosing which bag to start with, finally choosing the indoor nursery bag. She become absorbed in the activity for a short time, and declared, "This is going to be the babies' room". She took a break when the children were invited to play outside.

She returned and at this point was more interested in how the video camera worked. She began to play again and asked Alan to help her as he had been watching. They played together for a few more minutes, exploring items from the bag. Zoë adopted the role of teacher, telling Alan not to play around but to set things out. Her interest was not sustained and she decided to leave, having a final look through the video screen and asking for affirmation that she had "done a good job, haven't I?"

This research activity reinforces the importance of the theme of babies for Zoë. Her friendship with Alan is also confirmed. In her play with Alan she adopts the 'teacher' role, setting expectations and boundaries, with which Alan co-operated. Zoë's play nursery sessions were noticeably shorter than those of the other core children. It is possible that she found playing alone unsatisfying, preferring to share the play with others, whilst she was in control. It is noted that Zoë asked for approval of her efforts.

A summary of quality experiences in preschool from Zoë's perspective:
- The security of knowing her mother was close by in college – but waiting for her was hard
- Having a sister and thinking about her in nursery
- Having friends and using the common references of nursery to share play and companionship with many different children

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- Finding spaces in nursery where she felt comfortable, for example, the trampoline or Jane's desk offered a sense of physical and possibly therapeutic security
- Helping others and showing responsibility, for example, organising the sand to give fair shares; helping with the babies; tidying up and clearing her plate
- Being able to rely on nursery staff and enjoying close relationships with adults in nursery, notwithstanding a mutual ambivalence about the babies
- Following and recognising rules and disregarding rules
- Eating most nursery food – snacks and lunches - though wary of certain ingredients
- Enjoying the social aspect of mealtimes
- Knowing what was going on in nursery and noticing details, particularly in relation to people and the babies
- Learning about letters and writing; stories and singing; exploring materials, such as sand and the soil; learning to balance and jump
- An awareness of routines of nursery which offered security

Lauren and Ben's Research Story

This research story is a joint story of twins, Lauren and Ben, who were core sample participants covering a fourteen month period. They were the youngest children amongst the core group, and they attended High Trees on Tuesdays, throughout the year, taking up community places. On other days, in term time, they attended the nursery class at their local primary school. They had had their third birthday soon after becoming part of the core group in August 2004, and were 4 years 2 months at the end of the second period of field work in October 2005. They live with their parents and elder brother in a suburb close to the nursery.

Lauren and Ben gave their consent to join in the research formally, by looking through the *Finding things out* book and consenting to join in by circling a smiley face on a consent form; it is noted that Lauren nodded her consent. They gave further verbal consents in the course of the fieldwork when they took part in the research activities. Initially Lauren was a more responsive participant, but in the second period of research Ben became increasingly involved in the activities.

Their Tuesday attendance coincided with that of Batman and Carl. Zoë also attended regularly on Tuesdays during the first period of fieldwork. The friendships that developed between these children are reflected in the research stories.

As later recruits to the core group, some research activities were not completed in the first period of fieldwork. Neither twin was recorded completing a formal tour during this time; however, both were involved in extended tours in the second period of fieldwork. Only Lauren completed a play nursery in the first period of fieldwork. These omissions have been acknowledged and discussed within the methodology chapter, in the section describing the sample. The children chose their names.

Focused observations of:

Lauren and Ben and their parents

Ben and Lauren were normally dropped off and picked up by their mother, and they were happy to leave her. The twins attended for long days, to cover their mother's working hours, typically from before 9am to around 5pm. Over the two periods of fieldwork, Lauren made several comments in relation to waiting to be picked up, and both children were heard talking about missing their parents. The

following excerpts from the field notes, illustrate some of the twin's reflections on their parents.

Lauren made this observation at the end of the day, at the beginning of November, "Where's my mummy? My mummy's late". Michael, noting that her comment was based on the darkness outside, replied," No she isn't – the clocks went back…". Another time, Lauren was having tea around four o'clock, by which time many of the children whose parents were students, were being picked up. Responding to the other children leaving, Lauren remarked, "My mum takes a long time when all the people have gone". Soon after tea, reading a story with the researcher, Lauren told her, "My daddy's coming and my mummy…Two", holding up two fingers. It appeared that Lauren was sensitive to the signs of time passing, indicated by other children leaving or the encroaching darkness.

Ben was also observed talking about his mother one tea time. Lauren had left the table and Ben wanted to go too, but still had to finish his tea. He said, "I'm missing my mummy", starting a discussion about parents with Elizabeth, who told him, "My mummy and daddy love me."

When they were collected from nursery, children often had to wait whilst their parents gathered together belongings, signed the children out and had a word with staff. The field notes record an observation of Lauren after her mother had arrived to pick the twins up. As she was waiting to leave, Lauren played, arranging some magnetic letters, telling another girl that, "You can't find a letter 'cos your mummy's not here". Her mother's presence appeared to be empowering, allowing Lauren to play with the letters. From Lauren's point of view this seemed to be an advantage that the other girl, whose mother was not there, did not have.

There was one example of an atypical response to being collected from nursery, from both twins. In the second phase of fieldwork at High Trees, the nursery organised a Fun Day on a Wednesday, inviting all the children on roll, bringing together children who attended on different days. Entertainment was provided by a magician; lunch was a picnic outside, eating crisps, sausages and other party food; there was a bouncy castle and the children played games including parachute games. Lauren and Ben took part in every activity. The day ended early, and the twins were picked up by their mother, who arrived along with other parents, at two o'clock. Uncharacteristically Lauren cried when her mother came

and wanted to be comforted. Meanwhile, Ben said his good byes and thanked the staff. In the confusion of parents arriving and leaving with their children he disappeared, causing some panic and worry. He had left the building and was found standing by the family car outside nursery. It was possibly Lauren's sensitivity to situations that accounted for her crying on the Fun Day. All the normal routines had been put aside for the day, which was not the twins 'normal' nursery day. Lauren and Ben had enjoyed the day, with Ben saying thank you as he left. However, Lauren's tears and Ben's leaving nursery on his own may be an indication of the reliance on routines and predictability by the children, so that when these were suspended (as on the Fun Day) the children appeared to have experienced some insecurity or confusion.

In addition to the spoken references and observations, several instances are recorded of Lauren drawing her mummy and daddy. Along with other children, Lauren drew pictures in the field notebook. In one drawing (see below), in the first period of fieldwork, when she was three, Lauren explained as she worked, "It's going to be daddy (he) has got to have curly hair. That's mummy, she's going to have a black eye", using her pencil to draw a large, dark dot for an eye.

Lauren's drawings of mummy (left) and daddy (right) in a field note book

A year later Lauren was observed with two younger girls, Rachel and Eve, at a table where there were paper and pencils. All the other of the children were playing in the garden. Eve had a pile of paper in front of her. Batman, coming in from playing outside, joined them, asking "How did you get in here? Can I have some paper?". Eve gave a piece out to each child. The children began to draw. Lauren drew a picture and then rejected it. Rachel drew two pictures, saying, "That's my mummy there, because it's my mummy".

Lauren's drawing that she scribbled across.

By her side, Batman drew a face, saying, "It's the mummy. It's my mummy". His next drawing was, "That's a man and that's my daddy". He drew a third picture of

Ben, saying, "Ben's in my family". He had written his name, reversing the letters, on every picture. Lauren working along side, announced, "I'm going to draw a picture of my mummy and my daddy".

 Lauren's drawings of mummy and daddy.

The children's drawings of their parents can be interpreted as a need to recall their family and bring them closer into the nursery. For Lauren the drawings are both personal and shared with others, and can be seen as an emotional response to being apart from the most important people in her life. 'Mummies and Daddies' provide a common reference for the children.

It is clear that the relationship with their parents was important for Lauren and Ben whilst they were in nursery. Though home was invoked by the children at other times (for example in relation to Food below) most of the recorded references to their parents occurred towards the end of the day, in the context of waiting to be picked up.

Ben and Lauren as twin brother and sister
An observation in the field notes of Lauren and Ben, when they were three, records that they were 'still solitary players or side by side'. At this time, they were observed cutting and gluing paper. Lauren was adept at both tasks, whereas it was noted that Ben was 'working out which hand to use' to cut with. Lauren, acknowledging this, remarked, "Ben can cut them", and provided him with more paper to cut, whilst she glued pieces of paper.

In the following months they continued to play separately, usually alone at a task of their own choosing, but they were also observed playing together, as part of a group of other children, mostly boys and often the play was outside. They were aware of their sibling-ness, as Lauren explained, "We're brothers (sic) and friends. There's all sort of brothers at nursery – Batman and Ben, Carl and Alice", alluding to the other siblings she knew. Lauren was aware of the significance of being a sibling and was knowledgeable about other sibling pairs.

Throughout the research story, there will be more references to the twins playing together and their mutual awareness. During the second phase of field work Lauren drew a picture herself and James, photographing them afterwards (see below).

The field notes record Lauren's tendency to watch over Ben more than the other way round, but Ben was aware of what Lauren was doing, and often asked to join an activity in which she was already involved. There was an example of this when Lauren was taking photographs outside in the garden. She had taken a few shots and Ben was following her around, waiting for the camera. Ben declared, "I want to take a picture of the vegetables". Lauren responded, "I take a picture of the plant", and holding on to the camera she took the photograph. She then took a photograph of Ben, prompting him, "Ready Ben…smile". He posed in front of the camera and said, "Cheese". They moved on and Lauren photographed Ben in front of the hazel tree. Aware that Ben was still waiting for his turn, the researcher intervened, asking if Ben could take a picture. Lauren answered, "I'm going to give it to him", with some exasperation in her voice, and handed over the camera. It was her turn to follow Ben around. Lauren watched Ben's distinctive camera technique, which appeared to mimic professional photographers as he 'snapped' several photographs in quick succession. She seemed to be aware of the contrast to her own slower and more deliberate method, and she directed him to stand further away as he took the photographs. As seen in this example, Lauren was not always willing to concede to Ben when she was playing.

Towards the end of the second phase of field work, Lauren was observed crying on the sofa. She was upset because someone had scribbled on her drawing. She wanted to go home and wanted her daddy. She was sitting very close to Ben, so close that she leant her head against his back for comfort. The researcher sat with her and they looked through an album of photographs taken by the children. Lauren pointed out those of Ben and herself. In this vignette, she seemed to be aware that she had been justifiably wounded by someone spoiling her drawing and sought comfort in the person closest to her in nursery. Ben acknowledged his empathy and solidarity with Lauren by being a shoulder to lean

on. Lauren extended her sense of belongingness to Ben by confirming their special relationship through the photographs.

From this section and others that follow, the twin's relationship is seen as strong and supportive. When they were younger children it was noted that they were often together as a pair, before they had established strong friendships with other children.

Ben and Lauren and other children

Lauren identified that she and Ben had each other as 'friends' (see above). At High Trees, the extent of their friendship group was restricted by their attendance at nursery for just one day a week, with Lauren finding it harder to make a particular friend of her own age amongst the children who attended on Tuesday. Often she was the only four year old girl. During the first phase of fieldwork, Lauren was observed giving Zoë a kiss at group time, and they were companions around the lunch table. However, Zoë did not attend on Tuesdays in the second phase. Lauren was observed playing with other girls. Lizzie was one, but though she was the same age, she only attended for half-days, leaving after lunch. Alice and Annie were younger children who Lauren played with occasionally. For Ben there were several boys of his own age, including Batman and Carl, and Lauren often played as part of the same group, particularly in the second phase of fieldwork.

One of the ways friendship was established and sustained by the children was through playing and talking; these little inconsequential chats were made up of the day to day exchange of mutually significant information, making reference to the shared experiences of early childhood, within and outside nursery. This is illustrated in this short conversation between Ben and Carl, as well as elsewhere in the research stories. Carl had been for a visit to his new school, and the next morning he came in talking about the visit. He announced, "I'm going to school in September", and asked Ben, "When you going to school?", to which Ben answered, "Carl, my Shaun, my brother, goes to school". Similar talk went on at snack and meal times.

Sharing experiences and being part of the same key worker group also fostered friendships. The following excerpt from the field notes, describes the older group of children going on trip together to a local museum. The group included Batman, Carl as well as Lauren and Ben, together with Hazel, a slightly younger girl.

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As they left the children anticipate the outing announcing, "We're going to Ice Age!". Setting off to catch the service bus into the town the children all found an adult hand to hold, without being prompted. At the bus stop, Carl instructed, "Ben, you look for the number 3 bus". Whilst they waited, the children talked about the cinema, Lauren saying, "We're going to see Postman Pat at the cinema". When the bus arrived she headed for the back, where she sat next to Ben. Michael and Carl were discussing birthdays. Lauren said her birthday was in August. Questioned if she was going to be four she replied, "Ask mummy".

At the museum a variety of activities had been arranged, some in a 'class room' and others in the galleries. The experience was new to the children and their behaviour was subdued but responsive. In the classroom, the children were read a story about a baby polar bear; an accompanying story sack contained a collection of soft animals from cold and hot climates for the children to choose. It was noted that Ben wanted to examine these. To demonstrate the polar environment of the story, a block of ice had been shown to the children, with a discussion about its properties. During the reminder of the session, its progress was monitored from time to time, and children noted it was melting but was still cold.

The children were offered a sticking activity, making a polar bear and a butterfly. Again they were all focused on the task, gluing and colouring in. When she had finished Lauren ran round the room 'flying' her butterfly.

Waiting for the ice to melt further, the children were invited to play in two 'igloo' play tents. With a final check on the melted ice, they completed their visit with a tour of the galleries, which displayed various effects of the ice age. They returned to nursery a little weary and hungry for a late lunch.

The children were asked by Deborah what they had been doing. Carl reported, "We saw a massive, massive polar bear and a massive baby polar bear". Ben added, "We've been doing some pictures".

The researcher asked if they were tired. Carl pointed silently to the Yorkshire pudding he was eating. Ben was tucking into some ratoutille, his face so close to the plate he was almost eating it off the plate. Carl commented on this, "He's like a whale eating pasta!" Ben was still hungry and requested, "I want some more". He told Deborah, "We missed you and that other girl," referring to a student on placement, who he had been working with.

Other shared events took the form of extended play sequences when Ben and Lauren developed elaborate and sustained levels of cooperative play with Carl, Batman and some younger children. The children showed a confidence in each other's company that was characterised by trust and reciprocity, but not always immediate compliance to one another's wishes. Carl was observed wanting to wear a superman cape that Lauren was wearing. He pointed out, "There's a girl

one and Lauren has to have that", clarifying, "I mean the one with the hood".
However Lauren did not want to hand over the cape and Carl had to make do
without.

The following sequence that took place around the play house, demonstrates the
influence the children have on one another in choosing and pursuing their own
play objectives:

> Carl was climbing up the boards of the roof of the playhouse, when Lorna went
> over to speak to him about climbing so high. He shouted, "I can see my car. Look at
> me Johnny I got up here", before coming down.
> Soon, Ben Carl and Batman were all climbing back on the roof. They looked down
> on others, waving and Carl called out again, "Look at me Johnny!" Rachel and
> Elizabeth looked up, smiled and waved.
> Chris (who was younger) and Johnny tried to join them. Chris got to the top before
> Jane intervened, saying, "That's it! All get down. No more climbing today." The
> boys got down. Lauren had started to climb, but backed down

Climbing up the horizontal boards of the play house had become a theme for a
short time in the second period of fieldwork. Discovered by the children as they
explored the playhouse, it became linked to an ongoing play theme of firemen,
and helping and rescuing one another, as well as the theme of workmen
constructing and hammering. Ben and Lauren were involved in the play around
the fireman theme, and their play with Carl and Batman on this theme was
observed over several months. It had been first noted during the first period of
fieldwork, with play inside and out, on the ground. The children dressed up in
firemen's hats and tabards, and used various props to suggest hoses, reporting
and seeking out 'fires' to put out, which they did in an group, running around both
inside and out.

The play had evolved to climbing inside nursery, on the shelf units (see Carl's
research story) before extending this aspect of the play outside onto and up the
play house in the summer, coinciding with several weeks of fine, warm weather.
At one point there was a misunderstanding between the children's intention and
adult understanding of the meaning of the play for the children. The field notes
record Ben and Lauren climbing up, and, with the other boys, shout for "Help!".
Amongst the cries, Ben's call of, "Help. Help me!" was interpreted literally. The
researcher and one of the practitioners stood beneath him and started to help
him down. But Ben had been playing and, clearly upset, stamped his foot,

protesting "I didn't want to be rescued. I didn't want a big grown up to get me down!".

Another play theme that was observed around the play house was elaborating on and replicating fairy stories. This sequence illustrates the twins' relationships with Carl and Batman, and took place in the afternoon following the visit to the museum. Carl and Batman were the instigators of the play, and Ben and Lauren had their roles, though Lauren resisted being assigned to being 'mother', both twins were happy to be princesses.

At the playhouse, Ben is asleep. Carl and Batman talk of being princes

Carl: Batman, I'm the prince

Batman: No I'm the prince

Carl: I can be another prince

Batman: Only if you find another cape outside

Ben: Come on prince, got to hurry up prince. This is my little door (the door to the house)

Batman: You fall asleep.

Ben: You fall asleep with me and then we're….

Batman: I'm pretending you're a girl and then you're going to marry her

Carl: Hello father we're going to see mother

Batman: Let's go and see mother

Carl: Only boys when they grow up marry girls

Lauren: Can I play?

Batman: Yes…princess. Lauren can be the princess. I am going to be prince

Carl: You can be mummy

Lauren: I don't want to be mummy I want to be daddy

Carl: I tell you what you can be a girl as well. You can be mummy

Lauren goes into the playhouse. She is on the bench. She and Batman play, first in the house then they leave. Carl and Ben have been playing too.

Carl: I already kissed the girl. I'm going to marry Ben

Batman and Lauren go to the slide, which is attached to the play house. It is metal and hot in the sun. Lauren warns Batman not to go on the slide, but he carries on and she tells him again, "Think you're not allowed".

Carl joins them.

Carl: You know what, Batman, Ben isn't being a princess anymore

Carl moves to top of the slide.

Carl: I'm the king of the castle. You're the dirty rascal.

Batman says the same – there is a bit of a stand off

Batman: You're going to be the nasty queen if you're up there

Carl: I'm the king of the castle. Ben is the dirty rascal.

He is standing at the top of the slide and he walks down it.

Ben kicks Michael playfully and starts a play fight. At tea time they all come in. Lauren and Batman have been playing the game of prince and princess. Lauren says, "I want to sit next to Batman. I like Batman". But Batman sits next to Carl in the end.

This description of the children playing together illustrates one feature of playing with friends, that of assigning roles and accepting roles or not, and matters of leadership. From the observations, Ben and Lauren did not often initiate play sequences involving others. This was possibly because they had spent less time in nursery relative to time spent by Carl and Batman. Their influence over their peers seems to have been inhibited by their limited presence in nursery. However, Lauren and Ben were able to assert their autonomy and control over the situation by accepting or rejecting the ideas of others, including play roles. This extended to the 'ownership' of resources, such as costumes or other artefacts that denote roles; in an earlier example above, Lauren was seen to be unwilling to accede to Carl's request for the 'boys' cape, thereby maintaining some control over the situation.

Another aspect of children's relationships was the care and consideration they extended to one another, influenced by the rules and routines of nursery. The children absorbed the rules and conventions and responded automatically, as when Lauren reminded Batman to be careful on the hot slide. Lauren maintained a sense of knowing what to do and what should be done, applying it to her own behaviour and that of others. She was observed going to wash her hands at a basin in the bathroom. Even though she was wearing a short sleeved top she said, "I've got my sleeves pushed up". This demonstrates the power of rules, in this case, pushing sleeves up to keep them dry, which children are conditioned to apply whether they are relevant or not. The researcher turned on the hot tap, and Lauren just pointed to the tap when a younger girl came to wash her hands, silently making the other child aware of the danger of the hot water and acknowledging the need for safe hand washing.

The field notes record Lauren helping Annie after she had had a fall. Lauren fetched two wet paper towels, to place on Annie's sore knees. A further example of Lauren's awareness and kindness towards younger children is illustrated in an observation of Lauren with Alice (Carl's sister). The girls were sitting on the sofa looking through a book. Lauren was reading out the names," elephant, snake and monkey", and Alice shrieked with delight as Lauren turned the pages and

revealed the animals. Lauren appeared to enjoy looking after Alice and entertaining her, whilst Alice's response demonstrated her appreciation.

In addition to the observations of their relationships with other children, friendships are recorded in the photographic data. Lauren and Ben took photographs of their friends during their tours of nursery, which will be referred to below. There were also photographs of the twins, separate and together, chosen intentionally by other children, because they were their friends. The photographic data included three photographs of the twins together, engaged in a task or activity, which had been taken incidentally by other children as part of a 'tour'.

Lauren and Ben and the nursery practitioners.
Lauren and Ben's entry into nursery coincided with the start of the fieldwork, in June 2004. By the time they became part of the core sample group, in August 2004, they had been at nursery for two months, and were establishing relationships with the staff and children.

One of the first observations of the twins with a practitioner was at the end of the day, when there were only a few children remaining in nursery.

> Deborah took the children outside to play a game of 'What time is it Mr Wolf?'. Lauren and Ben were 'enjoying running up and down' and when 'dinner time' was called they screamed and ran back to safety. Taking her turn, Lauren became Mr Wolf enjoying her position.
> Deborah: What time is it?
> Lauren: 4 o'clock
> A boy tried to join her at the front of the children, but she told him to "go back".
> Deborah: What time is it?
> Lauren: 4 o'clock
> Deborah: What time is it?
> Lauren: It's three o'clock

The game carried on for over ten minutes, and it was noted that the children enjoyed the excitement and suspense of the game. The twins responded well to playing organised games and activities with an adult. This may reflect their experience in the school nursery class, where there might have been more adult initiated activities. The following year, Lauren described playing adult led parachute games as, "It was fun". Photographs taken by other children (that were referred to above) reveal Lauren and Ben busy completing craft and painting

activities, prepared by nursery staff and students. In the incident also noted above, Ben playfully kicked Michael, to initiate play. Here Ben could have reflected a confidence and trust he feels for Michael, which has parallels with family relationships in terms of the intimacy and acceptance of behaviours which might be otherwise not be tolerated.

Lauren was seen helping to do 'adult' tasks. On several occasions she was noted collecting up cups and plates at lunch time, as well as gathering up beakers after snack time and, once, picking up empty cups, after physical exercises led by Deborah. She was not asked to take on this responsibility, but was seen being praised by Deborah for being helpful. This provides a further example of Lauren absorbing the rules and conventions of the institution, and responding spontaneously. Her actions mirror adult responsibilities suggesting identification with the role of the practitioner, and possibly, of a mother. Deborah's appreciation of her helpfulness reinforces the behaviour.

For all the children there was the problem of being one of many and competing for adult attention. Observed after lunch one day Lauren was sitting with the others at group time. Jane asked the children to suggest an animal for the song, Old MacDonald. Lauren seemed keen to name an animal. She was sitting very close to Jane and trying to gain eye contact. She became restless as more and more children were asked to name an animal but she was not chosen, and she was seen to disengage from the singing. She appeared to be distracted by the actions of group and she was watched moving away from Jane. It was noted Lauren "worms her way to the back and peers through the gap" between the children.

Another time, Deborah introduced some animal glove puppets. She invited the children to choose a puppet and talk about it to the others. Lauren wanted to take part, and chose a piglet. It was noted that she was "quite shy and had her head down as she spoke about her animal". Though she had wanted to take part, she became self-conscious when she was asked stand and talk about the piglet. Batman had had his turn first and Lauren copied his response, quickly telling the group that the piglet "liked to eat cucumber and to sing", before sitting down. On some occasions Lauren found being the centre of attention uncomfortable.

Amongst the photographs of staff taken during their tours Ben included Val. Looking through the photographs later he explained, "Val. I like her". He also

included Michael in his photographs. Lauren photographed Ruth, her key worker; as well as Michael; a poster with photographs of all staff; and Jane, at the snack table.

Lauren and Ben made relationships with every practitioner, but particularly with their key worker Ruth and Michael, as well as Val. From the observations it appeared that these staff gave more time to the children, Ruth as their key worker, and Val because she was responsible for curriculum planning for the Foundation Stage, including managing resources and organising activities, including games. Michael, as a modern apprentice and the youngest member of staff in his early twenties, spent a high proportion of time playing with the children. The children appeared to recognise his proximity to them in terms of age and generation, as Ben's direct physical approach demonstrates. The younger staff, including students, made themselves more available to the children. But the children acknowledged the care offered by other members of staff. When Ben told Deborah "we missed you and that girl" he was possibly giving recognition to both these aspects of adult attention.

Ben and Lauren and food

Lauren and Ben ate nursery lunches. They both seemed to like the food, particularly Ben; in the field notes there are several references to him asking for seconds and eating everything on his plate. Lauren ate most of what was offered, but occasionally expressed her dislike for some food item, as illustrated below:

When she was three years old, Lauren was observed at lunchtime. Whilst the plates were carried to the tables she looked at the food, "I'm having sausage and chips". She was served and picking up the sausage, eating it off the fork, but it fell onto the floor. As she cut up her chips she was given another sausage, and she commented, "I need my sausage cut up". She ate the chips and announced, "I finished my chips. Ben and I big boy and girl. I don't like skin", referring to the sausage. She drank two cups of water, saying "I'm full with all that drink and food". The pudding was brought to the table. She looked at the plate in front of her and said, "I don't like jam tart". The notes record that she played with it saying she was "Cutting it".

Here, Lauren is shown voicing her reaction to the food as a way of influencing a situation over which she had little control.

The lunch time arrangements brought together a range of food, deriving from homes as well as nursery. Children were able to compare and think about food.

Some months later, several core children were observed eating lunch together. Batman was eating his packed lunch; Lauren, Ben and Carl were eating nursery lunches. Batman observed, "This is Baby Bel". Lauren responded, "Actually we have Baby Bel at our house and me and Ben have the same". At the same meal, the field notes comment, 'Ben eats with his fingers if he can get away with it – often children pick up Yorkshire pudding and eat with (their) fingers. Their friends, sharing the table eating their pack ups, use their fingers'. Though the children were expected to eat their nursery meals with a fork, from a child's point of view finger feeding was acceptable and more practical in many cases.

Lauren and Ben enjoyed the social aspect of lunch times, and being part of a child led sub-culture. Children initiated their own rhymes some days. One lunch time a 'yummy' theme was developed amongst the group; the contributions reflect the familiar idiom of 'yummy' associated with food; the children observe the ad hoc 'rules' of the game as they escalate and elaborate on the idea of 'yummyness'. This episode includes Ben requesting more:

Carl: Yummy in my body

Batman: Yummy in my tummy

Carl: Yummy yummy in my shirt. Yummy yummy in the flower tops. If you say that you're out.

Ben: Yummy yummy in your face

Lauren: Yummy yummy in my tummy

Ruth comments on her tummy rumbling.

Lauren repeats: Yummy yummy in *my t*ummy (her emphasis). Yummy yummy in your mouth

Lizzie: Yummy yummy in my hands. Yummy yummy in my shoes

Lauren: I know what begins with that. Yummy yummy in my tummy. Yummy yummy outside .Yummy yummy in the plates

Carl changes the game:

Carl: There's a hen on your head

Lauren: There's a lion on your head

Carl: Did you say Ben?

Lauren: No I said you

Carl: There's a chicken on your head

Ben is offered more of lunch.

Ben: I only want a sausage

Later, having cleared the plates from the first course and brought yoghurts for the second course, Ruth returns to the table. Ben asks for more yoghurt as he takes his first yoghurt carton to the bin.

The rhymes children made up emerged spontaneously. Here Carl initiates both the "yummy" and the "head" sequences. There appear to be rules, 'if you say that you're out', and an element of playful confrontation as seen in the short exchange between Lauren and Carl. These are fleeting episodes but ones where the children engage verbally, creatively evidencing their knowledge of language and ideas. Ben takes a small part in the wordplay but is alert when seconds are offered, bringing the conversation back to the practical matter of eating lunch.

Issues of etiquette arose at meal times. Being 'polite' was sometimes discussed; Deborah in particular made the children aware of the need for 'manners'. Another observation at lunchtime noted Ben looking at his plate of garlic bread, salad and chicken, and saying "Yuk!" before tucking in. Lauren responded swiftly, telling him, "Don't say yuk". Lauren's awareness of correct behaviour was demonstrated again one tea time, with Lauren and Ben taking turns to clarify and specify the use of these courtesy phrases, which they associated with their grandfather:

Lauren:	We always say "please may I have" at my grandad's
Lauren:	Please and thank you
Lauren:	Please for food and thank you for drinks
Ben:	Please for food and thank you for drinks
Lauren:	Please for food and thank you for drinks

Deborah sometimes supervised the core children. She acknowledged her concerns about their behaviour once when she was overseeing their meal. As they were eating the first course she told the children, "I must say you are very good, very sensible. I'm very impressed. I was nervous before I came on this table. Are they going to be sensible?" Once the children had finished, the plates were tidied up and Lauren started to collect the beakers, telling Deborah, "I'm taking the cups up". The pudding was served and when it was finished there was more interest in taking things back to the kitchen. Carl said, "I'm going to carry these", taking two bowls. He asked Ben, "Are you finished?", wanting to take the bowl which Ben was still using. Carl took up two bowls, Lauren another two and Ben took the last bowl, licking it on the way to the kitchen. Deborah commented approvingly, "A bit of responsibility is good for them". She set expectations which the children were eager to meet. Children were not always encouraged to help clear the table but when they were there was some rivalry over the jobs, and a scrabble for things to take up. Ben seemed determined to take his own bowl back

and to make sure it was licked clean, an action that suggested his liking for nursery food.

At lunchtimes children's name cards were placed on the tables to guide them to where they should sit. Lauren was observed finding her name card on a table and taking it to place it down next to Ben's name. Being able to read the names was important and allowed children greater autonomy and control of the circumstances in nursery.

Lauren and Ben's play and learning

The field notes record examples of the twins finding meaning in the nursery and making connections with events in their own lives. The following examples illustrate the twins' interactions, with Lauren particularly checking on Ben to see where he is or what he is doing. Ben is observed doing the same. Elements of their mutual dependency remain throughout the field work period, however the twins do become more confident and separate. They show an independence from others, both of them want to do things their own way. The observations show the business and determination of both children as they pursue an exploration of areas of provision.

One of the earliest observations of Lauren records her playing, after lunch, at the dough table looking at recipe cards where she recognised the pizza and birthday cake, saying "My birthday cake coming for my three!" She made a cake from the dough, baking it in the oven. When she took it out of the oven the researcher placed candles in the cake. Lauren 'blew' them out, saying, "Hot, burny", before removing them. She cut and handed a portion of 'cake' to the researcher, telling her to, "Eat it, share it". Taking it back again she said, "That's it, that's it".

Lauren then went to look for Ben. He had been playing at the water tray and had got very wet. She found him being changed into dry clothes in the bathroom by Lorna. She asked Lorna where a painting was that she had put to dry earlier, then returned to the dough table and her cake, putting the candles back on.

Ben had been playing in the water, but he moved to a large cardboard box, where Naomi was playing. He pushed her from the box. Seeing Rachel, a younger girl, with a doll he went to snatch it from her, but she held on and walked away. Upset, he followed her and took the doll from her, but then he found a Bob the Builder doll on a chair. He took this doll and threw the first doll back at

Rachel. He returned to the box and threw Bob the Builder inside before getting in himself. He closed the lid and snuggled down, talking to the doll. He said, "I'm trying to hide in here". Another boy came across announcing, "He's a parcel", and opened the lid, which Ben pulled down. He popped up, saying, "Look at me. Bob the Builder's hiding. Can I be a Jack in the box? Can you try to find me? Can you close me up?" Lauren joined him and they took turns to hide in the box, only stopping when everyone was asked to line up at the door to go to play outside. Lauren came back to play in the box saying, "Hide again". She asked about her picture once more and wanted to look at it. When all the children had gone out she said, "I want to go in the garden." There, Lauren took a photograph Ben by the hazel tree, where he had been climbing, and Ben took one of Lauren by the tyres.

The observations illustrate the closeness of the twins, who played together throughout their time in nursery. It records their exploration of nursery resources and the meaning that they draw to their play from personal experiences, for example, the birthday cake and Bob the builder. Ben at this time is seen to be egocentric and socially assertive, pushing Naomi from the box and snatching Rachel's toy. His actions were not interpreted as being malicious, but pragmatic from Ben's point of view. He wanted to play with these items and had little apparent empathy for the girls' feelings. Lauren's search for her painting indicates how important her work is to her, perhaps because she wanted to be able to take it home.

On another occasion, soon after her third birthday, Lauren sat with the researcher and spoke about herself. She told her, "I sleep in a bed not a cot. Daddy took it down stairs and broke it all up…big bed. So I'm not a baby anymore." The researcher asked her, "What's your favourite song?" Lauren replied, "Miss Polly", and she sang this song and finished off with Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. Lauren told the researcher that she liked singing and stories; she liked puzzles and playing with the bricks and water, and the sand and spades. A year later, in another conversation with the researcher, Lauren was asked about a music session; the best bit she said was the shaking music and the parachute which "was fun".

Lauren's interest in letters and words has already been noted. In the second phase of fieldwork, when she was still three, she brought a pile of four picture books to the researcher, to read herself. She admitted, "I can't remember all the

words", as she opened a 'flap' book. She stopped to explain, "Oh, missed a page!", and then pointed out, "You're supposed to open this (flap)". She finished reading and said, "I'd better go outside". Lauren knew about the correspondence between spoken and written words; she understood the sequence of stories and she was beginning to be aware of herself as a reader, as demonstrated in this example and previously when she read to Alice.

Ben's learning, at this time, was more physical and exploratory. An early observation of Ben playing outside, noted him crying until he found an unoccupied scooter, which he got on and began to scoot. Passing the shed he looked in and smiled when he saw Michael getting out the slide. Leaving the scooter, he went to queue to go down the slide, with a crowd of other children. Ben played on the slide again and again, until he fell over when another child bumped into him at the bottom of the slide as he stood looking around. He went inside, taking off his coat as he headed for the bathroom.

Going out again he put his coat back on and tried to fasten the zip, refusing help, he carried on trying to place one end in the other for another minute. Finally he approached Gayle saying, "Can't do this". Jane sorted him out and pulling the zip up he headed for the door where he looked round to see what he could do. Returning to the slide he went round and round for over five minutes taking turns with Lauren, Zoë and three other children. Once he went down backwards on his stomach. It was noted that each time he got to the bottom he stopped to look round before returning to the queue.

Suddenly he left the slide and climbed on the see saw with Simon. Simon laughed but Ben looked serious. Another boy came to stop the see saw and Ben got off and went back inside. He unzipped his coat and cast it off. The telephone rang and he went up to answer it, but he could not reach it. He fetched a chair and placed it under the phone and climbed up on the chair. In this position he could look over a half-door into the baby room and as Gayle came to pick up the phone Ben stood on the chair watching the children in the baby room. He got down at Gayle's suggestion and played with the train track for a short time before moving to a table where there were several jigsaw puzzles laid out. Sitting on a chair he struggled to lift his foot over and under the table, as he started to complete an inset puzzle. Using trial and error strategies he replaced a series of vehicles. When he had finished he began another, more complicated puzzle. He had a very serious expression as he worked. He attempted to replace the pieces

and eventually admitted, "Can't do that one. Can't fit it in". The researcher leant over to help but Ben protested, "I want to do it!". After several more minutes he did complete the puzzle, and smiled when the researcher clapped his effort. Then he broke up the puzzle and started again, repeating the process twice more.

A year later Ben was observed puzzling over a jigsaw again; the researcher offered to give him a clue, but he replied, "I can do it on my own!" His persistence was demonstrated in the following joint observation. Ben had finished playing a boisterous game with Bart, and had gone to join Lauren to roll paint covered marbles over paper. First of all he went to get a painting overall, asking an adult for help, "Can you put this on?" He picked up a tray and placed a sheet of paper in it, putting two marbles on top and rolling them over the paper, where they left thin trails of paint. He changed the marbles and rolled them over the paper, saying, "I'm going to have two…three". He took three more marbles and coated them in paint, and then a fourth, rolling them to and fro, covering the paper with a pattern of different coloured marks. On the table were pots of paint, and paint palettes, with six sections, to 'ink' the marbles. Ben poured more paint into a palette. Bart had joined Ben and Lauren at the table. He and Lauren had a small squabble over marbles, which Ben ignored, finding four more marbles for a fresh picture. Bart had finished, and taking his painting to a drying rack he asked, "Where do I put this? I might forget it. I want it on the front row. I can see it. I can't see it there".

Lauren and Ben worked on, and Lauren held up her paint covered hand, enjoying the messiness of the activity. Ben continued to put more and more paint on and playing with the marbles in the palette. He moved the marbles around, into the different palette sections, in one to one correspondence; he then placed two in one section, and a "big one". He put all the marbles into the one section, and then poured them back into the tray, rolling them back and forth. The tray slipped through his paint covered fingers onto the floor, and the marbles fell too, but he picked them all up. He had been playing for fifteen minutes, exploring and enjoying the paint on his hands. Bart came back and commented, "Is he still playing?", as Ben tipped the marbles from the palette and into an empty tray. His concentration was noted, his tongue was out and paint up was up his arms, and he tripped again, falling against the table. He said, "Finished – I've finished" and looked at Ruth. She asked him to place all the things in the sink to be washed. He went to the bathroom sink and played with the marbles in the water. He asked," Can I take these home?" He continued to wash the marbles, hiding and

enclosing them in his hands until Ruth brought a pot and he tipped the marbles in. He cleaned his hands and arms, saying, "Soap, lots of soap I need lots of soap", before revealing he had hidden a "little marble. I have it inside here. See I told you".

The twins assisted each other's learning. Lauren initially was more accomplished at some of the activities requiring hand eye coordination, and Ben was possibly motivated to tackle some of these activities because of her interest. Ben was more independent, but he relied on Lauren at times to help him and was willing to take her advice. Ben's learning was characterised by his extended interest and persistence, and the exploratory and repetitive nature of his play, discovering the properties of materials. Lauren was more definite in her approach, appearing to be aware of her skills and abilities, and gaining pleasure from her competence. Both children involved themselves in a range of activities provided by nursery. They were observed to take part in tasks planned and organised by practitioners, such as the craft activities, more than any of the other core sample children.

Observations and photographs

Lauren showed an interest in using the camera during the field work, other than when she was offered the camera as part of a tour of nursery, for example, she had used the camera to photograph her drawings. One afternoon, Lauren had been watching Lizzie and Hazel using the camera and asked if she could "take a picture". The researcher suggested they look through the photographs Lauren had recently taken on her tour, to help her decide what photograph to take, but Lauren ignored this. Taking the camera outside she watched the boys playing fire fighters again, dressed in tabards, hats and cloaks. Lauren asked a younger boy, "Chris can I take a picture of you?" Chris agreed and Lauren confirmed, "Chris said I can take a picture" and checked with the researcher, "Can I take a picture of Chris?" The boys were busy playing and Lauren had to tell Chris to "stay there…Chris is going away". Chris heard her and stood still, looking straight at the camera whilst she took a photograph of him. Lauren wanted to take a photograph of James and the others. They were playing in the play house and Carl called out, "You'd better get out, there's a fire". Lauren photographed Carl and James as they played. Some children were climbing up the bars of the playhouse, shouting "You can't catch us!" Lauren was in the playhouse and she said, "I want to take a picture of those shoes", taking several photographs of various legs and feet climbing on the bars (see below).

Lauren's pictures from inside the playhouse

These photographs echo Alan's pictures from inside the play house. It was a popular place for all the children. It was the only outdoor place of shelter. It was a space free of other toys, and could be viewed in whatever way the children wished.

Lauren and Ben's Tours - conversations and photographs

In the first period of fieldwork the twins did not complete a tour, although both children were recorded using the camera. Ben had seen Carl taking photographs and he asked to take a photo of a large cardboard tube from the 'anything' corner

Lauren also showed an interest in using the camera to photograph Ben on a makeshift swing that Deborah and Michael had made, suspeneded from a tree in

the play area outside.   .

In the second period of fieldwork the twins were asked to take and show the researcher around the nursery. Ben took the researcher on two separate tours, two months apart, taking a total of forty-two photographs. On the first tour, Ben was asked what he wanted to photograph and he listed "people…. Batman. I want to take a photo of nursery and all the people in it". He was eager to use the camera and told the researcher, "Excuse me I want to press the button. Leave it here", anxious that the camera might be put away or out of reach. Making a list he identified several specific people and places that he wanted to photograph, and added more as he went round. He photographed Ben and then Carl and Chris at the fire station, as well as the fire station on its own. The fire station was a new play item at the time and Ben like other children was interested in new toys. He also photographed Lauren playing "under the rainbow" and at the drawing table. He photographed Michael sitting on the sofa, with Chris, Alice and Simon. Recalling that image later he noted, "Chris and Alice dressing up". He photographed Val by the sofa, and said,"I like her".

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Ben took more photographs a few weeks later. Again he began by photographing friends. He wanted to photograph his friend Johnny playing in the sand, but he declined. Ben went to ask Bart who initially declined and then agreed to be photographed. His next choice was to "take a picture of Lauren" followed by, "I want to take a picture of Michael. That's all I want to take a picture of." However, once again, with the camera still in his hand, he went on to take several more photographs of other children; of Lily, of the computer; of a display of photographs of children, and including a photograph of himself in the mirror. The field notes comment on Ben's use of the camera. He appeared to mimic a professional photographer as he snapped one photograph after another, holding the camera to his eye rather than looking through the screen, as other children had done. He appeared to be fascinated by the camera. He took a picture of his hand. He took further photographs out side later in the day, in the garden area, alongside Lauren.

A sample of photographs from Ben's tours of nursery, with his words:

The drawing table   the fire station   the office   the rainbow

monkey fingers   Lauren playing in the rainbow   that's me   cars

the puzzle table   the sand tray

puzzles   the computer   photographs   the fence   the garden

vegetables

A few days after Ben's tour, Lauren approached the researcher and asked to take some photographs and was shown the album of Ben photographs of his tour. She was asked to show things and people and places to tell about nursery. Lauren took thirty one photographs during her tour "all round nursery" to show the things, people and places that she liked in nursery. It was very comprehensive and included many of the resource areas as well as people, including Ruth, Michael and Jane, Ben, Batman and James.

The following week Lauren looked through the photographs and her comments when recalling the tour were written down:

A sample of Lauren's photographs:

I took a picture of
Ben playing with the firemen.

I took a picture of the
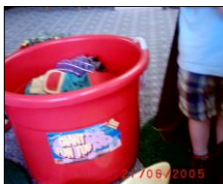world. I like the animals

I like the rainbow.
 It's at the sand now

I took a picture of Robin
playing with the glasses

I took a picture of the animals

I took a photo of the dressing up box

… the sand

the table and the snack

The photos

the office

the gluing things

the water

Ben and the puppet

At the end of this long sequence, Lauren wanted to take another picture of Ben, standing on some shelves, with a hand puppet. Ben was aware of the need to ask for consent and the following exchange took place:

> Lauren indicated that she wanted to take a photograph of, "Ben on top of there". She took a photograph. Ben pointed out , "You've got to ask me first". Lauren took this for consent, and told the researcher, "Ben said I could take a picture". Having taken another photograph Lauren asked, "I want to take a picture of Ben again, he's very, very funny", and took a third photograph.

Lauren took these final photographs (below) several weeks later, when James was completing his second tour. Her explanations were written down at the time of taking the photographs.

I want to take a picture of the mud

I take a picture of this plant

A tree

From their tours Lauren and Ben's photograph's reflect their wide interest in every part of nursery, their friendships, and the practitioners who were special to them.

Lauren and Ben's play nurseries
Lauren's first play nursery

Lauren's first play nursery

Lauren created her first play nursery with Zoë, who had already made her own play nursery, watching alongside. It was recorded on audio tape and with brief notes in the fieldnote book; at the end Lauren took two photographs. This first experience was characterised by an exploration of the small world furniture and items, taking one piece at a time from the bag, naming and making sense of it in turn, and placing it on the table. Lauren made sense of items according to their function and association with an area of the nursery. Finding a mirror she looked round to place it in "the bathroom"; then "sink..there". Zoë contributed from time to time to offer advice or clarify, for example, "there's the cot…this is the toilet". Taking out an "oven" Lauren placed that on the table saying "in your kitchen" (sic). The researcher handed her a fridge that was already on the table and Lauren placed that down by the oven. She laughed when she found a "washing machine!" and there followed a discussion about whether it should go in as the bathroom or the kitchen. Lauren was offered some people for her house, one of whom she designated, "My mummy". She created some short play scenarios with the people, she called one "the baby .in the high chair", and another she referred to first as "the dolly" and then "that's the little girl and she sitting on…". She took photographs of the finished nursery when she had placed all the items available

Eight months later as part of the second period of fieldwork, both Ben and Lauren were recorded on video film making a play nursery. They had a different

approach to the task. Lauren arranged most items available to create scenarios and scenes, as she had the first time. Ben selected only those items that he needed as will be explained below.

Lauren's second play nursery

Lauren's second play nurseries

inside   outside

Lauren made two nurseries an inside and an outside nursery, starting one in the morning and completing the other in the afternoon. She chose to make an inside nursery first. Her approach was systematic and thoughtful; as she took things from the bag, and later the boxes, she made sense of each new item in relation to those things she had placed down already, in the same way she had eight months before. She lined items up around the edges of the low table used for this activity, grouping by function for example the toilet and the "washing sink". Finding a swivel chair she made the association, "That's for the computer", and she noted it was "like a wheel spinning". She put together the computer table and all its components, lining them up with the other furniture. She continued to find and sort items. When she took out the vacuum cleaner she played with it for a short while, 'cleaning' the floor. From time to time Lauren giggled as she sorted or fixed things, for example as she placed drawers into pieces of furniture, to see if they fit. She smiled as she matched cushions to some chairs and a sofa, and when she placed chairs round a table. Piece by piece she placed the inside set of furniture from the bag, and then she opened the boxes of 'dolls' and animals. She expressed frustration when one of the dolls slipped off the computer chair, asking, "Why can't any doll sit in here?". Saying she,"didn't want no people. I do want the animals", she moved on to line up the animals. Asked if she would have a rabbit in nursery, she said, "No", adding, "They didn't have this bunny rabbit. It's a scary one".

It appeared that she was gaining satisfaction and enjoyment from the activity from the way she worked, from her smiles and giggles, and the length of time she spent arranging items, almost forty minutes. At the end she asked to take a

picture, remembering the procedure of the first time. Whilst making her play nursery Lauren was aware of other real events going on around her. She commented, "I like Bob the Builder", about a tape she could hear. She was working by a window and noticed that it had started to rain, observing, "My mummy might get wet". At one point, Lauren asked, "Can I go for a wee wee first?" She returned to open one of the boxes and carried on ordering new objects, rearranging items if necessary to fit everything in. None of these interruptions had distracted her from the main purpose of making her play nursery.

After lunch, that day, Lauren asked for "another go" with the play nursery items. She was reminded that Ben and Carl should also be offered a turn. She claimed, "Ben's been naughty", providing a reason why he might miss or wait for his turn. As the boys were playing elsewhere, it was agreed that she could make a second, outside nursery. Knowing what to do, she checked which bag contained the 'outside' items and set to work. Again Lauren approached the task carefully and thoughtfully. She was unhappy that she had attracted an audience, protesting, "Nobody's leaving me alone!", but she continued, ignoring children coming to watch. Lauren took out and placed the items from the bag around the sides of the table, including the climbing frame, the skateboard, the umbrella, and the seesaw, lining them up as before. She took out the "vegetable patches" placing the vegetables, which she called "carrots" in the holes. She placed the wheel barrow and the watering can on the table too. She found and placed some deck chairs and canvas chairs in a line, matching them up and counting them.

Once she had finished ordering and grouping the contents of the bag and the boxes, she created a scenario involving the "truck" (the car), some people, the tent, some chairs, the skateboard and three figures. Playing filling the car with people and the skateboard, and balancing other items on the roof, Lauren announced they were off to the "seaside". As she pushed the car forwards and back, she added, "We go onto seaside at home. Need our decking (sic) chairs – three – and skateboard". Announcing their arrival, "Here we are", Lauren took the chairs off the roof and got out the skateboard. She placed the boy on the board and skated, making "whee whee" sounds. She placed the chairs in a row, by the umbrella and sat the people on the chairs; she called one of the figures "teacher", and placed two baby figures in the sand tray. She put one of the people back in the car, with the tent on the roof. By this time Ben had come to watch and asked for his go. Lauren was still engaged with the scenario she had

made and when it is suggested she packed up she said, "Not yet". She asked for five more minutes as Ben come back to check what was happening. Then she requested, "Two more minutes", before handing over to Ben. She was knowledgeable about the rules and conventions of nursery that allowed her to keep her turn for five more minutes, asserting herself and her right to play.

Ben's play nursery

Views of Ben's play nursery

Ben had watched Lauren make her nursery and he was aware of the process, and eager to begin. He chose to make an outside nursery. The video shows him taking it very seriously, and working silently at first. He took all the items from the bag and emptied the boxes of people and animals, piling them up on the table. Then he began to pick out a few items – the climbing frame, with a slide and tyre swing, and the skateboard. He started to arrange things on the table, lining up the animals, saying "make space". He placed a guinea pig and rabbit on the skateboard and took it down the slide, repeating this several times. He played with the animals on the frame and down the slide, making humming sounds, "Do, do, do….". He placed one of the figures, a boy, on the skateboard with a couple of rabbits. Then he moved them on to the swing, this time making, "Whee" sounds and still humming. Carl was watching, and commented, "Have you just got one person – the toy people?" Lauren was also watching and Ben put his arm out to defend his play from them. When Robin also appeared Ben shouted, "No! Get out!", and continued to play with the rabbits on the skateboard. Asked by the researcher if he'd like to have a rabbit in nursery he replied, "Just a rabbit". He added, "Have cats at my house not at nursery". Continuing to play with the rabbit and the skateboard (and protecting the toys from the interest of other children) he commented, "Action, action….skating along, I wonder where we're going", repeating this. Aware that several children were watching him he said, "Thirty seconds and then one. When I say one, he can have a go", carrying on playing. Two minutes later he stopped playing and told the researcher, "Excuse me, I want the people to play with me", again repeating this twice. As Carl and

the others joined him, he said, "My mummy said we have to have a skateboard because we haven't got one. A new skateboard – a new skateboard we don't want it to get broken". James played for only sixteen minutes.

From their responses, it appeared that Lauren and Ben understood that the play nursery task was to create a play space. Their respective 'nurseries' reflected their interests and approaches to play in the 'real' nursery. Lauren's was rational and thoughtful, combining careful and precise organisation with imaginative play, that was linked to the reality of home and nursery. Ben's play was physical and exploratory and less organised but very spontaneous. Both children involved 'people' in their nurseries, possibly reflecting their perspective of nursery as a social space for children and 'teachers'. Lauren's interest and involvement was sustained for a long time; but Ben's play was deep and involved only whilst his attention was held. Lauren and Ben were initially possessive of the toys, enjoying a monopoly position for a short while. Previous sections of the research story note some fierce and some more reasoned competition for play items. Lauren appeared to be more competitive than Ben, and is seen to be more possessive in her play. Ben is shown to want to share his play with others, again reflecting a pattern observed in real life.

A summary of quality experiences in preschool from Ben and Lauren's perspectives:

Quality experiences for Ben:
- Parents who knew what he wanted, for example a skateboard
- Having his sister Lauren to play with and have fun with and to look after him
- Following Lauren's initiative to take part in craft and other 'messy' play, and having her help to learn new skills
- Learning to master materials and puzzles
- Having friends who he could rely on to include him in their play, and to know over time
- Being sufficiently confident to determine his role and character in play that he was not leading
- Staff who could be trusted to care and understand his needs, and who would become involved in physical play at times
- Being able to persist in and practise a task with out being rushed or directed by an adult

- Being independent, knowing there were adults to help if necessary
- Nursery food that he usually ate up and having second helpings
- The physical challenge of outdoor play, such as the playhouse and the hazel tree, and running about with friends

Quality experiences for Lauren :

- Parents who gave you confidence (to know letters)when they came into nursery; but missing parents was not something that represented a quality experience
- Being aware of the rules and routines, and knowing how things are done
- Being able to care for others and take responsibility and to have that rewarded by practitioners
- Having her brother Ben in nursery to provide emotional support and to play with and have fun with, and to find "very funny"
- Nursery staff who she could trust and rely upon
- Friends to play with, both boys and girls, and older and younger children.
- Having places to play and interesting play items to play with
- Being confident enough to stand up for herself when she was not able to lead the play
- Being at nursery for just one day a week gave Lauren some good experiences, as seen in her play, however, from a social point of view it took Lauren time to establish close friendships with other children
- Having a sense of continuity as she attended term time and in the holidays.

Chapter Summary

The research stories have presented the data illustrating individual experiences. The summaries for each child provide conclusions from the data analysis, which collectively form the basis of the findings of this study. Eleven categories and themes constitute these findings and have been drawn together as a matrix found at Appendix viii. A sample of the matrix is provided to clarify the relationship between categories and themes within the matrix and the Research Stories (Fig.4.1).

Figure: 4.1 Sample from the matrix display of the data

Matrix displaying categories and themes from the data

Categories: definitions reflecting aspects of preschool identified from the literature and analysis and confirmed by continued comparison between cases	Themes emerging from the data and further explored during analysis	Subthemes emerging from the data and further explored during analysis Evidenced from: Photographs (P); Observations (O); Conversations (C); Tours (T); Drawings (D); Play nurseries (Pl N)	Cross case/ category phenomena	Interweaving and overarching themes
1 Personal relationships – interactions between individuals *Underlying values: trust /respect /reliability/ empowerment*	Child/child	• friend/ sibling/companion (P;O) • time known (C) • time spent with (C)	**Play Emotions Learning Time**	Empowerment and well-being
	Child/practitioner	• with key worker /manager/ other/ student (O,T,C,P) • younger/older/ male/female (O) • making time for (O) • being fair (O)	**Food Play Learning Resources**	
	Child/parent	• Thinking about parents (C,O,D) • Missing parents (C,O,D**)**	**Time**	
	Trust/respect/fear	• 'hate', 'love' (C)	**Emotions**	
2 Routines – the activities and organisation throughout the day *Underlying values: reliability/relationships/ respect*	Arrival /departure/	• Excitement/ anxiety (O;C)	**Control Relationships**	
	group times	• comfort/ excitement/frustration (O, C)	**Emotions Relationships**	
	snack times	• comfort; pleasure; (P, O,C)	**Emotions Food**	
	playtimes	• going outside/ playing inside (P, O, C, Pl N)	**Play**	
	tidying up	• responsibility, co-operating and complying (O) • praise for helping (O)	**Rules Relationships**	

The matrix was generated over time as the data were analysed. The process and stages of analysis, employing a constructivist and interpretive approach, have been explained in detail in Chapter Three. The stages of analysis are reflected in the matrix. Categories from the literature, which formed the starting point for understanding the data, were added to and refined as each phase of the fieldwork (at both sites) and ongoing analysis proceeded. For example, the

category of 'relationships' (Category 1) had been identified in previous studies; in the current study these are defined as 'interactions between individuals'. Within this category four distinct themes were identified from the data distinguishing the inter-relationships between children and practitioners, with their parents, and with other children; a fourth theme identified attributes of the relationships. Further specific meanings were found and coded as subthemes.

The emerging themes and subthemes reflected individual and general aspects of children's experiences which have been illustrated in the research stories. It was possible to cross categorise the themes and subthemes and the phenomena represented, demonstrating how lived experiences occur in the context of complex social activity. Finally, the matrix reflected the concluding aspects of the analysis, presenting interweaving and overarching themes of autonomy, empowerment and well-being that were associated with quality experiences for children in the study and the research stories. Underlying adult values for each category, which were evident within the literature (Jamieson, Cordeaux and Wilkinson, 2000) and highlighted in Chapter Two, were identified and included in the matrix.

From the two methods of presenting the data, a taxonomy of characteristics of quality experiences from children's perspective was constructed, found at Appendix x. The original taxonomy was written as a development of the matrix. It utilised nine of the categories as the basis for representing the children's lived experiences, incorporating the two remaining categories of 'rules' and 'life outside'. A sample from the original taxonomy is provided in Fig.4.2.

Figure 4.2 Sample from the original taxonomy

Category 7 Learning and knowing

<u>Theme 7a The importance of learning and knowing facts and skills:</u>

Subthemes:

- *learning and knowing things about the world outside and relating it to nursery*
- *learning and knowing about letters and books and reading: letters and pens and writing; and numbers and counting and shape*
- *learning physical skills – sticking, cutting, drawing, writing, painting*
- *learning how to use the computer*

This first taxonomy was further developed and 'translated' into a second version, written in the idiom of children's language, from their view point. This final version draws together the concluding findings of the study and is presented in the

concluding chapter. The children's version retained the nine categories however it gained in translation. As the subthemes were interpreted into children's idiom some were expanded into more precise descriptors of children's nursery experiences that emerged from the Research Stories. Figures 4.2 and 4.3 illustrate the changes to and expansion of the subthemes that came out of this process.

Figure 4.3 Section from the final taxonomy

Category 7 Learning and knowing

Theme: 7a Learning and knowing about things and how to do things are important:

Subthemes:

- *I can learn from watching older children and younger children can watch me*
- *I can learn and know about people and the world outside and link this to what happens or what I can find in nursery*
- *I can learn and know about letters and books and reading: and letters and pens and writing; as well as knowing colours, numbers and counting and shapes, and weighing and measuring and things like that*
- *I can learn to do sticking, cutting, drawing, writing, painting*
- *I can learn to pedal a bike, to run, skip, jump and climb*
- *I can learn to use the computer and other things like that*

The experiences that indicate quality from the children's perspectives include the people in their lives; the organisation of nursery; and the resources available. What also emerges from the data is the way in which these contribute to children's feelings of well-being (Laevers, 1994). Well-being has been described 'as helping the child to feel at home, to be him/herself, to remain in contact with him/herself and have his/her emotional needs…fulfilled' (1994:5). A sense of empowerment is closely linked to well-being, as was identified in the matrix. Amongst other experiences, the children were empowered through relationships with siblings and friends; through the resources of places to climb and take risks; and through the organisation of visits outside the nursery.

The research stories show how children make sense of the primary relationship between home and nursery, and the way they rationalise the differences between the two places. The relationship between home and nursery is seen to be well established by Batman, through his lunch box, bringing home into nursery; and his comments about finding an envelope, taking nursery back home. Alan makes links by bringing items into nursery from home to play with; through the computer he establishes consistency and unity in home/nursery activities. From the

references to parents by all the children it seems that parents are often present in children's minds. This is expressed physically in Lauren's drawings of her parents and Carl's photograph of the family car and the window where his mother worked.

The forceful and consistent incidence of children's thinking about their parents in the research stories deserves some comment. This aspect of the children's experiences can be associated with attachment theory. The separation of young children and their parents has long been recognised as a traumatic event which requires acknowledgement by those taking the place of parents. The research stories reveal the resilience of children and their use of maintenance strategies to restore their connection with their parents whilst at nursery. Important attachments to other adults and children have been demonstrated in the research stories, particularly with Michael and with Ruth, the children's keyworker at the time.

From the stories emerges the effect of institutionalisation or 'schoolification' (Bennett, 2006) as the children are socialised into nursery practices, including knowing the rules and routines. Also revealed are the challenges that children make to resist the dominance of these, carving out some autonomy and control, and involving the creation of a group subculture (Cosaro, 1997). The children's actions are not necessarily confrontational. Although Alan is the most verbally assertive child, each of the children can be seen to individually pursue their own route through nursery, with separate experiences within a common situation. Collectively, in pairs or peer groups, they create a sub-culture to interpret their understanding of this situation through their play, through jokes and fun at mealtimes (Alcock, 2007) , and through the solidarity of being part of a larger group when singing, standing waiting to go outside or playing a group game.

The friendships that children establish, either as companions or closer friendships, across gender and age, emerge as powerful relationships that feed their imaginations and learning. Having a sibling in nursery is also an important aspect of well-being for Carl, Batman, Lauren and Ben. Zoë, who chose her sister's name as her research name, and Alan, who found a 'nursery brother', did not have this advantage.

The resources in the form of 'stuff' can excite the children. Batman's play with feathers; Zoë's jumping on the trampoline; Alan's transformers; Carl's climbing up

the play house to hammer; Ben's fascination with the marbles and Lauren's constant activity, are just a few of the episodes described in the research stories that illustrate the children's willingness to engage playfully with items they found in nursery. Special places were found and returned to. Quality experiences were provided for the children through a choice of playthings and other items. Staff attitudes to children's exploration and a willingness to accept the children also indicate quality experiences.

The concluding chapter presents the full taxonomy of quality experiences from children's perspectives, drawn from the stories and developed from the matrix of categories, themes and subthemes.

Chapter Five   Conclusion

In this chapter the aims and objectives of the research, including the research questions, are restated in order to evaluate if and how these were achieved and answered. A summary of the findings will be presented, firstly in the form of a taxonomy of characteristics of quality experiences from the point of view of young children, representing the factual conclusions. Following on from this, reflections on the data from an adult perspective and the conceptual conclusions will be presented. Together with the taxonomy, they constitute the original contribution to knowledge made by the research. The effectiveness of the methodology will be considered and its limitations identified. Finally, the implications of the study will be proposed in relation to policy and practice.

To recap on the development of the thesis and the conceptual framework, the study argues that children's views have significance as they are key stakeholders in early years provision (Moss and Pence, 1994). The quality of early years provision is perceived as a fundamental factor determining the most favourable outcomes for children (DES, 1990; Abbott, 1994a; Sylva, Roy and Painter, 2003; Bennett, 2006). It has been argued that all stakeholders contribute to an understanding of quality (Moss and Pence, 1994; Katz, 1994; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999; Podmore, 2004). The concept of quality in relation to early years provision has been examined and different perspectives critiqued including those of children.

The purpose, aims and objectives of the research

The purpose of the research was to explore and identify the perspectives of children on the quality of their experiences in early years provision as stated in the first research aim:

> To identify the characteristics of quality as perceived by a group of young children, as they experience education and care.

From this aim the following research question emerged: '*What perspectives do young children have on the quality of early education and childcare?*' The study drew on the burgeoning body of literature in relation to children's perspectives (amongst others Cousins, 1999; Christensen and James, 2000; Clark, Kjorholt and Moss, 2005), within which the study of childhood has acknowledged and established the authority of children's viewpoints and in particular the notion of children's agency (Jenks, 2000; Mayall, 2002; James and James, 2004). In response to this, methodologies have been developed to involve the participation of very young children in conveying their understanding of their lives, notably the

Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2001; 2005). This present study adapted their methodology and participative techniques to elicit children's views on the quality of their preschool experiences, as they experienced two years of early educational entitlement, in order to fulfill the research objectives which were:

- To elicit the meaning that children give to their presence in early education and childcare settings, to their activity there and to their role in the social context of the settings.

- To identify and implement a range of methodological approaches to elicit the views of children within the age range three to five years, and to explore and report on their use with young children, at two research sites.

- To propose characteristics of quality as perceived by children receiving early education and childcare and to draw down from the data analysis a taxonomy of those characteristics, as determined by children in this research.

- To exemplify characteristics of quality in the words and actions of children, as a basis for informing early years policy and practice beyond the life of this thesis.

Two supplementary questions arose from the objectives, which were; '*How do children give meaning to the activities and relationships within their preschool settings?*' and '*Can the meaning(s) children give be interpreted as quality indicators, to demonstrate an understanding of quality?*' In addressing these questions the research generated a range of substantial data sets, which when analysed demonstrated children's critical understanding of the quality of their preschool experiences.

A second purpose of the research was to interrogate two aspects of recent government policy. Firstly, the expansion of free nursery provision for children under five in order to increase the opportunities and attainment for all young children (DfEE, 1998; QCA, 2000). Secondly, the expectation that children's views should be taken into consideration by adults when decisions are made on their behalf (DfEE, 1998b; CYPU, 2001; Great Britain. *Childcare Act 2006*). The second aim stated the intention:

> To critically analyse policy development over the past ten years in relation to meeting the individual needs of children, and to demonstrate how young children's views on quality are absent from the formulation of current government policy.

The study has traced the recent expansion of early years provision, reflecting government priorities. A significant aspect of the development of services is the emphasis on the quality or standards of provision. As stakeholders children's views on this issue are important and have been recognised in the literature

(Langsted, 1994; Abbott 1994b; Cousins, 1999). The research aimed to highlight the government's lack of response to the emerging evidence of the competence of young children to make constructive comment on their lives, using participative methodologies with the support of adults (McAuliffe, 2003; Clark, Kjorholt and Moss, 2005; Bryson, 2006). The study has considered the inconsistency between the stated aims of policy to consider the views of young children, and the implementation of policy to provide for the care and educational needs of the same group of children, within in a foundation stage, without any apparent reference to their views. In relation to this anomaly a fourth research question was posed:

'*As the New Labour government has developed policies to consult with children of all ages in relation to provision they receive, what use is the government making of the results of these consultations at national policy level?*'

The scrutiny of government policy in relation to the second aspect of the research will be considered towards the end of the chapter when the implications for policy will be discussed. Before that the main findings from the empirical research will be considered.

The Findings

In response to the first aim of the study and the related research questions, the findings identify the characteristics of quality as perceived by a group of young children, as they experience education and care. They demonstrate young children's perspectives on quality experiences and how children give meaning to the activities and relationships within their preschool settings

The bases for the findings in relation to children's perspectives are the thematic analysis of the various data sets collected in the fieldwork and the descriptive presentation of the data in the research stories. Collectively these suggest the meaning children give to their early education and care.

Findings from the point of view of the children

Initial categories of analysis had been derived from findings from previous research studies into children's perspectives on early childhood provision. Relationships, rules and routines, food and play resources emerged as common features of group care and early years provision that had been identified as being important by children. These were presented in Chapter Two and had influenced the research design (Langsted,1994; Clark and Moss, 2001; Dupree, Bertram and Pascal. 2001; Blackburn and Mooney, 2003; Einarsdottir, 2005). Chapter

Three expounded an initial conceptual framework based on an understanding of the children as social agents and experts in their lives.

The process of analysis worked outwards from the initial pre-existing categories which were expanded as other significant aspects emerged. Additional categories included other factors affecting children's perspectives, for example, time; their control over events; learning and knowing about their own lives, their life in nursery and the world beyond; and emotions and feelings. From each of these categories further meanings, referred to as themes, were identified, some of which were common to several of the children, some which were associated with just one or two children. The themes themselves were refined into sub-themes, which again reflected both common and individual or particular experiences. A complex matrix displaying the results of the thematic analysis was developed alongside the process of analysis (Appendix viii). As already stated, the research stories, exemplifying the categories, themes and subthemes as accounts of children's lived experiences, together with the matrix, form the findings of the study. The findings are summarised in classified form, as a taxonomy of characteristics of quality experiences that are constructed by children in response to being in nursery (Table 5.1).

As previously explained, the original taxonomy was written in 'adult language' (Appendix x). However, a final version was written that aimed to translate the language into children's idiom. There are precedents for this. Katz (1993) posed questions in children's language to emphasise children's exclusion from the quality debate. The UNCRC (UNICEF, 2000) has been written in forms that are accessible to young children as acknowledgement that to know their rights children need to understand them. This version of the taxonomy has not been presented to children for their comment, and it is not claimed to represent the authentic voices of children. What the translation hopes to achieve is to reflect perspectives of the experiences of attending a nursery that is not the adult view. Derived and constructed from the research stories and the matrix of categories and themes, the taxonomy provides a synthesis of the combined perspectives of children experiencing nursery provision. The ordering and classifying of quality experiences mirrors the ordering and classification of standards in adult constructed quality frameworks, which prioritise adult values. The child's taxonomy prioritises children's values. The taxonomy responds to the research objective: 'To identify the characteristics of quality as perceived by a group of young children, as they experience education and care.

Table: 5.1 A child's taxonomy of quality experiences

Category 1; Relationships

Theme : 1a Adults at my nursery are important:

Subthemes:

- *to look after me, to know me and to be kind and understand my feelings*
- *to care for and to comfort me*
- *to be fun to be with, to be fair and to understand and accept me as I am*
- *to be there everyday and to be the same everyday towards me*
- *to trust, respect and make me feel I can do things and be strong*
- *to know about things and to share that with me and to tell me things to help me learn*
- *to know and be known to me for a long time so that I feel happy with the adults who look after me*
- *some grownups are more important to me than others and they may be my key person*

Theme: 1b Other children are important:

Subthemes:

- *to play with, to have fun and be playful with me*
- *to share play and ideas with me*
- *so that I can lead and follow and we can do things together and feel close*
- *to know things about them and their families and to tell me things they know and to make me feel good because I know more things*
- *to be friends with me and to make together a world we share by being playful with the things we say and do*
- *to be there everyday– or to be missed if not there*
- *to know each other better for a long time; sometimes I will love them or I may hate them too*

Theme: 1c Sisters and brothers are important:

Subthemes:

- *to cheer me up, to be by my side and to stand by me*
- *to play with me and to look after me and to make me feel safe and strong*
- *to be take care of me and to be there when I need them*
- *to tell me things and help me learn*
- *to share a mum and dad with and to remind me of home*

Theme: 1d Mums and dads and carers are important:

Subthemes:

- *to love me and to be loved by me, and to make me feel safe and strong*
- *to look after and take care of me and be proud of me*
- *to leave me at a nursery where they think I will be busy and safe and happy*
- *to come back to me and to pick me up at the same time each day*
- *to be missed by me when they are not there*
- *for me to think about and remember things like our holidays, being with my granny, grandpa, aunties, uncles and cousins when I am in nursery, and to talk about*
- *to be drawn and for playing mums and dads and children*

Category 2: Rules and routines

Theme: 2a The rules are important:

Subthemes:

- *to keep me safe*

- *to help children know how to behave at different times of the day and how to behave with each other and with the adults*

- *to make sure all the children are treated the same and to make them feel strong and safe*

- *to forget or to break sometimes and to know the adults will not be too cross about it*

- *and who will understand when I am naughty and help me to keep to the rules*

Theme: 2b The routines are important:

Subthemes:

- *so that I know what and when things will happen every day and every week*

- *so that I can do or be given little jobs to help that make me feel important*

Category 3: Resources – places and provision

Theme: 3a Places and space outside and inside are important:

Subthemes:

- *to move and rush about in, and to explore and get to know each corner*

- *to be places that are just for the children where I can sometimes go to and hide away in*

- *and where I can make up and play out stories from television and DVDs as well as books*

- *or where I can be quiet and on my own as well as being busy and noisy*

Theme: 3b The different parts of nursery where I can find things to do are important:

Subthemes:

- *to interest and excite me and make me want to know and learn about things*

- *and where I can find the same thing each time as well as new things*

- *where I can learn to know how to do things with help and on my own that makes me pleased with myself*

- *where there is "stuff" that I find interesting and that I will want to play with for a long time*

- *and where there is enough for everyone to play with*

Category 4: Food at snack and meal times

Theme: 4a Lunch and snacks are important*:*

Subthemes:

- *this is a time when I can enjoy food from nursery and/or from home*

- *sometimes I can say I don't want or like some food and that is OK*

Theme: 4b Eating together is important:

Subthemes:

- *this is a time I can to enjoy myself with my friends and talk about our home and families*

- *this is a time to make up rhymes and songs together and laugh and joke as well*

- *these things make us feel happy and strong and we are leading what happens*

Category 5: Children's emotions and feelings

Theme: 5a How I feel inside and how I feel about what happens in nursery are important :

Subthemes:

- *to be allowed to show anger, excitement and strong feelings*
- *to be with adults who see and understand when I am worried, anxious or frightened*
- *to be a little bad tempered sometimes when something makes me cross*
- *to be able to find places to be sad and cry*

Theme: 5b : Times when I am really enjoying myself are important

Subthemes:

- *to be able to be excited, happy and to sometimes shout when I am having fun with other children*
- *to be excited, and happy when I am singing or playing games in a group of children*

Category 6: Play

Theme: 6a: Playing with other children and making good friends is important:

Subthemes:

- *for me to say what will happen when we play or for me to do what someone else says*
- *to play together and feel close to each other as friends and different from other children*
- *to make up our own rhymes, songs and stories together, and to do this over and over again*
- *to decide to pass things on to other children, who may or may not be my friends*
- *and to decide to share when there is not enough for everyone*
- *to sometimes decide not to share because I want to play longer with something*

Theme: 6b: Playing and learning things is important:

Subthemes:

- *to learn about things and how to do things when I play and then to show and tell other children how to do these things*
- *to know things makes me feel good and help other children to feel good too*
- *to be able to explore and to wonder around nursery and to touch things and use them to find out how they feel or how they work*

Category 7: Learning and knowing

Theme: 7a Learning and knowing about things and how to do things are important:

- *Subthemes:*
- *I can learn from watching older children and younger children can watch me*
- *I can learn and know about people and the world outside and link this to what happens or what I can find in nursery*
- *I can learn and know about letters and books and reading: and letters and pens and writing; as well as knowing colours, numbers and counting and shapes, and weighing and measuring and things like that*
- *I can learn to do sticking, cutting, drawing, writing, painting*
- *I can learn to pedal a bike, to run, skip, jump and climb*
- *I can learn to use the computer and other things like that*

Theme: 7b Knowing about and understanding other people is important:

Subthemes:

- *knowing who the other children are and that they will help me*
- *knowing who the practitioners are and that they will help me*
- *knowing what is in nursery and where to find it*
- *knowing how to ask other children if you can share the toys or to play with them*
- *knowing what to do and how to do it and that you are allowed to do it*
- *knowing the places and things that are not for children*

Category 8: Time

Theme: 8a The time I am in nursery is important:

Subthemes:

- *as I get older what I am interested in and what I like to do changes and I know I can do things better*
- *As I get older I am able to cope with things going wrong*
- *I learn how to do more things when I am four and I still want to learn more*
- *I know more about and am closer to my friends when I've known them a long time*
- *I am sad when my friends leave nursery and I will miss people when I leave*

Theme: 8b The time taken for things to happen is important:

Subthemes:

- *It can feel a long time waiting for my mum or dad to come to pick me up*
- *It can feel a long time waiting for my turn*
- *It can feel a long time waiting to go outside*

Theme: 8c Time allowed

Subthemes:

- *Being allowed time play; and time to learn; and time to eat*

Category 9: Control

Theme: 9a Being able to say or change what happens in nursery is important:

Subthemes:

- *I am able to use the rules to change what happens to me, like asking someone to share*
- *everyday we do some things at the same time to help me know what is happening next*
- *I can make my own choice of things to do from all the different parts of nursery*
- *I can choose to start my own game and be the leader or decide to join someone else's game or do what they are doing*

Theme: 9b Not being able to change what happens is important:

Subthemes:

- *I cannot decide if I have to go to nursery or how long I stay there*
- *I cannot decide what food I eat*
- *I cannot decide when I can go home*
- *sometimes other people won't let me join in their game or let me play with them or with something*

An objective identified in the research design was: 'To propose characteristics of quality as perceived by children receiving early education and childcare and to draw down from the data analysis a taxonomy of those characteristics, as determined by children in this research'. It is proposed that the child's taxonomy fulfills this objective.

Further findings from the study – an adult reflection

The taxonomy presents a summary of the children's view points and represents an attempt to be empathetic with the children's standpoint. Further findings emerged from the research which can inform our understanding of quality experiences for children in nursery. These findings are based on reflections made during the fieldwork and in writing up, and are adult constructions, presented separately and additionally to the children's viewpoint.

- Experiences are not the same for all children as their individual experience of being an attendee at a day nursery is unique. Certain factors appeared to influence positively the experiences of some children. The status of a child's attendance in respect of the length of time attended appeared to be significant. Those children (Carl and Batman) who had spent the lengthiest period at nursery appeared to have the closest relationships with staff and to be most confident in their play. It may also be significant that they had a sibling in nursery, and contact with a sibling appeared to be most important for the twins. However, each of the children sought increasing independence and autonomy in their play and learning in the second period of fieldwork as their relationships with staff strengthened. Though the adults were not the focus of interest, staff relationships appeared to become more respectful and trusting of children over time.

- The change to children's circumstances and views over time, from being three year olds, to becoming four year olds, resulted in a gradual evolution of the meaning that these core children gave to their presence in nursery that has been associated in this study with autonomy and empowerment. As they matured from three year olds to four year olds their expectations appeared to change and they became more confident and assertive.

- In contrast, time could be viewed as a constraint on the children in terms of the effect of time spent in nursery impacting on children's participation in family life, expressed by the children as 'missing' their parents, an issue not

addressed in this study but one that has been foreshadowed by the research. Children in this context can be seen to be disempowered as control over their circumstances is taken from them. As a result the quality of their personal experience and sense of well-being appears to be diminished.

- Referred to above, the theme of empowerment occurs throughout the taxonomy. 'Power' had been identified as an important aspect of being at nursery early in the process of analysis. Issues of lack of power predicated the study, as implicit in the research on children's perspectives is the question, 'If children, as subjects of the policy to entitle them to a period of preschool, have views on the preschool how can they express their views?' From the analysis it became clear that whilst control over events was a concern that was voiced by the children and evidenced in their behaviour, it was felt that they were not seeking power over events but empowerment to be what they wanted to be. The children acknowledged and appeared to expect and accept readily the role of adults to be responsible for them. Despite the absence of any formal device to give the children voice, the research stories evidence the function of relationships to empower children to be able to express their feelings, put forward their views, and make decisions about their play and learning.

- A further reflection is on the authority of the children's voices and the insight they provide. The research stories reflect distinct voices and clear characters. The children emerge as individuals but in writing up the data the sense and significance to them of their being part of a group became apparent. Their identity is shaped by nursery and home and the children construct connections between the different people and places in their lives, demonstrating strong attachments made by the children. Their key person is important but so are friends and siblings, and other members of staff, who may not be their key person. These connections are acknowledged within government policy on care standards in relation to working with parents (DfES,2000; DCSF, 2008). However, it is possible that the strength of the links with home and the attempts children make to bridge the gap and understand the differences between the home and nursery are not fully acknowledged. It is proposed that this is an under recognised aspect of early years provision which links to the significance of time spent in nursery and out of the home.

- In the light of an absence of established routes or resources to respond to children's views through consultation and participation at setting level, it came as no surprise that there are no references to involving children in decision making in the most recent standards framework and practice documents detailing education and care for young children (DCSF, 2008). The difference between government rhetoric and reality in relation to hearing and responding to the views of young children gapes as wide as ever. This point will be returned to when addressing the implications for policy.

The original contribution to research

The study aimed to fill a gap in the literature of early years provision in respect of an in-depth research over time into the perspectives of young children on the quality of their experiences whilst attending their preschool. Chapter Two described the various approaches existing studies had used to elicit children views on qualitative aspects of their preschools at one point in time. This study followed previous research but was methodologically distinct by concentrating on the views of children alone and by studying children over time, when they were three year olds and whilst they became four year olds. The resulting data produced five research stories which illustrated the children's real time lived experiences and provide fresh insights into those aspects of being at nursery that impact on children's experiences positively and also negatively. Social, material and emotional features and elements are revealed and exemplified through the personal experiences and relevance of these to the children, creating a distinct and unique story and meaning for each child.

Through the research stories, this research provides a range of perspectives of quality experiences from the point of view of a group of young children attending the same day nursery together over a fifteen month period. The study adds to our understanding of quality from the point of view of children by continually reiterating the importance of autonomy and empowerment in relation to well-being as central features of quality from a child's perspective. The study also confirms aspects of previous research. Quality experiences have a commonality, as depicted in the taxonomy, but for individual children, diversity is a key element. By acknowledging the diversity, quality emerges as a phenomenon that is individually defined by and for each child. The study does not aim to analyse the implications of the differences, only to draw attention to them as a defining feature in determining the quality of the experience for each child in an early years setting.

The study contributes to the understanding of quality early years provision in England from the point of view of the individual. It contrasts this micro subjective process with the macro objective process of understanding quality standards in terms of adherence to curriculum outcomes and care standards. The two are not necessarily mutually incompatible or conflicting but their relationship is not realised or acknowledged in government policy. The difference between these contrasting perspectives is examined further in the next section, which addresses the research question. 'Can the meaning(s) children give be interpreted as quality indicators, to demonstrate an understanding of quality?'

Quality indicators or indicators of quality experiences?

Mooney and Blackburn (2003) suggest the term 'quality indicators' to categorise aspects of childcare from the point of view of children. The term relates directly to quality control models of assessing quality, which are helpful in a system that is designed to measure quality for accountability and assessment of performance purposes. Essentially this is an adult-centric model rather than a child-centric model, and reflects an institutional and instrumental response to quality, measuring the delivery or outcomes of childcare rather than the process of receiving childcare, the inputs or what is contributed by all involved. It aims to ensure a universality of provision, and an equality of entitlement, by establishing common standards against which all are measured. It is an outsider view.

Whilst 'quality indicators' are identified by adults, children do not have a conscious sense, or an understanding in the abstract sense, of quality. However, they do have an awareness of good and bad experiences that for them contribute to or detract from a feeling of 'well-being' (Laevers, 1994; DfES, 2003b; Great Britain. *Children Act 2004*; DCSF,2007). The study proposes that these should be viewed as 'indicators of quality' within the wider debates on quality. Chapter Two presented a detailed account of the development of quality systems that have been applied within early years settings alongside recent studies that evidenced children's awareness of quality experiences. A distinction was made between 'outsider' (adults') and 'insider' (children's) perspectives. What this study has sought to illustrate is that whilst there is some considerable compatibility between these perspectives, as policy stands at the moment it is adults' 'outsider' agenda that is driving policy development and practice. This aspect is returned to later in the chapter.

An aim of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of quality pre-school

provision from the perspective of a group of young children. This has been realised through the research stories, which provide an account of the day to day experiences of nursery. From these accounts it is possible to identify quality experiences for children; those aspects of being there that excite their involvement and create a feeling of well-being, which may involve a feeling of achievement or of appreciation. Children's responses are important and represent an intrinsic and intuitive response to quality. This study makes explicit that children are aware of better or worse experiences and argues that their views should be considered as indicators of quality when adults are making decisions about and with them, either through formal methods or informally. The taxonomy is designed to help policy makers and practitioners consider the relationship between children's and adults' perspectives in relation to indicators of quality experiences.

Limitations of the thesis

1 Limitations of the methodology

The methodology relied on an interpretative, constructivist approach. As semi-participant observer the researcher decided what data to collect and selected what was written in the field notes. The process of analysis, though informed by earlier studies, was based on an interpretation of the data and the construction of research stories. Chapter Three explained how the researcher used standard triangulation methods to limit bias. However the thesis represents the interpretations of the researcher which are open to challenge and reinterpretation by others.

2 Limitations of the sample

The contribution of an opportunistic sample at both sites needs to be considered as part of a review of the sampling methods. The need to have contact with children who were not part of the core sample was recognised at the start of the study, and a notional opportunistic sample was identified as those children who approached the researcher and showed a willingness to participate in the research. These children made a significant contribution to the research, as friends and siblings of the core sample children and as children who were observed and took part in conversations and children's tours. Some children took photographs. They contributed to the data and added validity to the construction of themes and sub-themes.

The fieldwork period at Skies Lane was shorter than at High Trees, and that had an inevitable impact on the quantity of data collected on the four core sample children at Skies Lane. The data that was collected at the second site was found to be consistent with data collected at High Trees, in terms of analytical categories, justifying the second research site as a means of authenticating these categories, developing the matrix and informing the taxonomy. In terms of ethical responsibilities, short case studies had been written up for the four children at Skies Lane and copies given to parents and the setting for information and comment.

The extent of data collected at the High Trees site proved a challenge in terms of data reduction and deciding the method of approach for the case studies of six of the core sample children. Selecting observations to illustrate the analytical framework and contextualise it from the perspective of the individual children took considerable time. It required an approach which aimed to provide a rounded picture of the experiences of attending the nursery, by selecting complementary episodes about individual children which would piece together to reflect the lived experiences of the group. Whilst the total sample was sufficient for a case study approach the findings are not generalisable.

The findings reflect previous studies which have aimed to elicit the perspectives of young children, and they develop a closer understanding of what it means to attend a day nursery, refining the meaning given by the core sample children to their experiences of attending a day nursery, and of playing, learning and being cared for. The findings add to the body of knowledge into the precise and detailed expertise young children have as specialists on their lives (Reifel, 1988; Langsted, 1994; Eisendotttir, 2005). Children have individual perspectives based on what they know and understand about the circumstances of their lives.

3 Limitations of the methods

Using mixed methods provided a triangulation of data for the study, and rich and illuminating accounts of each child's experiences. The research stories cannot claim to be typical of all children's experiences. What they do present are authentic portraits and voices of six of the original core sample children, from which clear perspectives can be identified through an inductive process examining and ordering and classifying the data according to the categories and emerging themes and subthemes.

The fieldwork methods provided sympathetic and respectful opportunities for the children to represent themselves with adult support. A detailed and extensive annotated record of observations complemented the children's participation in the research providing a contextual framework for the analysis. The parallel processes of child-led and adult - response activity over time formed a depth of understanding of the core sample children's experiences that would not have been possible from interview methods alone. The photographs would not have been sufficient– but added a literal perspective and a close look (at child height) with themes reoccurring in the different research stories. The child tours placed the initiative with the children. Their selections and their choice of media/medium to show and tell about the nursery revealed a personal response. The experimental play nursery method appeared to reflect each child's individual approach to nursery as well as revealing items and areas of play that were particularly appealing and engaging to the child.

Presenting the data as research stories in case study form revealed some weakness in the methodology. There is some discrepancy in terms of robustness of the narrative due to the later recruitment of Zoë, Biddy and Jack, and also to their attendance patterns, which had the effect that they were observed on fewer occasions than the former children and were omitted from one or more research activities. There was more data for Alan, Batman and Carl with the consequence that their stories are stronger than those of Zoë and the twins. In the light of this reflection on the methodology, the decision to not write up the four core children at Skies Lane nursery can be justified in terms of a relative paucity of data compared to the High Trees sample where there was a longitudinal element. However the taxonomy reflects the accumulation of both core and opportunistic sample child's contribution to an understanding of children's perspectives and the development of themes at both sites, ultimately illustrated in the five research stories.

Issues of gender, race and ability were not considered as part of the methodology. The small sample group, selected against defined criteria, did not allow for diversity in terms of the characteristics of the children involved. However, it is acknowledged that these are important aspects influencing children's perspectives and worthy of further study. The lack of sample diversity is recognised as a limitation of the study.

A further methodological ethical dilemma was the failure to consult with one child on his research name at a time that was most propitious within the fieldwork period, when the children were actively involved in the research. Though attempts were made to re-engage with the child to nominate a research pseudonym, these failed in the case of Carl. This experience was illuminating methodologically in terms of demonstrating the need to strike whilst the iron was hot and the fieldwork active. It also served as a reminder of the peripheral place of the research in the context of the children's lives and the relative insignificance afforded to research by those being researched compared with the researcher.

In conclusion of this section, the research aim: To identify and implement a range of methodological approaches to elicit the views of children within the age range three to five years, and to explore and report on their use with young children, at two research sites, was fulfilled.

Implications of the study

1 Implications for policy

This section considers the aim of the study to critically analyse policy development over the past ten years in relation to meeting the individual needs of children, and to demonstrate how young children's views on quality are absent from the formulation of current government policy.

During the ten years of New Labour government policy and legislation have increasingly committed to involving children in decision making, including very young children (CYPY, 2001; Kirby et al, 2003; DfES,2006). However, the means of participation for the youngest children remain vague, and the conduits of response back to central government even less distinct. Government rhetoric appears to propose participation at local level, taking place in settings and at the point of delivery of services, though they limit their expectations of children's involvement:

> However, sometimes it is difficult to translate commitment into practice that is meaningful for children and young people, effective in bringing about change and which becomes embedded within the organisational ethos (http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/participation/ (16 November 2005)

Since September 2008, Ofsted inspections in early years settings are required to include children's views through the Self Evaluation Framework (SEF). It is not yet clear how this aspect of the SEF influences inspection outcomes at setting level. Neither does there appear to be a process to aggregate children's responses in order to inform macro policy decisions. Such a partial involvement

does not commit children's voices to being truly heard, nor are they able to reflect on or influence changes in their lives. Though children's rights to be heard and informed are acknowledged in these policies, children's agency is not a term used by government in relation to very young children in any context.

As pointed out in Chapter Two, in one aspect of policy there appears to have been a

retraction of the commitment to listen to young children. The first published edition of the Early Years Foundation Stage Practice Guidance (DfES, 2007:8-9) acknowledged the need to consider children's views and set up processes to take account of parents' and children's views as part of quality improvement. In the second edition (DCSF, 2008:8-9) the approach to 'continuous' quality improvement emphasises a strategy of promoting leadership and staff qualifications and training. It is concerning that the significance of children's contributions in the process of quality improvement has been removed.

The most recent government Children's Plan (December, 2007) (http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan/) did involve consultation with children and young people, but the youngest children were not directly involved. Securing children and young peoples' 'wellbeing' (sic) is a central aim of the plan. Children's well-being cannot be assumed; children need to tell adults what it means to them to have a sense of well-being in early years provision. Until the influence of children at the highest level of policy is demonstrated clearly, it does not seem possible to realise the potential for schools and preschools to be places where children can contribute to a sense of mutual purpose through sharing their views and opinions with those of their parents and practitioners (Schratz and Steiner-Löffler, 1998).

This study has shown that children have agency to influence and can contribute to an understanding of the quality of their day to day experiences in an early years setting. This can be an empowering process. This study can only point out the inconsistency in government policy in relation to involving young children in decision making.

2 Implications for practice

The research stories demonstrate that children have a critical awareness of what is happening in the nursery. They are making pragmatic evaluations of their experiences on a daily basis. Practitioners can understand the children's points of view through dialogic observations, watching and talking with the children as they

play to refine meaning and search for understanding. Tours of nursery allow children to make critical comment on those aspects of provision, or on relationships, that are important to them. Young children are competent and confident in using cameras to represent their perspectives, providing a visual context to be shared in discussions with practitioners, and with others, to illustrate what their pre-school is like for them.

From any of these interactions children's play and learning intentions can be discussed and extended through adult contributions based on shared understanding. A dialogic approach can also illuminate the understanding of children's relationships within their preschool and their family and beyond, bringing together the different worlds of childhood and addressing the many transitions that children experience in their lives. The research has implications for the involvement of children in the evaluation of their pre-school to contribute to developing quality. It is relevant to point out that it takes time and commitment to elicit young children's views.

Further research

The research findings can be seen to relate to two other approaches to understanding the process of interrelationships within early years settings that promote learning through close and deliberate working between adults and children, those of sustained shared thinking and the co-construction of meaning. It can be confusing for practitioners to know how to respond to and to absorb all these aspects of practice into their day to day work. An area for further research would be to consider the role of children within these separate processes at setting level to establish their relationship and their individual significance within early years pedagogy.

In response to the core children's perspectives evidenced in the research stories, the relationship between nurseries and home was not able to be confronted in this study. However, as previously mentioned, this issue has foreshadowed the possibility of future research aimed at developing a better understanding of the triad of relationships between parents, children and practitioners, in particular, to explore further the impact of these relationships on the quality of experience for children in a setting.

Summary

The concluding chapter has demonstrated the extent to which the study has met its aims and objectives and the response to the research questions. The study presents a child's perspective on their early years experiences at a time when this phase of learning has expanded to become a universal entitlement. It provides evidence that young children can be supported to reveal their perspectives on their experiences, and that these can be seen to be indicators of quality that are as significant as adult constructions of quality. The sophistication of children's insights and the level of their expertise are too important to be ignored, at both setting level and at the point where policy is framed and implemented.

Appendices

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Appendix i

Proposed pilot structure for children's views on their early education and childcare provision

Purpose of the pilot:

- To establish a view of children's understanding of quality – or what they value in the places they find themselves and about the people they meet there
- To attempt to elicit the meaning the children give to their presence in the places they are in, to their activity there and to their role in the social context of those places
- To compare the difference evidences produced from different methods
- To plan the data collection methodology for my final thesis, based on the pilot data and returning to the literature to refine methods and deepen understanding of findings

Methodology

Based on Cousins (1999) and Clark (2001) methods, using a variety of approaches and adopting the assumption of:

> Young children as experts in their own lives
> Young children as skillful communicators
> Young children as active participants
> Young children as meaning makers
> Clarke (2001)

These assumptions can be supported from my own observations at East Town nursery.

The approaches I intend to adopt are:

- Cousins' 'conversational approach to listen and talk to children…..shared meanings and understandings were checked as the conversation proceeded'.
- Using taped and un-taped – but noted – methods, to provide flexibility in catching children's responses in active sessions – and to allow for some comparison between a more or less formal approach
- This may involve 'tours' (Clark, ibid) – as children may lead
- Supplementing conversations with photo evidence – as in Clark's research
- Supplementing conversations with picture drawing by the children and model making – to allow children to express their thoughts and demonstrate meaning in non-verbal expression

Pilot settings

For the pilot I propose to work at the Commuter Village Partnership. I would track children at Duck Pond preschool and at the lunch club. I hope to also track children in associated settings – subject to the consent of the managers of these settings. (one problem – no CM in this partnership – tho are CM working in the area – possibly need to step outside partnership to find an appropriate example)

Pilot sample

I would be selecting children who attend at least two different provisions. My sample would be of 6 children – age split between 3 and 4 year olds. I would talk to them in both/all the settings they attend. I will provide them with a camera to take pictures in both/all settings. I will also make paper and pencils available and playmobil /lego for them to create situations to express their understanding of the places they are in.

I would expect to have a range of data to analyse at the end of the pilot to inform the next steps of my research.

Appendix ii   High Trees joint observation proforma

Joint observations in nursery

Purpose

To authenticate the understanding of children's activity through shared observation of their play, noting any language heard, noting non-verbal communication and body stance. Interactions with other children and adults will also be noted.

The observers will seek to understand the play activity from the child's point of view, taking into consideration existing knowledge of the child and their interests, as well as from the evidence before them and note down any themes or categorisations that emerge.

Through discussion afterwards the observers will share their thoughts and compare their understanding of what they have seen. They will exchange copies of their observation notes.

As an extension to this activity, the child may be asked to comment on the observer's
understanding of their play.

Consent

Before starting the observation, the child(ren) who will be observed will be asked if they can be observed, giving their verbal consent.

Observation

The observation will focus on the recording of:

- the context of the play
- any activity initiated by the child/ren
- the presumed intention of the activity
- any toys or play items used by the child/ren
- any interactions with other children or adults
- the presumed intentions of the interactions
- any spoken or non-verbal language
- anything else felt to be significant

Before starting the observation, observers will agree the length of the period of observation - eg for half an hour, for the duration of the play activity

Appendix iii Information prior to consent

Finding things out researching children's views on early education and childcare

Jo Armistead, Post Graduate Student, School of Health, Community and Education Studies, Northumbria University

What is this research all about?

This leaflet explains my research project. I am studying children's perceptions of quality in early education and childcare settings. I believe that this is an important area of research as many children now spend a high proportion of their early lives in nurseries or playgroups, or with a childminder. Katie Watson has agreed to allow me to undertake a research project at the Riverside Centre, involving children at the nursery.

Who am I and where am I from?

I am a research student at Northumbria University, in Newcastle. I have been a teacher in primary schools, and a pre-school teacher for children with special educational needs. Recently, I have worked in an early years and childcare service for a local authority. I am now a full-time research student. I was CIB checked in October 2003, which means I've had a police check.

What do I want to do and where do I want to do it?

I want to research the way young children view their early years setting and the activities there, as well as the relationships they have with children and adults. I want to do my research 'fieldwork' in a setting that provides funded early education and also wraparound childcare to three and four year old children.

How will I do that?

I have planned an 'ethnographic study', which means that I want to research in as natural a way as possible, using methods that will fit into the children's routine, and I hope to work alongside the staff and children.

These are the methods I plan to use:

- I'll make observations of the children playing and learning

- I'll have conversations with children to find out how they understand their pre-school experiences

- This may involve 'tours' – where children lead me around the setting to explain how it works in their own words

- I'll record what the children say by writing notes and also using a tape recorder to catch children's responses as they play

- I'll give children cameras to photograph the places/people/activities that are important to them. Afterwards the photos will be used to prompt the children's recall of why they took the picture

- Some children may want to draw pictures of people or places in their setting, and talk about them

- I'll provide small world play materials for children to create 'arrangements' of furniture and items found in early years settings, and we will talk about and photograph the arrangements they have made

Using these different methods will build up a rich picture of the way children view their early experiences, and, as time goes by, I will ask parents and practitioners to comment on the children's words and pictures. I want the adults to add their views about what they think the children are saying.

How long will it take?
I plan to spend 2 or 3 days a week in nursery, for up to four weeks. This amount of time will enable me to get a good knowledge of the children and the settings, which is necessary for my research.

How will children and parents and practitioners agree to take part in the research?
It is very important that any person who is asked to take part in a research project understands what it involves and why it is being done. This includes knowing who will benefit and to be assured that no harm will come to them as a result of the research.

My aim is that this research will bring a benefit to children by showing that children have valid views about good quality early years provision, and that these might be different from the views of the government and the views of parents and practitioners.

This leaflet is intended to provide information about the research project for parents so that you can decide to consent to your child taking part in the research or decide to withhold your consent. I will not approach any children where parental consent has not been given, and no child will be disadvantaged if, for whatever reason, they are withdrawn from or do not take part in the research. I will ask parents and practitioners for their verbal consent to take part in the research.

I have prepared a booklet for children, to explain what I will be doing and how they will be involved, using photos taken by other young children and their words. All the children in this research project will be asked to give their consent to work with me, or to decide to withdraw. The children's consent forms will use pictures with happy or impassive faces to point to, to give or withhold consent.   Children will be able to leave, or refuse to be involved, at any time. I won't expect any child to work with me against their will.

☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺

How will I select a sample group of children?
It is difficult to ignore children in any early years setting and I expect to speak and have some contact with many children in the setting, if they and their parents have given their consent.

However, I need to have a core group of at least four, four- year-old children, two girls and two boys, who have been selected because they attend both early education and childcare on a full time basis. Parents of the children in the core group have been sent a separate letter that clearly indicates that their child is in the core sample.

Will the setting or people be named in the research?
The name of the settings and all the people involved will be changed so that they can't be identified. Staff will be asked to check the final report and correct any inaccuracies. Everyone involved will receive a short report, with a separate report for the children, which could be told as a story.

What if you are unhappy about the research?
If, at any time, you have a reason for complaint about the process of the research or my conduct as a researcher, in the first instance you should speak to me to resolve any difficulties. If we are not able to come to a resolution, Professor Pat Broadhead, my research supervisor, will respond to any complaint. She can be contacted on 01912156670 or email pat.broadhead@unn.ac.uk

Appendix iv Letter to parents requesting consent

School of Health, Community
and Education Studies
Northumbria University
Coach Lane East
Benton
Newcastle Upon Tyne NE7 XA

email jo.armistead@unn.ac.uk

13 May 2005   Tel: 0191 215 6703

Dear

**Finding things out research project with children at High Trees Nursery May -
July 2005**

I am writing to let you know that I am returning to nursery for a further eight week
period of fieldwork, starting next week. I want to confirm your consent for   to
continue to take part in a research project.

As you already know, I am trying to find out how children understand quality in early
years provision. I am planning to use a variety of research methods, as before, and
which will involve me in different kinds of conversations with children. Having
reviewed my methods, I feel that one method might be changed. I ask children to
make their own 'play nursery' using small world play objects, and I would like to video
this activity, so that I can record the actions and words of the children on video, to
allow me to analyse their response in depth. I have previously taken notes while
observing the children at this activity, and have found this to have provided only a
partial record of what the children have said and done. I will need full parental
consent before I can record the children on video. All video images will be kept
secure by me and will not be used for any purpose other than for the research
analysis.

This is what the research will mean for you and your child:

- The research will take place over eight weeks between 17 May and 16 July
  2005, when I will be in the nursery for three days a week
- All but one method used will be based on established methods that have
  been evaluated by other researchers. The one exception is the 'play nursery'
  activity.
- Research will always take place within the group setting – no child will be
  alone with the researcher
- Children will be able to take themselves away from a research activity at any
  time
- Children will not be disadvantaged if, for whatever reason, they are withdrawn
  from the research

I will be in touch in the next week to arrange to speak to you, at a time convenient to
you, so that you can comment on the evidence from the research so far in relation to
xxxxxxx to provide a further perspective.

If at any time you have a reason for complaint regarding the process of the research
or my conduct as a researcher, in the first instance you should speak to me to
resolve any difficulties. If we are not able to come to a resolution, Professor Pat

Broadhead, my research supervisor, will respond to any complaint. She can be contacted on 01912156670 or email pat.broadhead@unn.ac.uk

You can also contact me as indicated at the top of the letter for more information, or speak to me at nursery. I hope you have all that you need in order to decide if you can give your consent.

Yours sincerely

Jo Armistead

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Finding thing out research project with children at High Trees Nursery May-July 2005

CORE GROUP CONSENT FORM Please hand this completed form to staff at nursery

I have read the information the continuation of the research project and understand its purpose and how children will be involved.

I give/ do not give* my consent for my child…………………………… to take part in the project.

I give/ do not give* my consent for my child to be included in video footage of making a play nursery activity , and understand that the video images will only be used for this research project.

I understand that my child or I can withdraw consent from participation at any time in the project without experiencing disadvantage.
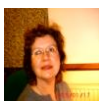
Name: Signature: date:

*Please delete as appropriate

Appendix v Finding Things Out booklet

Finding things out

My name is Jo and I'm a researcher.

I've come to nursery to find out what things are important to you when you're at nursery. This is called research.
And I want you to help me to find things out.

I think lots of things are important to children, such as people and friends, and toys and things to do, or if the sun is shining, and clothes, and books and stories and singing.

I think some things make children happy and some things make them sad.

I asked other children to show me what they liked.
These pictures were taken by children in their nursery to show me what was important to them.
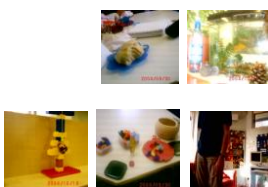
These are the ways I'll be finding things out. I've got a note book to write things down.

I'm going to watch what goes on and write things down in my note book.

I'll talk to you and I'll write down what you say in my note book.
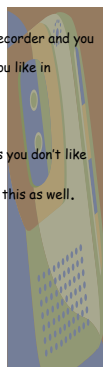
I've got a camera and you can take photos of things in nursery and then tell me about the photos.

I'll ask children to draw pictures of things in nursery

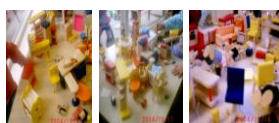I'll bring a cassette recorder and you can talk about what you like in nursery.

There might be things you don't like and we can talk about this as well.

I hope you will show me round nursery and tell me about the things that are here and let me meet your friends.

I have some toys and I'll ask you to make a play nursery with the toys, just like some children did in these photos.

Nobody has to talk to me if they don't want to. You can just walk away or say I don't want to talk to you now. You can shake your head, or you can use a thumb sign to say yes or no like this:

yes   no
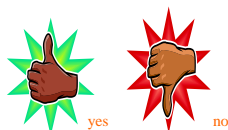
I'm going to think about the things we find out at nursery and write a book to tell other people what children think about nursery.

Appendix vi Sample draft case studies

Draft Case Study 1   Carl at High Trees Nursery 2004/2005

Carl was aged 3 years 3 months and 4 years 3 months, respectively, at the start of the separate periods of research. He is has a younger sister (also attending nursery) and lives with his mum and dad. His mother works as a college lecturer. He attends a local playgroup as well as attending nursery. Carl has attended nursery for three and a half years so far – started as a baby.

Consent
Carl saw the Finding Things Out book and was able to give his informed consent to join in the research. He has developed a growing understanding of the different research activities. Initially he was very interested in taking photographs and would greet the researcher to check if she had brought the camera and asking to take more photographs of specific items in nursery. In the second period of research this has not been a major feature of Carl's response to the research. As a four year old he is content to give his consent to be observed by the researcher and for her to write down verbatim reports of his play and activity. He has also consented verbally to allow other children to photograph him in his play.

Observations
Several observations were planned for each child. These involved the researcher writing down and the actions and any conversation the child had with other people, to develop an understanding of typical play patterns, and particular interests and relationships. Carl was observed:

- Playing alone and with friends inside and outside – including being with his sister
- At meal times
- At group times
- Arriving and leaving nursery

Tour of nursery – children show and talk about nursery
As a three year old, Carl took the researcher on a tour of nursery, with another boy. On this tour Carl pointed out bricks, cars and also the family car in the car park. Over successive weeks, Carl added to his photographs – pointing out to the researcher that he hadn't taken a photo of certain items e.g. the sand or the dinosaurs. Carl has not completed second tour.

Play nursery x 2
Carl was offered small world play items to create his own nursery during the first period of research and explored the furniture and toys. Recently, he made a second play nursery, with Amy playing alongside. He showed greatest interest in creating an outside play area.

These aspects of Carl's play and learning emerged from the observations and other research activities:

- Carl is a busy boy who seeks out purposeful play opportunities, which have always (in the researcher's experience) involved other children, but which as a four year old involve him in organising groups of others and jostling for position to lead a play activity.

Check notes *to see if crashed was Carl's meaning rather than 'trashed' that I have written down in field notes . Mum reports that neither she nor Carl's dad use trash and she queried it.*

- Carl's preference for play in nursery have been outside play activities – on wheeled toys, with play tools (Bob the Builder theme and firemen theme) as well as chasing games. Long, sustained and elaborate play has been a characteristic of Carl's activity in nursery.

- Carl has some particular friends who he has know for at least two years. He plays with all or a selection of these children – mostly boys. Their play is thematic and is picked up each time they are together, and dropped as other things intervene – e.g. nursery routines, the departure of a child or a change in the weather.

- Food is an area of nursery where Carl has some ambivalence. He has consistently rejected eating some meals, whilst at the same time acknowledging expectations to try things (small tasting) before pushing his plate away or saying he doesn't want something. As he has got older his tastes haven't expanded but his awareness of how small a sample he can get away with has.

Mum said that Carl is same at home. We talked about issue of letting Carl eat what he wants and to accept his preferences and not worry about what not eating. Enjoys fruit and milk.

- Carl is very aware of Amy's presence in nursery. This is shown through gentle acknowledgements of one another – from touching hands, small hugs and occasional kisses.

- Carl has to use an inhaler each full-day session he attends nursery. He does so calmly and responsibly. *Mum added that Rosie had told her recently that C had said he didn't need his inhaler – C's expertise*

Mum told story of Carl being looked after by neighbour recently. He was being reminded to walk safely round the village, watching for cars etc – and said to the neighbour, 'why do you remind me of my mummy'……

Draft Case Study 2   Rose at Skies Lane Nursery Jan/Feb 2005

Rose was aged 4 years and 1 month at the time of the study. She was attending nursery five days a week and receiving both funded early education and childcare. Rose is the only child in her family. Her mother is studying for a childcare qualification that is taught on the Skies Lane campus; and she uses the nursery to provide childcare whilst she studies.

Consent

Rose was initially a shy girl but over the four weeks of fieldwork she became an eager and revealing participant in the research process. Kathy, her key person in nursery, commented that Rose appeared to have grown in confidence through the process of involvement as a research participant.

Rose was able to give her informed consent to joining in to 'Find things out' on 20 January, when she was shown the *Finding things out* book and afterwards she drew a smiley face on a consent form. She was able to give her consent verbally to join in on other occasions when asked by me if she wanted to. She also declined to join in to show me round on a tour of nursery initially, but agreed to do so when she had a friend to accompany her. She volunteered to show me more as she became confident in the process and possibly realised that working with me allowed her access to areas which would normally be 'out of bounds' to children at certain times. I feel Rose enjoyed the attention of an adult, in a situation where children compete for adult attention.

Observations

Rose was observed on several occasions with her consent.

- Rose was observed playing with playdough with Louise when they made lollipops, and took photographs of these.
- She was observed playing with children in the sand tray
- She was observed helping to set the table before lunch and at lunch time
- She was observed playing outside
- She was observed drawing with other children in family time

Rose's 'Tour' of nursery to show and tell about what happens there

Rose initially too shy to take a 'tour'– to show and tell about nursery – on her own, but she was given confidence to join in with Louise, who was a special friend. The tour lasted from 9.45 until 12.15. Once Rose had started she became very involved in showing – and wanted/ needed to show as much detail as possible. The first tour came to an end because she was called to lunch, and the following day Rose asked to continue to show other areas not visited on the first day. This included the coats hanging up and the names of children – she gave me very thorough introduction to nursery.

Rose's play nursery

Rose took part in making a play nursery twice. The first time she made the nursery with Luigi. She showed an interest in placing the furniture carefully on the table and arranging sets of items – chairs round tables etc. But she became fascinated by some pieces of material and asked to cut them out – making 'carpets' for the nursery. She placed herself behind a table, to play alone with the carpets. She took a photograph of them as well as a photo of the lay nursery.

Rose played again with the play nursery, on her own, in the dining area, when she showed a similar interest in the pieces of material, but also arranged an inside and outside nursery.

Rose and the camera

Rose showed interest in using the camera when I asked if she wanted to take a picture of her work – drawings and play dough lollipops – but she was not motivated or possibly confident to ask to use the camera without a prompt. Rose and Louise used the camera to record part of the tour, but declined to record everything they showed. Rose was so involved in showing and demonstrating that she did not appear to need to photograph places or areas.

Three particular aspects of Rose's play emerged from the observations and other research activities:

- The tour of nursery revealed that Rose knew all about nursery and what each part of nursery was for from the point of view of the children. Her style of 'showing' about nursery was very practical and literal. Rose wanted to show and demonstrate individual areas and to introduce playing and playfulness into her demonstrations.

- When she was playing Rose enjoyed using as much of any material as possible – not to deprive others, I don't believe, but because she wanted to make the most of the experience. In an attempt to get their share of materials this led to children making comments such as:

  1   Rose is playing with playdough with Louise and Trudi.

         Louise: You have loads of playdough. Are you just making
                        it for us?
         Rose: Yes
         Louise: Are you the mam?

  2   There is a pile of pictures of Chinese dragons for the children to
         colour in. Rose is resting on the pile and colouring in pictures one
         after another, she gives a completed picture to a student. A child
         asks for a sheet and Rose resists at first and then hands one out.
         She is still drawing and colouring ten minutes later. She looks at
         Tom's drawing and says, "That's scribbling". He shows his to the
         student, "Mine isn't scribbling is it?"

- The observations of Rose showed several instances of her leading play and directing other children, and making comments about their behaviour. During the tour with Louise, Rose set up a situation where she was the teacher and Louise was the child. In her play Rose showed several instances of control and attempt at mastery of tasks. She showed persistence, understanding of the task and a sense of purpose in all the play activities I observed.

- Rose was familiar with many children, but most friendly with Louise. She was quite reserved with staff and a quiet little girl who busied herself with one activity or another at all times. Rose was happy to part from her mother or dad when brought to nursery, but was also pleased to see them again at the end of the day. I feel that Rose enjoyed her time in nursery but that home was very important to her.

Rose's mum made only a few comments about this description of Rose, essentially accepting the account, though confirming Rose's shyness and her enjoyment of play.

Draft Case Study 3   Tom at Skies Lane Nursery Jan/Feb 2005

Tom was aged 4 years 1 month in January at the time of the research. He is an only child and lives with his mum and dad.   He is sometimes picked up his grandmother from nursery. He has talked about his aunt, who appears to be an important part of his life.

Tom's mum explained that Tom attends fulltime due to her poor physical health. She expressed that she would prefer to spend more time with him – but needs the support of nursery. She also elaborated on his relationship with his aunt and confirmed this close relationship.

Consent
Each child was asked to consent formally to join in the research through being read the Finding Things Out book and Tom consented using a formal consent form. He also consented verbally to be observed on several occasions, to make a play nursery with Ian and to taking me on a tour to show and tell me about nursery.

Observations
Several observations were planned for each child. These involved the researcher writing down and the actions and any conversation the child had with other people, to develop an understanding of typical play patterns, and particular interests and relationships. Tom was observed:

- Playing alone and with friends inside and outside
- At meal times
- At group times
- Arriving and leaving nursery

Tour of nursery
Tom took me round nursery and told me about the different spaces and places, including which ones he liked best. Though he was offered a camera to take pictures he only took three pictures on the tour, but he was able to describe in some detail the use of the places in nursery. He was talking about nursery for half an hour and appeared quite tired at the end.

Tom's mum told me that he was used to taking photographs at home.

Play nursery
Tom made a play nursery with Ian, using small wooden toys I had brought in. They were most interested in an outside nursery. They had brought with them a van toy from the block area and they incorporated this toy into the play nursery.

These aspects of Tom's play and learning emerged from the observations and other research activities:

- Tom is very knowledgeable about routines and rules in nursery – how order is maintained is important to him.

- Tom is aware of details. He is a boy who appears to take in a great deal from any experience. He likes to demonstrate any expertise he has and it appears to be important to him to be right on a matter.

- Tom is influenced by stories from books and also videos in his play. He brings these experiences and incorporates them in his imaginative play – which for the time being becomes 'real'. He can immerse himself in play. While he plays well with other children he can occupy himself in elaborate play scenarios. Tom verbalises the play to himself and can articulate it clearly to others.

- Friends are important to Tom – and he has a strong sense of his best friends. He also appears to avoid certain children who do not conform to the rules.

Appendix vii Final letter to core sample children's parents for further consent

School of Health, Community
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Northumbria University
Coach Lane East
Benton
Newcastle Upon Tyne NE7 7XA

September 2007

email jo.armistead@unn.ac.uk

Tel: 0191 215 6703

Dear

Finding things out research project with children at High Trees Nursery

I am coming to the end of my research project and have a couple of outstanding issues to raise with you.

Firstly, I am writing to ask for your consent for the use of photographs taken by xxxxxxxx to be included in the thesis and in the dissemination and sharing of the findings from the research. To protect children, no photograph will be used where a child could be identified i.e. photographs of full or partial face or other distinguishing feature. You do not have to give consent, in which case I will not use any images taken by xxxxxxxxxx in the writing up or in dissemination.

Secondly, each child is anonymised within the research, which means that their name is changed. Some children have already suggested their own research name, but others have not. I would be grateful if you could discuss a research name that I could use instead of xxxxxxxx.

At the bottom of this letter is a reply slip where you can indicate your consent and nominate the research name for xxxxxxxxx. I am enclosing a SAE for your reply.

Finally, can I thank you and xxxxxxxx for your contribution to the research. I will have a collection of data to pass on to you, in the form of photographs, some video and a research story, when I finally complete the process in the New Year.

You can also contact me as indicated at the top of the letter, for more information. I hope you have all that you need in order to decide if you can give your consent.

Yours faithfully

Jo Armistead

Jo Armistead

✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂
PARENT CONSENT FORM   *Finding thing out* research project at High Trees Nursery
1. <u>I give/ do not give*</u> my consent for my child's photographs to be included in the thesis and in the dissemination and sharing of the findings from the research. I understand that no photograph will be used where a child could be identified i.e. photographs of full or partial face or other distinguishing feature.

2. XXXXXXX has chosen --------------- to be his/her research name.

Name: Signature: date:

*Please delete as appropriate

Appendix viii	Matrix displaying categories and themes from the data			
Categories: definitions reflecting aspects of preschool identified from the literature and analysis and confirmed by continued comparison between cases	**Themes emerging from the data and further explored during analysis**	**Sub themes emerging from the data and further explored during analysis** **Evidenced from:** Photographs (P);Observations (O);Conversations (C);Tours (T);Drawings (D);Play nurseries (Pl N)	**Cross case/category phenomena**	**Interweaving and overarching themes**
1 Personal relationships – interactions between individuals *Underlying values:* *trust /respect /reliability/ empowerment*	Child/child	• friend/ sibling/companion (P; O**)** • time known (C) • time spent with (C)	**Play** **Emotions** **Learning** **Time**	Empowerment and well being
	Child/practitioner	• with key worker /manager/ other/ student (O,T,C,P) • younger/older/ male/female (O) • making time for (O) • being fair (O)	**Food** **Play** **Learning** **Resources**	
	Child/parent	• thinking about parents **(** C,O,D**)** • missing parents (COD)	**Time**	
	Trust/respect/fear	• 'hate', 'love' (C)	**Emotions**	
2 Routines – the activities and organisation throughout the day *Underlying values: reliability/relationships/respect*	Arrival /departure/	• Excitement/ anxiety (O;C)	**Control** **Relationships**	
	group times	• comfort/ excitement/frustration (O, C)	**Emotions** **Relationships**	
	snack times	• comfort; pleasure; (P, O,C)	**Emotions** **Food**	
	playtimes	• going outside/ playing inside (P, O, C, Pl N)	**Play**	
	tidying up	• responsibility, co-operating and complying (O) • praise for helping (O)	**Rules** **Relationships**	
3 Play/resources – **1. the activity of playing and being playful** **2. the items children make use of for their play, provided by adults or found by the children** **3. the places and spaces chosen to play in or at** *Underlying values: reliability/respect/relationships*	child led	• access to resources (P,O,C) • autonomy (C,O) • excitement (C,O)	**Rules, Control** **Emotions**	
	other child led	• sharing/ co-operating/ withholding (O,C) • leading others (O,C) • excitement (O, C)	**Rules** **Control** **Emotions**	
	adult led	• fairness/fun (O,C)	**Emotions**	
	provision/ resources	• novel / familiar / adult provided / found/ discovered (P,O,C,Pl N)	**Emotions**	
	indoors/outdoors	• time to play/time limited (O,C) • where can/cannot play (P,O,C) • risk and challenge	**Places** **Rules** **Control**	

4 Food/resources – provided by nursery or parents *Underlying values: reliability/ respect/relationships*	Food provided by nursery	• choice/ no choice (O,C) • delicious, gagging, love, hate (O,C)	**Control** **Emotions**
	Food brought from home	• special food eg. birthday food (O,C) • same (matching) food as other child (O,C)	**Relationships**
	Mealtimes	• Time to eat (O,C) • children's culture • anticipation and enjoyment for both home and nursery food	**Relationships** **Emotions** **Control**
5 Rules – expressed and acknowledged ways of behaving, staying safe, and use and care of play areas and play resources *Underlying values: respect/ reliability*	Rules/ conventions	• transgression/subversion (O,C) • etiquette – behaving politely or not • upholding/conforming (O; C) • challenging (O;T;C;Pl N) • looking after things/playing carefully (O,C)	**Food** **Play** **Relationships** **Routines**
	Making the rules	• Places can/can't go; things can/can't do (O,C,P) • keeping safe, avoiding danger (C,O) • taking turns (C,O)	**Routines** **Play** **Places** **Time**
6 Learning – formal and informal led acquisition of new knowledge or skills, adult led, other child led and (lone) child led *Underlying values: respect/ reliability/relationships*	Knowledge of nursery	• events/artefacts/ routines/rules/ songs rhymes (C,O,P,Pl N) • learnt from adults (O,C,P) • learnt from other children (O,C, P) • learnt by personal exploration and observation (O,P,C)	**Relationships**
	Knowledge of people	• Siblings, friends, adults, children (O,P,C) • Developed over time (O,C)	**Relationships** **Time**
	Knowledge of world	• home/nursery/ other (C,P,O) • learnt from adults (O,C,P) • learnt from other children (O,C) • learnt from personal investigation/exploration (O,C)	**Relationships** **Resources**
7 Emotions – feelings expressed and observed in response to people, resources or events or incidents *Underlying values: respect/reliability/relationships*	Fear/anxiety	• settling in/transition (O)	**Control**
	Excitement/ happiness	• Familiarity/ feeling at home/ shared and individual.(O,C) • joy of singing in group (O) • cuddling, kissing friends/siblings/practitioner (O,C)	**Relationships**
	Anger/crossness	• publicly displayed (O,C)	**Control**
	Passion	• strength of feeling (O,C)	**Relationships**
8 Life outside – home, people places and events on children's lives	Talk of home Talk of familiar places beyond nursery	• description of house and where live (C) • people in family (C) • things done with family eg holidays (C)	**Relationships** **Places**

9 Places –'child defined 'spaces and places used by the children for play, socialisation and solitude, not necessarily sanctioned by adults *Underlying values: resources/ reliability/relationships*	Spaces for children/ child created	• borders/ spaces in between (C,O) • places to go away from adults (C,O,P) • places for comfort/escape (C,P,O) • spaces to share with others (O,C,P)	**Relationships Rules Emotions**
	Spaces for adults	• areas where children may not go (O,C)	**Resources Food Control**
10 Time – time taken and time passing that has particular significance for children *Underlying values: reliability/respect*	Being collected by parent Turn taking Time spent	• waiting for parents to arrive (O,C) • waiting for a go to play with an item or in an area (C,O) • time to move on to other activity (C,O) • time to transfer to other setting (C)	**Relationships Resources Routines Control**
11 Control – aspects of nursery open to the influence of children or under their influence *Underlying values: respect , relationships; reliability*	Organised by adults	• making decisions when offered choices (O,C) • using areas of provision autonomously (O)	**Relationships Play Learning Food**
	Organised by others Organising other children Self-directed	• Choosing or declining to play (O,C) • Directing and assigning roles and actions; allocating resources to other children; appropriating resources (O; PI N) • Autonomous play – exploratory; investigative; therapeutic (O;PI N)	**Relationships Play Rules Resources Emotions**

Appendix ix   Example of transcription of raw data

| Ref: | Case study 1 ALAN | Coding |

Core Group Boy ALAN was three years nine months at the start of the fieldwork. He is an only child, living with his mother and grandmother. His mother works from home and he attends for three and a half days a week. His grandmother is on the staff of the college. He has an uncle, his mother's brother, whom he sees in the holidays. These are the significant adults in his life whom he references during data collection.

Relationships	Helpfulness
Play	
Food	
Life outside	
Emotions	
Rules/control	Etiquette
Routines	Responsibilities
Learning	Knowledge
Places	Spaces

Note book (NB)1
P40

Monday 21 June 2004
Note ALAN screaming when couldn't join in game – too many children already

Rules and challenging them

P45
12.00
Observed at lunch 12.00 –comment - not very happy – not eating garlic bread or other food, pasta bake.
A little girl OG A is being fed her lunch, he comments 'she's a baby' but older boy (Opportunistic Group Boy OB D) says, 'excuse me' and looks at ALAN directly
CG E says,"Sorry", and later he repeats, "baby".
This happens in the context of a discussion about the leaving of another boy and the sadness felt by his friend, OBD. ALAN is not engaged in this discussion. He is upset and doesn't want any food. He is not alone – other children have turned away from the table or pushed their plates away. OB D says, 'I've tried a bit and I don't like it.' ALAN also tries a bit of pasta – as he wants some seconds –

Relationships – ALAN and babies
Rules – takes lead from older boy
Is he trying to work out hierarchy

Food – nursery food not liked – trying food

12.30
fromage frais.

Food rules

13.00
The pasta is cleared away and children are given a fromage frais, and ALAN eats his – very happily.

Likes this food

ALAN is shown the 'finding things out' book. He looks at the collection of photographs from the other setting. Some are pictures of a snowy day, he shivered, ' I always get cold in the snow'. He gave his consent – Yes – which he was able to read and recognize as a word.

CONSENT given; ALAN attempted to sign name on consent form

I was observing other children about an hour later, ALAN came up and said, 'I miss my mummy so much. I want my mummy.' And he cuddled close. Close by is a baby activity ring (babies sit in ring to play) ALAN sees in the ring playing animal play with OG G. ALAN goes to them, saying 'I'm going to be a horse.' Context here is that these girls often play horses

Relationships / life outside – ALAN and mum. Trustful relationship with researcher – part/ob role Emotions…

NB1 P 52
Later, in the toilet area ALAN and RACHEL are in the toilet looking at books. They come out looking sheepish, probably aware that this is not 'allowed', but expressions also suggest aware of illicit nature of the space they had found to look at books. **(subversive spaces)** .

Places – places chosen by children away from adults.

Later, outside, in the grassy area, ALAN is part of group of 9 older children, with 2 adults. The children have about ten tyres, some balls, several lengths of plastic tubing and the climbing tree to play with. Note book (NB) comment that they are very happy children. Boys are running about with tubes playing a horse racing game and playing with the tubing. ALAN is following OGB1 and the tube, saying, 'I want to have a go', when he stops running he is caught by tubing by OGB1. Later he wants to have a go with the 'wheels' – the tyres – which are piled up – and boys jumping over them – he eventually managed to get over.

Places – outside – tree is pecial place – adults can't go in – and tyres
And other
Resources – sharing/ dominating/ having a go/
Learning challenge and mastery

screams if he wants something and is thwarted. At 4pm the play is

NB1
P.54 stopped for tea. ALAN screams as all queue up and is copied by OGB1 and OGB 2. This quietens down as walk back in to nursery.

Emotions – screaming – is copied by others – behaviour is contagious and challenges the order of things – child led

Tea time and children have snacks from home or a nursery snack. OGB1 smells other children's food. ALAN comments on OGB1's snack and asks about OGB2 , 'Why did the teacher's give you that?' about a cup OGB2 has been given. He also shows interest in same boy's cherry tomatoes.

Food

4.20

ALAN leaves the table (children may at tea time, but not at lunch when they wait for all to finish.) He goes to make things with construction kit.

Rules – interpreting these according to understood context

ALAN has had no drink today. He makes a space rocket

Food/drink – won't drink if doesn't like drink or doesn't like cup

24/06/04
NB1
P.57 Thurs 24 June 2004

ALAN listening to dingle dangle scare crow on the tape and is very animated. Has played with nursery play items - ++ interest in mol? (unclear.).

24/06/04

Play with IT resources

8 July 2004

P.92

10.00 am OGB1 has just talked about being picked up tonight by grandparent, if mummy doesn't pick up

Relationships – importance of family and knowing what will happen – issues of control

ALAN follows up on this *(chaining p.56 Wood etc 1980)* 'I'm going to have a Burger King kids' meal after my nursery, with a spider man 2 toy.' We are sitting at the mark making table and I am asking children to draw plan of nursery – not successfully. I make a diagram/map of nursery and ask ALAN where Burger King is, 'Burger King is too far to draw.'

Learning and being aware of own skills – and limitations

ALAN is reading out letters and numbers that are on the table, he turns a 5 round as it is upside down,

Demonstrating his skills and knowledge – unselfconsciously at age 3.10 yrs

He draws round the hole puncher and says, 'I'm cutting out'. He cuts round, and says, 'chopped' when finished.

More skills demonstrated – he always chops rather than cuts – accurate description of action (CGB2's learning at 3.4 yrs)

CGB2 sees ALAN's name written and sharing the initial letter, asks, 'Is that me? Is that me?'

NB1
P.93 10:20 start **Formal observation with other child 1** of ALAN – ask if Ok to watch ALAN and OGB3 play –they say it's OK.

Consent given

Boys are at water table and both are pouring water from washing up bottles. ALAN puts on top and squeezes a big stream of water, splashing OGB3, 'It went in my eye.' He then says, 'Not at me.' He repeats, 'Not at me', stands back and looks at me – ALAN also refers to me with a look, continuing to squirt the water, laughing. He asks, 'Is it down yet. Is it empty yet, empty yet,' as he empties the water into a beaker.

Relationships – trusting others or not: Rules also – those of situation and context of play – conflict with playfulness – issue of point of view.
Learning about levels – level going "down" to "empty"

P.94 As he plays he looks over from time to time at a crying incident – CGB2 is upset – he wants M and goes to him.

Emotions – interest in and caring? for others

ALAN and OGB3 have a spat over tall beaker both pulling – ALAN wins

More emotions of conflict

10:30 still playing, ALAN with tall beaker "It's nearly full".

Hear music and both boys throw off their aprons, 'It's Simon' says ALAN, and they rush over to the book area to the tape – playing

Emotions raised by music –

259

Simon Says

Both boys leave the book area and move to the bricks and are building with the bricks. ALAN is boisterous and active. He takes the cars, he builds a tower and crashes the cars into the tower.

10:35   OBH2 (younger three year old child) says, 'Don't knock it over'. He goes to ALAN and there is a stand off as OGB 4 touches the cars and bricks. The boys stand close enough to pull hair with stretched out arms. They then go back to their play -

p. 95   CGB2 is at brick table with OGB3 – ALAN is building. CGB2 leans forward and knocks his chin – he's hurt and initially is Ok then he cries and goes to L saying, "I hurt my chin".

He gets over it and returns to table and building a tower and says, "Look at that - a lot taller than me". ALAN pushes into the brick area to avoid "disturbing OGG4", (names younger girl) and it is ALAN "smashed".

10:45   ALAN and OGB 3 play now with police cars. ALAN says, 'You be brother I be daddy,' OGB3 says, 'Shall we go down that big slope,' – they are playing in the block area. CGB2 , watching them, says, 'You have to wipe your nose ALAN (names)'

p. 96

They continue to play with the cars – over the brick and blocks and up and along the shelves. OGB3 says, 'Lock me up' and he climbs onto a shelf for a moment before going back to pushing the cars around the blocks. They play together for next five minutes and at one point look closely at the cars and the word 'POLICE" and make a comment which is not clear to researcher

10:55

ALAN alone with both cars plays with them on the shelves and parks them. He says, 'I really need a wee' and starts to leave. He goes back to the cars and asks, 'Don't let anyone play.' CGB2 has noticed that they may be available and takes the smaller car. ALAN looks a bit upset – he's not happy – he gets the car back from CGB2 –who leaves it on the floor. After a pause for thought ALAN takes cars with him to the toilet. He didn't take up an offer researcher made to keep cars safe under a low table. **Observation ends.**

11.30

ALAN returns from the toilet and watches children playing trains with cardboard box – he wants a go and screams when can't – seeking out adult support to get him a turn.

Researcher deflects his attention by asking him to take her on a tour. The toilet, space between the bookcase and window were part of the tour. ALAN says, "Well done" as researcher squeezes through.

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interest in IT – tape – also and mastery of game

Relationships – friends playing together over time; Play reflects excitable aspect – see water splashing above – and moves into other situation – stand off re pushing over other's construction – situation resolved by boys themselves

Smashes CGB2's tower – but avoids younger child – Relationships in play – friends still playing together Children caring for each other by noticing runny noses – normally associated with adult/child care – also rule/ etiquette area – having a wiped nose

Play moving to other shared domain – police and criminal

Play and monopolizing/ having control over items/ and maintaining it – dilemma of needing a wee – again e tiquette of respecting ownership – or avoiding trouble…? - Places that are safe – taking the cars to the toilet Trust issue with the researcher.

Wanting…raised emotions – passionate about being able to play - ? single child syndrome?

ALAN is happy to have adult attention – also opp to use camera and to have responsibility of taking R round – displaying knowledge

Appendix x   The original taxonomy

A taxonomy of quality experiences from the perspectives of children at High Trees Nursery

Category 1 Relationships

Theme : 1a The importance of practitioners:

Subthemes:

- *to provide, to relate and to empathise*

- *to care and to comfort*

- *to be fun and tolerant and fair*

- *to be predictable and reliable, to trust and respect*

- *to have and share knowledge and advice and to support learning*

- *to know and be known over time to enhance confidence in interrelationships with adults*

Theme 1bThe importance of other children:

Subthemes:

- *to play with, to have fun and be playful*

- *to share experiences and ideas with, and sometimes to feel love or to feel hate*

- *to lead and to follow and to co-operate and find solidarity with*

- *to have knowledge of and to advise and to empower*

- *to be friends with and to co-create a child culture based on playfulness with words and actions*

- *to be reliably there – or to be missed if not there*

- *to know better over time*

Theme 1c The importance of siblings:

Subthemes:

- *to provide comfort, support and solidarity*

- *to play with and to care for and to empower*

- *to be responsible for and to be reliable towards*

Theme 1d The importance of parents and life outside nursery:

Subthemes:

- *to love and to be loved by, and to empower*

- *to provide comfort and protection*

- *to choose a safe and stimulating place to be left in*

- *to be reliable and to be reunited with*

- *to bring memories and stories of holidays, grandparents and family to nursery, through talk, drawings and play*
- *to be missed*

Category 2 Rules and routines

Theme 2a The importance of rules

Subthemes:

- *to keep everyone safe and offer responsibilities*
- *to maintain order and to establish a sense of social etiquette*
- *to be fair and to empower*
- *to be there to challenge and subvert, in a safe environment with strong relationships*

Theme 2b The importance of routines:

Subthemes:

- *providing reliability and predictability from day to day and week to week*

Category 3 Resources – places and provision

Theme 3a The importance of physical places and space outdoors and indoors:

Subthemes:

to move in, to explore physically

- *to become children's places and spaces, to sometimes escape to and hide away in*
- *in which to imagine and re-enact stories from television, videos as well as books*
- *to provide spaces for both calm and solitary time and more boisterous activity*

Theme 3b The importance of areas of provision

Subthemes:

- *to stimulate and excite learning to take place*
- *to offer familiar and novel experiences*
- *to develop skills and to empower*
- *to provide "stuff" that offers possibilities for sustained play*
- *to be sufficient for all who want to take part*

Category 4 Food at snack and meal times

Theme 4a The importance of food and nourishment*:*

Subthemes:

- *to enjoy food from nursery and from home*
- *to be able to reject food without criticism*

Theme 4b The social importance of food

Subthemes:

- *to enjoy eating with friends*

- *to have a time to make together a children's culture of rhymes and songs*

- *to be empowered by these circumstances*

Category 5 Children's emotions and feelings

Theme 5a The importance of powerful emotions and feelings:

Subthemes:

- *being able to show anger and passion and strong feelings*

- *having fearfulness and anxiety understood*

- *finding places to be sad and cry*

Theme 5bThe importance raised emotions and feelings:

Subthemes:

- *being able to be excited and happy*

- *enjoying heightened emotions in group situations eg singing and playing games*

Category 6 Play

Theme 6a The importance of play socially and emotionally:

Subthemes:

- *to lead and to follow and to co-operate and find solidarity with*

- *to be friends and to make together a child culture based on playfulness*

- *to pass on to and share with when there are not enough*

Theme 6b The importance of play cognitively:

Subthemes:

- *to have knowledge of and to advise and to empower*

- *to explore and to wonder around and to touch and find out*

Category 7 Learning and knowing

Theme 7a The importance of learning and knowing facts and skills:

Subthemes:

- *learning and knowing things about the world outside and relating it to nursery*

- *learning and knowing about letters and books and reading: letters and pens and writing; and numbers and counting and shape*

- *learning physical skills – sticking, cutting, drawing, writing, painting*

- *learning how to use the computer*

Theme 7b The importance of knowing in a social context:

Subthemes:

- *knowing other children and that they will help*

- *knowing the practitioners and that they will help*

- *knowing what is in nursery and where to find it*

- *knowing how to negotiate to play with toys or to play with others*

- *knowing what to do and how to do and that can do*

- *knowing the places and things that are not for children*

Category 8 Time

Theme 8a Time passing

Subthemes:

- *changing interests and confidence with age*

- *changing emotional and learning needs of three year olds and four year olds*

- *acquiring and developing new skills over time*

- *building stronger relationships over time*

- *losing friendships over time as others or self leave*

Theme 8b Time it takes/ taken

Subthemes:

- *waiting for parents to arrive*

- *waiting for a turn*

- *waiting to go out*

Category 9 Control

Theme 9a Being in control

Subthemes:

- *supported by rules ie sharing,*

- *supported by routines ie to know what is happening next*

- *autonomy to make choices from a range of provision areas*

- *taking control over others by leading play or by joining others in play*

Theme 9b Having little control

Subthemes:

- *over the decision to be in nursery and the length of time they are in nursery*

- *over food choices*

- *over when you can go home*

Glossary

CASE	Central Advisory Council for Education
CSR	Comprehensive Spending Review
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council
CUPU	Children and Young Person's Unit
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DES	Department for Education and Science
DH	Department of Health
ECF	Early Childhood Forum
EPPE	Effective Provision of Pre-school Education
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYD(C)P	Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships
EYE	Early years Professional
FSP	Foundation Stage Profile
HMT	HM Treasury
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
HO	Home Office
HoC	House of Commons
KS	Key Stage
LEA	Local Education Authority
LA	Local Authority
NAIEA	National Association of Inspectors and Educational Advisors
NAO	National Audit Office
NCB	National Children's Bureau
NCVO	National Council of Voluntary Organisations
NCE	National Commission on Education
NCS	National Childcare Strategy
NDNA	National Day Nurseries Association
NNI	Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative
NQIN	National Quality Improvement Network
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PLA	Pre-school Learning Alliance
PPA	Pre-school Playgroup Association
REPEY	Researching Pedagogy in English Pre-schools
RSA	Royal Society of Arts
QCA	Qualification and Curriculum Authority
SCAA	Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority
SEF	Self-evaluation
SSLP	Sure Start Local Programmes
TSO	The Stationery Office
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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