Early years teachers' perspectives of integrated working and professional development: a qualitative exploration in a local authority in London

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Abstract

An important strand of early years policy development has been an increased focus on integrated service provision. This has been part of government policy initiatives during the past two decades that have sought to promote children's development and enhance their life chances (Barnes et al. 2018). Collaboration between professionals from different disciplines is considered to effectively support multifaceted issues that may adversely affect young children's development (Gordon et al. 2016; Vandekerckhove et al. 2019). However, integrated working has been identified as a complex area of practice (Canavan et al. 2009; Wong and Sumsion 2013; Nutbrown 2018) that takes place in a fluid landscape of children's services. Developing the proficiency to collaborate effectively and responsively with others requires additional layers of expertise, as well as the specialist knowledge and skills associated with particular professional roles (Edwards, 2010a; Cumming and Wong 2012).

This project explores measures that can enhance support for early years teachers in integrated working practice. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006) is employed as a theoretical framework for the research. This model draws attention to the importance of the early years teacher's reciprocal interactions with key actors in integrated working and how these might be influenced by personal characteristics, contextual and temporal factors.

The research is framed as a qualitative interview study that incorporates the use of in-depth interviews and the experimental use of a walking interview with one participant. Thematic analysis of the participants' data reveals an array of measures to support the early years teacher to engage in integrated working. Findings from the research are supplemented by exploration of the current evidence base to identify recommendations for practice. These include a focused consideration of the role of reciprocal interactions in integrated working practice, the use of technology to support communication, practical tasks in professional development and an exploration of the wider field of support to help the early years teacher to manage the 'complex realities of practice' (Dalli et al. 2012: 7).

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Glossary of terms that are used in the work

Integrated working

Early Intervention (EI)	'Identifying and providing effective early support to children and young people who are at risk of poor outcomes'. (Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) 2019)
Joined-up working, policy or thinking	'Refers to deliberately conceptualised and co-ordinated planning, which takes account of multiple policies and varying agency practices' (Warmington et al. 2004: 4)
Integrated working (IW)	For consistency, the term 'integrated working' is used generically in this work to represent a collaborative or 'joined-up' mode of working. This is adopted from Hood's (2014: 29) definition of integrated working as a 'general category for collaboration' amongst professionals, 'as opposed to a specific structure or process'. Integrated working enables 'professionals from diverse disciplines to work collaboratively and consistently to provide access to the range of services and supports families may need' (Wong and Press 2012: 7). Other terms that might be used to denote this area of practice are included in this section of the glossary for information.
Collaborative working	'Collaborative working occurs when two or more professionals from different professional groups are required to interact to ensure that appropriate care is delivered to a service user' (King et al. 2017: 1)
Co-produced services	Co-produced services are distinguished by an equal and reciprocal relationship between the user and provider in order to achieve an identified outcome (Whalley 2013)
Inter-agency	'More than one agency working together in a planned and formal way, rather than simply through informal networking (although the latter may support and develop the former). This can be at strategic or operational level' (Warmington et al. 2004: 4)
Inter-professional	Practitioners from different professional backgrounds work together to respond to the needs of children and their families who encounter complex challenges (Payler et al. 2016)
Multi-agency	Practitioners from different professional groups could be working together in the same location, though their work might not be collaborative (Leadbetter at al. 2007)
Multi-disciplinary	Practitioners from two or more different disciplines work alongside though independently from each other (Malin and Morrow 2007)
Multi-professional	'The coming together across traditional professional boundaries of staff from education, health and social care' (Warmington 2011: 146)
Transdisciplinary	Practitioners across different professional backgrounds have space to explore and develop new perspectives to manage the complexities of practice (Cartmel et al. 2013).

In the terms listed above, those with the prefixes ‘inter’, multi’ or ‘trans’ are combined with words such as ‘disciplinary’, ‘professional’ or ‘agency’ to form adjectives that can be applied to words, such as ‘practice’, ‘working’ or ‘teams’ that are found in literature on integrated working.

Early Years Terms and their acronyms

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)	A term used to denote services for young children and their families that are provided by the state or private, voluntary or independent (PVI) sector that broadly combine education and care of children. The notion of education and care can also be known as ‘educare’.
Early Years (EY)	Period in a child’s life from birth to 5 years. This would typically be to the end of a child’s Reception Year in school; i.e. up to 31st August in the academic year in which they are 5 years of age.
Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	A curriculum framework to support children’s learning and development from birth to 5 years in England (Nutbrown 2011: 51)
EYFS Statutory Framework	‘Specifies government requirements for learning and development in the EYFS and for safeguarding children and promoting their welfare’ (DfE 2021: 5)
Early Years Teacher	Term used in this work that could be applied to an early years teacher with QTS or EYTS (see below). They are differentiated by their training, professional standards and status
Early Years Teacher who has gained EYTS	Early Years Teacher (EYT) is a teacher who has undertaken early years initial teacher training (EYITT) principally with children aged 0-5 years and has been awarded Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS). EYTS is ‘awarded to graduates who are leading education and care and who have been judged to have met all of the standards in practice from birth to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage’ (EYFS) (NCTL 2013: 2). However, there is ‘disparity in pay and conditions’ between early years teachers with EYTS and their counterparts with QTS (Kay et al. 2021: 190)
Early Years Teacher who has gained QTS	Teacher who has undertaken initial teacher training (ITT) principally with children aged 3-7 years across the EYFS and KS1. They have been awarded Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), which is required to lead teaching and learning in maintained schools (DfE 2011)
Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS)	Graduate-level status awarded to EYTs who have met all the EYTS standards (NCTL 2013)

Key Stage One (KS1)	Phase of provision for children from 5-7 years in Year 1 (Y1) and Year 2 (Y2) covered by the National Curriculum (NC)
Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)	Graduate-level status awarded to teachers who have met all the Teachers' Standards (DfE 2011).
Teachers' Standards	Standards for the award of QTS in England (DfE 2011)
Teachers' Standards (Early Years)	Standards for the award of EYTS in England (NCTL 2013)

Additional acronyms used in the work

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CCA	Child-centred approach
CoP	Code of practice (SEND)
CSR	Comprehensive Safeguarding Review
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007-10)
DfE	Department for Education (2010 onwards)
ECT	Early Career Teacher
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (2001-7)
ECM	Every Child Matters
HLE	Home learning environment
IR	Integrated review
IS	Information sharing
MH	Mental health
OCC	Office of the Children's Commissioner
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PD	Professional development
SCR	Serious case review
SEND	Special educational needs and disability
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Other terms used in the text

Parent	Parent or other significant adult in a child's life
Pedagogy	How learning and teaching are approached
Social exclusion	'The process of becoming detached from the organizations and communities of which the society is composed and from the rights and responsibilities that they embody' (Room 1995: 243)

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Chapter 2: Theoretical framing

This chapter discusses Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006), which evolved from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) previous ecological model of human development. The chapter explains the suitability of the bio-ecological model for the project and discusses how the model encompasses four elements; proximal processes, personal characteristics, context and time (PPCT).

Chapter 3: Literature review

This chapter explores literature on the key subjects for the project of integrated working and professional development in early years practice. The chapter considers literature that was reviewed prior to the research to inform the research activity and literature that was also accessed during and after the research, bringing the work up-to-date. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model is utilised to support the discussion of the literature in the chapter.

Chapter 4: Research designing

The chapter discusses various influential factors on the research design and relevant ethical considerations for the research. The chapter also considers the feasibility and accessibility of participants and explains how the project was then framed as a qualitative interview study.

Chapter 5: Research design, method, project activity and details

This chapter considers the research design method, activity and details; this includes discussion of participant sampling and the use of in-depth interviews and a walking

interview. The chapter concludes by exploring further ethical considerations for the research.

Chapter 6: Analysis

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the research data and explains how the data was analysed. The chapter details the six themes and their respective sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the data.

Chapter 7: Findings, discussion and recommendations

The chapter explores the six themes and their respective sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the participants' data. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model is used to organise the discussion in the chapter. The chapter considers the implications from the discussion for supporting the early years teacher's role in integrated working. The chapter also discusses the project's contribution and makes some recommendations for practice and research. The chapter concludes with the dissemination strategy for the project.

Other elements of the work:

A glossary of terms used in the project can be found at the front of the work.

Following Chapter 7, there is a reflective section where I reflect on the experience of undertaking the research project.

The list of references follows the reflective section.

The appendices follow the list of references in the final part of the work.

Chapter 1 Introduction and context

1.1 Introduction and Context

Integrated working is a process whereby professionals from different disciplines 'work collaboratively and consistently to provide access to the range of services and supports families may need' (Wong and Press 2012: 7). This research project is concerned with early years[1] teachers' participation in integrated working. The project explores how early years teachers' collaborative working with others can be optimised to maximise support for young children's learning and development. In this chapter, I explain the rationale for selecting this subject as the focus for this project and discuss contextual factors that are relevant to its focus. I then critically reflect on these contexts and consider my own positionality in relation to the project. This chapter concludes with details of the project's purpose, aims, objectives and desired outcomes.

1.2 Project rationale

During the past two decades, policy initiatives have advocated integrated approaches to public service provision in the early years sector to promote children's development and enhance their life chances (Barnes et al. 2018). For the purposes of this research, child development refers to 'the expansion of physical, cognitive, psychological, and socioemotional skills that lead to increased competence, autonomy, and independence' (Daelmans et al. 2015: 23). Concern for optimising children's development is pertinent, as the child's experience 'during early years (prenatal to the age of five years) creates a trajectory across the lifespan' (ibid.).

Through sharing their specialist knowledge and unique perceptions when participating in integrated working, professionals ascertain needs and develop suitable strategies and interventions to support a child's development (Christner 2015). However, though collaborative working with others who have 'different professional experiences, training, and ways of seeing children and their contexts' can help to develop more holistic service provision that incorporates a range of strategies to support a child's needs, it may also result in misunderstanding or even discord (Jarvis and Trodd 2008: 212). There is a risk that implementation of integrated approaches in practice is perceived to be unproblematic and assumptions could be

[1] Term used in this work to denote the two graduate-level roles with title of 'teacher' who work in the EYFS in England; i.e. teachers who have gained either EYTS or QTS.

made that professionals' positive intentions are sufficient to generate favourable outcomes for families (Hopwood and Edwards 2017).

Moreover, research has identified inconsistencies in integrated service provision (Brooks and Thistlethwaite 2012). Successful implementation of integrated working in early years practice has been found to be variable (Payler and Georgeson 2013a) and is noted by Barnes et al. (2017: 6) as 'context specific', functioning 'in different ways at differing levels, with a variety of objectives, methods and structures'. Research also indicates that the ways in which early years staff engage in integrated working are 'under-researched and underdeveloped, particularly outside children's centres' (Payler and Georgeson 2013a: 39). Assumptions cannot be made that the 'ability to collaborate with others is acquired as a natural corollary of becoming a professional' (Hood et al. 2016: 494). Although staff in early years provision are expected to work collaboratively with parents and other professionals to support children's development, there is limited focus on issues they might encounter when participating in integrated service provision (Cumming and Wong 2012). According to Nutbrown (2018), further studies on the effects of training on integrated working in early years provision are needed nationally and internationally.

These academic perspectives on potential challenges to effective integrated working in early years practice have important implications for my role as a tutor in a university department of education where I am involved in supporting the development of teachers' efficacy in practice. Collaborative working is a significant aspect of early years teachers' roles, as stated in government professional standards (DfE 2011; NCTL 2013). My professional concern with this subject prompts this project's focus on exploring how early years teachers' participation in collaborative working can be facilitated. Through this exploration, the project seeks to enhance my own practice as a university tutor and to contribute to the development of broader knowledge in relation to early years teachers' roles in integrated service provision, which are relevant aims of a professional doctorate (Gibbs and Maguire 2016).

Use of terminology within integrated working is an area that can be problematic; there is a tendency to use different terms inconsistently and terms may be applied interchangeably in literature on the subject (Wong and Sumsion 2013). Examples of terms that could be used to denote integrated working are included in the glossary at the beginning of this work. In this project, I have adopted Hood's (2014: 29) application of the term integrated working as a 'general category for collaboration' amongst professionals, 'as opposed to a specific structure or process'. Additionally, as Hood

suggests, use of the term ‘integrated working’ in this work is associated with collaborative working by networks of professionals rather than more specific ‘integrated teams’ working ‘under a unitary management’. I consider the use of terminology in integrated working further in Chapter 3.

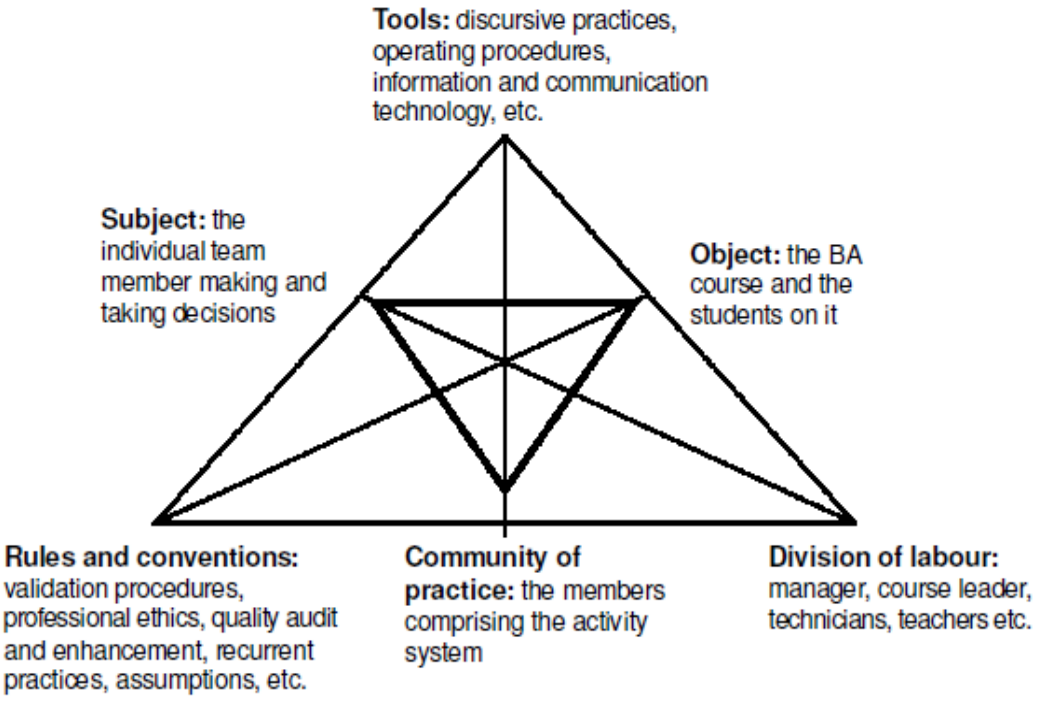
1.3 Personal and professional context

The focus of this project is grounded in my learning and experience within the field of young children’s education and development. After leaving school, I embarked on an initial teacher-training (ITT) programme and taught in primary schools in London for several years before moving to higher education (HE) in 2005 to work in the education department of a modern university on ITT programmes. I then moved to another modern university’s education department in 2007, where I currently work on professional programmes. Reflection on my teaching experiences in school and in HE prompted further consideration about how I responded to changes in my professional roles and deployed knowledge and skills to different teaching contexts.

When moving from working in school to HE, induction processes provided details of university methods and sources of information that helped to facilitate the transition from the teaching and learning context of primary school education to HE. Professional learning involves the negotiation of meaning in social contexts through critical dialogue (Russell and Bullock 2001); my discussions with new colleagues in the education department were pertinent to the development of my understanding of HE practices and systems when starting to work on ITT programmes. This form of learning is conceptualised by Trowler and Knight (2000: 28); drawing on Engestrom’s Activity theory (1987) and Wenger’s (1998) Community of Practice theory, they suggest activity systems or communities of practice are ‘important sites in the acquisition, enactment and creation of culture and knowledgeability’ that enable new academic appointees (NAAs) to ‘come to know’ about new workplace processes. The authors have adapted Engestrom’s (1987) diagram of activity theory to illustrate how a degree programme can be treated as an activity system, which demonstrates how ‘induction is about the discourses and practices of the teams and departments that the NAA is trying to join’. This diagram, shown in Figure 1.1, helps to convey the wider context of a NAA’s specific role. It could also be used by academics transferring from one programme to another, as I have experienced in HE; for example, to help appreciate differences in ‘rules and conventions’ about students’ admissions to a programme that must be followed to comply with professional requirements, such as an ITT programme.

One of the most interesting aspects of my move to HE has been the opportunity to engage in effective communication about educational issues and to think at a deeper level. Discussion with colleagues in formal and informal meetings has been a valuable process; they provide a space to think and learn that promotes reflection and the formulation of ideas. Engaging in professional dialogue about tackling new approaches and providing moral support to colleagues is a helpful process, as these actions are an effective catalyst for professional learning (Cordingly 2013). My experience of transitioning from Primary school to HE could be described as 'border crossing' between professional knowledge landscapes (Britt and Sumsion 2003: 118); which enables teachers 'to challenge traditional ways of thinking', 'create new professional learnings and knowledge', value different perspectives and extend the limits of their understanding.

Figure 1.1 Engestrom's diagram of activity theory (Trowler and Knight 2000: 31)



When working as a teacher, I mentored undergraduate and postgraduate ITT students on their school placements and newly qualified teachers (NQTs) during their first year of teaching. My interest in teacher education developed from undertaking these roles; working with ITT students and NQTs was an interesting and rewarding experience and I welcomed the opportunity to continue to support the professional development of trainee teachers when moving to HE. My interest in mentoring led me to focus my research for my master's degree qualification on the role of the university tutor working with ITT students and school mentors on school placement. This enabled me to reflect deeply on the issues involved in supporting novice teachers and extended my knowledge and understanding of professional development.

My experience of mentoring ITT students was broadened when working on the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) programme from 2007-12. The graduate role of the early years professional (EYP) was introduced by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC)[2] in 2006. EYPs were tasked with leading and supporting others to raise the quality of children's experiences in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and improve children's outcomes (Allen and Whalley 2010). Students seeking EYPS were required to demonstrate they could meet a set of 39 EYP standards through their personal practice (CWDC 2007). These included four standards (S33-36) under the heading 'Teamwork and Collaboration' that were concerned with collaborative working with colleagues and other professionals.

EYP Standard 36 was particularly focused on integrated working, which had been growing in prominence in early years policy and practice since the end of the twentieth century. Integrated working was defined by CWDC (2008: 2) as a process 'where everyone supporting children and young people works together effectively to put the child at the centre, meet their needs and improve their lives'. The Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) (DfES 2003) and the ensuing 2004 Children Act, which is discussed further in the work, had advocated the necessity for improved collaborative working practices by all professionals involved in providing children's services. Integrated working was also embedded in the former EYFS Practice Guidance (DCSF

[2] CWDC was closed by the Coalition government in 2012. The EYP role was replaced by the role of 'Early Years Teacher' (EYT) in 2013 and EYPS was replaced by 'Early Years Teacher Status' (EYTS); EYTs had to demonstrate they could meet the set of 'Teacher Standards (Early Years)' (NCTL 2013) in order to gain EYTS (see Glossary for more details).

2008a: 6), which specified that early years practitioners 'should work together with professionals from other agencies, such as local and community health and social services, to identify needs and provide the best learning opportunities for children'. Furthermore, The Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector (ELEYS) study also identified that a commitment to collaborative working with families and other professionals was a fundamental requirement for the role of early years leadership; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007: 12)[3] noted this role was essentially 'Leadership of Learning', as the main aim of an early years setting is the development of children's social and academic outcomes. The importance of early years leaders' role in supporting integrated working is identified by Nutbrown (2018: 129) as one of three essential requirements for integrated working to be effectively implemented:

1. *A real and deep understanding of what each professional and each discipline can offer families*
2. *Those in positions of leadership need to understand the benefits and potential to be derived from multi-professionalism*
3. *Realistic and adequate investment must be made to build team understanding of the contributions of team members so that a deep understanding of the different roles represented in a team is achieved, in a fully integrated ECEC [Early childhood education and care] provision*

However, collaborative practice with other professionals is not necessarily perceived as 'welcome or easy' (Croker et al. 2016: 672). Collaboration involves an emotional as well as an intellectual commitment to working with others that could be weakened without approval from others (Day 2004). From my experience of working on the EYPS programme as a tutor, assessor and external moderator, I appreciated that EYP Standard 36 was perceived to be problematic. I sought strategies to further EYP candidates' knowledge and understanding of collaborative working; for example, by liaising with university colleagues in Social Work and Midwifery departments, who were interested in developing joint learning experiences on the subject of collaborative practice. We planned and developed two workshop sessions on integrated working, which were attended by over a hundred social work, midwifery and early years students. From analysis of feedback, the majority of students reported they had a positive learning experience and had developed their knowledge and

[3] Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007: 12) identified two other fundamental requirements for the role of 'Leadership of Learning'. These are:
- 'contextual literacy', which is the leader's consideration of the situation in which they operate and the people they are leading
- 'commitment to the improvement of outcomes for all children' - where children's learning and development is considered holistically and individual needs are identified and addressed (Whalley 2011: 26).

understanding of the importance of integrated working and the roles of different professionals who could be involved in children's services (Villadsen et al. 2012). When asked to identify areas of improvement, some students thought that smaller discussion groups would have enhanced the quality of their learning (ibid.) This was useful feedback and demonstrates that it is important to focus on aspects that both enable and improve learning (Claxton 1996).

1.4 Socio-political context

My critical reflection on the significance of the broader socio-political context of the project focus 'takes account of cultural and structural factors that are so important in shaping professional practice' (Thompson and Pascal, 2012: 322). Reflection on student performance, for instance, may be affected by consideration of the broader context of schooling, such as social inequity; reflective practitioners can then 'come to see themselves as agents of change, capable of understanding not only what is, but also working to create what should be' (Jay and Johnson 2002: 79).

1.4.1 Educational policy reforms

Early years policy and practice are situated within the broader socio-political context of dynamic educational initiatives that have occurred since the 1980s. Successive governments have sought to raise educational attainment through standardisation measures affecting the curriculum, pedagogical approaches and assessment processes that have instigated increasing levels of accountability for education practitioners and the organisations in which they work (Robinson 2016).

In the Coalition government White Paper, 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE 2010), reform is expressed 'in a crisis narrative centred on the economic functions of education' (Hulme 2016: 46). Linking educational outcomes with the country's future economic prosperity, the White Paper cites the views of Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education (2009–15) who states:

> *education is the new currency by which nations maintain economic competitiveness and global prosperity […] opportunities to land a good job are vanishing fast for young workers who drop out of school or fail to get college [HE] experience* (cited in DfE 2010: 17)

A key concern for policy makers in enabling a well-educated workforce for the future is ensuring the quality of teaching practices, as these are considered 'to be the most important factor in promoting learning and raising performance for all students' (Tan

et al. 2010: 478). This has implications for teacher-training and professional development to 'better meet new educational challenges and problems posed by key drivers at the global level' (ibid.) The White Paper (DfE 2010: 19) declared there was not 'a strong enough focus on what is proven to be the most effective practice in teacher education and development' and advocated an apprenticeship approach to teacher education by announcing an expansion of school-based routes into teaching so more trainee teachers could learn 'on the job'.

Educational reform is thought to have been prompted by a speech in 1976 at Ruskin College, Oxford by the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan; in his speech, Callaghan opened a national debate on concerns about state education and its capacity to prepare children for life and work in the 21st century (Ball 2017). An agenda of policy initiatives, including the introduction of a National Curriculum, external testing and publication of test data followed in the wake of the 1988 Education Reform Act; this has led to a redefining of the work of schools and the professional role of teachers. Government strategy has sought to standardise the curriculum, teaching and assessment in the belief that testing will 'increase competition between students, teachers, and schools, on the assumption that it will drive up standards' (Robinson 2016: 12). This impacts the whole school community; 'teachers are judged mainly on their students' test results… tests influence funding allocations, staff promotions, and whether or not schools stay open or are placed under different leadership. This is why they are called "high stake assessments" (p.13). Moreover, a focus on measurement affects how aims and values of education are perceived. Suggesting education is often 'narrowly defined in terms of standards', the British Academy and The Royal Society (2018: 14) argue against judging success in education solely by standards achieved by students, they state:

> *Education is successful if it contributes towards enabling people to meet basic needs: being healthy; developing strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills; dealing with complexity, diversity, and change; developing personal qualities, such as fortitude and good judgement; and being active citizens. A narrow focus on measuring only those factors that can be measured distorts how we understand the benefits that education delivers.*

Wider concerns about statutory testing, the use of standardized assessment tasks (SATs) at the end of Key Stage 2 and use of wider test data have emerged since the introduction of SATs in the 1990s, culminating in a boycott of testing in 2010 by a quarter of schools that were required to administer the tests. This resulted in the government establishing an independent review of the process in 2010, led by Lord

Bew. In his 'Independent Review of Testing, Assessment and Accountability' (2011: 9), Lord Bew noted that 'the testing system is too 'high stakes' and this could lead to unintended consequences, such as over rehearsal and 'teaching to the test'. Concerns about the impact of testing continue to be expressed; Ofsted (2019a: 5) note that 'international evidence indicates that a focus on only a few measurable outcomes has had some negative consequences for curriculum design. As a result, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds may be discouraged from taking academic subjects'.

Educational reforms have been part of an increased 'marketisation' of education; Ball (2017: 215) advises the main aspects of reform policy are 'embedded in three interrelated policy technologies; the market, managerialism and performativity'. These technologies contribute to 'aligning public sector organizations with the methods, culture and ethical system of the private sector'; they create the pre-conditions for various forms of 'privatization' and 'commodification' of core public services (p.216). Competition has also been fostered by the work of Ofsted. Established in 1992, Ofsted is a non-ministerial department that acts on behalf of the government to regulate the quality of educational provision in England. Ofsted's reports of its inspections are published on its website and are publically available; these influence the status of schools and ITT providers in HE, which are inspected by Ofsted (Whiting et al. 2018). Fullan (2019: 99) warns about the impact of such evaluation measures; he notes it is 'neither natural nor effective to motivate humans through surveillance…the tools of accountability are not instruments to be wielded but cultures to be built'.

This shift in policy initiatives has direct consequences for teachers; they are subject to new forms of professional practice that are required to implement government initiatives. The reforms raise questions about the status of teachers as autonomous professionals and their capacity to exercise professional judgment. There is a revised perception of the teacher as a 'technician', who works closely within current national guidance; their professional identities could be perceived to be destabilised, as they transform themselves towards new roles and unfamiliar actions (Bates et al. 2011).

1.4.2 Early Years Policy and Practice

Early years policy and practice has received greater focus within broader educational reforms since the turn of the century. There has been an accompanying expansion of provision, which has been influenced by research evidence that has pointed to the

contribution that high quality early years provision can make to supporting children's holistic development and to tackling social inequality (Bury et al. 2020). For example, emergent evidence concerning the significance of early brain development on children's learning and development (Wood et al. 2017) and findings from the longitudinal research study, 'Effective Provision for Pre-School Education' (EPPE) (Sylva et al. 2004) that indicated beneficial effects of good quality pre-school provision on children's future outcomes, have drawn attention to the capacity of early years provision to impact young children's learning and future outcomes. Running from 1997-2003 with 3000 child participants, EPPE was the first extensive UK study of the effects of children's pre-school experience and family support on their learning, which has made a significant contribution to knowledge about early years practice (Sylva et al. 2010). EPPE reported that children's experience of quality early years provision enhanced their early learning and development, promoting school readiness and school attainment into adolescence and positive life outcomes (Melhuish and Gardiner 2019). Support for integrated services was also offered by EPPE, as it indicated that early years provision that integrated education, childcare and family services was beneficial for young children's development (OECD 2006).

EPPE was later extended to become the Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) project, which enabled evidence to be collected on the longer-term impact of pre-school education. The study reported that children who had attended high-quality pre-schools were more likely to achieve five GSCEs at the age of 16 at A*–C grades, including English and mathematics (Taggart et al. 2015); these findings further emphasised the importance of children's access to high quality early years provision. The findings from EPPSE have contributed to a prevailing view that a child's early years are crucial to their later educational attainment and life outcomes. This, in turn, has prompted the development of early intervention (EI) programmes that aim to improve health and educational attainment at an early stage of a child's life (Nutbrown 2018).

EI was advocated by the former Labour MP Graham Allen (2011: xiii); in his influential report 'Early Intervention: The Next Steps'; Allen advised that young children should be provided with 'the right type of support in their earliest years, when they should achieve their most rapid development'. His view was supported by other key reports relating to provision for young children that were commissioned by the Coalition government (Field 2010; Tickell 2011; Nutbrown 2012). EI is currently a key early years policy approach to identify and provide early support for children and their families to enhance children's health, well-being and outcomes in later life (Powell

2019). Although EI policy is not limited to children's early years, programmes are generally targeted at this stage due to the fast pace of their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development in this phase of their life (ibid). EI policy is highly relevant to the scope of this project, which aims to support early years teachers' engagement in integrated working. However, Wood et al. (2017: 113) caution that, while EPPE and EPPSE have supplemented international evidence on the importance of quality early years provision, subsequent UK governments have 'cherry-picked key findings from this research', which is indicative of a 'somewhat problematic relationship between research, policy and practice'.

Early years provision is also understood to support an increased rate of maternal employment, with subsequent expansion of tax revenue and reduction of welfare costs; maternal employment is also considered to lower the risk of child poverty, which impacts on the child's welfare and outcomes (Hillman and Williams 2015). However, while early years provision is charged with supporting beneficial outcomes for both the child and broader socio-political aspirations, two key factors need to be considered. Firstly, the early years sector is a complex entity; the early years workforce holds varying levels of qualifications and provision occurs in a mixed-market model that incorporates a maintained publicly funded sector and a private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector. Secondly, early years provision alone cannot be regarded as a 'silver bullet' and needs to be positioned within broader influential factors that concern child outcomes and social inequality (Bonetti and Blandon 2020: 6). This view is echoed by Archer and Merrick (2020: 44) who advise:

> *Children's life chances will not improve unless the root causes of disadvantage are tackled: poverty, poor health, inadequate housing, unemployment and other sources of stress on families. However, as part of a joined-up package of services, early childhood education can be a source of support for parents and an opportunity for children to thrive in a safe and supportive environment.*

Children's learning and development in early years provision is shaped by the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework (DfE 2021). Statutory from September 2008, the EYFS framework integrates the elements of education and care in early years provision and sets standards that are applicable across all provision for children from birth to 5 years. In particular, it outlines requirements for learning and development and for safeguarding children and promoting their welfare (p.5).

The EYFS framework covers seven interconnected areas of learning and development (p.7). Acknowledging the findings of the EPPE research, the framework views children's socio-emotional and cognitive development as complementary to each other (Siraj-Blatchford 2010). The Framework's (2021: 5) aims for early years provision are:

- *quality and consistency in all early years settings*
- *a secure foundation through planning for the learning and development of each individual child, and assessing and reviewing what they have learned regularly*
- *partnership working between practitioners and with parents and/or carers*
- *equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported*

Contemporary early years policy and practice seeks to celebrate diversity and protect children's rights. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was ratified by the UK government in 1991 and applied in 1992, has drawn attention to children's agency in their lives and their opportunities to express their views and be respected (Einarsdóttir 2014). International perspectives on early years provision, such as the innovative nursery provision developed by Malaguzzi in the Reggio Emilia area of Italy at the end of the Second World War, also exert influence on approaches to practice. Malaguzzi (2011: 2) promoted the concept of a child's 'hundred languages', which supports the child to express themselves using diverse forms of communication such as technology, dance or construction materials.

The rapid growth of digital technologies during the twenty-first century has provided young children with access to new contexts for communication and play through such devices as electronic game consoles, digital toys, television, computers, smartphones, and iPads or other tablets. At the same time, queries have been raised about children's use of new technology, such as 'screen time' and its possible negative effect on their safety and well-being (Macdonald 2018). It is argued that children's accessibility to screen-based entertainment at home contributes to their inactivity and encroaches on their opportunities to engage in more traditional play experiences, especially within outdoor environments (Brown and Patte 2013). According to Stephen and Plowman (2014), concerns about children's use of digital technology can be classified into three main areas of adverse impact; children's health and well-being, their brain development and cognition, and their social and cultural competencies.

There are also views that suggest a rising level of approval for children's increased engagement in digital activity (Colwell et al. 2015). Digital technologies are largely

perceived by parents as beneficial rather than threatening in nature; they are seen as a useful form of children's entertainment, as well as an educational asset (Lauwaert, 2009), and are thought to present constructive play opportunities, which can promote children's creative, imaginative and social development (Frost, 2010). Digital games can also provide a more inclusive platform for children with disabilities than those afforded by real world games (Byron, 2008). Young children's engagement with digital play is also considered to be beneficial preparation for their adult life; Rosen and Jaruszewicz, (2009: 163) suggest that educators and parents appreciate that children 'must learn how to live on a wired planet'. Such arguments can represent a binary choice about children's use of digital technology. From his research with trainee early childhood teachers in Finland, Mertala (2019: 1238) suggests 'an individual teacher – depending on the situation – can be both for and against the use of technology', which indicates the importance of reviewing the context and purpose of the activity. This view prompts consideration of how early years practitioners can 'bring a balance to children's digital fluencies and early years pedagogy' (Palaiologou 2016: 19). This is a dynamic area of practice where opportunities for discussions between early years practitioners, other relevant professionals and parents could be beneficial concerning young children's use of digital technology.

1.5 Critical reflection on personal, professional and socio-political contexts

Critical reflection on my experience in professional practice and the broader socio-political context of education is facilitated by the work of Van Manen (1990: 56) who notes that 'lived-experience descriptions' are significant as they open up 'the question of the meaning' of the research focus. He observes that awareness of 'one's own experience of a phenomenon' could offer the researcher 'clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon'; the researcher recognises that 'one's own experiences are the possible experiences of others and also that the experiences of others are the experiences of oneself' (p.57-58). This suggests that it is useful to turn to the accounts of others' lived experiences to support my reflection and meaning-making of my personal and professional experience and wider socio-political context for this research. Such written or verbal accounts can offer 'new and interesting insights' on our own life experience and 'how we get things done' (Mercer, 2000: 15). Examples of accounts from two authors have provided me with insight on others' lived experiences, which has supported reflection on my own experience and the wider socio-political context. These examples are discussed below.

The first example consists of two extracts from reflective accounts authored by Grigg in 2010 and 2012 respectively that are discussed by Brown and Grigg (2017: 338-9). These extracts each illustrate a scenario from Grigg's experience of practice in a nursery centre attached to a school. According to Brown and Grigg's discussion of the extracts, provision in the nursery shifted from adopting a child-centred pedagogical approach (depicted in Extract 1) to more formal provision (depicted in Extract 2), following a change in school leadership. The latter approach in this extract is termed 'schoolification' by the authors, which refers 'to the growing trend for school-like behaviours (or school readiness) to be increasingly imposed on early childhood education settings across the globe' (Brown and Grigg 2017: 339).

> Extract 1: 2008 (child-centred approach)
> *I hurriedly set up the outdoor learning space on a cold winter's morning. I only have thirty minutes left before the children arrive. I am mindful to set up hands-on activities that support all the developmental domains of learning. A short while later, the children arrive with big smiles on their faces. Parents are in no hurry to leave, and are milling about and engaged in watching their children involved in activities…This is what I love about teaching in an inner-city school. I love this mix of culture and these happy children, eager to play, communicate and have fun* (Brown and Grigg 2017: 338).

> Extract 2: 2010 (*schoolification approach*)
> *What sound does it make? Good! Yes, it makes a g g g sound. G for goat! Now you say it, boys and girls.' I now have to do these phonics lessons daily. This is so frustrating! The children are wriggling in front of me and appear disinterested. I can tell they are eager to get to the puzzles or out into the sandpit to interact with their friends…. Later this month, I must also input student progress into a computer tracking system. If any student has not made enough progress with their phonics, I will need to write an accountability statement outlining what interventions I will use to enable improvements next term* (Brown and Grigg 2017: 338-9).

Reading these two extracts has supported my reflection on my experience of issues that are relevant to the research focus. Though only a brief snapshot, the text in Extract 1 conveys a sense of a vibrant, playful and inclusive environment that I value as an aspect of EY provision and relates to my knowledge and experience of young children as 'resilient, active learners, who are eager to explore their world and engage with others…using play as a tool to develop mastery over skills, ideas and practices' (Jackson and Needham 2014: 4). When working as a university tutor on EYPS training pathways, I co-authored the book 'Supporting pedagogy and practice in early years settings' (Allen and Whalley 2010), which aimed to support students to meet the set of EYP standards and gain EYPS. Readers were encouraged to consider how an EYP could lead and support practice; in doing so, it also sought to help them to

examine certain practices that were advocated by theorists or policy makers and consider the intended outcomes of pedagogical approaches applied in their practice. The term ‘pedagogy’ was described in the book as ‘supporting, walking beside and leading the child’ (Allen and Whalley 2010: 4). This draws on Vygotsky’s (1978) view of learning as a process of social interaction, interpretation and understanding that enables the active co-creation of knowledge and his emphasis on the importance of the sociocultural contexts in which learning occurs.

Extract 1 also demonstrates a positive and welcoming environment for parents at the centre that supports children’s parents and centre staff to build effective partnerships, which can have a positive impact on children’s learning and development (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002). The beneficial effect of parental engagement in children’s learning and development is advocated in the research literature on the subject; for example, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003); Goodall and Vorhaus (2011); Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2018). The EPPE study reported that the quality of the children’s home learning environment (HLE) was highly influential for children’s cognitive and social development; EPPE stated ‘what parents do to support their children’s learning was found to be more important than who parents are’ in terms of other important influences, such as parental education, occupation or income (Sylva et al. 2004: 5). EPPE identified activities in an effective home learning environment (HLE) (‘what parents do’); these include parents’ regular reading with their child and playing with numbers and letters (Hallett 2016). Parental engagement is a complex activity that calls for mutually respectful relationships between home and school; activity needs to be relevant and ‘informed by an understanding of families’ lives’ (EEF 2018:10). From my knowledge and experience of parental engagement and development of home reading schemes with staff and families when working in school, I agree with Robinson’s (2016: 210) view that when schools build positive partnerships with families and listen to their ideas and concerns about their child’s education, they are likely ‘to create better and more successful learning environments’.

Though only a brief glimpse of the centre’s provision, Extract 2 demonstrates a shift towards a more formal style of learning and teaching, following the change in school leadership. It portrays seemingly little enthusiasm on the part of the teacher or the children for the phonics session that is depicted in Extract 2. This perspective relates to wider concerns about the introduction of systemic synthetic phonics (SSP) as the prime approach to the teaching of reading in 2006 in England (Rose 2006). SSP is

an approach where children learn to decode single words that are not read in meaningful contexts. The government Phonics Screening Check introduced in 2012 requires children in Year 1 to decode 20 ‘real’ words and 20 ‘pseudo’ words; if they do not pass the test, they retake it in Year 2. When it was introduced in 2006, advocacy for SSP appeared to disregard knowledge of the complexity of learning to read and the inconsistency of the English language in both reading and spelling (Wyse and Goswami 2008). While Extract 2 is only one perspective of phonics teaching, I agree with Merchant’s (2008: 91) view that while there needs to be an element of phonics teaching, ‘phonics alone would lead to a limited and impoverished kind of literacy and one that is insufficient for full participation in society’. Moreover, approaches to teaching and assessment of reading or other subjects should aim to ‘motivate, rather than inhibit learning’ as ‘the basic prerequisite for effective education is to cultivate students’ enthusiasm for learning’ (Robinson 2016: 231).

The second example is Evans’ (2002: 123-4) reflective account of her personal development in the early part of her career as a primary school teacher that was also useful to read; her explanation of her personal development resonates with my own reflection on my personal experience in the early part of my teaching career in school:

> *My own development occurred so gradually and imperceptibly that it took me unawares. I would not find it at all easy to identify precisely what events and circumstances influenced it. I do not believe it was simply effected by the influence of the courses I attended; there was more to it than that…. I am inclined to attribute it, at least partly, to the influence of key colleagues.*

Although I experienced some interesting and varied professional development opportunities, I could not readily identify which particular occurrences shaped my development in the initial stages of my teacher career in school, though I recognise that my development was influenced by key colleagues. This influence could be described as ‘a connected professional learning approach, in terms of knowledge and relationships’ whereby ‘coherent, connected and situated experiences integrate professional learning across teachers’ individual and collective thinking and practice’ (Keay et al. 2019: 134). However, teachers’ professional learning and development is a complex process; I agree that ‘questions remain about the nature and quality of the learning experiences available to teachers’ (p.126).

From reflecting on my knowledge and experience of professional development, I recognise that ‘defining professional development is not an easy task’ (Campbell et

al. 2004: 16). This position is not supported by the number of publications on professional learning or development that, as claimed by Evans (2019: 6), 'fail to conceptualise and define these terms', which 'is both astonishing and disappointing'. I interpret the term 'professional development' in a broad sense and recognise its 'multidimensionality' (ibid: p.6). In the context of this project, I draw on OECD's (2009: 49) definition of the term 'professional development' as 'activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher'. This definition acknowledges the different roles and dynamic contexts in which early years teachers might work and is relevant to my understanding of the notion of practitioners' work with young children as 'a complex combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes' (Campbell-Barr 2019: 35). Following Cable and Miller's (2011: 158) view, I believe professional development 'needs to be seen as a process, not an end product, because change and complexity are central aspects of life'. Teachers need opportunities to participate in professional development throughout their career (Gomez et al. 2015). Therefore, initial training can be viewed 'as an aspect of professional development' (Campbell-Barr 2019: 26). I also recognise teachers' professional development as being dependent on the context of the time and place in which it occurs (Balduzzi 2011).

While use of the term 'professional development' is principally focused in this work on support for novice teachers' engagement in integrated working, I see its application in this study and its findings as having relevance for both initial and post-qualifying teacher development. I consider the subject of professional development further in the work.

1.6 Positionality

My positionality has important implications and ethical consequences for the development of the research. In professional practice research, 'the subject, the body is very much present. The researcher is more than insider but *inside* the research' (Maxwell 2019: 12). The centrality of this role implies there is the potential for my assumptions to engender specific ways of thinking about the research and shape my decisions and choices during the course of the research. I recognised the need for reflexivity throughout the project, which is crucial to practitioner researchers for "understanding their own place in their own research" (Fox et al. 2007:189).

My reflective thinking is supported by Fook's (2019: 64) definition of reflection in relation to professional research, as it encapsulates the form and purpose of reflection about my philosophical assumptions that I sought to undertake:

> *[Reflection] is initiated by a process of unearthing and examining deeply held assumptions embedded in experience, in order to redevelop the meaning of this experience and reformulate new guiding principles (more congruent with fundamental values) for practice. This is turn should enable a more ethical and compassionate engagement with the social world.*

Focusing on an ontological perspective prompted reflection about my view of the reality of the social world pertaining to the research. I believe the social and cultural dimensions of the organisational context pertaining to the research focus are a crucial influence on the teacher's enactment of their role and how their work is defined (Forde et al. 2006). The reality of the research phenomenon is subject to fluctuating and variable factors that affect actions and events that occur in practice. I recognise the need for overarching policies that express a common set of professional expectations and requirements on educational processes and teachers' behaviour that are intended to serve the best interests of the child, their family and wider society and I maintain a commitment to this endeavour through my university role in teacher education, which involves supporting novice teachers to attain professional status.

However, culture is 'a powerful determinant' of the lived experience of the school community, 'as are the unique institutional dynamics and local circumstances' (Alexander 2001: 9). I recognise a need for more nuanced understanding and application of situated knowledge, as 'effective organisations don't passively follow state directives and data, but rather proactively consume the information at hand' (Fullan 2019: 85). The interpretation and implementation of education policies in situated contexts of practice is a pertinent consideration that exerts a crucial influence on the lived experience within the social world of the research focus. I am aware of the challenging effects of 'command and control policy levers' on the realities of individual practice contexts, which promote an outcome-based ethos of practice (Wood 2019: 785), as discussed previously in this chapter. I appreciate that the 'challenges of what is right for the individual, and ultimately beneficial to a collective human endeavour' are not readily measured in terms of ''productivity'' Bateman (2015: 130).

Education practice is a complex endeavour and cannot be interpreted as mechanistic in nature or be supported by 'inappropriate managerial imposition' of policy (Boaz et al. 2019: 48). Referring to the context of increased education policy reform and utilisation of school accountability measures two decades ago in the United States, Cochran –Smith and Lytle (1999) note this reform led to an increase in research-based models of educational improvement and the notion of 'best practice' guiding discussion about student achievement and teacher education. They suggest these developments incorporate underpinning assumptions about practice development that 'de-emphasizes difference in local contexts, de-emphasizes the construction of local knowledge in and by school communities, and de-emphasizes the role of the teacher as decision maker and change agent' (p.22). These are important considerations for my role as a practitioner researcher in view of my understanding of education practice gleaned from my professional experience and academic literature on the subject.

I also appreciate that I have an emotional connection with the social reality of the research focus, which has implications for the research. My ontological perspective is wholly grounded within my professional experience in educational practice; therefore, I see Hiim's (2007: 108) view that 'feelings and engagement are a basis for what we see as professionals, as teachers or students or teacher researchers' is pertinent to my reflection. I recognised that I could feel empathy towards the role of education practitioners and privilege education over other disciplinary areas of children's services, which could inadvertently impact the project; this calls for ongoing consideration of 'research affect', which involves managing 'your own responses, those of others and the emotional labour of doing the research' (Taylor and Hicks 2009: 67).

My ontological view of the research focus is one of a complex environment in which multiple realities and contradictions reside. I see the enactment of the teacher's role in the early years sector as a complex pursuit that entails various forms of action and expertise. The role cannot be enacted through a fixed set of knowledge and skills but is constantly reshaped through actions within intricate situations (Cable and Miller 2011). This view points to a relativist ontological view whereby reality is viewed as subjective and constructed individually, rather than a realist ontological perspective, which considers that 'a discoverable reality exists independently of the researcher' (Opie 2019a: 15). From my reflection on these different conceptual views, I recognise

the importance of remaining cognisant of my ontological position and its potential influence on the research. I return to the subject of my positionality further in this work.

Reflection on my epistemological position in relation to the research phenomenon prompted my deliberation on the type and form of knowledge that could be developed about the research focus and 'whose knowledge seems to count' (Taylor and Hicks 2009: 71). Knowledge produced through doctoral research can be categorised in two modes. Though there are overlaps between these two modes, mode 1 knowledge 'is particular to a discipline or disciplinary approach' that is generated in a focused way, while mode 2 knowledge 'is generated through addressing problems or issues' occurring in practice and can therefore draw on a range of disciplinary approaches (Maxwell 2019: 3). Research in practice is not simply a matter of gaining new ideas from teachers; knowledge drawn from practice does not rest 'upon professional experience alone' but 'essentially, it should be seen as co-constructed'. This form of engagement with practitioners enables knowledge that is socially-produced; it is reflexive and developed in dialogue with the field that has transformational possibilities' (Groundwater-Smith 2007: 61).

I do not view knowledge about the research focus as singular or objective but open to 'multiple realities that are constructed by individuals' (Waring 2017: 16). Both my epistemological and ontological views relating to the research focus are closely inter-related; epistemologies are 'reciprocally linked to *ways of being* – to professional practices of individuals as well as of the professional system we are all part of' (Urban 2010: 2). At the same time, I am aware that my philosophical assumptions are not fixed perspectives and are subject to modification through my research journey.

Braun and Clarke (2019: 591) refer to the need for 'knowingness' about ontology and epistemology, as well as research design and method, as 'knowingness demonstrates engagement with research as a thought-out adventure, rather than simple recipe following activity'. The authors' perception of research as 'a thought-out adventure' resonates with the exploratory stance that I decided to adopt when undertaking this project to support my engagement with the 'discussions and debates about issues of importance to teacher educators, policy makers, and those who do research about teacher education' (Zeichner 2007: 43).

1.7 Research purpose, aim, objectives and desired outcomes

My reflection on personal, professional and socio-political contexts relating to the research focus prompted further thinking about how early years teachers could be supported to work collaboratively with others. At this stage of the research, I was intrigued to know more about how the value of collaborative working is made explicit to novice teachers in the way that teaching is modelled in educational provision or through their own engagement in collaborative learning tasks. My thinking led me to consider ways in which teachers' understanding of collaborative working could be extended to help equip them for their practice roles.

My deliberation on these questions steered me towards exploration of the following overarching research aim to support the purpose of this project. At this stage I organised my thinking in a way that would guide a research undertaking strongly motivated by my desire to achieve something useful for my profession, especially for younger members.

The overall **purpose** of my research is to contribute to support for teachers of early years when new policies or initiatives are introduced.

The **aim** of this particular project, which has the potential to contribute to this purpose is to explore what can enhance support for teachers to achieve integrated working practice.

The **objectives** to fulfil the aim would be to find out through a number of steps how I can realise the aim:

- To enhance my knowledge by critically reviewing policy and legal frameworks and professional and academic literature relevant to integrated working within early years provision.

- To gather data from professionals in the sector boundaried by experience and location

- To analyse the data and contextualise it in existing literature and seeking resonances across and between experiences of established practitioners, as well as my own

There are three **desired outcomes** of the project:

- To have reliable findings that can be useful to the sector

- To integrate the findings into designs for professional development

- To disseminate the findings with my communities of practice through conference papers, etc. to enhance support for new and established early years teachers

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has identified an issue of professional concern that I wish to explore further to support my role in HE working with students and colleagues on professional programmes and to contribute to the development of broader knowledge concerning early years teachers' roles in integrated service provision. The research focus is positioned through critical reflection on my personal experience and socio-political context of early years education. My reflection has been supported by following Maguire's (2019: 98) concept of 'critical reflection of self, reflexivity in relation to the local context and wider contexts (the micro, meso and macro)' as contributory features of practitioner research. This critical approach builds on Schön's (1983) theory of reflection *on* and *in* action; it is not intended to provide 'a simple solution, but rather ends with material for further reflection, new questions, and improved understanding' (Jay and Johnson 2002: 79).

I have sought to understand how my experience and understanding of education influences and enriches my knowledge. From reflection on my ontological and epistemological positioning in relation to the research phenomenon, I recognise there is 'no such thing as a single reality' but 'there are multiple ways of understanding/knowing the world' (Butler-Kisber 2018: 14). I am also aware that the 'transient nature of practice' can be overlooked in research (Costley and Fulton 2019: xxi). Early years policy is subject to broad social and cultural trends and developments, as well as to specific events within the field of early years practice (Fitzgerald and Kay 2016). In view of the continuous policy initiatives in EY education, I recognise that I needed to manage the process of research with an ongoing oversight of changes.

My exploration of the research focus requires a critical approach and there is a 'need for credibility not only for sharing, presenting research findings, but also as a credible colleague in the field' (Costley 2019: 28).

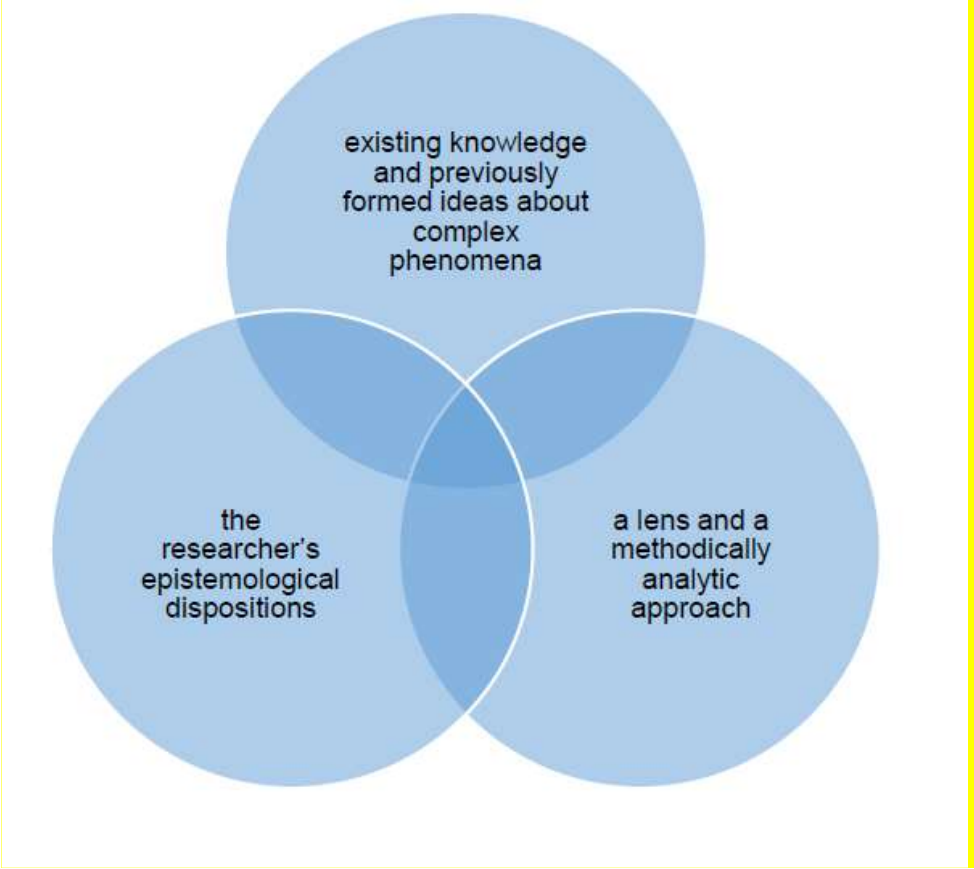
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framing

2.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with the value of using a theoretical framework. Employing a framework has many advantages; in their discussion of using a theoretical framework, Collins and Stockton (2018: 2) advise that a framework is at the intersection of the following three points, which are shown as a Venn diagram in Figure 2.1:

1. existing knowledge and previously formed ideas about complex phenomena
2. the researcher's epistemological dispositions
3. a lens and a methodically analytic approach

Figure 2.1 Diagram to show three intersecting attributes of a theoretical framework (adapted from Collins and Stockton 2018: 2)



In this chapter, I focus on Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006), which is used as theoretical framing for this work. The three points in Figure 2.1 support the application of

Bronfenbrenner's theory as a 'valuable tool to the coherence and depth' of this study (Collins and Stockton 2018: 2). Firstly, the project is exploring complex phenomena, as discussed previously in the work. Secondly, Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model aligns with my knowledge and professional experience of early years practice and thirdly, the model provides a comprehensive framework for exploration of the project's focus. Moreover, the applications of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems to the context of professional practice in the literature that are discussed in this chapter (Miller et al. 2012; Campbell-Barr 2019) support a focused approach to exploring integrated working within the different ecological layers of early years professional practice.

While I see the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model for this work, I also appreciate that all the various aspects of his theory 'cannot be examined in a single investigation' (Ashiabi and O'Neal 2015: 1). However, there are some pertinent aspects of this model that have particular relevance to the focus of this project, which warrant further consideration in this chapter. I first discuss Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model and its evolution to his bio-ecological model, and then further explore how this latter model provides a suitable theoretical framework for this project.

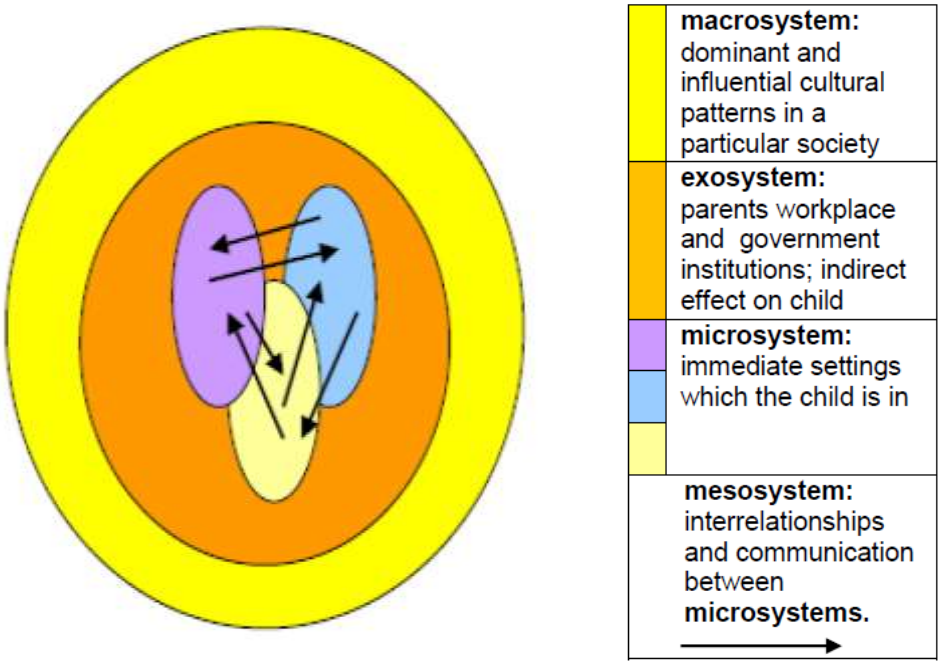
2.2 Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) seminal ecological model explains how different aspects of a child's environmental systems affect their development and learning experiences. The model can be 'conceived topologically as a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next' (Bronfenbrenner 1977: 514).

Figure 2.2 shows how Bronfenbrenner positions the child at the centre of the following interdependent environmental systems in his ecological model (1979):

- *microsystem* – closest system to the child that includes their immediate family and friends
- *mesosystem* - interrelationships and communication between microsystems in which the child actively participates; for example, their early years setting and family
- *exosystem* – different contexts that exert influence on the child, though they may have not have direct involvement with the contexts; these include social services, health care, neighbours, and parent workplaces
- *macrosystem* – wider legal, socio-economic, political and cultural context affecting the child's development

Figure 2.2 Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model of ecological environments



(adapted from Allen 2011: 116)

Bronfenbrenner (1986) later added a further contextual layer to his model that he termed the 'chronosystem'. This system is concerned with the influence on a human's development of changes and continuities in their environments over time (ibid). The influence of 'time' is broadened in the bio-ecological model, which is discussed further below.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model illustrates how broad dimensions of children's lives affect their development. Refuting research on human development that involved unfamiliar, artificial or short-term situations and omitted factors concerning children's environmental contexts, Bronfenbrenner observes that some contemporary psychological research approaches could be described as the 'strange behavior of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time' (1977: 513). Rather, he saw the family as a key influence on children's development and recognised how variables in family contexts, such as differences in parents' work schedules, housing arrangements or family interactions could exert influence on human development (Jaeger 2016). His writing on families reflects the 'dynamic nature of actual family relations' (Swick and Williams 2006: 371). He recognised that understanding families rests on the notion of empowering them

'through understanding their strengths and needs' (ibid.). This latter point has been reiterated in later literature (Boag-Munroe and Evangelou 2012; Whalley 2013; Fenton et al. 2015; Gordon et al. 2016).

Based on his study of joint programmes for children and their families in western and eastern Europe, Bronfenbrenner advocated for a pre-school programme to be initiated in the United States (US) during the 1960's that would support children and families living in disadvantage. He subsequently became a member of the planning committee for the Head Start programme that was initiated in 1965 in the US and took an active role in policy and programme development for children and families (Zigler and Valentine 1979). In this respect, Bronfenbrenner was one of the first people to identify ways in which 'social disadvantage negatively impacted children on multiple ecological levels' (Asmussen et al. 2016: 120). In his report on evaluations of pre-school programmes nearly five decades ago, Bronfenbrenner (1974: 36) warns that potential benefits of early childhood programmes that seek to support children living in disadvantage in the US could be limited without due consideration of the impact of broader socio-economic contexts affecting children's lives:

> *The psychological and practical advantages of the family-centered approach to early intervention clearly offer great promise for the future. But effective as this strategy is, it cannot work miracles. Nor is it the sole, sufficient, or even feasible solution for many disadvantaged families whose children could profit from early intervention. In many homes, the conditions of life are so harsh that, so long as they persist, the parent has neither the will nor the capacity to participate in educational activities with the child. Under these circumstances, any realistic strategy of intervention must begin by meeting the family's basic needs for survival*.

Bronfenbrenner's view resonates with contemporary concern that education intervention programmes for young children and parents should not to be seen as simple solutions to tackling complex socio-economic issues affecting families (Vandenbroeck et al. 2012; Pascal and Bertram 2014; Goodall 2019). While education contributes to supporting young children to realise their potential, gaps remain in the evidence base for education about 'what works', 'what works best', 'what works for who' and 'what works in what contexts' (Nelson and Campbell 2019: 131). This latter view aligns with Bronfenbrenner's concern about the interplay between the child and their surrounding environment and the impact this has on the child's development.

2.3 Bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006)

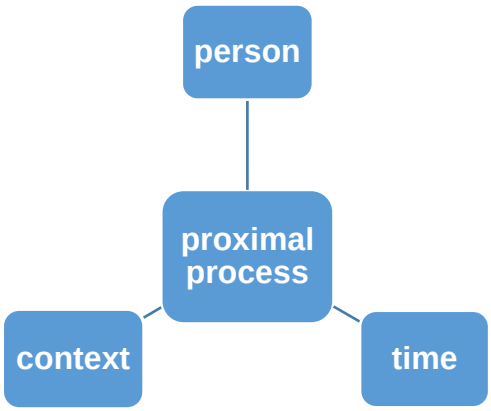
Over time, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model evolved into his bio-ecological or proximal process, person, context, time (PPCT) model, which constitutes the mechanisms through which ecological systems influence human development 'in a two-way process that occurs not instantly, but over time' (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994: 572). The evolution of Bronfenbrenner's theory transpired as his thinking about ecological contexts extended to encompass greater attention to person, process and time variables; Rosa and Tudge (2013: 243) note this shift occurred across the following three phases:

- Phase 1 (1973-1979) This concluded with the publication of 'The Ecology of Human Development' (Bronfenbrenner 1979), which explains how human development was influenced across relevant ecological contexts, as shown in Figure 2.2.

- Phase 2 (1980-1993) Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory was modified to include a greater focus on the role of the individual and developmental processes.

- Phase 3 (1993-2006) Proximal processes were defined and positioned at the core of the bio-ecological theory. From 1998, the proximal processes, person characteristics, context, time (PPCT) model was described as the theory's research design. The four components of this model are shown in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3 Components of the Bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006) (hereinafter referred to as the PPCT model)



Proximal process

The term ‘proximal process’ denotes processes that embody reciprocal interactions within and across different contexts; proximal processes ‘constitute the basic mechanisms that produce effective developmental functioning’ (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994: 584). Interactions can involve people, objects and symbols; they need to occur regularly and be sustained over a period of time in order to become increasingly complex (Ashiabi and Neal 2015). Bronfenbrenner viewed proximal processes as ‘the single most important factor in development’; they are influenced by the child’s individual characteristics, the different contexts that surround them, and by the time period in which they live (Jaeger 2016: 168). Using a metaphor, Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994: 584) explained proximal processes as ‘the engines of development’ that drive its course and it is ‘the characteristics of person and context that provide the needed fuel and do most of the steering’, which emphasises the central role of proximal processes in supporting the child’s development. While ‘proximal’ refers to reciprocal interactions between the child and their immediate environment, such as parent-child interaction, processes can also be distal; these are indirect reciprocal interactions, such as parents’ employment arrangements (Asmussen et al. 2016).

Person

‘Person’ refers to personal characteristics that affect processes; these are categorised as ‘force’, ‘resource’ and ‘demand’ characteristics (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006). ‘Force’ relates to ‘cognitive, social, emotional, and motivational factors associated with temperament and personality’ (Jaeger 2016: 166). These factors encompass dispositions that influence the child’s persistence, motivation or interest that affect how they respond to adults and other children or their willingness or reluctance to take risks in their learning (Perry and Dockett 2018). ‘Resource’ characteristics affect the child’s ability to engage in proximal processes; they include mental resources, such as experiences and skills and material resources, such as provision of healthcare; nourishment or learning resources (Rojas and Avitia 2017). ‘Demand’ characteristics refer to visible indicators that mark out a child’s being; for example, their age, gender or skin colour. These characteristics can influence others’ reactions to and expectations of the child. Other examples include a calm or agitated temperament, a passive or hyperactive state or an attractive or unattractive appearance (Rosa and Tudge 2013).

Context

Context refers to the ecological systems that were discussed previously in the chapter, which influence processes that take place. While reference is made in the PPCT model to the contextual systems that had been outlined in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, the microsystem is identified as the main location for proximal processes in the PPCT model (Perry and Dockett 2018). However, occurrences in one system can affect those in another system so all systems are still influential (ibid). For example, changes to government policy concerning employment in the exosystem could impact proximal processes within the microsystem, such as parent-child interaction.

Time

The final component of the PPCT model is 'time'. Building on the concept of the chronosystem, time is considered in the PPCT model as relating to 'ontogenetic and historical time' (Rosa and Tudge 2013: 254). Bronfenbrenner (1986: 724) thought that the passing of time should be used as a reference point to study change in the environment, as well as psychological change in human development and the 'dynamic relation between the two processes'. The chronosystem had been added to his ecological model to facilitate this study; its simplest form was concerned with normative transition points in life, such as entering school or the workplace and non-normative events, such as critical illness in the family or moving home that affect family processes (ibid.). The importance of time in the PPCT model is underlined by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) through references to microtime (consistency of proximal processes); mesotime (their frequency of occurrence) and macrotime (historical time) (Perry and Dockett 2018). This consideration of time broadens understanding of issues relating to continuity and change in contexts and cultures, as well as individual change (ibid.). For example, the financial crisis in 2008 exerted influence on the provision of resources that support the child's development across micro, meso and macro levels.

2.4 Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model as theoretical framing

Employing Bronfenbrenner's work as theoretical framing is not a novel concept. Illustrating the bi-directional influence of ecological contexts on human development, his theory has been applied to the subject of early childhood and has supported understanding of various risk factors that might adversely affect children's

development (Asmussen et al. 2016). His work has also been applied to research on areas of learning, such as a study on using an early childhood mathematics intervention, which reported that effective interactions that support young children's learning of mathematics involve proximal processes that build on a 'framework of noticing children, their interests, their existing understandings and individual characteristics, the contexts in which they are located and their situatedness in time' (Perry and Dockett 2018: 614). These findings support views on the importance of high-quality interactions between adults and young children, where adults demonstrate genuine interest in the child's activity, listen sensitively and extend the child's thinking and knowledge (Wall et al. 2015).

The significance of effective interactions is further highlighted in an application of Bronfenbrenner's theory to a study on professionalism in different cultural contexts that looked at the professional practice of six practitioners based in different localities (Miller et al. 2012). An emergent common factor in this study's findings was that participants' view of themselves as early years professionals is underpinned by the 'immediacy of their roles, *what they do* in interaction with children and adults', which places an emphasis on 'relationality as a key aspect of being a professional' (Urban and Dalli 2012: 161). Focusing on what it means to be and act professionally, the study employs Bronfenbrenner's ecological levels to support exploration of a new conceptualisation of early years professionalism as 'a critical ecology of the early childhood profession' (Dalli et al. 2012: 7); the authors explain this concept:

> *cannot be defined in simple universalistic and immutable terms, or through finite lists of qualities and attributes… [it] is something whose meaning appears to be embedded in local contexts, visible in relational interactions, ethical and political in nature, and involving multiple layers of knowledge, judgement, and influences from the broader societal context.*

Bronfenbrenner's different ecological levels are defined in the study to explain how each level relates to the context of professional practice (Dalli et al. 2012). These definitions and accompanying examples, which focus on the early years practitioner and their interactions, are shown in Figure 2.4. Overall, Figure 2.4 illustrates the multifaceted nature of early years professional practice and the interconnectedness of the different ecological systems, while the examples given in this table help to focus attention on particular contextual influences on practice.

Figure 2.4 Definitions of Bronfenbrenner's ecological levels related to the context of early years professional practice (Dalli et al. 2012: 7)

Ecological level	Definition	Examples
Microsystem	Situations in which the practitioner is physically present and has face-to-face contact with influential others	Practitioners interacting with: Children Co-workers Parents
Mesosystem	Relationships between the *microsystems*; connections between situations	Team connections Multi-/inter-professional work
Exosystem	Settings in which practitioners do not participate but in which significant decisions affecting them are made	Local/regional body authority Parents' workplace
Macrosystem	'Blueprints' for a particular society; assumptions about 'how things should be done'	Values, shared assumptions, broad ideological patterns of a particular culture; socio-economic and political context
Chronosystem	Developments of the ecological system over time	Socio-historical context

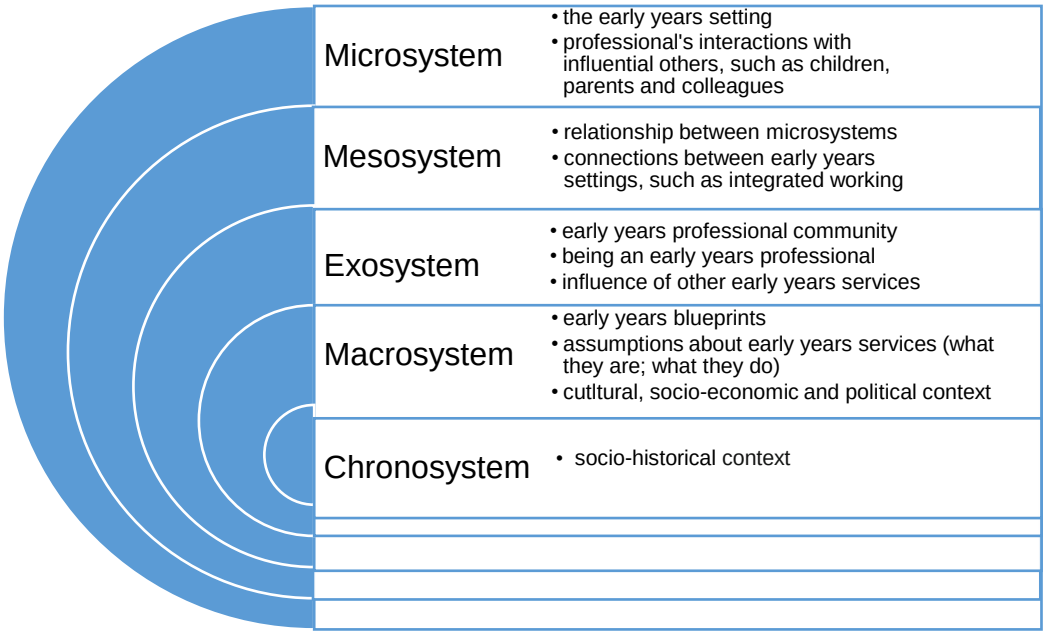
In a further application of Bronfenbrenner's theory in relation to early years professional practice, Campbell-Barr (2019: 96) advises that Bronfenbrenner's different ecological levels facilitate practitioners' opportunities for reflection, which support them to 'consider the complex realities in which early years professionals live their lives and their profession'. This model of reflection and its alignment to Bronfenbrenner's ecological layers is shown in Figure 2.5.

By focusing practitioner reflection on areas of practice aligned with Bronfenbrenner's different ecological layers, reflection can be directed towards specific contexts of practice, such as assumptions about early years services in the macrosystem, as well as the interplay between the different contexts of practice (ibid). This promotes practitioner understanding about how the ecological layers influence assumptions about 'what early years services 'do' and how an early years professional 'should be' (Campbell-Barr 2019: 98).

Through using this model of reflection and looking at the environmental influences on practice, practitioners can also consider the 'knowledges that shape professional practice' (Campbell-Barr 2019:102). This includes consideration of 'context-specific

knowledge' that enables the practitioner to be 'contextually literate' so their understanding of practice is informed by 'the needs of the children, families and community' that they serve (Siraj-Blatchford and Hallett 2014: 42).

Figure 2.5 The layers of early years professional reflection (adapted from Campbell-Barr 2019: 97)



2.5 Applying Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model as theoretical framing for this project

Review of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model indicates its suitability as a theoretical framework for this project's focus on early years teachers' engagement in integrated working. The dynamic interplay between proximal processes and other elements of the PPCT model (person, context, time) supports consideration of proximal processes (reciprocal interactions) that occur in early years practice between children, parents and other professionals in relation to influential personal, contextual and temporal factors. The aforementioned applications of Bronfenbrenner's ecological layers (Miller et al. 2012; Campbell-Barr 2019) to the context of early years professionalism provide further focus on influential and interactive contexts affecting early years practice and support exploration of the 'different knowledges for professional practice' (Campbell-Barr 2019: 2). These considerations will support this project's exploration of how the early years teacher's engagement in integrated working can be optimised.

2.5.1 Reciprocal interactions

The notion of proximal processes as 'the engines of development' in the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994: 584) supports understanding of the importance of reciprocal interactions that take place in the mesosystem and influential factors affecting these processes. This perspective relates to findings from the EPPE research project (Sylva et al. 2004) on the effects of early years education and the home learning environment (HLE) on the child's development that was discussed previously in this work. Sylva et al. (2010: 1) acknowledge that the notion of 'reciprocal influences between the child and the environment owes much to the work of Bronfenbrenner'.

Consideration of the practitioner's role in reciprocal interactions that occur between children, parents and other professionals in the mesosystem is supported by Dalli et al.'s (2012) and Campbell-Barr's (2019) respective applications of Bronfenbrenner's theory to the subject of professionalism that enable focus on specific ecological contexts of practice. Moreover, focus on the practitioner's reciprocal interactions provides scope to consider professional learning that takes place in this process. Glazer and Hannafin (2006: 180) propose learning can be encouraged through the process of reciprocal interactions, which they define as 'interactions demonstrating and influencing a mutual relationship supporting teacher learning and development'. In this process, individuals help one another to 'maximise their learning potential through interactions, which can be 'expressed through various forms of communication, such as in writing, verbal and non-verbal gestures, and physical movements'; learning is viewed as 'a social enterprise where peers rely on the expertise and support of one another to adopt innovative practices' (p.179).

2.5.2 'Complex realities' of practice (Dalli et al. 2012: 7)

Exploring Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model underlines the complexity of early years practice that was previously considered in this work. This perspective is discernible in Dalli et al.'s (2012) discussion of professionalism in the different contexts of practice that are explored in their study. For example, in their discussion of a head teacher's role in a New Zealand kindergarten, Dalli et al. (2012: 97) explain that 'complex realities' identified by the head teacher include:

> *issues of timing, of weighing up priorities, of balancing confidentiality with the need to keep team members informed, and of deciding accountabilities to professional staff at the Kindergarten Association.*

The issues raised in this example show the different layers of influence affecting the head teacher's professional decisions, from their relationships with key actors in the immediate context of the early years setting to external notions of accountability. This illustrates how 'professional epistemologies, are reciprocally linked to *ways of being* – to professional practices of individuals as well as of the professional system we are all part of' (Urban 2010: 2).

2.5.3 Broader socio-economic context

Earlier in the chapter, I discussed Bronfenbrenner's (1974) view that educational programmes that seek to support the development of children living in disadvantage need to take account of broader socio-economic factors affecting the lives of families. This concern draws attention to the importance of considering influential factors relating to the different ecological layers that affect practice when adopting programmes or interventions in practice, as Biesta (2007: 18) explains:

> *educational practice is more than the simple application of strategies or techniques to bring about predetermined ends — there is always the question about the desirability and educational value of such strategies, and there are questions about the specificity of particular contexts in which problems need to be addressed.*

Moreover, Bronfenbrenner's work suggests that consideration of interventions in early years practice should be concerned more broadly with positive outcomes that might extend beyond those focused on the child's development; for example, interventions might affect relationships within the child's family or the building of community capacity, which may not be readily measured, though are still valuable outcomes to be attained (Campbell-Barr 2012).

2.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have considered how Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006) provides a compelling theoretical framework to explore this project's concern with optimising support for early years teachers' engagement in integrated working. The PPCT model does not suggest certain causal factors or outline a particular theory of development and learning but draws attention to the importance of reciprocal interactions and how these might be influenced by personal characteristics of those involved in interactions; by different contextual factors; by consistency and frequency of interactions, and by historical time factors. These elements of the PPCT model support exploration of multi-dimensional aspects of integrated working in early years practice. Moreover, applications of

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to professional practice (Miller et al. 2012; Campbell-Barr 2019) that were discussed in this chapter provide a further lens through which to explore the nuanced aspects of integrated working and to consider how early years teachers can be supported to engage in this process.

While appreciating beneficial aspects of using Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model as theoretical framing, I also recognise I must not be too reliant on the PPCT model in this work; Collins and Stockton (2018: 9) warn that use of a theory 'comes with the threat of becoming myopic. An overreliance on a theory may also produce a tendency toward or the perception of confirmation bias'. This implies I need to carefully reflect on how I apply Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model as a main theoretical framework for this project.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3:1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore literature on the subjects of integrated working and professional development in early years practice, which are key subject areas for this project's concern with supporting early years teachers' engagement in integrated working.

Literature was reviewed before the research to inform the research activity; I also accessed literature during and after the research, bringing the work up-to-date. I draw on Bronfenbrenner's 'Process, Person, Context, Time' (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006), which was explored in Chapter 2, to support the discussion. The chapter starts by considering factors that guided my search of the literature.

3.2 Guiding factors for the literature review

My review of the literature was guided by a range of factors. There are many dimensions to the meaning of integrated working. I sought to cover a number of perspectives that could feed into the transdisciplinary nature of what I was investigating. This is not a literature review that explores theoretical perspectives; I was looking for relevance based on common themes and exploring what is absent, as well as what is present in the literature. For example, in an analysis of serious case reviews 2011-2014, Sidebotham et al. (2016: 91) noted there was a 'relative paucity of comment on the role of schools in the safeguarding process' and far greater prominence 'seems to have been given to the role of health and social services as key agencies in children's welfare'. However, as stated by these authors, schools and early years education providers 'do play a crucial role in children's welfare and have important responsibilities in relation to safeguarding' (p.92). From reviewing literature, I agree with Sidebotham et al.'s (2016) perspective and draw on literature from the disciplinary areas of social work and health when discussing safeguarding and other aspects of integrated working to inform the review.

I was familiar with several literature sources and authors from my professional knowledge and experience of the field. However, as an insider researcher, I sought to maintain a critical and open approach to sources of literature for the review so it was not dominated by my prior perspectives on the research subject (Kahn et al.

2008). Peer-reviewed journal articles were accessed from searches of the university library's databases, including Arts Premium Collection; 'EBSCOHost Education Research Complete Online'; 'Sage Journals Online'; 'Taylor and Francis Journals Complete' and 'Wiley Online Library All Journals'. Key words and phrases were used to refine the search, such as 'early years teacher'; 'integrated working'; 'multi-agency' and 'parental engagement'. I employed the university's 'Library Search' tool when looking for key authors. Searches of literature were also guided by discussions with university staff and with external academics at academic events or conferences. I was principally interested in texts that were published from the late 1990s when there was a national policy shift towards the development of integrated working and an increased focus on early years provision, although I did not discount literature prior to this date that was particularly salient to the project's focus.

Following Maguire's (2019: 106) advice that 'the scope in professional doctorates is not limited to peer-reviewed journals and seminal texts', I explored 'additional materials, such as professional journals; policy documents and other kinds of reports'. Integrated working in early years practice occurs in a fluid landscape of young children's services so it was important to review policy drivers related to the process of integrated working. The substantial development of Sure Start children's centre services in the first decade of this century, followed by a decline in the second, which is discussed further in this chapter, is an example of this fluidity.

My exploration of knowledge on the subject also involved 'research *of* education – blue-skies research' that facilitates 'development of educational theories and phenomena' and 'research *for* education - a focus on what works' that contributes to 'evidence-informed policy and practice', as research from both these perspectives should be acknowledged (BERA 2013: 3). More recently, the latter approach has been supported by the 'What Works Network' (WWN) that was founded in 2013 to improve the way government and other organizations create, share and use evidence to inform decision-making (Cabinet Office 2019).

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) are relevant WWN centres for the focus of this project. Following a call for an EIF by Allen (2011), the EIF was established in 2013; it aims to promote and support implementation of effective early intervention strategies through development and dissemination of resources, which it claims are 'the go-to for how-to in early intervention' (EIF 2019). The EEF, which was launched in 2011 as the government-

designated WWN centre for education, introduced an online 'Early Years Toolkit' in 2015, which summarises educational research on effective pedagogical approaches and early years interventions in terms of their supporting evidence, cost and impact on children's learning (EEF 2015). The 'Early Years Toolkit' covers areas of practice, such as self-regulation strategies, parental engagement and early literacy approaches that are highly relevant to the early years teacher's role. Additionally, the EEF have been involved in the development of the national Early Career Framework (ECF) (DfE 2019) that sets out a two-year period of induction training and support for newly qualified teachers, which is intended to take effect nationally from September 2021. EEF's role has been to independently review the framework 'to ensure it draws on the best available evidence' (DfE 2019: 4).

It was necessary that I accessed literature while I was undertaking the project to understand the findings and 'live literature' was pertinent to my review to enable the project work to remain current. I had previously registered for email alerts from relevant organisations such as the EEF and the Nuffield Foundation to help keep abreast of new publications; I also needed to be mindful that my knowledge sources remained 'substantiated' to ensure integrity of the work (Maguire 2019: 106). Therefore, reviewing literature was an ongoing process as the project developed and overlapped with reading of literature for my professional role. Overall, I recognised the need to continuously refer back to literature as the project progressed (Costley et al. 2010).

3.3 Integrated working in early years practice

3.3.1 Introduction

In this section of the chapter, I discuss literature relating to integrated working in early years practice. As Penn (2011: 65) indicates, provision of services in early years 'is shaped by many considerations, some of which may not even be directly linked to practice'; however, services need to be viewed within the context of the policy framework and conversely, consideration of policy 'needs to be grounded in practice'. When considering policy, Penn advises that acknowledgement of 'what has gone before' is a useful starting point (p.28). Presenting a similar view, Leadbetter et al. (2007: 87) suggest that analysis of integrated working involves 'interrogating how and why changes have come about and what can be learned from questioning earlier practices'. Taking account of these academic views, I first discuss policy developments from the end of the last century, focusing on the subjects of Sure Start and safeguarding, which led to an increased emphasis on integrated working and

identified expectations for early years practice. Drawing on the framing of the four elements of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, I then explore aspects of integrated working practice; I consider prevailing challenges to enacting practice and look at factors that are considered to support implementation of integrated working. The discussion on integrated working concludes with exploration of the area of interprofessional education.

3.3.2 Policy development: Sure Start

Rationale for exploring Sure Start

My rationale in choosing to review Sure Start is that this initiative is an example of a project that started with an intention of being holistic but later become more fragmented due to policy and budgetary issues. The nature of my focus on Sure Start involved looking at the interfaces of policy and how they are manifested in action. From the perspective of a practitioner in education and drawing on Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, I am interested in factors affecting Sure Start's formulation, implementation and development. As Ball (2017: 10) advises, policy cannot be considered 'as an object, a product or an outcome'; rather it can be viewed 'as a process, something ongoing, interactional and unstable'. A further reason to consider Sure Start in the context of this project is that early years education is seen as needing to be at the foreground of positive early childhood development. Moreover, Sure Start is a pertinent initiative to explore, as there is much literature on the subject so that it is able to surface the variables involved concerning provision for young children's development. It is also a lesson for what informs policy makers and the lag between policy making and policy enactment.

Sure Start policy rationale and implementation

In Chapter 1, I referred to an increased focus on integrated working in early years policy towards the end of the twentieth century, which was part of broader policy initiatives that sought to enhance young children's learning and development. The Rumbold Report (DES 1990) looked at the quality of experiences for children aged three and four years and called for improved provision for children under five years of age. Interestingly, for this project, the report proposed that effective co-ordination of services for young children could promote improvement in the quality of their life experience, enable services to be more responsive to their needs and facilitate a more effective use of resources. Referring to The Children Act (1989), which 'made a start on embodying in legislation the principles of collaboration', Rumbold (p.30) contended that integrated working 'needs to be built upon at all levels'. The report's

recommendations that development of co-ordinated services should acknowledge local needs and opportunities and be supported by local policies and management procedures were later embedded in the principles of the Sure Start local programmes (SSLPs) that were announced in Parliament in 1998, following New Labour's election victory in 1997.

The introduction of SSLPs had been identified in The Treasury's (1998) Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), as part of New Labour's strategy to promote fairness and improvement in the quality of public services. SSLPs aimed to offer a range of integrated and preventative services, 'targeted in particular on pre-school children and their families in areas of need' (21.6). Children's outcomes and life chances are subject to various influences or 'risk factors'. These include their background environment, such as poverty and income; crucial family features, such as health; and important family processes, such as parental aspirations (DfES and HM Treasury 2007). Provision of Sure Start services draws on the view that early intervention programmes have the potential to reduce negative effects of living in disadvantage[4] (Pascal and Bertram 2013). However, Pascal and Bertram (2014: 18) note that interventions on their own 'should never be seen as a panacea for addressing deeply entrenched social class inequalities in the UK'.

It is also useful to consider that, although there is an increased likelihood of a child experiencing unfavourable outcomes by the presence of negative or challenging risk factors, the relationship between risk factors and poorer outcomes is complex and adverse outcomes may not be inevitable (DfES and HM Treasury 2007). Acknowledging the complexity of socio-economic disadvantage, Ofsted (2016: 11) note 'there is no quick fix to such a deep-rooted issue'; they call for broader efforts to be made to ensure that additional funding for children in disadvantage has the required impact on their future outcomes. This perspective is supported by Wood et al. (2012: 190) who suggest that poverty 'should be considered in a multi-dimensional way' that embraces both economic and social factors; this would help policymakers and practitioners to move 'from a one-size-fits-all approach (usually focusing on improving income) to a more nuanced and multi-faceted approach –

[4] 'The proxy indicator generally used in education to identify disadvantage is children's eligibility for free school meals. This provides a measure by which society can estimate the relative performance between poor children and their better-off peers in school' (Ofsted 2016: 11).

based on the lived experience of people actually on low income'. Fullan (2019: 9) supports Wood et al.'s (2012) advice; he suggests there is a need to take account of people's own experiences when considering how policy can seek to redress particular issues and proposes that 'the people who have the problem' should function as 'key actors', as 'the more complex the problem, the more that people with the problem must be part and parcel of the solution'.

Though I was familiar with the broad aims of the SSLPs, it was interesting to look further at how the underlying rationale for this initiative had developed. Encouragement for introducing SSLPs was offered by Ball's (1994) report 'Start Right: The importance of early learning'. Pre-empting the EPPE research findings (Sylva et al. 2004), which were discussed in Chapter 1, Ball (1994) argued that all children benefited from high-quality learning experiences in early years education. He referred to research that had indicated the effects of high quality early years learning experiences are strongest for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Citing the UNCRC (UN 1989), which covers all aspects of a child's life, Ball (p.24) advocated that young children have both a need and a right to services that support their early learning and development. This was an early reference to the issue of children's rights that has 'gained currency in research over the last two or three decades' (Nutbrown 2018: 261).

The introduction of Sure Start had been promoted as an investment in early childhood that could transform children's 'lifetime opportunities, reducing health inequalities, helping performance at school, preventing truancy and reducing the risk of unemployment, drug abuse and crime' (HM Treasury 1998 21.2). This presentation of Sure Start as an 'investment' is seen by Penn (2011: 35) as indicative of the influence of 'economic rationalisation' on 'thinking and decision-making in early childhood'. Welshman (2010: 94) contends that the CSR's (1998) launch of Sure Start as a targeted measure to reduce poverty and social exclusion was driven by evidence of the 'impact of poverty on economic and social outcomes in later life', particularly adult unemployment and involvement in crime, which had a 'dramatic effect on thinking at the Treasury'.

Clarke (2006: 702) warns of the risk of focusing on social investment, as this is a 'narrowing of perspective to the benefits in terms of the return on the state's investment' and there is potential to overlook intrinsic benefits of services and social justice arguments for provision of services for children and support for their families.

A further concern is proposed by Ball (2017: 215) who warns that claims made by policy-makers 'are easy to make' but their enactment can be 'challenging and difficult'. Fullan (2019: 9) concurs with this view; he notes that 'being ambitious by itself is not a strategy'.

Overall, there is a focus of utility in the policy rationale for Sure Start; the literature demonstrates a policy concern that is future-focused on the child as a potential risk to society. An example of this perspective can be seen in a speech by Blair on social exclusion in 2006:

> *where it is clear, as it very often is, at young age, that children are at risk of being brought up in a dysfunctional home where there are multiple problems, say of drug abuse or offending, then instead of waiting until the child goes off the rails, we should act early enough, with the right help, support and disciplined framework for the family, to prevent it.*

Operational aspects of Sure Start

Operating to a set of key Sure Start principles, the SSLPs included the active involvement of parents and carers in the development, management and delivery of services, as this was considered to be crucial to ensure provision would be appropriate and accessible by children and their families (Eisenstadt 2002). The SSLPs' integrated approach to service delivery was conceptualised as 'one-stop-shops' that offered 'joined-up' services to support children's social, emotional, and cognitive development at an early age, promote their health and well-being and tackle the 'cycle of deprivation' (Malin and Morrow 2007: 445). They also acted as 'a gateway to more specialised provision' (Smith et al. 2018: 4).

SSLPs were replaced by the Sure Start Children Centre (CC) programme in 2003, which aimed to expand CC provision nationally. This development was viewed as an effective means of increasing the reach of integrated services, although there remained a greater focus on provision in areas of disadvantage. However, CCs have been subject to financial constraints due to cuts in public expenditure following the UK recession of 2008; public spending on Sure Start fell from £1.7 billion in 2009-10 to £0.7 billion in 2016-17 (Kelly et al. 2018). Concern has been raised about the reduction or dispersal of CC services during the last decade; The Social Mobility Commission (2019: 31) note the 'closure of somewhere between 500 and 1,000 children's centres (CCs) in response to LA funding cuts' and the associated reduction in integrated services risks 'isolating the least advantaged in society'.

In view of the reduction of CC services, it is useful to gain insight from the important voice of the service-user. Joshi et al. (2015: 27) explored the views and experiences of children under five years, and their parents, of services that aim to reduce the impact of living in disadvantage. Their findings noted that the loss of Sure Start CCs 'was felt strongly by a number of parents, while in some centres parents felt that the range of (free) activities had reduced'. Parents also explained that due to a lack of locally-based services, travel costs and the timing of sessional activities were also barriers to their use. These findings are supported by research on CC provision across England conducted by Smith et al. (2018: 4), who report 'hollowed out' CC services; they observe:

> *There was a greater focus on more limited services targeted at referred families, with less open access and different services distributed across centres in the same authority. This meant families needing services also needed access to public transport and better information.*

Alongside this reduction in funding, there has been a return to a more targeted approach to service provision in early years policy, including an increased number of health visitors; Fitzgerald and Kay (2016) suggest this indicates a greater focus on supporting families with young children in their own homes. The issue of targeted approaches is contentious. For example, Penn (2011: 41) observes that they are 'associated with stigmatisation' and could be unpopular 'with the very families for who it is designed, so that take-up is low'. Moreover, targeted initiatives for vulnerable families may be subject to short–term funding or political trends so may not be sustainable or continue in the form of their original objectives (ibid). Vandenbroeck et al. (2012) express concern about the reliability of underlying evidence that is used to justify the scope of what might be achieved by early intervention strategies. This highlights the need for practitioners to consider contextual factors against claims of effectiveness of particular approaches when decisions are made about their implementation.

Evaluation of Sure Start

Literature on Sure Start also indicates the challenges of evaluating integrated working initiatives. Barnes et al. (2017) observe that there is still limited evidence of the impact of provision of integrated services, while Lewis (2011: 81) suggests that it is doubtful that national evaluation of Sure Start against its policy objectives for children and families could be conclusive 'in establishing causal relationships' due to the variation in Sure Start service provision. In their review of literature on integrated early years services published from 1995 to 2012, Wong and Sumsion (2013) note that

evaluations of integrated services have largely focused on integrated working processes and there has not been convincing evidence of impact of integrated working on child and family outcomes. However, they found broad support for integrated services in the literature from a number of disciplines, premised on the view that integration of services can offer the most effective provision for young children.

Focusing on health, Cattan et al. (2019) researched the impact of access to Sure Start services on the health outcomes of children in primary school from the inauguration of Sure Start in 1999 to the late 2000's when it operated at its peak. They report Sure Start 'had significant benefits for the health of children, preventing hospitalisations throughout primary school' (p.8); however, they found these benefits were only realised 'in the most disadvantaged areas'. Recognising their research had focused 'only on a narrow set of outcomes', Cattan et al. (p.9) advised further research was needed on broader effects of access to Sure Start services, such as on children's academic and behavioural outcomes; they suggested:

> *all interested parties – politicians, policymakers and practitioners – should continue to assess how the resources targeted at early intervention can best be used to improve outcomes for children and their families, and how they can best encourage the families who would benefit the most to use the centre*

Supporting this call, the EIF were commissioned by the DfE in 2019 to review contemporary CC practice to support local authorities in England with their future planning of effective early childhood services. Lewing et al. (2020) report there was limited national data on the efficacy and characteristics of contemporary children's centres and hubs, their provision and organisation of services and families' use of services. However, while this lack of evidence on current approaches 'makes it difficult to be conclusive about what works in delivering children's centres and hubs', the report found 'a strong practice consensus that greater integration can benefit families' (ibid p.8). These findings align with other views from previous literature cited above regarding the challenges of evaluating provision of early years integrated services, whilst also maintaining support for integration as a positive approach to service provision for young children and their families.

Summary

The importance of reviewing the literature on Sure Start is that there is a resonance between my professional experience and observation and the literature regarding 'a

multitude of interrelated variables' (Vandenbroeck et al. 2012: 542) that affect the child's educational outcomes. These variables highlight the complexities involved in integrated working, as indicated by Eisenstadt[5] (2011), when discussing the challenges of implementing Sure Start:

> *The biggest mistake was not understanding the complexities of running a Sure Start local programme. Joining up local services across health, education and social welfare, commissioning a major capital project, working collaboratively with local parents, understanding the critical nature of data about the local population were all critically important factors in running a successful programme.*

As discussed in the literature, Sure Start had been proposed as a strategy to tackle social exclusion; it sought 'to intervene to interrupt the reproduction of deficit and disadvantage' (Ball 2017: 170). However, such assumptions made about families need to be more nuanced; as discussed in Chapter 2, Bronfenbrenner underlines the importance of understanding families' needs and strengths as a means to empower them (Swick and Williams 2006). Sure Start had embraced community involvement as part of its principles; however, this involvement needed to be facilitated to support genuine involvement. Rogaly et al. (1999: 54) advise that references to participation in policy do 'not necessarily mean that poor and socially excluded people will have a voice'. In reflecting on the complexities of tuning into the varied needs of populations, Ball (2008: 46) notes the challenge for Sure Start in meeting the needs of diverse communities 'was simply too daunting'. Moreover, rather than 'assume a position of superiority', professionals 'can learn a great deal' from tapping into [community] groups and individuals' and 'stand shoulder to shoulder with them' (ibid.). This view resonates with literature on parental engagement, which is explored later in the chapter.

The later fragmentation of Sure Start is a further variable that affects the access and efficacy of support offered to children and families by such initiatives. In considering Sure Start's return to more targeted approaches after the financial crisis of 2008, I have observed in my professional experience that targeted approaches have limited capacity to work, especially if these are not sustained over time. This perspective resonates with Bronfenbrenner's and Morris' (2006: 797) advice that 'interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time' to be effective.

[5] Eisenstadt was the Director of Sure Start from 1999-2006

The issues raised in the literature that emerged from my exploration of Sure Start raise important questions about the intentions of Sure Start, how these intentions were enacted, and the expertise that was involved in their enactment. The issues also point to the important influence of contextual factors that affect policy. Overall, the literature was helpful in keeping these issues in mind when exploring the research subject with participants.

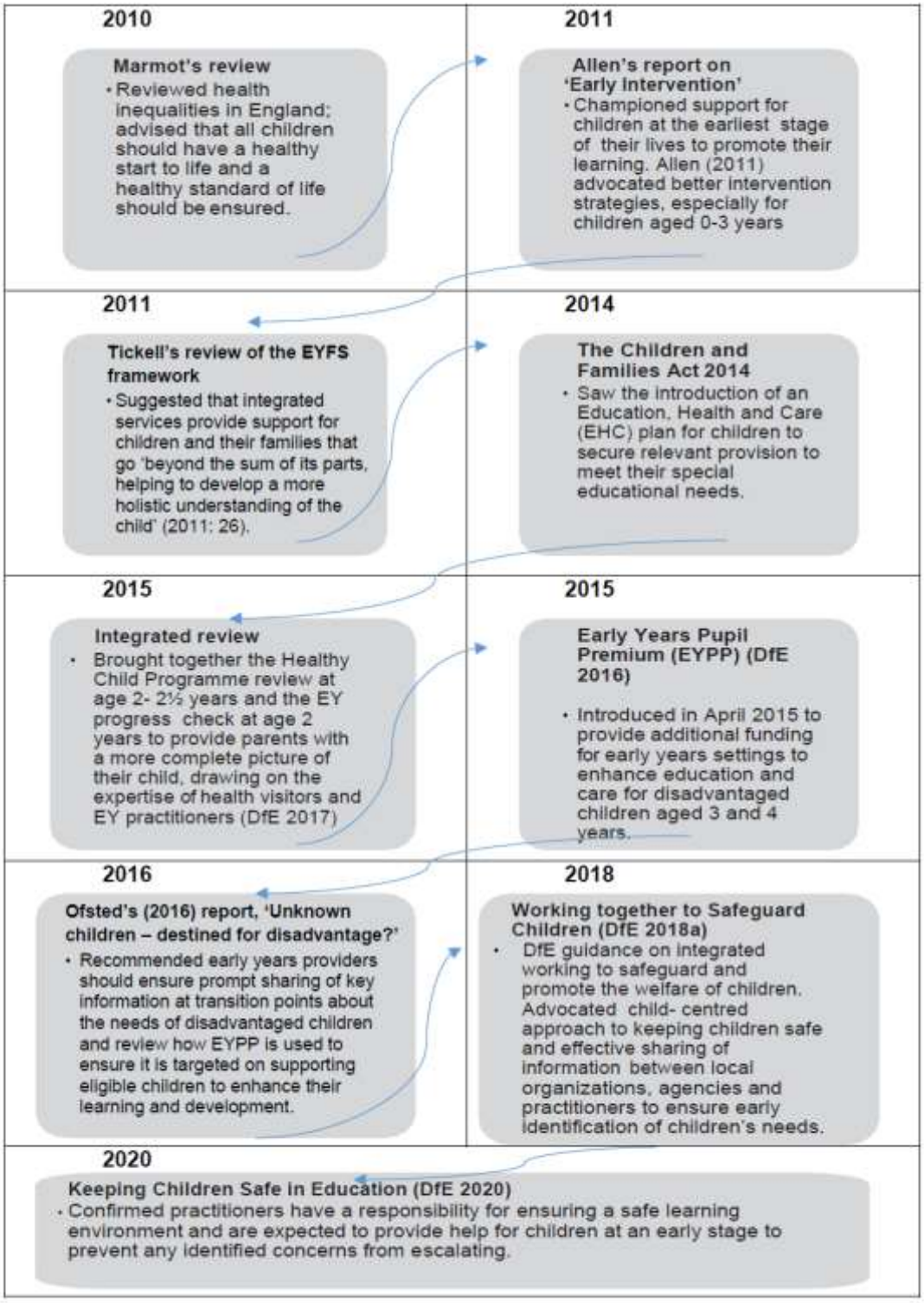
3.3.3 Policy development: post Sure Start

Since the introduction of Sure Start, policy development on integrated services for young children has continued during the first two decades of this century. A key advocate of integrated services is Field, whose (2010) report highlighted differences in cognitive ability and behaviour between children who are from poorer and more advantaged backgrounds. Aligned with the narrative of New Labour's (1998) CSR, Field's (2010: 6) report proposed increased spending on integrated services to counteract the likely impact of disadvantage on children's longer term outcomes. Issues raised in Field's (2010) report regarding the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on young children's development continue to be documented. Law et al. (2017a) report a higher occurrence of language difficulties amongst children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds than in the wider population. This is significant as language difficulties are associated with poorer educational outcomes (Law et al. 2017b).

The introduction of funded early years provision for disadvantaged two-year-olds in 2013 and the extension of Pupil Premium funding in 2015 for eligible 3- and 4-year-olds aimed to 'close the gap' between advantaged and disadvantaged children by providing targeted support for children. However, concerns have been raised that some eligible two-year-old children may not be taking up their entitlement to 15 hours funded provision; moreover, places that offer high quality provision, which is associated with improved child outcomes, are not consistently available across early years provision (Hillman and Williams 2015; Stewart and Waldfogel 2017; Campbell et al. 2019). This latter point is concerning as the quality and stability of early years provision for children under three years of age is considered to be particularly important for their development (Otero and Melhuish 2015).

Policies developed during the last decade that are relevant to this project are shown in Figure 3.1 in order of their publication.

Figure 3.1 Key reports and policy initiatives in integrated working in England 2010-20



Building on the statutory requirements of the initial EYFS framework (DCSF 2008b) and the Equality Act (2010), the 'Children and Families Act' (2014) introduced a new special educational needs and disability (SEND) Code of Practice (CoP) (DfE and DH 2015) for children and young people with SEND aged from birth to 25 years. This legislation places a duty on local authorities to improve the quality of provision for children with SEND, requiring them to seek integration of education, health and social care provision. The SEND Co-ordinator supports staff in the early identification of children's needs and works closely with families to facilitate access to appropriate professional support for children's disability or emerging SEN. Some children may require an education, health and care (EHC) plan that provides details of additional support to meet their identified educational, health and social needs. Ofsted (2018: 4) reviewed how the SEND CoP is operating in practice; they note that the quality of EHC plans is variable and the gap in performance for children with SEND 'is widening between the best and the worst local areas'. In their research of EHC assessment and planning, Sales and Vincent (2018) also found variation in terms of the quality of detail in EHC plans and how different schools chose to respond to children's plans. This is a challenging issue; as Sales and Vincent (2018: 75) suggest, variation in the structure and execution of EHC plans can lead to 'inequitable outcomes' for children, which can then 'undermine the intent of a fair and transparent process, and do little to instil parental confidence'.

3.3.4 Safeguarding in early years practice

Rationale for exploring Safeguarding

In this section of the chapter, I look at the subject of safeguarding. This area of integrated working has much relevance for the research; in early years practice, there has been increased concern about safeguarding since the turn of this century, which has been a key driver for a greater policy focus on integrated working, as part of 'preventative state support' for children (Wyness 2015: 121). Professionals are aware of the need to communicate effectively when undertaking the critical role of safeguarding (Harrington-Vail et al. 2016); conversely, if practitioners do not communicate with each other regarding a situation that is raising concerns, then 'improved outcomes are unlikely, no matter how strong the inter-agency links are' (Wong and Sumsion 2013: 345). The policy document 'Working together to safeguard children' (DfE 2018) that was cited in Figure 3.1 states that everyone working with children 'has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action' (p.11). Moreover, safeguarding is embedded in 'Teachers

Standards (Early Years)' (NCTL 2013) that apply to teachers with early years teacher status and in 'Teachers Standards' (DfE 2011) that pertain to teachers with qualified teacher status.

The policy context shapes the forms and attitudes towards integrated working (Hood et al. 2016). However, professionals who work with children have reported that safeguarding is an aspect of practice 'for which they feel poorly prepared' (Hood et al. 2017: 705) and the process of sharing information can be 'highly problematic' (Stone and Foley 2014: 84). These issues noted in the literature, which align with my own professional experience, signify it is important to explore safeguarding in early years practice to support the research. Policy guidance in this area also states that practitioners are expected to adopt a child-centred approach in safeguarding that involves 'keeping the child in focus when making decisions about their lives and working in partnership with them and their families' (DfE 2018: 9). However, as Campbell-Barr (2019: 55) advises, a child-centered approach 'can be variously interpreted' so it also useful for the research to look further at the notion of child-centeredness as part of this exploration of safeguarding in early years practice.

Policy rationale and development of safeguarding

A significant document in the area of safeguarding was Lord Laming's (2003) report on the death of 8-year-old Victoria Climbié in 2000, which detailed numerous failings in collaborative working across the key agencies that had responsibility for Victoria. The report (p.4) found the principal failure of agencies to protect her from fatal abuse by her carers was the 'result of widespread organisational malaise'. Of particular relevance to this project is Laming's (p.6) observation that 'effective support for children and families cannot be achieved by a single agency acting alone. It depends on a number of agencies working well together'. In calling for clear lines of accountability, the report proposed that agencies should work together more collaboratively and recommended that each LA should establish a 'Directorate of Children's Services' to oversee the process of effective integrated working. Laming's report also suggested that agencies should share information more effectively, and The Children Act (2004) set out clear expectations for improving information sharing. The current guidance 'Working Together to Keep Children Safe' (DfE 2018: 19) warns practitioners against making assumptions 'that someone else will pass on information that they think may be critical to keeping a child safe', which is a relevant point for the focus of this project.

The conclusions of Laming's report led to the publication of the 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) Green Paper (DfES 2003) and ensuing Children Act (2004), which outlined the process for integrating children's services in England. ECM advised that the child should be at the centre of any intended interventions and identified five outcomes that were important for children's well-being and holistic development:

1) Stay safe
2) Be healthy
3) Enjoy and achieve
4) Make a positive contribution
5) Achieve economic well-being

These objectives were embedded in the four principles of the initial EYFS framework (DCSF 2008b); 'A unique child'; 'Positive Relationships'; 'Enabling Environments' and 'Learning and Development'. ECM aimed to support a reform of working practices and the structures of organisations providing children's services, enabling a cultural shift from 'a reactive service for a few to a preventive service for the many' (Munro 2007: 1). Expectations that professionals should work collaboratively with each other and have an awareness of their experience and expertise were embedded in ECM (Menter 2010). The concept of collaborative work is not new to teachers, particularly within the domain of early years practice; however, integrated working has been identified as a complex area of practice (Canavan et al. 2009; Wong and Sumsion 2013). As Hood (2015: 141) suggests, integrated working can be regarded 'as doubly bound up with complexity, in that it constitutes a response to complex problems but is also a complex area of practice in itself'. ECM policy was later discarded by the Coalition government (2010-15) and 'withered away'; however, it was a significant initiative at the time of its inception and ECM objectives still have relevance for young children's provision, despite the loss of the policy in which they were framed (Fitzgerald and Kay 2016: 27).

Safeguarding is a broad-ranging and complex issue (Nikiforidou and Anderson 2016). Despite the policy agenda that followed Laming's (2003) report, reviews of further cases of children's deaths have highlighted failures in effective collaborative working by agencies involved in children's lives. After the death of 17-month-old Peter Connolly in 2007, Laming was asked to report on how the development of arrangements for safeguarding children had progressed since the introduction of ECM and The Children Act (2004). Laming (2009) found that the recommendations in his previous report (2003) had not been fully implemented and challenges still remained in providing efficient safeguarding processes. However, Walker and

Donaldson (2011: ix) suggest that Laming's call for clearer structures for co-ordinating and integrating the work of different professionals occurred at a time of 'extensive reconfiguration of children's services' and tensions had emerged in some areas 'between efforts to implement a new integrative policy framework and the concomitant pressure for change within individual services'. This view highlights the importance of ensuring adequate resources are in place to enable policy initiatives to be implemented and sustained effectively; as Rawlings et al. (2014) suggest the 'rapid pace and uncertainty of reform' can leave 'little time for individual professionals to adjust to new roles'.

A child-centred approach

Policy initiatives can divert professionals' focus from their key roles. In her review of safeguarding, Munro (2011: 6) found practitioners and managers indicated that extensive 'statutory guidance, targets and local rules' had limited their ability to remain child-centred. Munro (p.6) advised that attention in safeguarding practice was being paid to 'process over the quality and effectiveness of help given' by children's services. Rather than focusing on 'doing things right', in terms of following procedures, Munro thought the system should focus on 'doing the right thing' by checking that children received help (p.6). Detailing ways in which safeguarding could be improved, Munro recommended that unhelpful or unnecessary government direction should be removed to leave a focus on essential regulation for effective integrated working. Supporting this view, Skattebol et al. (2016: 119) cite Fenech et al.'s (2006) view that regulation is a double-edged sword, as it confers legitimacy but also confines the professional's ability to apply their wisdom and knowledge to the situation at hand. In considering Munro's (2011: 6) call for the system to focus on 'doing the right thing' and ensure children receive the necessary help, it should also be noted that concerns are expressed regarding the positioning of the child as a vulnerable participant who is dependent on others to manage their needs (Woodhead 2012). While the child may require further professional support, a focus directed on their needs could overlook the child's competences and devalue their agency in the process (ibid.). The need for professionals to maintain a child-centred approach, which had been the focus of ECM, is embedded in the guidance 'Working together to safeguard children; (DfE 2018), which states (p.10):

> *Anyone working with children should see and speak to the child; listen to what they say; take their views seriously; and work with them and their families collaboratively when deciding how to support their needs. Special provision should be put in place to support dialogue with children who*

have communication difficulties, unaccompanied children, refugees and those children who are victims of modern slavery and/or trafficking.

Daniel Pelka

The importance of maintaining a child-centred approach was identified in the serious case review (SCR) report (Lock 2013) on four-year-old Daniel Pelka, who died in 2012 from a head injury. According to the report, Daniel had seemed 'invisible' to agencies; it advised that 'no assessment of risks within a family or to a particular child can ever be effective without direct engagement of that child as an integral part of the professional interventions' (p.72). The report stated that Daniel's mother and step-father, who were found to be responsible for his death, had deceived professionals about his true circumstances (p.6). Due to this deception with the school and other agencies, the report (p.71) advised the need for professionals 'to think the unthinkable' as they had 'tried to rationalise the evidence in front of them' and thought it did not relate to abuse. The report noted the relevance of Kant's view that 'we see things not as they are, but as we are' because 'if practitioners were not prepared to accept that abuse existed for Daniel, then they would not see it' (p.71). The professionals' view of Daniel's family, which is characterised in the report as 'professional optimism', states their perception of the family needed to be supported by 'objective evidence… prior to any optimistic stance being taken' (p.73).

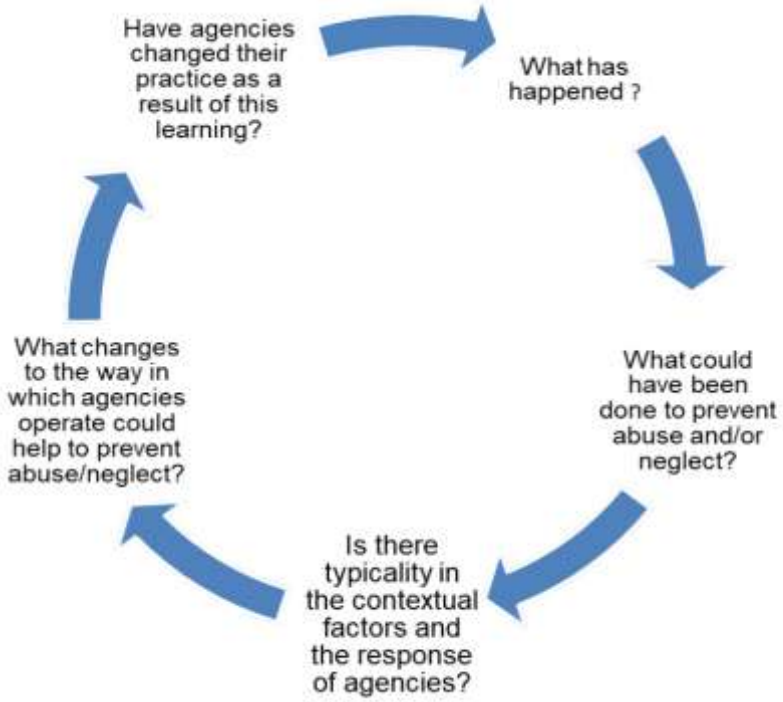
The SCR identified that professionals seemed to believe that an agreed formal process was sufficient in itself to protect children rather than professionals' own effective and consistent employment of the process. This point aligns with Munro's (2011: 6) view cited above that attention was being paid to 'process over the quality and effectiveness of help given'. As part of its recommendations, the report proposed a review of the adequacy of safeguarding training for school staff and suggested 'a robust system for recording any injuries or welfare concerns', as the SCR had noted a lack of appropriate recording by staff of their concerns about Daniel's injuries (p.75).

In their investigation of barriers to learning from SCRs and potential strategies to manage these challenges, Rawlings et al. (2014: 8) note that SCR publications create an 'ethos of blame'; they advise a resetting of the SCR process that promotes 'learning rather than blame' and 'reflection and analysis rather than primarily description and hind-sight judgments'. My reference to the SCR of Daniel's death in this work is not intended to focus on blame; overall, the report concluded Daniel's death was a complex case and 'no one professional, with what they knew of Daniel's

circumstances, suspected or could have predicted that he would be killed' (p.69). However, this SCR offers opportunity for learning, reflection and analysis, as Rawlings et al. (2014) suggest, so it has relevance for the scope of this project. Daniel was in early years school provision, albeit briefly, and the EYFS Statutory Framework (DCSF 2008b: 9) that was in place at that time required early years providers to be 'alert to the early signs of needs that could lead to later difficulties' and respond 'quickly and appropriately, involving other agencies as necessary'. However, as the SCR noted (Lock 2013: 45), 'it was apparent that the children [Daniel and his sister Anna] did not particularly show by their demeanour and presentation at school, that they were neglected… they did not fit the image of neglected children'. The SCR's suggestions for professional actions, such as being prepared 'to think the unthinkable', offer salient considerations for the project's focus.

Aligned with Rawlings et al.'s (2014) view, guidance issued by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (CSPRP 2019) advises that SCRs are not intended to hold people to account for not complying with professional standards or attribute blame to organisations for their service performance; if necessary, this role is managed by the respective regulatory body. Instead, the review should focus on adding reflection and learning into local safeguarding systems by exploring how practice can generally be improved through changes to the system as a whole. The CSPRP provide a flow diagram (p.7) with key questions to aid the review process; this is shown in Figure 3.2. (The diagram is untitled in the guidance and the title below is my own).

Figure 3.2 Key questions to aid the review process (CSPRP 2019: 7)



Professional authority

Guidance on professional action in safeguarding contexts is offered by Sidebotham et al. (2016: 201) in their report on SCRs from 2011 to 2014; they suggest the need for 'professional authority', which involves confidence and competence; this allows professionals 'to adopt a stance of professional curiosity and challenge from a supportive base, rather than relying on undue optimism'. Authoritative practice enables professionals 'to be curious and exercise their professional judgement in the light of the circumstances of particular cases' (ibid). Highlighting the need for a child-centred approach, the report also suggests professionals require empathy that considers:

> *both the voice of the child and the needs of the family. It must be grounded in the centrality of the rights and needs of the child, while being sensitive but not colluding with the needs and views of the parents* (p.202).

Sidebotham et al.'s concept of 'professional authority' and 'professional curiosity' are explored further in this work.

Summary

This exploration of the literature on safeguarding is important for the research focus, as there are dimensions to safeguarding that need to be foregrounded for practitioners. From reviewing Lock's (2013) SCR, a salient point to emerge was that

no practitioners had talked with Daniel; he had seemed invisible to agencies who had responsibility for him. Acknowledging the importance of reciprocal interactions between key actors to support the child's development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006), Lock's SCR (2013) raises questions about how practitioners are supported to manage interactions with the child and their family, with colleagues and with other professionals in complex circumstances. Complexity thinking 'reminds us that the world is essentially interconnected, messy, uncertain and changing' (Boulton 2010: 33). In attempting to make meaning of complex situations, it is important to contextualise these; locating the circumstance in early years practice 'within a particular place and time' is critical to the discourse of meaning making' Dahlberg et al. 1999: 109). Campbell-Barr's (2019: 97) model of reflection, which was discussed in Chapter 2, offers support with this issue, as it encourages focused reflection on different contextual layers of influence affecting early years practice, which, in turn, enables a more precise consideration of a seemingly complex issue at hand.

Burton and Revell (2018: 1517-18) examined Lock's SCR, as part of their exploration of professional curiosity in the area of child protection within the context of social work practice; they suggest that the 'emotional dimension of child protection practice is precisely the element that can cause distortion, uncertainty and confusion, yet it is invariably absent from discussion and Serious Case Review reports'. While these authors' suggestions to support practitioners are made in respect of social workers, their views could apply to early years practitioners in the context of their professional role; these suggestions are 'to learn, practise and rehearse complex skills' in 'emotionally demanding contexts' (ibid.). They also posit the 'need for an emotional curriculum' for pre-and post-qualifying practitioners to 'develop and hone these skills' (ibid.).

In the context of teacher training, Toll et al. (2004: 175) make a similar point; they warn that 'if we pretend that differences do not exist or can be easily resolved', this may provide a false impression of the reality of professional practice; 'understanding the complex forces' that shape teachers' work makes 'struggles visible and essential, not to be swept under the rug'. Such activity helps practitioners to develop their understanding of more complex issues that they could encounter in practice and consider how they can 'work with other educators who perceive teaching and learning differently' (ibid.). From my professional experience, I agree with these views; policy expectations and teachers' own emotional relationships 'to their teaching, to their children, and to change in general' are all key factors affecting their participation in

practice (Hargreaves, 1995: 26). These views point to the importance of teachers having opportunities to talk through complex issues with other practitioners so they can be 'encouraged to develop and extend their own decision-making capacities or professional judgments' (Carter 2015: 22).

Overall, the literature on safeguarding indicates the complexities involved in this area of early years professional practice; from my professional experience, I agree with the notion of looking at such complexities that can be encountered as part of pre-and post-qualifying professional development, as suggested by Burton and Revell (2018). Focusing solely on technical competence does not enable interrogation of the functions and parameters of professional practice. As Boulton (2010: 38) argues, we should:

> *regard actions and policies and strategies as experiments and be prepared to learn, modify our approaches, listen to feedback and, quite often, just be prepared to pay more attention to what is actually happening, what is plain to see.*

The literature on safeguarding also highlights the importance of the practitioner's role of child advocacy in promoting the child's rights and their welfare, as the child should be at the forefront of thinking in integrated working. In their research on the placement experiences of final year Early Childhood Studies students and trainee teachers, McLoone-Richards and Robinson (2020: 4) found students experienced inconsistency of learning in practice and that opportunities to develop 'disposition for advocacy' in practice were 'either thwarted or nurtured by the influences of the organisational culture and daily interactions with practitioners'. The findings from this study are relevant for the research as they incorporate the voice of novice practitioners; they also indicate variance in how policy is interpreted and enacted in practice. This aligns with Wood's (2017: 110) view that tensions and contradictions exist 'in what policies state, and how those policies become real and everyday practices'. The significance of the setting culture to support practitioners' learning in practice was indicated by the ELEYS study; Siraj- Blatchford and Manni (2007:13) found that in effective early years settings, leadership was characterised by a child-centred ethos; leaders valued 'the importance of adult-child interaction and they supported their staff in developing better ways of engaging with children'. This points to the significance of the efficacy of 'experiential learning in practice' that contributes to 'the process of coming to know how to work with young children' (Campbell-Barr 2019: 47).

Overall, the issues raised in this exploration of safeguarding work in early years practice raise important considerations for the research focus about the 'constellation of factors in particular situations' of safeguarding (Hood et al. 2017: 711) and the nature and availability of support for the practitioner to manage the expectations and responsibilities of their safeguarding role. At the International Conference 'A Child's World - Next Steps' at Aberystwyth University in 2014, I explored the complexities of policy and practice in early years provision and included an image of 'spinning plates' in my presentation; this is shown in Figure 3.3. The image was used as a metaphor to illustrate how the practitioner has to keep a multitude of issues in mind as they 'continuously 'juggle' multiple demands'; the ability to cope with these 'is a key characteristic of being an early childhood professional' (Urban and Dalli 2012: 169). The metaphor has not lost its relevance in the intervening years. As Campbell-Barr (2019: 25) observes, early years practitioners are seemingly 'now the answer to everything – the development of the child neurologically, socially, emotionally and economically'. This latter perspective supports the relevance of this project's focus on exploring how early years teachers can be facilitated to participate in integrated working.

Figure 3.3 Image of spinning plates from my conference presentation (Aberystwyth University, 25-27June 2014)

Green (2010) Spinning plates

I now look at the enactment of integrated working in the context of early years practice; this will highlight why the issues discussed above are important to consider.

3.3.5 Enacting integrated working in early years practice

Introduction

In looking at the complexities of integrated working practice that have been discussed above, I recognised that it would be important for the research focus to explore literature on the enactment of integrated working in early years practice in greater depth. While literature on the subject emphasises the importance of integrated working to support young children's development (Munro 2011; Melhuish 2014; Vandekerckhove et al. 2019) and policy and regulatory frameworks outline expectations for integrated working (DfE 2018; DfE 2021), the literature also indicates challenges regarding enactment of integrated working in practice. For example, Canavan et al. (2009: 380) suggest that it is 'by no means simple or straightforward; it can be a complex process where a number of potential difficulties can serve to undermine or completely inhibit it from occurring'.

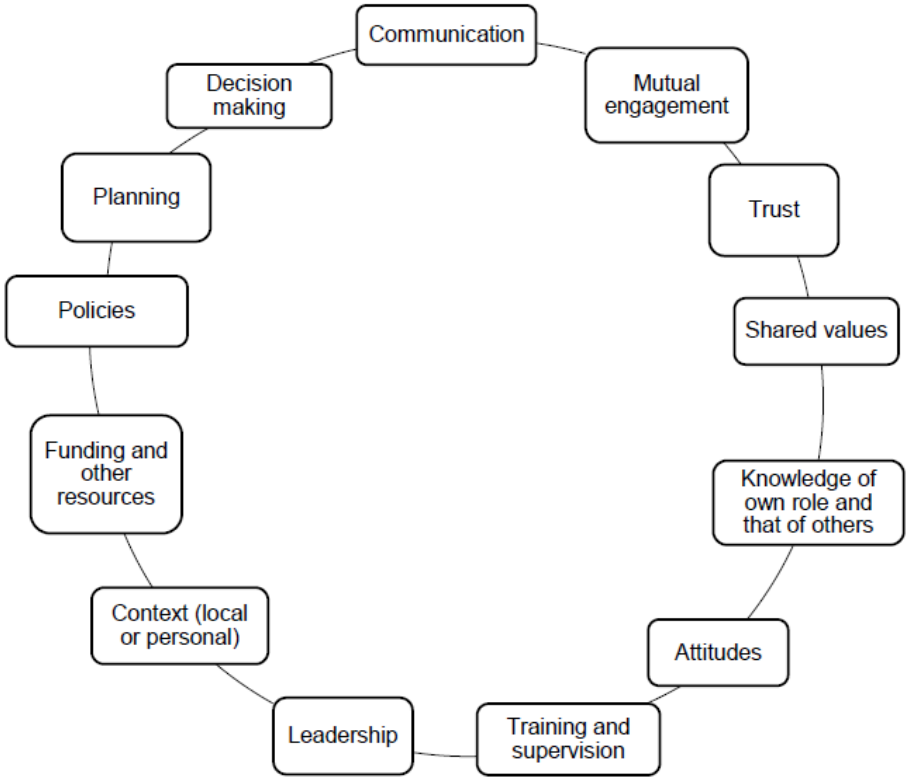
While acknowledging that integrated working can occur in a variety of forms and be variable according to the individual context in which it occurs, it is useful to explore what integrated working is likely to entail to support the research focus.

At this point, I want to introduce two important models that have been very helpful in understanding the landscape (Barnes et al. 2017; Leadbetter et al. 2007). These models are related to enactment of integrated approaches in early years practice that are needed to support analysis of the research.

The first model: Barnes et al. (2017)

The first model indicates strategic and operational dimensions that are common to 'most or all' models of integrated approaches that have been identified by Barnes et al. (2017: 9). These dimensions are represented in Figure 3.4; they enable aspects of integrated working to be discerned, though I do not perceive these dimensions to be 'stand-alone' features of integrated working. From exploring these dimensions, I see them as being interrelated so have depicted them in a circular shape in Figure 3.4 to represent their interconnectedness. They are mapped against the PPCT model in Figure 3.6 and explored further in the discussion of the PPCT model in sections 3.3.5 - 3.3.8 below.

Figure 3.4 Dimensions that are common to models of integrated working (adapted from Barnes et al. 2017: 9)

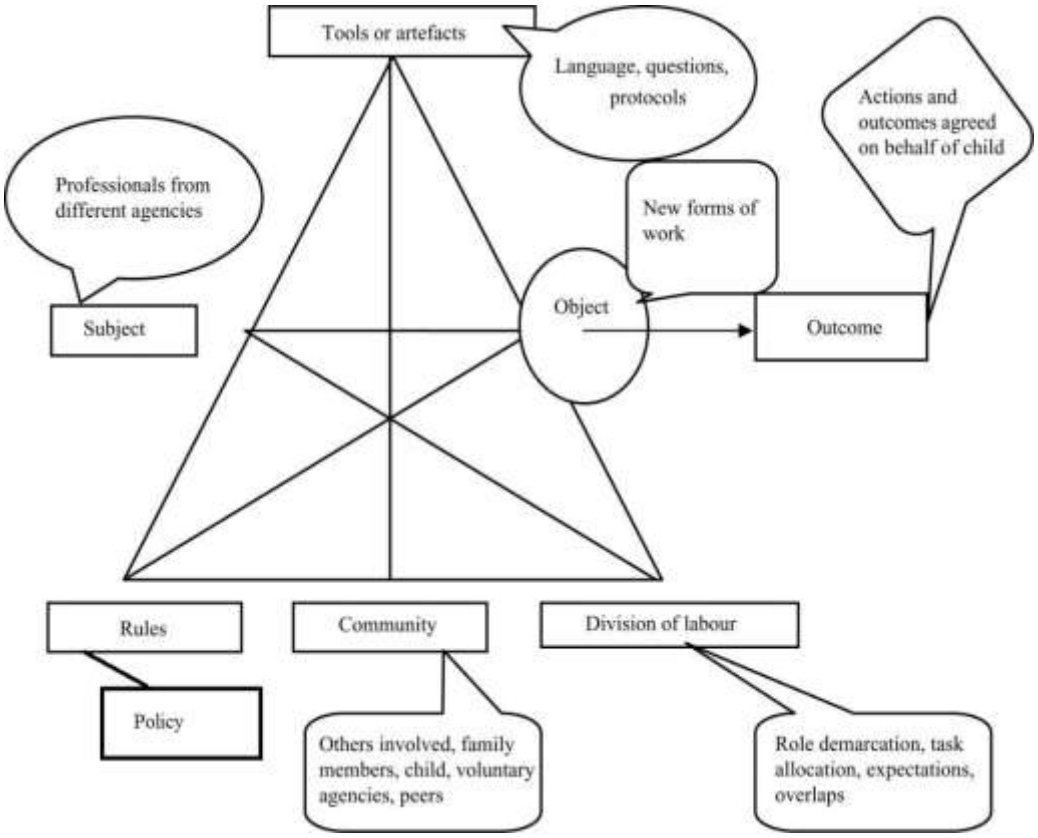


The second model: Leadbetter et al. (2007)

Leadbetter et al.'s (2007: 86) reworking of Engestrom's (1999) activity theory is another helpful model; this shows how integrated working can be viewed as an activity system 'within which individuals function and the social, cultural and historical contexts within which the activities exist'. As previously discussed, I had drawn on Trowler and Knight's (2000: 31) adaptation of Engestrom's activity theory that was shown in Figure 1.1; this had supported my reflection on aspects of my professional learning about higher education (HE) practices and systems when moving from school to HE to work on ITT programmes. Similarly, Leadbetter et al.'s (2007: 90) diagram is a useful tool for analysing and understanding complex work-based practices and considering individual actions within wider ecological, social, cultural and historical contexts when reviewing the literature on integrated working. This, in turn, helps to determine how effective integrated working can be developed (Barnes et al. 2018).

Leadbetter et al.'s (2007: 90) diagram highlights the significance of the interaction between the different elements within the activity system and the need to comprehend relationships between these various elements, especially where disagreements or frictions could occur within the system. Adapted from Leadbetter et al.'s (ibid) diagram, Figure 3.5 illustrates key players involved in integrated working; these are shown as the 'subject' (team of professionals) and 'community' (child and family members). The process of integrated working is labelled as the 'object', which relates to the child's outcome. Influential factors affecting the process of integrated working include 'tools' or 'artefacts' that are shown at the apex of the triangle in the diagram; these mediate the process of integrated working, such as use of language in professional conversations or meetings. Further influential factors are located at the base of the triangle; these are 'rules' that guide the working of the team and 'division of labour' that influences the team's activity; for example, through assignment of roles that are undertaken by different team members in integrated working (Leadbetter et al. 2007). The aspects of Leadbetter et al.'s (2007: 90) diagram are mapped against the PPCT model in Figure 3.6 and are explored further in sections 3.3.5 - 3.3.8 below.

Figure 3.5 Form of work undertaken in integrated working (adapted from Leadbetter et al. 2007: 90)



Mapping of Barnes et al.'s (2017) model and Leadbetter et al.'s model against the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006)

I referred to Bronfenbrenner's work before the research but explored it further following the research, as discussed in Chapter 2. Since completing the research, I created the mapping of Barnes et al.'s (2017: 9) dimensions of integrated working and the main components of Leadbetter et al.'s (2007: 90) diagram to the four elements of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model to help me interpret my analysis of the data. This made sense to me while undertaking the research to support the research focus. The mapping is shown in a table in Figure 3.6; the four elements of the PPCT model that are shown in the right hand column of the table are applied to the context of integrated working practice; the first element, 'proximal processes' is denoted by the term 'reciprocal interactions' both in Figure 3.6 and in the discussion below. This mapping is not intended to cover all aspects of each model or create fixed categories; its function is to help elucidate factors pertaining to enactment of integrated working in practice.

Figure 3.6 My mapping of Barnes et al.'s (2017: 9) 'Dimensions of integrated approaches' and Leadbetter et al.'s (2007: 90) diagram of 'Form of work undertaken in integrated working' against the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006) (Allen 2020)

Dimensions common to models of integrated working (Figure 3.3) (Barnes et al. 2017: 9)	*Aspects of Leadbetter et al.'s (2007: 90) diagram 'Form of work undertaken in integrated working' (Figure 3.4)*	*Four elements of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (Figure 2.3) applied to integrated working practice*
Communication Mutual engagement Trust Shared values	Process of integrated working (object) involving interactions between subject and community, involving use of tools, such as language	i) Reciprocal interactions between children, parents, and colleagues and other professionals
Knowledge of own role and that of others Attitudes	Those involved in integrated working and roles they play	ii) Personal characteristics that affect engagement and perspectives of integrated working
Leadership Training/supervision Context Funding/resources Policies	Contextual aspects, such as rules, policy or wider expectations affecting process of integrated working	iii) Contextual factors affecting integrated working
Planning Decision making	Agreed modes of working; actions to be undertaken by key actors and their duration	iv) Time - factors affecting frequency and consistency of integrated working practice

In the next section of the chapter, I use the structure of the four elements of the PPCT model to organise the discussion of aspects of integrated working that are covered in Figure 3.6. In Figures 3.7 – 3.9 and Figures 3.11 – 3.13, I have listed significant 'variables' in the left hand column of each table that are discussed in literature relating to the elements of the PPCT model; corresponding discussion of the variables can be found in the right hand column of each table with reference to the literature on the subject.

Although I created separate tables for each element of the PPCT model, I see the four elements as being interconnected and there is overlap of the variables within and

between the tables shown in Figures 3.7 - 3.9 and Figures 3.11 – 3.13. I start by considering the first element, reciprocal interactions; the discussion incorporates the corresponding dimensions of the Barnes et al.'s (2017) model and aspects of Leadbetter et al.'s (2007) diagram that are shown in Figure 3.6.

3.3.6 Reciprocal interactions

In this section, I focus on the subject of reciprocal interactions that was previously considered in Chapter 2 where I explored Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model. Focusing on literature on reciprocal interactions was important, as it supported my thinking about the early years teacher's interactions with the child, with colleagues and other professionals, and with parents in the context of integrated working. The views from the literature, which are shown in a table in Figure 3.7, focus on interactions between the early years practitioner and the child. I consider the early years teacher's interactions with other key actors in Figures 3.8 and 3.9 respectively.

Figure 3.7 Features of reciprocal interactions between the practitioner and the child (Allen 2020)

Variable	*View from the literature*
1) Effective communication with children: core skills	Core skills needed for communicating with children include 'effective listening; ability to convey genuine and empathic concern; appropriate emotional warmth and sensitivity; and respect and sensitivity to cultural needs and communication difficulties' (Hafford-Letchfield and Spatcher 2007: 314). Where the child may not fully understand or be able to communicate their needs, the practitioner could seek insight from others within the boundaries of the setting's policy on sharing information so their needs can be effectively addressed (Smylie et al. 2020). A sensitive approach to children's and families' 'linguistic differences' is advocated by Swick and Williams (2006: 376), as these 'may create obstacles to full participation in their learning'.
2) Joint construction of meaning through shared dialogue	Reciprocal interactions are pertinent to Vygotsky's (1978) socio-constructivist theory, which states the process of shared dialogue enables joint construction of meaning and knowledge. Rogoff's (1991) notion of 'guided participation' explains how young children acquire meaning from their interactions with others in routine activities; participants in the process 'find a common ground of understanding on which to base their contributions so as to ensure mutual comprehension'(Rogoff et al. 1993: p.8). Dialogic interaction is not only critical to support the child's cognitive development; it is also significant for the 'development of their very identity, their sense of self and worth' (Alexander 2004: 7). Use of terminology should be considered in dialogue

	with children to support their opportunity for involvement in decision making processes that affect their provision, as advocated by the UNCRC (UN 1989).
3) Extending children's thinking and learning	The 'Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years' (REPEY) project (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva 2004: 718) found that highly effective settings encouraged the process of sustained shared thinking (SST) where 'two or more individuals 'work together' in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities or extend a narrative'. SST was found to be strongly associated with children's progress (ibid) and to be particularly powerful when also encouraged by parents (Siraj-Blatchford 2010).
4) Relational pedagogy	Effective interactions are recognised as a feature of relational pedagogy (Payler et al. 2016). This 'emphasises inter-human, personal encounters and relationships where the focus is on the quality of interactions between children and their teachers'; this promotes 'academic, social, and emotional growth' (Pascal et al. 2019: 40). Relational pedagogy requires early years teachers to be 'fully attentive and listen carefully to children' (Cherrington 2018: 318). Supportive human relationships 'promote and protect a child's physical and mental health[6], behaviour, and learning across his or her lifetime' (Chan 2013: 1514).
5) Ethics of care	'Ethics of care' is a term used by Noddings (2012) to portray the practitioner's awareness and attentiveness to the child's expressed needs. Practitioners apply their moral and professional judgement in their responses to a child's situation; through building a caring and trusting relationship with the child, the practitioner becomes attuned and responsive to the child's actual expressed needs rather than needs they assume to be present (ibid.).
6) Nurturing care	The term 'nurturing care' conceptualises support for children's physical and psychological development; this includes interactions with the child that are 'responsive, emotionally engaging, and cognitively stimulating' (Richter et al. (2017: 104).
6) 'Caring about' and 'caring for'	'Caring about' involves having a knowledgeable outlook and sensitive appreciation of the other's needs, while 'caring for'

[6] Mental health can be defined as 'a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community' (World Health Organisation 2018)

	involves taking responsibility to actively support them (Nguyen 2016: 288).
7) Promoting the child's understanding of care and attunement to others' circumstances	The practitioner has an instrumental role in promoting the child's own understanding of care and attunement to others' circumstances; they can do this by asking the child how they think another person feels, rather than how they would feel in that situation; this helps the child to appreciate that a situation can be experienced in varying ways by different people (Noddings 2012). By modelling caring practices, the practitioner develops the capacity for caring for the child, parents and colleagues in the setting (Smylie et al. 2020).

The views on practitioner and child interaction clearly highlight the importance of interactions that enable the practitioner to establish respectful and responsive relationships with the child and have a greater understanding of the child's individual strengths, needs and interests. This, in turn, helps the practitioner to contribute to the process of integrated working and support the child's 'say in matters that affect them' (Simpson et al. 2017: 185).

Figure 3.8 Features of reciprocal interactions between the practitioner and colleagues and other professionals (Allen 2020)

Variable	*View from the literature*
1) Clear communication	Effective professional communication is identified as a key aspect of collaborative working (King et al. 2017) and is embedded in national policy (DfE 2018; DfE 2021). Clear communication is essential to ensure the work of the team is providing the required support and everyone concerned is informed of the progress towards the agreed outcomes (Christner 2015). When everyone shares the responsibility for a child, it may be unclear who is responsible for that child at any particular time (Luckock, 2010); therefore, effective communication is crucial to ensuring that relevant professionals have a mutual understanding of each other's contributions (Christner 2015). The involvement of a diversity of actors who work collaboratively together and have clear communication between them can provide a pertinent source of innovative thinking and action to help manage complex issues occurring in practice (Sørensen and Torfing 2011). Use of digital technology helps to maintain interactions with parents, colleagues or practitioners from other disciplinary areas and enables joint planning and review through use of online tools (Hargreaves and O'Connor 2018).

2) Open communication	Assumptions and values inform professional practice and shape perspectives. A set of shared values that conveys a particular sense of direction could limit possibilities for change; therefore, it is useful to recognise and contest conflicting factors in values, as this could 'be a driver for change' (Watson 2014: 27). Disagreement is stronger and occurs more regularly in schools with collaborative cultures; this is due to the presence of an underlying secure environment that enables open discussion and transient disagreement on the basis that existing relationships will not be jeopardised by such interaction (Fullan and Hargreaves 1991). Open communication involves the ability to freely discuss pertinent issues with a team member, resolve conflicts and reach collaborative decisions and have the ability to disagree on a decision while still attaining group consensus (Briggs 1993). Through using open communication, practitioners can discuss and seek solutions to challenging issues affecting practice to enhance provision at the setting (Spier et al. 2019); this facilitates the creation of 'intellectual networks for making sense of experience and solving problems' (Mercer (2000: 15).
3) Respectful communication and trust	Features of collaborative relationships in early years practice include supportive engagement and respectful communication with others (Dalli 2011). A key aspect of establishing effective partnerships in integrated working is engendering trust and mutual respect between different agencies and fostering understanding between them (Barnes et al. 2018). Trust has a beneficial effect on working processes in complex situations when interdependence between parties is relevant; it promotes practices such as co-ordination of group resources and effectiveness in achieving beneficial outcomes (Zornoza et al. 2009). Respectful exchanges are denoted by an individual genuinely listening to others' views and taking these into account; individuals feel valued when others respect their views, even if they disagree with them (Bryk and Schneider, 2003). Practitioners demonstrate their understanding of their commitments towards others through their actions and words; trust is built when expectations are validated by their actions (ibid.). Through sharing their knowledge, practitioners from the setting and different agencies can further their own knowledge and understanding of ethical perspectives in a 'non-threatening space' and become more 'ethically literate' (Whitmarsh 2012: 309); this process can help practitioners to make shared and sound decisions about their approaches to managing complex situations.
4) Positive relationships	The practitioner's recognition of children's, parents' and colleagues' personal and emotional realties in their lives supports

	development of positive and trusting relationships in the setting; for instance, by asking people how they feel and by demonstrating compassion. This acknowledges the emotional aspects of early years practice, which are central to the practitioner's role and have the capacity to both invigorate and diminish their efforts (Hargreaves and Fullan 2000). Asking colleagues how they feel also acknowledges them as individuals rather than perceiving them through the lens of their role in the setting (Smylie et al. 2020).
Relational agency	Relational agency is a term used by Edwards (2010a) that involves working together in a purposeful way to attain each participant's intended goals that derive from their specialist area of expertise and deploying resources that each specialist area can employ. It is utilised for actions taken with others 'to work directly on problems where collaboration enhances the response'. (Hopwood et al. 2016: 114).
5) Communities of practice	Practitioners' self-development and pedagogical understanding can be supported though their participation in communities of practice (Wenger 1998), which enable them to engage directly with others in developing shared ways of understanding about how to enact their roles. They do this by engaging in collaborative dialogue, exploring new developments and drawing on shared socio-cultural perspectives and interests to support changes to their professional roles (Whitty 2008). Relationships are developed from mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire, which are key dimensions of a community of practice; these generate a strong cohesion of commitment and shared interests, which transform them into partnerships over a period of time (Laluvein, 2010). Variations in mutual engagement and shared repertoires across groups will be dependent on the nature and type of activity; each interaction is defined by its own joint enterprise, ways of engaging and shared repertoire. The sharing of stories and experience and the interchange of ideas can result in better understanding of socio-cultural issues (Lave, 1988).
6) Use of terminology	Confusing terminology in integrated working can disrupt professionals' understanding and clear communication with each other (Brown and White 2006). A further issue is that terms used interchangeably or used to refer to different aims and functions in research findings could cause difficulties when the findings are interpreted to inform practice (Hughes 2007). The use of terms 'in a loose or inconsistent manner' in integrated working contributes to a sense of complexity of the process. (Brooks and Thistlethwaite (2012: 405). Mutual understanding of terminology used in internal or external policy documents is needed to support a consistent process of policy application and information sharing

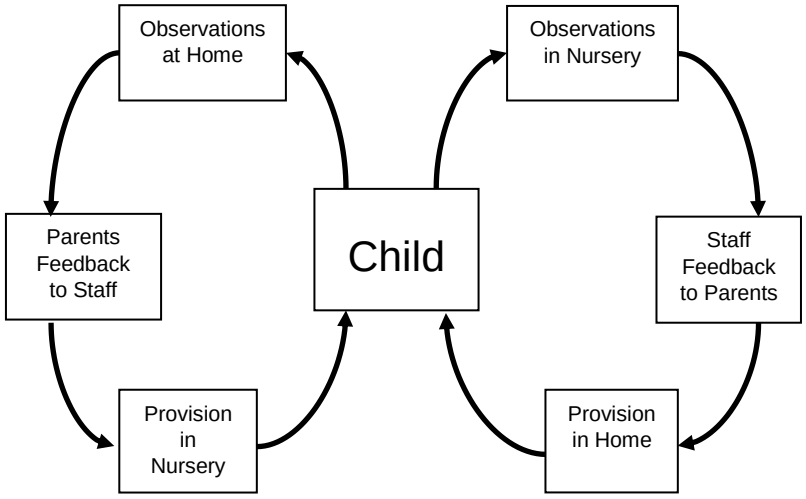
	(Siraj-Blatchford and Munni 2007). A 'shared language makes communication easier and brings down barriers, easing boundary crossing' Greenfield 2011: 86

These views from the literature on practitioner interaction with colleagues and other professionals indicate the significance of respectful, clear and open communication to support interactions between professionals' integrated working. A crucial attribute for a professional is recognising others' expertise and knowing how they make their own expertise explicit to others to support the process of integrated working (Hopwood et al. 2016). Interactions with colleagues and other professionals also present the practitioner with learning opportunities to broaden their perspective and augment their knowledge; Cable and Miller (2011) suggest that early years teachers can draw on different forms of professional knowledge so their expertise is continually redefined.

Figure 3.9 Features of reciprocal interactions between the practitioner and parents (Allen 2020)

Variable	*View from the literature*
1) Use of terminology	Interactions with parents should not be affected by use of terminology, such as 'poor parenting', that objectifies parents as 'feckless' and 'socially and politically irresponsible' who 'need to be 'saved' from their uncivilised lives through expert 'interventions' (Ball (2017: 201). This form of terminology shapes a perspective of 'poor parents' who are 'the causes of educational 'failure' and social inequality. Conceptualising parenting as 'irresponsible' (as opposed to 'responsible') is likely to negatively affect how families feel about school and could create barriers to their further involvement with the setting (Arnold, 2007). Moreover, a focus on 'family-related deficits' distracts attention from an examination of 'structural and other barriers that some families experience' (Feiler 2010: 13); this could impede awareness of parents' challenging circumstances and timely support with these. Such terminology about parenting could be regarded as an example of how 'language is not only used to enable joint thinking about a problem, language use itself may create a problem to be resolved' (Mercer 2000: 12).
2) Respectful relationships	Respectful professional interactions and relationships involve 'effective and timely communication between professionals and families' (Blackburn 2016: 341). In their research on effective implementation of SSLPs, Anning et al. (2007: 4) found this included mutual respect for the contributions of children, families

	and practitioners; when parents' contributions relating to children's development were 'genuinely valued, parents were more likely to feel confident of their role as active agents in promoting better outcomes for their children'. Communication with parents that demonstrates respectful acknowledgement of parents' practices at home enriches children's learning (Feiler 2010). Teacher-parent engagement is facilitated by leaders who have a genuine understanding of families' lives and prioritise engagement (EEF 2018). A study by Bryk et al. (2010) that explored parent and community engagement identified that relational trust in the whole school community had a significant effect on enhancing organisational change that contributed to student learning (Mausethagen 2013). Practitioners' efforts to understand situations that families are experiencing should incorporate the 'cultural, social, economic, and educational dynamics that are a part of their various systems' (Swick and Williams 2006: 375). This provides a more complete picture of the circumstances that a family may be experiencing and helps to guide approaches that could be taken to support the child and their family (ibid).
3) 'Collaborative knowledge work'	Hopwood et al. (2016: 112) suggest partnership work with parents can be considered as 'collaborative knowledge work'; this is when the practitioner and parent work together and explore their knowledge about an existing problem and then develop new knowledge that allows potential for finding a response to the problem. A focus is maintained on seeing the problem from different perspectives; the response is not selected from current insight of the problem but through the process of creating new knowledge (ibid). This approach positions the professional and parent as 'learning about, from and with each other', which is described as 'reciprocal learning' (Hopwood et al. 2016: 113) and involves application of the following conceptual tools: 1. *relational expertise: a capacity to work relationally with others on complex problems;* *2. common knowledge: respectful understanding of differing motives; and* *3. relational agency: a capacity to work with others to understand a problem, and to align one's responses to those new understandings*
4) Shared observations between home and early years setting	The Pen Green Centre (PGC) for under-fives in Corby, Northamptonshire uses the 'Pen Green Loop' model that is shown in Figure 3.10 (Whalley and Dennison 2007: 126). This model demonstrates regular and respectful two-way communication between staff and parents at the PGC about children's interests and learning, which is based on observations

	of children by staff at the PGC and by families at home. These observations inform the child's provision at the PGC and home; they help to develop mutual and respectful understanding between parents and staff that is based on shared knowledge and experiences (ibid.). ***Figure 3.10 Pen Green Loop (Whalley and Dennison 2007: 126)*** 
4) Co-production	Co-production enables parents to participate in the planning and delivery of early years provision; parents' coordination of activities and groups is an example of co-produced services at PGC (Whalley 2013). These services are distinguished by an equal and reciprocal relationship between the user and provider in order to achieve an identified outcome (ibid). When professionals are involved in co-produced service delivery, they take on the role of catalysts and facilitators; this involves building social networks that can help to address underlying issues and extend the capacity of service provision (New Economics Foundation 2008). Referring to a co-production approach as one where children and families are involved in the development of services they will use, Gordon et al. (2016) suggest 'a service can only be labelled as integrated when families experience it as such'.
5) Strengths-based approaches	Strengths-based approaches to working with parents in integrated working have gained in influence as a relevant theoretical and practical model in the context of early years provision (Fenton et al. 2015). These approaches 'emphasise people's ability to be their own agents of change'; they are 'broadly inclusive of the family and community; recognise the socio-political and cultural context, and encompass strengths-based perspectives' (Fenton et al. 2015: 32). Strengths-based

	principles (McCashen 2004: 11, cited in Fenton et al. 2015: 32) are shown below: • Respect for peoples' intrinsic worth, rights, capacities, uniqueness and commonalties • Sharing of information and 'knowledge', resources, skills, decision-making • Collaboration, teamwork and partnership, consultation and inclusion • Social justice equity, access, 'equality', participation, self-determination • Transparency having things out in the open, open information and communication • Respect for peoples' intrinsic worth, rights, capacities, uniqueness and commonalties However, strengths- based approaches have been contested; for instance, Fenton et al. (2015: 33) advise this perspective might 'negate the reality of complex issues, and are therefore simplistic and inappropriate' or that a focus on strengths might 'naively deny the existence and severity of problems in people's lives'. Additionally, Whittington and Whittington (2015) warn an assumption cannot be made that this approach will readily transfer to other practice situations; for instance, care is required where high risks might be involved, such as safeguarding issues. Wong and Sumsion (2013) also warn about making unrealistic assumptions, as these may imply that a problem is largely an organisational issue and can be remedied by applying a technical solution, which could be problematic, as it may inhibit other attempts to apply more creative approaches to the issue (ibid). The views posited above regarding a strengths-based approach point to the complex nature of integrated working and the importance of acknowledging the individual context of the child and their family (Hood 2015).

Views from the literature on practitioner interaction with parents advocate respectful interactions with parents, which demonstrate that the practitioner listens to the parent's views and values the parent's knowledge of their child. Negative labelling of parents can impede integrated working; this could lead to the 'right kinds of resources not being available at the right time' to the family (Featherstone and Fraser 2012: 251). Goodall (2015: 174) suggests it is useful to think about a model 'that focuses on what is offered to the families' rather than focusing on a 'deficient model of families' who are 'hard to reach' and 'do not engage', as this can evoke a negative and dependent view of the family.

3.3.7 Personal characteristics

Following the structure of the four elements of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, I now turn to views from the literature on the second element 'personal characteristics'; as in the tables relating to 'reciprocal interactions', these are considered in the context of integrated working in early years practice to inform the research focus, though only one table is needed for each of the remaining three elements. As above, I have categorised variables of personal characteristics in the left-hand column of the table and corresponding views from the literature are shown in the right hand column.

Figure 3.11 Features of the practitioner's personal characteristics (Allen 2020)

Variable	*View from the literature*
1) Practitioner competences or attitudes to engage in integrated working	A practitioner's past negative experience of engagement with a particular profession could 'inadvertently impact on openness and willingness to work with a member of that profession', which would impede collaborative working (Croker et al. 2016: 672). Integrated working involves the ability of professionals to 'look beyond the boundaries, capacities or responsibilities of a single agency' (Davis and Smith 2012: 101). Practitioners should demonstrate an 'enabling, welcoming, participative and inclusive work attitude' (Vandekerckhove et al. 2019: 95). Competences or attitudes that are required to engage in integrated working include (ibid.): - *readiness to cooperate with others and trust in other professionals,* - *willingness to reflect on one's own practice, and courage to reassess 'the way things have always been done'* - *an open mind to enable shared learning, and for the exchange of views on certain functions and the ways in which these may need to be adapted.*
2) Respect for others	Practitioners should demonstrate respect for the roles and responsibilities of other professionals (Hughes 2007). This involves valuing individual expertise and acknowledging unique contributions made by other team members (Greenfield 2011). Different professional contributions provide contrasting perspectives from varied forms of professional training and practice; the practitioner should acknowledge, respect and accommodate differences when working towards planned outcomes in order to facilitate this process (Hammick et al.

	2009). Practitioners' knowledge is enhanced as they 'learn from, learn about and learn with others' (Cable and Miller 2011: 158). Through collaborative working, knowledge can become a tool for professional development; this constant social interplay between knowledge and the processes of knowing makes new understandings possible (Melasalmi and Husu 2016: 427).
3) Status	Joined-up policies require synergy, as partnership working involves a common interest in achieving goals (Jelphs and Dickinson 2008). Differences in perceived professional status or power of those involved in integrated working may adversely affect values and priorities that are determined in the process of collaborative working (Wong and Sumsion 2013). Power issues can have a negative impact on relationships between members of the group, affecting the thinking and efficacy of the group's work (Edwards and Daniels 2012). Trust and respect between team members can be fostered by diminishing traditional boundaries that may negatively impact on team efficacy (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2012).
4) Relational expertise	Relational agency is seen as an aspect of 'relational expertise' (Hopwood et al. 2016:113), which is 'a capacity to work relationally with others on complex problems' and make 'responsive collaborations possible'; this involves 'the joint interpretation of the problem as well as joint response'. Relational expertise requires professionals to recognise 'the standpoints and motives of those who inhabit other practices' and also 'mutually align motives in interpreting and responding to a problem' in their collaborative work (ibid.).

The literature relating to the second element of the PPCT model, personal characteristics, highlights the importance of a practitioner's open and reflective disposition to support their professional development; as noted by Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018: 130):

> *What matters most of all is that educators inquire into what they are doing continuously and that they use the big data of numbers and small data of professional judgments in combination as a way to inform the process*

The literature also refers to the value of practitioners demonstrating an open and willing attitude towards working with others; this includes recognising and respecting colleagues' and other professionals' roles and expertise and making explicit their own role, knowledge and experience to others to support a shared understanding of the resources at hand when supporting a child and their family.

3.3.8 Resourcing (as an aspect of context)

I now look at the third element of the PPCT model, which is 'context'. Aspects of this element are covered elsewhere in this chapter and previously in the work. Here, I focus particularly on 'resourcing' as an aspect of context, and discuss this in relation to integrated working in early years practice.

Figure 3.12 Resourcing (Allen 2020)

Variable	*View from the literature*
1) Adequate resourcing	Efforts required for effective co-ordination and collaboration within and across different professional disciplines need to be adequately resourced (Nutbrown, 2018). However, financial pressures in the economy can lead to cuts in spending on children's services. For example, The Lancet warns that provision of additional CAMHS staff to liaise with teachers, nurses, and other school support 'does not train school staff in how to deal with mental health issues' (p.360). The need for relevant staff training is also noted in Brown's (2018: 24) research for the DfE on mental health and wellbeing provision in schools, which states that schools would benefit from more awareness, advice and resources so that strategies that help promote children's mental health and wellbeing can be implemented. From their analysis of thirty-three studies on integrated working to support children's mental health that were published between 1997-2015, Cooper et al. (2016: 338) suggest that 'inadequate resourcing' was 'the most commonly cited barrier to interagency collaboration by both professionals and parents/carers'. In their report on early access to mental health support, the Children's Commissioner (2019: 3) suggests that while there has been an increase in funding for mental health services, there is insufficient scrutiny of provision for children's 'lower level'[7] needs and there is 'a postcode lottery of children's mental health provision' due to variations in the funding of services in different areas of the country. Additionally, while integrated working can enable understanding of different professional expertise, it can also create further fragmentation of the sector, through competition between

[7] 'Low-level non-specialist services comprise those preventative and EI services which fall below specialist referral thresholds' (OCC 2019: 8).

	services 'for recognition and scarce resources' (Urban and Dalli 2012: 170).
2) Realistic goals	An optimistic view of integrated working does not necessarily correspond with the complexity experienced by professionals on the ground; engagement by people at all levels is required 'with the inherent messiness and ambiguity of everyday practice' (Hood 2014: 38). There is a need for realistic goals that have been determined by those involved in integrated working initiatives (ibid.); these can be disrupted by 'responsibilities and differences in organizational aims, lack of consensus on aims or overambitious aims' (Sloper 2004: 576). Broader engagement would enable an integrated approach to incorporate aims agreed by practitioners across different professional disciplines at the 'front line of practice', as well as those involved in the 'thoroughfare of official discourse' (Hood 2014: 38).

The literature on resourcing for integrated working indicates that child and family services involved in integrated working need to have adequate and sustained resources to ensure children and families are appropriately supported. Additionally, the literature refers to services having an opportunity for involvement in policy development so they can contribute to decision-making on policy initiatives, including the likely resources that are needed to implement and work towards policy goals.

The final element of the PPCT model is 'time'. I look at this element as 'Time and it limitations' in the context of integrated working in early years practice.

3.3.9 Time and its limitations

Figure 3.13 Features of time and its limitations (Allen 2020)

Variable	*View from the literature*
1) Organisation of time	Organisation of time is one of the main barriers to integrated working (Hall 2005). Canavan et al. (2009) identify that lack of time and commitment by participants in integrated working can hinder its process and intended outcomes, especially when professionals' participation is required over a longer term. Jelphs and Dickinson (2008: 107) suggest that 'teams need time to be teams'; time is needed for the team to 'meet, debate and explore' as they form a relationship. Building collaborative relationships requires effort to be sustained over time; this allows for personal conflicts to be negotiated and trust to be established (King et al. 2017). Sufficient time and levels of staffing are needed to enable

	practitioners the scope to establish positive relationships with the child through active listening, dialogue and purposeful conversations with the child (Simpson et al. 2017). As Noddings (2012: 774) indicates 'Time spent on building a relation of care and trust is not time wasted'.
2) Making decisions	Teaching is a complex role and complex situations 'call for teachers to use professional judgment to assess the most appropriate course of action in any particular situation' (Pollard et al. 2014: 71). Teacher knowledge can be more focused on 'implementation rather than creation and adaptation'; Forde et al. (2006: 168) suggest that implementation is mainly superficial without the time and processes for individual or collective reflection and inquiry which enable 'sense-making'.
3) Practitioner learning as a continuous process	By exploring practice and seeking new meanings with others, professionals acknowledge there are multiple forms of action and expertise is not comprised of fixed knowledge and skills but continuously reshaped through their actions within complex and changeable situations and their participation in a learning community. Their competences are, therefore, not 'finite or achievable or measurable at one point in time but as elements/aspects of lifelong learning' (Cable and Miller 2011: 158). Opportunities for participation in communities of practice should be perceived as valid functions of teachers' roles that will help them to address the complexities and challenges of their professional work in the 21st century.

The literature notes that time is a critical factor for integrated working to be effectively implemented in practice in terms of time for activities, such as interactions with key actors or training opportunities, and broader changes over time beyond the setting that may be driven by policy or other contextual factors.

Mapping the literature to the four elements of the PPCT model supported a clearer perspective of aspects of the practitioner's role in integrated working, which was helpful to support the research focus. In the next section, I look at barriers and solutions to integrated working.

3.3.10 Integrated working: barriers and solutions

I include a list of barriers and solutions in Appendix A, which relate to challenges that may occur within integrated working. These are generally aligned with challenges that have been discussed above. The barriers in Figure A1 (Appendix A) were identified by school and children centre leaders and their children's services partners

at a symposium on building effective integrated leadership (National College and Children's Workforce Network 2009: 18-19) and offer a service-provider perspective on barriers to integrated working. Corresponding approaches to manage these barriers were identified by the same group and are included in Figure A2 (Appendix A). These perspectives are important as they bring the voice of the experienced practitioner to the discussion of implementation of integrated working in practice. Overall, the literature demonstrates a range of factors can act as barriers to integrated working across all operational levels. As suggested by Hood (2015: 151), integrated working involves 'moving beyond routine communication and information sharing'; it is not sufficient for professionals to 'develop and use identikit assessment templates,' or 'learn generic competencies' for integrated working. Collaborative working with different service providers demands an 'awareness of possible obstacles to cooperation and communication and an ability to deal with those obstacles' (Pretis, 2006: 46***).*** Reviewing these barriers and solutions helped me recognise the significance of having the voice of experienced practitioners to inform the research.

3.3.11 Integrated working: interprofessional education

Introduction

The development of integrated working has resulted in the growth of interprofessional education programmes (Payler et al. 2008). In this section of the chapter, I consider literature on the subject of interprofessional education that aims to support practitioners' involvement in integrated working. I am particularly interested in approaches to interprofessional education, as it relates to the context of my role in supporting practitioners to manage pressures in early years practice. I start by looking at collaborative approaches to interprofessional education

Collaborative approaches to interprofessional education

Collaborative approaches to learning are reported to be widely used in interprofessional education programmes (ibid.). Shared professional development can help to promote understanding of professional roles and responsibilities and the importance of specialist expertise so professionals 'value what others bring to the practice of collaboration' (Carpenter and Dickinson 2016: 2). Provision of joint training for staff from different services fosters understanding and helps to reduce mistrust or rivalry between professionals when working to achieve planned outcomes (Barnes et al. 2018). Leaders facilitate these learning processes through their capacity to support interaction between all team members; this extends open communication,

builds trust and supports the development of collaborative relationships (Rodd 2012). However, facilitators of interprofessional education programmes and setting leaders should also acknowledge the complexity of integrated working; for example, while one intervention may enable a positive outcome for a child, it may not have the same effect in another scenario, despite the collaborative efforts of the team (Hood 2014).

Writing in the context of interprofessional education for healthcare students, Bridges et al. (2011: 2) note that common elements of collaborative practice that feature in interprofessional learning experiences include 'responsibility, accountability, coordination, communication, cooperation, assertiveness, autonomy, and mutual trust and respect'. Learning experiences enable students to share and practice these attributes with each other (ibid.).

Professionals from different disciplines may have different perceptions regarding children and childhood (Grant et al. 2018). However, in seeking to develop a national interdisciplinary educational framework that could be utilised for integrated working, Grant et al. (2018: 12) found that focusing on 'points of 'sameness' or agreement' in interprofessional education 'may be an important first step in going beyond the simple coalition and integration of early years services'. In this framework, the child forms the centre of integrated working and is the 'basis of a shared language for communicating within and between the disciplines' (ibid.).

Team working

A further interprofessional learning opportunity is participation in various types of team meetings; this enables practitioners to observe discussions to help them prepare to make their own contributions in meetings, as part of their professional role (Hammick et al. 2009). Interactions between team members serve to advance interprofessional working and help the team achieve its goal (ibid.); this resonates with the previous discussion on reciprocal interactions. However, informal communication channels that do not necessarily include all members of the team can disrupt interactions and undermine full collaboration, as it is not inclusive (ibid.). In such circumstances, it is important for professionals to demonstrate a duty of care to all team members and ensure they each feel included in the team.

Creative approaches to interprofessional education

Jarvis and Trodd (2008) discuss an initiative for interprofessional learning for use with both pre- and post-qualification education practitioners that involves use of their

imagination to explore their identity and realise ways of working with others. Practical activities include constructing a tool-kit to contain representations (words or pictures) of aspects of practice that indicate a teacher's knowledge base and skills; this could then be used as an aid for articulating knowledge and skills that are relevant to teaching or could be shared with professionals from other disciplinary areas (ibid.). By undertaking such activities, students are encouraged to learn about different professional cultures and view their own cultural stance from an alternative perspective (ibid.). A practice-based approach to interprofessional education is also discussed by Payler et al. (2008); they report students found role play activities, small group work and assessed presentations particularly useful in their preparation for collaborative practice. Payler et al. (2008: 71) also identify interprofessional learning should include 'discussions on professional tribalism, professional roles and communities of practice, leading to critique of students' own communities of practice'. Other forms of interprofessional learning activity include the development of simulation tools to support interprofessional learning for healthcare professionals, (Bridges et al. 2011), while King et al. (2017: 8) refer to use of 'joint training initiatives, task-focused inter-professional meetings (formal and informal), [and] co-location and shared spaces for interaction' to promote good relationships between healthcare professionals.

Mentoring and Coaching

An example of the use of coaching is reported by Lofthouse et al. (2016); through using an inter-professional video-based coaching approach, speech and language therapists engaged in conversation with teachers and teaching assistants about their practice using five minute video-recorded clips they had recorded themselves. The practitioners benefitted from the speech and language therapists' expertise during the non-judgmental coaching experiences; for instance, a nursery teacher is cited in the literature as feeling able to make more reliable assessments of children's language skills and engage in more productive conversations with colleagues about how to support children's learning (ibid.). This is a valuable development; according to the two speech and language therapists who participated in this initiative, a 'speech, language and communication need (SLCN) is often a hidden problem, because few professionals or parents know what it looks and sounds like' (Flanagan and Wigley 2018: 21). Moreover, it is important that children in the early years 'have a confident grasp of oral language and communication before they are moved on to grasp the skills of written forms of language' (Pascal et al. 2019: 7)

Learning opportunities in this video-based coaching approach were not limited to early years practitioners; at the same time, the speech and language therapists 'became more confident as coaches as they, in turn, learned substantially from the teachers and teaching assistants about pedagogy and curriculum' (Lofthouse et al. 2016: 527). Additionally, this example demonstrates the importance of reciprocal interaction between the adults involved in the initiative; Lofthouse et al (2016: 529) explain:

> *The model also shows the reciprocity of the partnership, each partner drawing on experiences from beyond the specifics of the project as well as building practical knowledge and understanding from their specific roles.*

Another form of support is the provision of an assigned mentor who is experienced in integrated working and can help the early years practitioner to consider how they communicate their knowledge to a professional from another disciplinary area (Payler and Georgeson 2013b). This is helpful, as the practitioner's effective dialogue across professional boundaries is 'the cornerstone of collaborative working' (Hughes 2007: 246). The mentor's own expertise in mentoring is crucial to the process; Hammond et al. (2015: 150) note that a senior professional assuming a mentoring role may not have 'the ability to mentor well'; they highlight the values of 'caring, attentiveness and receptivity' in a mentoring relationship that supports both the mentor's and mentee's engagement in critical reflection and co-construction of knowledge.

Approaches to interprofessional education that are discussed above have implications for resourcing so leaders' 'strong commitment to steer integrated working' is important to enabling such initiatives (Harrington-Veil et al. 2016: 109). In relation to this issue, Vandekerckhove et al. (2019: 108) recommend that

> *service providers, leaders and managers should facilitate the provision of time and resources for integrated working, including frequent, meaningful communication among services, e.g. by providing child-free hours to create time for reflective practice, team meetings, case reporting, exchanging experiences, training and coaching.*

Effectiveness of interprofessional education

In their review of pedagogic processes used in interprofessional education, Payler et al. (2008) found that while a broad range of approaches was used in interprofessional education programmes, there was limited information on the details of these programmes and limited evaluation of their effectiveness. Interprofessional education

can be an integral strand of professional education so cannot be so readily identified or quantified (Meads and Barr 2005). Moreover, much of the literature on interprofessional education is descriptive about programmes and processes and there is less attention to their outcomes (Carpenter and Dickinson (2016). A further issue affecting both provision and evaluation of interprofessional education is the fluidity of policy and practice and changes to the interprofessional teams (Anning et al. 2006).

Though there is a lack of evidence, this does not necessarily mean that interprofessional education is ineffective but it limits understanding about its effectiveness to achieve improved collaborative practice or outcomes (Carpenter and Dickinson 2016). The use of frameworks and different methodologies for evaluation of interprofessional education is suggested in the literature (Payler et al. 2008; Reeves et al. 2015) to explore the complexity of interprofessional education approaches, and to understand more fully about the effect of integrated working initiatives on outcomes.

Summary

Overall, the literature in integrated working indicates that by working collaboratively and sharing their specialist knowledge and unique perceptions, professionals can collectively support a child's development through the application of suitable strategies and interventions (Christner 2015). Shared training opportunities are intended to support staff from different services to engage in integrated working by fostering their understanding of other professional roles and helping to reduce any mistrust or rivalry between professionals (Barnes et al. 2018). However, limited evidence of the effectiveness of interprofessional training (Payler et al. 2008) and difficulties in discerning these from broader professional development activity (Meads and Barr 2005) could inhibit opportunities for such training. Resourcing could be a further barrier; Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018: 129) highlight the importance of focusing on 'what we should *do* to strengthen collaborative professionalism[8], not only how much time or money we have to do it'.

[8] Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018: 15) explain 'collaborative professionalism is about working well together in a professional way'

I was interested in the literature on creative approaches to training, as I have been involved in developing a role play scenario with colleagues from health and social care to support students on early years, health and social work programmes, as discussed previously in the work. I was also invited to join the development of a creative interprofessional training initiative for staff in a London Children Centre in 2008 that involved working with a professional movement specialist. Participants in both these initiatives valued their interprofessional training experiences; however, the impact on their future engagement in integrated working was not subject to evaluation and, as Meads and Barr (2005) indicate, it would be difficult to discern the future impact of these initiatives from other professional development opportunities undertaken by the participants. The coaching and mentoring approaches in the literature were also very interesting; these offer a more tailored approach to collaborative working and can provide a range of specialist support for practitioners, as in the example from Lofthouse et al. (2016) or help with managing professional skills, such as interaction, as reported by Payler and Georgeson (2013b). However, the pedagogical approach to mentoring is a key aspect to this process.

I now look further at the subject of professional development in the next section of this chapter.

3.4 Early years teachers' professional development

3.4.1 Introduction

Aspects of professional development have already been considered in other sections in this work; I now go on to explore the subject of professional development for early years teachers more broadly due to its relevance to the project focus. I start by looking at the issue of teachers' access to professional development.

3.4.2 Access to professional development

The significant review of early years workforce qualifications undertaken by Nutbrown (2012) highlights the importance of graduate pedagogical leadership in all early years settings and recommends that early years staff should have access to professional development and opportunities to discuss their practice so they could learn from each other. Four decades prior to Nutbrown's (2012) review, the James Report (1972) on teacher education and training advised that teacher education should be viewed as a 'life-long rather than a short-term one–off process' (Taylor (2008: 304). However, there exists a 'disparity in the perception and

treatment' between teachers with EYTS and those with QTS in the sector (Pascal et al. 2020: 6); for instance, teachers with EYTS do not have currently have access to the new early career framework (ECF) (DfE 2019), which is due to start in September 2021 and is available to their counterparts with QTS.

Nutbrown's (2012) review calls for the role of an early years specialist route to QTS that would replace the graduate role of the Early Years Professional (EYP), as discussed earlier in this work. This was due to concerns about the status of the EYP role; although EYPs were designated as graduate-level leaders of early years provision (CWDC 2007), the EYP role did not assume a clear identity in practice and EYPs did not have access to professional conditions of service that are associated with the role of the teacher with QTS (Payler and Davis 2017). In considering the issues raised by Payler and Davis (2017) concerning challenges for EYPs to effectively enact their role, Kay et al. (2021) note this indicates the problem with a policy initiative that places reliance on a singular role to effect changes in practice.

However, rather than realising parity with QTS, the role of EYT that replaced the EYP role in 2013 lacks 'financial rewards, career progression, and professional status', despite a 'clear alignment between EYTS and the roles and responsibilities of those with QTS' (Kay et al. 2021: 187), thus perpetuating the differential that had existed between QTS and EYPS. Moreover, numbers of enrolments on EYT initial teacher training routes 'have plummeted from 2,300 in 2013-14 to under 400 in 2019-20' (Archer and Merrick 2020: 5). This has implications for the quality of pedagogical leadership in early years provision, particularly in the PVI sector (Pascal et al. 2020). There are also implications for provision led by teachers with QTS, as the current QTS teacher role does not incorporate 'the holistic, multi professional nature of the role' in early years and 'work with babies' (Payler and Davis 2017: 12).

Following Nutbrown (2012), Archer and Merrick (2020) have called for a QTS Early Years role, with the opportunity for EYTs to convert to this role and have access to the ECF. This does not mean that EYTs have no access to post-qualification professional development but it is not embedded in a framework, as it is for teachers with QTS; this is important as professional development is 'not a luxury' but 'an essential investment in the success of students, their schools and their communities' (Robinson (2015: 235).

3.4.3 Characteristics of professional development

Teachers' professional development is a complex subject. Menter et al. (2010: 18) advise that contentions about teacher education include issues concerning the relationship 'between theory and practice, between pedagogical skills and subject knowledge, and between values and technical competence'. For instance, with reference to the Teachers Standards (Early Years) (NCTL 2013), Taggart (2015: 382) advises that EYTs are expected to 'understand attachment theory' and 'communicate effectively'; however, they are not expected to develop an appreciation of their facility to care, which is 'a key disposition which gives rise to these competencies'. A policy emphasis on technical efficacy and on measurement is perceived by Menter et al. (2010: 21) to align with the social context of 'an age of accountability and performativity' that offers the opportunity for children to 'achieve to their best potential and subsequently to contribute to the economy and society'. Basford (2019: 780) contends that this focus on the significant effect of a child's early years on their future potential and life outcomes has 'increasingly turned practitioners into policy puppets who are pushed and pulled between sometimes competing policy imperatives'.

While there is an emphasis on quality provision in early years practice, there is limited work that helps to explain processes that support professional learning and development, which 'can bring about sustainable change in practice and impact positively on children's outcomes' (Rogers et al. 2020: 157). Difficulties exist in 'identifying the efficacy' of professional development programmes, due to challenges in isolating 'the multiple variables' that comprise a programme in order to demonstrate 'causal links between improvements' and outcomes for children (Rogers et al. 2020: 158). This view resonates with similar issues that were discussed earlier in this chapter concerning difficulties in identifying the efficacy of interprofessional education (Meads and Barr 2005; Payler et al. 2008; Carpenter and Dickinson 2016).

Evans (2008: 30) uses the terms 'professionalism' and 'professionality' in her explanation of professional development, which she proposes is 'the process whereby people's professionality and/or professionalism may be considered to be enhanced'. Evans (2008) adds that the phrase 'may be considered to be' is a deliberate choice on her part, as it encompasses a subjective view about what might be considered to be professional development. If teachers feel that professional development, does not offer learning that is relevant to their current and pressing issues, they may consider the experience has not provided them with much opportunity for learning. This could occur, for instance, when teachers attend 'one-

off' or 'top-down' professional development sessions covering transmission of information details; research indicates these are not effective for teacher learning, as they do not generate change in practice or benefit children's outcomes (DfE 2016).

Arguing against a 'delivery mode' of professional development, Dadds (2001: 50) suggests a focus on professional standards in teacher education where the teacher is 'positioned as an uncritical implementer of outside policies' is inappropriate as a model for developing 'a well-educated teaching force'. Rather, professional development should incorporate opportunity for innovation and exploration of ideas that are associated with immediate, relevant learning and teaching issues, as well as those pre-determined at national level (McGilchrist et al. 2004). Opportunities to innovate and explore ideas as an aspect of professional development aim to nurture teachers' understanding, judgement and agency that support them to see 'how children's needs and rights might be met' (Dadds 2001: 55). For instance, Yarrow (2015) suggests that early years practitioners could explore likely tensions that occur between colleagues that can be attributed to pressures in practice and lack of support or funding; this would help practitioners to become more critically reflexive about their own and others' emotional responses and appreciate the significance of agency in fostering positive emotional responses in the future. This is important as 'emotions are at the heart of teaching' (Hargreaves 1998: 835) and it is pertinent in early years practice to 'critically analyse structures within which [these] individuals work (Taggart 2015: 390).

Drawing on research undertaken in New Zealand, Cherrington and Thornton (2013: 120) suggest key characteristics of quality professional development for early years teachers; these demonstrate a more personalised and sustained approach to professional development whilst also attending to broader issues of policy and practice. The characteristics are:

- *incorporation of participants' own aspirations, skills, knowledge and understanding in the learning context*
- *provision of theoretical and content knowledge and information about alternative practices*
- *participants' involvement in investigation of Early Years pedagogy*
- *participants' analysis of data from own settings*
- *critical reflection enabling participants to investigate and challenge assumptions and develop their thinking*
- *support for practice that is inclusive of diverse children, families and whānau [extended family]*

- *participants are facilitated to change practice, beliefs, understanding and/or attitudes*
- *participants gain awareness of their own thinking, actions and influence*

These characteristics align with Cable and Miller's (2011) view on the subject; they believe teachers' professional development should be perceived beyond a set of limited perspectives of knowledge, understanding, skills and attributes. They highlight the importance of early years practitioners having the ability to interact in diverse groups and relate effectively with others; to collaborate; to manage and settle disagreement and to act autonomously. These suggestions are supported by research by Lightfoot and Frost (2015) who advocate elements of professional development for early years practitioners should include peer support; membership of a setting-based group and access to external expertise that is related to school-based activity. Moreover, Boyd et al. (2015) suggest effective professional development incorporates visiting external specialists who can offer their expertise and knowledge. They further advise that school leaders should create conditions for professional learning and change to support teachers' opportunity to develop or reframe personal values regarding their professional role.

3.4.4 Use of technology in professional development

Professional development is contingent on the cultural and socio-economic situation of the time (Campbell et al. 2004). Fenwick (2018) suggests that delivery of professional knowledge and expertise in professional development is subject to change through the use of technology resources, such as smart devices. The rapid development of digital technology in the twenty-first century, which was considered in Chapter 1, has facilitated professional communication through social media channels and the dissemination of professional literature via the internet, such as the 'What Works Network' (WWN) education resources. The availability of webinars by experts in areas of early years practice or TED talks on YouTube are further examples of how technology can influence forms and content of professional development activity. Digital technology is transforming pedagogical approaches to learning; Robinson (2016: 65) refers to its impact on both 'the way students learn and the means by which they do it' and suggests it facilitates 'new partnerships between students, teachers and professionals in many other fields'. One concern is the volume of resources that are available, which can be challenging to navigate; Nerland (2018: 243) advises that practitioners require 'active sense-making and analytical skills' to enable these resources to be discerned and understood. However, overall,

technology offers a promising and pragmatic means of enabling early years teachers' access to professional advice and support (Gomez et al. 2015).

3.4.5 'Professionalism' and 'professionality'

Citing Hoyle's (1975) distinction between 'professionalism' and 'professionality', Waring and Evans (2015: 2-3) explain professionalism comprises status-related aspects of teachers' roles, whereas professionality encompasses the knowledge, skills and processes that teachers use in their work; the former term can be conceptualised as 'being a professional' and the latter as 'behaving professionally'. Teachers' enactment of their professional role is influenced by different circumstances, such as their training, their own experiences of learning and their view of themselves as professionals in their school community or in the wider context of government policy (Waring and Evans 2015).

Professional identity involves the interaction between the teacher as a person and as a professional; in their study of professional identity tensions experienced by beginning teachers, Pillen et al. (2013) found almost all participating teachers experienced identity tensions that were generally associated with negative feelings, such as feelings of insecurity. Mentors or teacher educators can support beginning teachers to develop their professional identity by making identity tensions more visible and overt, which would help them to manage these tensions more effectively; for instance, students could explore case studies and be supported to relate these to their own professional identity progression (ibid.).

3.4.6 Values

Central values that underpin teachers' moral obligations as a professional include a 'respect for and belief in their pupils' and their 'commitment to reducing inequality and challenging injustice both in and through education' Menter (2010: 26). This latter commitment can be associated with early years policy initiatives, such as the introduction of early years pupil premium funding from 2015 for eligible children aged three and four years that aims to enhance their educational attainment (Powell 2019). Values and attitudes emanating from an external context regarding issues such as inequality can influence the practitioner and their 'own inner qualities and professional drives'; therefore, development of 'inner expertise cannot be divorced from the nature of the outer context' (Dadds 2001: 55).

Competing sets of values that affect a teacher's decision-making in their professional practice can be categorised as their individual personal values, their professional values, and the values of their workplace and wider community, which may vary within the community (Forde et al. 2006). Teachers' opportunity to develop personal values is considered to have been compromised by an increasing focus in professional development on the achievement of particular competencies instead of critical engagement with them, which could affect how teachers might question and evaluate pedagogical approaches to practice that are endorsed by government (Waite 2011). This has meant that teacher education has 'been steered away from a more intellectual engagement with teaching, school and society' (Biesta et al. 2015: 638).

However, Forde et al. (2006) advise against a model of the teacher as someone who is in regular disagreement with their institution; rather, they could have a more central role in determining the aims, policies and development of their workplace. Teacher education could support this process through professional development that helps teachers develop negotiating skills and 'become the teachers they envision' in the complex environment of professional practice (Fairbanks et al. 2010: 168). Early years teachers' professional development could facilitate the development of negotiation skills to support their reciprocal interactions with others about aims and values in the workplace and explore contextual factors that affect how values are shaped; this could enhance mutual understanding about the setting's values and how these can be implemented in practice. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model as a framework for this research helps to highlight the importance of reciprocal interactions to support development. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 2, Bronfenbrenner considered interactions need to occur regularly and be sustained over a period of time in order to become more complex (Ashiabi and Neal 2015). This suggests that professional development opportunities that aim to promote the efficacy of teacher's reciprocal interactions with others need to be similarly sustained across broad dimensions of practice.

3.4.7 Teacher learning

In considering professional learning, it is important to take account of literature that points to the complexities of teaching in the 21st century, as discussed previously in this work. The role of the teacher has broadened in scope and is subject to a shifting policy and practice environment in which it is performed (Edwards and Daniels,

2012). Nerland (2018) suggests relations between government, different professionals and their service-users are changing, which challenges traditional notions of professionals as experts in their field. Elements of the complexities of teaching are indicated by Doyle (1980, cited in McIntyre 2005: 360); these are:

- *multidimensionality, the many different kinds of things with which teachers constantly have to concern themselves;*
- *simultaneity, the need to deal with these different things all at the same time;*
- *immediacy, the need to deal immediately with most of the issues that arise;*
- *unpredictability, never knowing with confidence what will happen next;*
- *publicness, the fact that almost everything one does, and its consequences, are in full view of some thirty observant pupils;*
- *history, the fact that what is done on any one occasion will be interpreted in the light of previous events and will have repercussions in the future.*

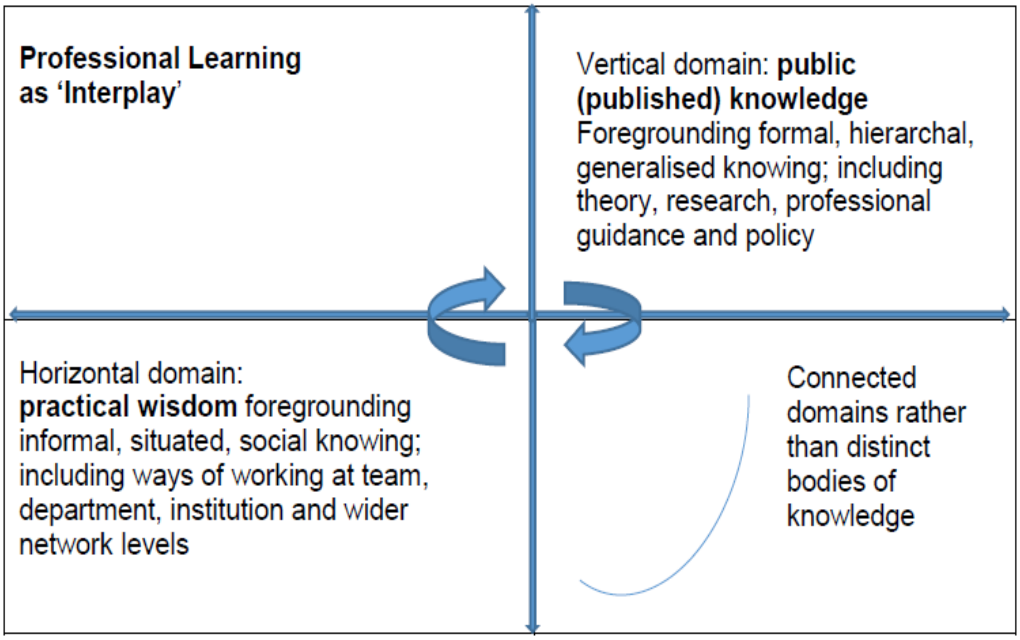
The above elements suggest the relevance of an enquiry-based approach to support teachers' learning, which is viewed as an effective form of professional development (Boyd et al. 2015). Flexible approaches to individual or collective enquiry enable teachers to explore complex issues, such as the unpredictability of teaching and promote 'sense-making to deal with the unexpected' (Forde et al. 2006: 168). Contesting transmission approaches to professional development, Nuttall and Edwards (2009: 132) advise that professional development should attend to the 'lived experience of teaching and learning' and recognise teachers' expertise and experience.

The notion of teachers' 'lived experience' is incorporated into a metaphorical framework for teacher learning by Boyd et al. (2015: 15), which is shown in Figure 3.14; in this model, professional learning is seen as 'interplay' between a horizontal domain of teachers' practical wisdom and a vertical domain of public knowledge. The former domain relates to teachers' local situated knowledge and practical 'ways of knowing'; this is represented horizontally, as teachers' knowledge changes as they move to another context and work collaboratively in different teams. The latter domain focuses on public knowledge, which consists of published literature, professional guidance frameworks and policy documents. This knowledge domain is vertical, as it is ordered hierarchically through peer review processes and gains status through publication in particular journals or by other authors' citations.

Boyd et al. (2015: 15) suggest these vertical and horizontal domains are not separate bodies of knowledge but should be seen as 'two dimensions of teacher knowing'.

Both dimensions also incorporate aspects of each other; theoretical writing will make some reference to practice examples and, equally, practitioners incorporate theory into the practice context when undertaking their professional role.

Figure 3.14 Teacher professional learning as interplay between practical wisdom and public knowledge (adapted from Boyd et al 2015: 15)



This model is helpful in representing the interconnectedness of professional learning. It also highlights the social and situated aspects of professional learning that were explored previously in the chapter through consideration of 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998), which offer a professional learning environment that is co-created by its participants (Boylan et al. 2018). Within the community of practice, members share their ideas and engage in social interaction; Schechter (2020: 4) indicates the four main characteristics of a professional learning community are:

1) *Collective learning, consisting of reflective dialogue…where teachers reflect on practices and examine tacit assumptions about teaching and learning*
2) *De-privatisation of practice, where teachers provide feedback through networks of professional interactions and share knowledge*
3) *Peer collaboration, where teachers collaborate on projects that focus on professional reform and improvement initiatives*

4) *Shared leadership and facilitative-supportive actions on the part of the leader and administration*

These characteristics demonstrate ways in which teachers can engage in reciprocal interactions with colleagues to support their own and others' learning. A focus on social interaction in professional learning communities further illustrates the relevance of applying Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model to this work, as it highlights the significance of reciprocal interactions to support human development.

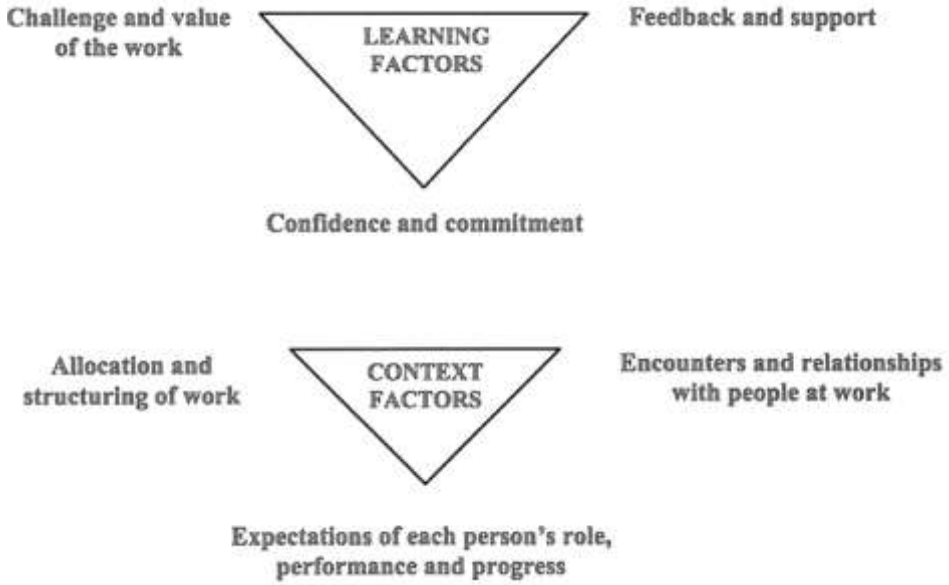
3.4.8 Professional confidence

One of the issues affecting teachers' responses to policy initiatives is their level of 'professional confidence'. This is largely dependent on contextual and cultural factors; such as being required to be compliant rather than creative, the extent and quality of support that they can access in the workplace and beyond or the volume of their workload (Helsby 1999). A focus on school failure is likely to generate an environment where fear prevails, risk-taking is deterred and professional judgement is supplanted by a 'tick-box culture' (The Sutton Trust 2015: 9). However, teachers should feel assured to take appropriate risks, as these might engender creative and excellent provision for children, rather than embrace a false sense of security 'that all ticks have been marked against a list of their competencies' (Andrews and Edwards 2008: 5).

Teachers who feel professionally confident have a firm belief in their capacity and their authority to take decisions about their pedagogical approach (Helsby 1999). This capacity enables them to focus on solving the problem in hand by exercising their professional judgement; moreover, professional confidence enables the teacher to feel they are managing tasks rather than being overwhelmed by them (ibid). The need for professional confidence for engaging in integrated working is considered by Nutbrown (2012: 3); she suggests early years practitioners should be continuously developing their knowledge, understanding and skills and need to feel 'confident in their own practice and in engaging with other professionals, such as health visitors and social workers'. Application of professional confidence and decision-making can be supported by the practitioner's understanding about 'forms of knowledge [that] are non-negotiable and which are discretional' (Campbell-Barr 2019: 48), as this would help to inform them about the appropriateness of actions and decisions in particular contexts.

Eraut (2004: 269) proposes there is ‘a triangular relationship between challenge, support and confidence’. From his research of workplace learning of professionals, technicians and managers, Eraut indicates that a worker’s confidence develops from effectively meeting challenges in practice, while having confidence to confront challenges is dependent on whether the worker feels supported in undertaking a challenge. If there is neither challenge nor support, then there is a depreciation in confidence and motivation to learn.

Figure 3.15 Factors affecting learning in the workplace (Eraut 2004: 269)



Eraut (2004: 269) depicts this view in a model shown in Figure 3.15; this model includes a second triangle which focuses on broader contextual issues. Eraut explains that for both triangles in the model, the left apex correlates to the task in hand; the right apex to the relationships at work and the lowest apex relates to the worker. The model indicates the importance for professionals to encounter both challenge and support, which enables them to build confidence and continue to seek learning opportunities. While confidence is important to managing challenges in the workplace, however, Eraut (2004) advises that complex situations should not be over-simplified and positioned as easily soluble in government or workplace discourse, as this suggests they can be readily managed following standardised training experiences.

3.4.9 Reflective practice

Reflective practice is recognised as an essential aspect of teacher learning; reflection can be understood to be 'active consideration leading to inferences that cause change in beliefs and practice' (Boylan et al 2018: 125). Reflection supports early years practitioners to gain understanding about their own actions and be responsive to engagement with others; this, in turn, enables new meanings to be created that extend 'narrow definitions of competence or imposed views of professionalism' (Cable and Miller 2011: 158). Moreover, early years staff should participate in critical reflection to ensure the nature of their professional practice is communicated by themselves and their colleagues to others, as this would support the recognition and value of the various dimensions of quality early years practice (Goodfellow 2004).

Reflection is considered to be a social activity by Zeichner and Tabachnick (2001: 83); they explain that reflection:

> *looks back at social interactions and tries to make sense of them in order to plan for future teaching, or it looks forward to social interactions of teaching and learning that have not yet taken place and attempts to shape these, or reflective teaching is within the process of teaching and learning, in which ideas and behaviour interact to shape one another. Meanings for the results of teaching and learning are grounded in and confirmed by social relations within a particular social context.*

The view of reflection as a social endeavour points to the importance of the focus on reciprocal interactions as the main element of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model and the interplay between reciprocal interactions and the other elements in the model; for example, the social context that Zeichner and Tabachnick refer to in the above reference.

3.4.10 Teacher knowledge

The literature on early years professional practice emphasises the importance of having well-qualified staff at graduate level to lead provision of young children's education and care; for instance, the findings from the EPPE research project that were discussed in Chapter 1 suggest children made more progress at settings whose staff had higher education qualifications (Sammons 2010). Research indicates the 'high levels of skill, sophisticated levels of operation and emotional and attitudinal competence demanded of practitioners' in early years settings (Wood et al.

2017: 116); this supports Tickell's (2011) view that early years practitioners need suitable knowledge and expertise to ensure they are making clear and apposite judgements. Mathers et al. (2014) endorse the perspectives noted above; their report on early years provision for children under three years, advises that quality provision is supported by sound attributes and pedagogical approaches of setting leaders and advocates that early years practitioners should have expert knowledge of child development theory, access to professional development and have opportunities to reflect and adapt their practice. However, teacher's development of practice will be limited if they are simply viewed 'as technicians and implementers of purely technical knowledge' (Sachs 2016: 391).

Likely effectual approaches to professional learning and development are those 'that marry the introduction of new knowledge with opportunities for reflection and scaffolded interaction through facilitated workshops and coaching' (Rogers et al. (2020: 181). Individualised and ongoing coaching support could facilitate teachers to embrace and sustain practices that promote the child's learning and development (Gardner-Neblett et al. 2020). These views relate to findings about the use of coaching reported by Lofthouse et al. (2016) that were considered previously in the chapter. Rogers et al. (2020: 181) found little consensus about the duration of coaching experiences; however, it was 'the type and quality of interaction between coaches and practitioners that becomes a deciding factor in efficacy of coaching'.

This emphasis on the quality of interactions between practitioner and coach provides further support for the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model as a theoretical framing for this work. For instance, in respect of the example above, the PPCT model helps to extend knowledge about coaching as a strategy to support effective practice by drawing attention to influential aspects concerning *how* coaching is applied in practice. This is important to consider as 'knowledge is not 'out there', disembodied from early years professionals, but grounded in the social interactions of the profession' (Campbell-Barr 2019: 47).

Consideration of teacher knowledge in this section of the chapter is supported by drawing on the framing of the separate but interrelated elements of the PPCT model. The model helps to illustrate how knowledge of an aspect of the teacher's role is not sufficient in itself; it is also necessary to 'know-how' to apply and evaluate knowledge and 'understand the reach and power of that knowledge' to meet the

challenges of early years practice; (Campbell-Barr 2019: 63). For example, acquiring knowledge about children's transitions in terms of processes and policy is helpful but could be extended further by exploring the influential elements of the PPCT model, such as the interactions between key actors and the characteristics of the people involved in the transition, by the contexts in which the transition occurs and by the timing of the transition and age of the child.

3.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have considered literature on integrated working and how it is enacted in early years practice and I have explored how practitioners can be supported through interprofessional education opportunities. I have also discussed the subject of professional development and looked at professional confidence, teacher learning, and teacher knowledge.

The literature indicates the importance of the early years teacher's collaborative practice and reciprocal interactions with children, parents, colleagues and other professionals to co-construct knowledge and make decisions that shape the child's learning experience (Forde et al. 2006). Through these relationships, professionals develop an attachment and sense of responsibility towards achieving agreed goals rather than feeling they have an obligation to do so (Siraj–Blatchford and Manni 2012). Collaborative relationships also enable teachers to learn together and test out ideas and practice (Forde et al. 2006).

I have found much consensus in the literature on the complexity of integrated working and the wider policy and practice environment for early years practice. There is broad support for integrated working as a positive approach to support children and families but there are gaps in the literature on how early years teachers can be effectively supported to enact integrated working. In particular, the review has identified the following factors that inform the aims of the project in terms of integrated working:

- Children's early years are a crucial stage in their lives. Early years teachers have a significant role in supporting their holistic development
- Integrated working enables children and families to benefit from the expertise of professionals working together to support children's particular needs and promote their positive outcomes. However, there is inconsistency in integrated working

policy and practice and it is context specific; this variation in integrated working affects both effective implementation and evaluation of policy initiatives.

- There is a need for further understanding of service-users' and service-providers' 'lived experience' of integrated working so that policy initiatives are informed by real experiences from practice.

Overall, the literature on professional development suggests that early years teachers:

- should have access to relevant and appropriate forms of professional development that help them to manage the complexities of their role
- need to be appropriately supported in the workplace and by wider policy initiatives and discourse to effectively engage in integrated practice
- require a broad range of knowledge and skills, including knowledge of child development
- need professional development opportunities that are relevant to the specific contexts in which they work that further their learning so they can manage the complexities of practice in the 21st century
- have opportunities that should be available throughout their career (Gomez et al. 2015)
- require particular skills to support their engagement in integrated working, including the need to maintain a child-centred approach, utilise effective communication skills and develop their capacity to apply 'sense-making' and professional judgement from a confident stance to address complex issues in practice
- benefit from opportunities from supportive working environments that enable them to engage in research and critically review policy initiatives
- be encouraged to try new pedagogical approaches and be responsive to new initiatives that seek to enhance children's outcomes.
- require further clarity on different terms used for integrated working, which have the potential to cause confusion, make access to research on the subject more complicated and create difficulties when making comparisons between different studies (Atkinson et al. 2007).

The discussion on the literature has been supported by applying Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model as theoretical framing for the chapter. While I have drawn on different theoretical models in this chapter, the literature cited in the discussion on reciprocal

interactions resonates with Bronfenbrenner's view of reciprocal interactions as the main element of the PPCT model to support human development.

Chapter 4: Research Designing

4.1 Introduction

Having critically reflected on the research context and reviewed relevant literature on the subject, I then considered the research design for the project. My deliberation on the interplay between the four dimensions of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006) that was discussed in Chapter 2, supported my thinking about influential factors on the research design for the project, which are shown in Figure 4.1. These influences and associated ethical considerations relating to the research design are discussed in this chapter.

Figure 4.1 Influential factors on research design

4.2 Influential factors on the choice of research design

4.2.1 Context

When reflecting on my personal experience in education, I had deliberated on my previous transition from teaching young children in school to teaching adults on professional programmes in Higher Education (HE). Reflection on this experience was supported by Britt and Sumsion's metaphor of 'border crossing' (2003:118) to

conceptualise transition across professional knowledge landscapes. This helped to elucidate the importance of immersion in new knowledge and integrating it with my existing knowledge, increasing my perspectives on mode 1 and mode 2 knowledge (Maxwell 2019) and the necessary dialogue between them. It also provoked my thinking about ways in which practitioners can be encouraged to engage with the perspectives of others and explore ideas about issues that are both immediate to their role and those which are tangential at the time but may become more central, depending on the context. An example of this would be my participation in a group task to moderate a sample of students' work, which occurred at an early stage of my move to HE and had a direct purpose of supporting my understanding of the moderation process. My engagement in the task was supported by participants' respectful dialogue that engenders a sense of shared authority where each person contributes their ideas, while also gaining from the collegial interaction (Ashwin et al. 2015). Reflecting on this experience prompted me to think that it would be useful to explore contextual aspects of professional learning further in the research, which involve 'the negotiation of meaning and significance' in social settings that each have 'unique characteristics' (Trowler and Knight 2000: 38).

My reflection on the professional context of early years education, which was discussed in Chapter 1, highlighted implications of a shifting policy agenda in practice and increased focus on the perceived potential of early years provision to support the attainment of a range of wider social policy objectives, such as reduced levels of poverty and unemployment (Vandenbroeck et al. 2012). I considered how policy initiatives and increased accountability measures in practice had fostered a revised perception of the status of the teacher from one of 'autonomous professional' towards a view of 'teacher as technician', who is charged with securing predetermined measures of children's attainment (Bates et al. 2011) and is 'judged and evaluated by external criteria set for, not by the teachers themselves' (Jovanovic and Fane 2016: 149).

This goal-oriented perspective of education has the potential to generate tensions for practitioners if they consider actions that are intended to comply with policy objectives conflict with their own perception of teaching 'as an act of caring-for students [that] addresses their educational needs – their developing intellectual, moral, psychological and emotional concerns' (Nguyen 2016: 291). My reflection on Grigg's account of teaching a phonics session in nursery provision (Brown and Grigg 2017: 339), which was discussed in Chapter 1, highlighted that critical reflection on practice elicits thinking about policy objectives for educational provision that can be at

variance with practitioners' own perspectives of their professional role and their personal values about education and its purpose (Brew 2006). This variance is exemplified by Palaiologou (2016) who undertook a collaborative research project with early years practitioners to explore how assessment could be more meaningful and effective, as they were concerned about use of standardised assessment processes to meet government requirements. When reporting this research, Palaiologou (2016: 1261) suggests that use of such assessment measures in practice can also impact on young children's developing view of what counts as valid forms of their learning:

> *early childhood environments that focus only on learning and standardized, school readiness-driven assessment become places where children learn to look to authority figures and experts for answers, therefore, and come to recognize only a certain set of 'knowledges' as legitimate.*

Furthermore, at the time of the research, tensions existed regarding proposals for national Baseline assessment of children at the start of their Reception year. Baseline was intended to be used as a value-added measure of children's progress in English and maths across their seven years in Primary school by comparing data from children's Baseline assessment with data from their Key Stage 2 SATs that are undertaken in their final year of Primary school.

The process of Baseline assessment has been widely contested by teachers, parents and early years organisations who feel it is inappropriate both as an assessment tool and as a school accountability measure (Bradbury 2019). A major concern is that it condenses the complexity of young children's learning to a simple numerical score (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury 2017). As an assessment that could be described as 'light on description and heavy on comparison' (Robinson 2016: 171), Baseline is considered to lie in sharp contrast to the form of assessment that utilises practitioners' professional judgement to gather data, acknowledges contextual aspects of the assessment process and is used to inform children's provision (Goldstein et al. 2018).

From research undertaken in 2015 on early years teachers' experience of a trial introduction of Baseline, Bradbury (2019: 825) argues that early years teachers perceived their interaction with Baseline as 'an affront to the values and professional principles of early years pedagogy' due to its form and purpose. These teachers' views illustrate how a policy initiative can be a source of tension for early years practitioners, as it challenges their 'ecologies of practice' (Stronach et al. 2002: 122),

which encompass their 'experience, 'child-centred' principles and beliefs about what constitutes 'good practice'. From my reflection on professional contexts, I thought it would be pertinent to include attention to the issue of contested values about practice in the research and ask questions about how early years teachers might be supported to manage potential challenges they may face in practice.

4.2.2 Literature

When reviewing literature on early years policy initiatives, I reflected further on how practitioners comprehend and manage expectations communicated in early years policy initiatives about children's outcomes that they 'are supposed to deal with and live up to' (Kampann 2013: 3). Considering Hopkins' (2001) view that policy makers' strategies for improvement also need to connect with an understanding of the realities of teachers' practice, I considered how perspectives on policy drawn from 'realities of teachers' practice' could provide insight about how practitioners understand and enact policy objectives in varied contexts of practice. This is important to consider, as teachers' engagement in research enables valuable knowledge to be generated from the practice context (Dana and Yendol-Hoppey 2014). Moreover, incorporating teachers' perspectives on their lived experience of practice in the research supports an inclusive approach to the process and acknowledges them as valid contributors to practice and policy development and 'not just the passive receptacles of policy' (Ozga 2000: 7).

According to Van Manen (1990: 155), a 'rich dimension' drawn from practitioners' perspectives is essential for research:

> *Pedagogic situations are always unique. And so, what we need more of is theory not consisting of generalisations, which we then have difficulty applying to concrete and ever-changing circumstances, but theory of the unique; this is theory eminently suitable to deal with this particular pedagogic situation, this school, that child…we can move toward theory of the unique by strengthening the intimacy of the relationship between research and life.*

One research study in particular (Dalli 2011), which was cited in Chapter 1, provided a useful model resulting from a study that had explored practitioners' perspectives on professionalism in early years practice in New Zealand. Dalli (2011: 171) argues that the views of teachers on the meaning of professionalism in early years practice 'can contribute a 'ground-up' perspective that can enable the concept of professionalism to be reconceptualised in ways that reflect the reality of teachers' work experiences'. This research enabled practitioners to posit a view of the

reality of professional practice as they experienced it in their everyday work in the early years sector, which Dalli (2011: 183) conceptualises as 'vibrant and complex'. Interestingly, Dalli also notes that 'teachers had very clear views about the behaviours, attitudes and skills that a professional teacher would use in response to this context'; moreover, the practitioners were 'clear about behaviours and attitudes that were unprofessional' (ibid). From publication of Dalli's (2011) research, practitioner views are disseminated to wider audiences and serve to reconceptualise the concept of early years professionalism; new meanings of the term emerge, which are shared with 'readers from different practice communities, situated in different socio-cultural settings' (Hoveid and Hoveid 2007: 51). As Dalli (2011: 183) explains, this is important because meanings derived from the reality of respondents' experience add 'a rich dimension' to prior scholarly work on early years professionalism, which had previously 'tended to 'express expectations' about practitioners rather than express their professional reality'. This view indicates that research has the potential to not only enrich concepts of early years professionalism but also shift 'taken for granted' perspectives in different directions.

Dalli's research has influenced my thinking about the research design. Firstly, based on much smaller-scale research, I have previously drawn on 'ground-up' perspectives of professional behaviour from practitioners who were based in a large children's centre (CC) when co-authoring 'Supporting Pedagogy and Practice in early years settings' (Allen and Whalley 2010). The practitioners in the CC had developed a professional 'code of conduct' that had been agreed by all staff members; this was comprised of four factors that included both positive and negative qualities of practice. The code provided a valuable example of qualities of professional practice for the book's intended audience; its publication also served to acknowledge the practitioners' voice in self-determining realistic qualities of professional behavoiur that were relevant for the context in which they worked. The code was not intended as a template to be adopted by readers; however, they were encouraged to use the example to prompt their own perspectives about positive and negative qualities of practice and the likely impact of these qualities on the setting community in which they operated. Secondly, I had the opportunity of meeting Dalli during her visit to the UK in October 2015 and hear her talk about 'Discourses of early childhood professionalism in New Zealand', which was an inspiring experience and led me to look further at her work. Therefore, reference to her example of research in

this work is influenced by this positive encounter, as well as my view of the quality of her research and its insightful perspectives of early years professionalism.

My review of literature on integrated working in early years practice provided key insights on the subject. Exploration of policy revealed significant shifts in key policies relating to integrated approaches to supporting young children's development. Moreover, research highlighted that integrated working is a complex activity (Barnes et al. 2018) and there is inconsistency in its implementation in practice (Nutbrown 2018). The literature guided me to consider how early years teachers adapt to dynamic contexts of practice and how support structures might facilitate their work in this field. For example, the ELEYS study identified leaders' ability to engage with shifting contexts of practice and their provision of respectful support and professional learning opportunities for staff as features of effective leadership of early years practice (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007). The study also noted leaders' promotion of effective communication with and between staff fostered the development of a shared vision of the setting's practices, policies and procedures and promoted a consistent approach by staff in their work with children and families (ibid). Effective communication was also highlighted in a study of a relationship-based early intervention (EI) service for children with complex needs in New Zealand; practitioners at the setting noted 'the importance of an interdisciplinary approach which was underpinned by effective and regular communication between professionals and between professionals and families' (Blackburn 2016: 337).

From my reflection on perspectives of integrated working from prior literature on the subject, I thought it would be helpful to explore ways in which teachers' preparedness to manage complexity and inconsistency in practice could be incorporated into the research design. For example, I could explore views about how to support teachers' perception and interpretation of learning contexts and associated decision-making actions, which are important situational skills to be nurtured (Blomëke 2017). I reflected on how 'ground-up' practitioner perspectives in research contribute to knowledge production that can support practice and policy-making (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007; Dalli 2011; Blackburn 2016) and considered how practitioners' perspectives could offer useful insight on the research subject.

4.2.3 Purpose

Purpose is distinguished from aims as being the significant thing that one wants to contribute to but which a piece of research cannot do of itself. The purpose of this research is to contribute to knowledge and understanding about how early years teachers can be facilitated to engage in integrated working that seeks to support a child and their family. The aim of the research is to support its purpose by exploring the dynamics and complexities of integrated working policy and practice in order to design support mechanisms for early years teachers' practice.

The focus of this research could be perceived as an 'experiential puzzle', which is concerned with 'how the world is encountered or how 'lifeworlds' are lived', as I am 'seeking to explore how the world and experience are interconnected' (Mason 2018: 12). This is a helpful characterisation of the research, as its purpose is to 'puzzle out' ways in which early years teachers can be supported to engage in a complex area of practice. The concept of research as a puzzle is also considered by Hanks (2019: 169) who sees exploration of aspects of practice as 'puzzling', which Hanks relates to a Vygotskian approach to research. Hanks reconceives Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical view of the Zone of Proximal Development[9] (ZPD) as a 'puzzlement zone' that activates 'practitioner curiosity' (ibid.).

Approaching the research design in this way resonates with my reflection on my own experience of seeing how research was undertaken at the Pen Green Research, Development and Training Base in Corby, Northamptonshire. When working on the Early Year Professional Status programme, I undertook several visits to the Pen Green Centre for children and their families and its neighbouring research base where I engaged in discussions about research undertaken by early years practitioners at the centre who were regularly involved in researching aspects of everyday practice, such as the subject of parental engagement that was considered in the previous chapter.

In my own research, I am interested in finding out about the 'lifeworld' of the early years teacher and their involvement in integrated working, which aims to support

[9] Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical view of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) describes a range from where the learner could achieve independently at the lower end of the ZPD to what they could achieve at the higher end with the help and support of a more knowledgeable other (MKO) (Conkbayir and Pascal 2014).

children's development so seeing the research as a 'puzzlement zone' seems a fitting concept. I am intrigued by the research focus and wish to explore how support for early years teachers' integrated practice could be enhanced. I believe that teachers require professional support, 'which goes beyond conveying content or pedagogic knowledge', as they undertake 'complex cognitive and affective aspects of their work' that aim to support children in their care (Hanks 2019: 174). While integrated working is a relatively novel area of practice, it occurs within a dynamic policy context and is subject to socio-political influence, as discussed previously. By gaining a better understanding of this shifting phenomenon, I can then apply this knowledge to my own practice and contribute to broader professional knowledge on the subject. In this way, I aim to act as an agent for positive change (Mellors-Bourne et al. 2016). I recognised that a single study will not shift thinking in the subject but a volume of smaller studies that explore lifeworlds can be more significant. My research design needs to recognise the work of other researchers and draw on them for ideas and approaches to the research process.

4.2.4 Positionality

Positionality is our shaping, it is our ontology: how we come to be who we are, which informs how we view and act in and on the world and what we accept as reality and its genesis. I appreciate as a practitioner, and as someone carrying out practitioner research, I am putting myself in a position to potentially shape my own views and those of others to bring about improvement. I am an agent for change and my responsibility as a researcher is to be transparent about my positionality; my actions are 'rooted in a responsibility to the common good' (Edwards 2002: 159). I have familiarity with the context through several years of accumulative knowledge and experience, which I recognise can inhibit my objective thinking about the research process (Wilson 2017). As an education professional, I am an 'insider' practitioner researcher; as discussed in Chapter 1; I bring a set of assumptions to this project that are derived from my knowledge and experience of professional work in early years education, which are of an epistemological and ontological kind (Cohen and Manion, 1994***).*** I needed to challenge my assumptions about integrated working and be open to diverse forms of practice within early years provision.

I also needed to consider how my epistemological and ontological stance might impact on my actions during the process of the research. Zemblyas (2006) emphasises the significant influence of social and cultural practices, including the use of language. It was pertinent to consider potential influences on my 'being' or 'what I

do' and reflect on how my actions might impact on others who are involved in the research process. For instance, how I communicate with research participants; how they might perceive my use of language on the subject, and how their perceptions of me and my role may influence their response. These issues have direct relevance not only to the process of the research itself but also to the nature of the research focus, as it concerns social practice.

This consideration involves me being cognisant about all potential influences of and on the research and critically looking at my own role in the process (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). I appreciated the need to maintain a reflexive stance regarding my positionality in the research by clearly identifying myself as a practitioner researcher and by remaining close to related ethical considerations for the research. This stance relates to supporting 'the quality and validity the research and recognising the limitations of the knowledge that is produced' (Guillemin and Gillam 2004: 275).

O'Toole and Beckett (2013: 155) offer further support with maintaining an objective stance to the research; they provide questions to support the researcher to maintain a level of objectivity and distance from the research. These questions, which are shown in Figure 4.2, supported my engagement in reflexive practice during the research.

Figure 4.2 Questions for researchers to support their objectivity (adapted from O'Toole and Beckett 2013: 155)

Credibility	Is the research credible in its context?
Resonance	How does the research resonate with the context itself, with other research in the area, with what is already known?
Plausibility	What is there in the analysis of the research that will enable others to believe it?
Transferability	Who else might find the research useful and will its results have any currency beyond the end of the project?

4.2.5 Participants: feasibility and accessibility

An exploration of feasibility and accessibility of likely participants for the research is a sensible approach to designing and planning research to confirm whether the research aim has a good chance of being achieved. In my university role, I work with

practitioners and see myself as a bridge between theory, policy and practice. I support qualitative research in education studies, which legitimises the voice of practitioners and, at the same time, I encourage in myself and others attention to academic discourses and the tension there may be between evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence.

Practice is part of the dynamic of research. I believe insights from those who work every day in the practice can both challenge and enrich academic discourses and these discourses can contextualise and validate insights from practice through the accumulation of diverse research. From reflection on Bronfenbrenner's PPCT theory, I agree with Brown and Rogers (2015: 80) that it is unlikely:

> *that evidence will ever inform practice in a 'pure' form: i.e. that acts of practice will be instigated and will follow exactly what was intended by the researcher. Instead evidence must conjoin with contextual and other practice related factors and any decision made will be a function of all of these.*

In keeping with Haydn (2014: 456), I considered the contribution to the project of 'professional voice', which attempts 'to gain greater insight into educational situations, issues and problems by eliciting the views of experienced professionals'. Without such strong attention to practitioners who have experience of integrated working in early years practice, I am excluding vital players in the dynamic.

I considered the use of questionnaires, as these are widely used as a method of collecting data that can be obtained from participants' responses to questions set by the researcher (Denscombe, 2003). They allow a large number of people to be reached; additionally, questions are standardised and can be written for a particular purpose (Opie 2019b). However, there is no opportunity for the researcher to pursue a discussion with the participant and validity can be a concern, as the researcher cannot check the 'veracity or the reliability of the informants' (O'Toole and Beckett, 2013: 136). Rather than simply discounting questionnaires as a research tool, I piloted one with a colleague and then asked them about their experience of completing the questionnaire, as suggested by Lee (2009). They identified some questions that could be improved, which could have been quite easily rectified. However, from the overall response, it was evident that a questionnaire would not be an appropriate form of data collection to use for the research. Questionnaires are generally not effective at enabling the researcher to gain a depth of response from participants; open-ended questions could be used in a questionnaire to try to gain explanations for particular findings that give the research 'its richness and value' but

‘often fail to do so’ because interviewees may not be willing or lack confidence in expressing their ‘views, thoughts or feelings on paper’ (Opie 2019b: 169). I recognised that ‘our knowledge, opinions and attitudes are shaped by our engagement in dialogue’ (Mercer 2000: 78). I needed to gain pertinent knowledge about how a dynamic policy agenda is understood and implemented in everyday practice, which would enable me to grasp a ‘deeper understanding of both action and context’ to support the realisation of the project aim (Radnor 2001: 4).

Overall, the feasibility of using interviews to converse with practitioners about the research focus seemed an optimal approach and I became clearer that the research would involve the use of in-depth interviews, as they would allow exploration of the views of experienced practitioners who had an understanding of the complexity of the research focus. In-depth interviews are ‘loosely structured’ and ‘can evolve according to the interviewer’s take on the interviewee’s response’ (Newby 2010: 343). This would enable me to have some guiding questions that would provide shape for the interviews, while also allowing flexibility for issues to be explored in greater depth by offering scope for interviewees to express themselves freely. This approach would also enable me to follow up on interesting points raised by participants, which I may not have previously considered (Flick, 2018). As a method of data collection, interviews are ‘particularly good at exploring feelings and beliefs’ or ‘obtaining a rich understanding’ of an issue (Newby 2010: 343), which was appropriate for the research.

After considering the influences discussed above, I decided on the following key design features:

1 I sought to comprehend participants’ experience through quality engagement in in-depth interviews (Seidman 1998). Therefore, I decided to frame the research as a qualitative interview study, which is based on ‘interviews that sacrifice uniformity of questioning to achieve a fuller development of information’ (Weiss 1995: 11) and planned to use interpretative analysis of the interviews.
2 My target participants would be practitioners who had knowledge and experience of integrated working in early years practice in private, voluntary and independent (PVI) or maintained early years provision and had Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) or Early Years Professional Status

(EYPS)[10]. I also decided that target participants should have some knowledge and experience of supporting either initial or post-qualifying early years teacher development, as discussed in Chapter 1.

3 Target participants would be sent an invitation to participate and consent form that explained the reason for my invitation and what I requested them to do, as approved through the university research ethics application process.

I recognised that my position as a university tutor on professional programmes would enable accessibility to interview suitable research participants. Additionally, I had an understanding of practitioners' professional protocols, which are important practical and ethical considerations, though I also needed to consider their working lives and how their situatedness might influence the design.

I do not see knowledge as 'fixed and objective' or believe there was 'one answer to be learnt but several to be suggested, as we each view and construct the world differently' (Cotton 2013: 19). In assuming this approach, I 'did not seek generalizability' but rather sought a quality of engagement and a 'depth of understanding' that can inform early years teachers' preparedness for integrating working practice, and provide insights that enhance wider knowledge of the field (King et al. 2017: 8). Further details of the research approach and participants are considered in the following chapter.

4.2.6 Ethical Considerations

My consideration of the research design involved a close look at ethical issues relating to the project. As Brooks et al. (2014: 155) advise, the significance of the researcher's critical reflection at the start of the process on what is 'ethically justifiable or indeed practically possible' are important issues for the researcher when undertaking their ethical commitment throughout their research. I was guided in this process by referring to BERA's (2018) 'Ethical Guidelines for Education Research', to Middlesex University's guidance on ethical research practice and by engaging with other relevant literature on the subject. My knowledge of ethical issues in education research is drawn from my prior experience of research, both as a participant and as

[10] Practitioners who had gained EYPS were included, as existing Early Years Professionals had been 'recognised as the equivalent of Early Years Teachers' when EYTS was announced as a replacement for EYPS in 2013 (DfE 2013: 27).

a researcher; as a member of the University's Education Ethics sub-committee, and from my role as a tutor working with students who undertake practice-based research in their schools or early years settings.

As a practitioner researcher, my consideration of ethical issues is framed by my professional knowledge of ethical conduct about educational practice (Dana and Yendol-Hoppey 2014). As suggested by Maguire (2019: 103):

> *Research designing becomes the creative product of engagement with personal and professional integrity whether one is in the role of the scientist following an established script or in the role of the practitioner capturing experiential learning with multiple variables.*

While ethical considerations are fundamentally intrinsic to the research design, I also recognised that I should be attuned to ethical issues throughout the research project by maintaining a 'conscious mindset' towards these issues, rather than adhering to a 'strict procedure that one follows legalistically' (Fulton and Costley 2019: 77). I discuss ethical considerations further in the following chapter and elsewhere in the work.

4.3 Chapter outcomes

My reflection has supported the rigour and ethical direction of the research. Considering the interplay between the four dimensions of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, and the primacy of 'proximal processes' in this model, helped me to ascertain the suitability of the research design , which was to explore the dynamics of integrated working in order to suggest support mechanisms for early years teachers' practice. Moreover, conceptualising the research as an 'experiential puzzle', which is concerned with 'how 'lifeworlds' are lived' (Mason 2018: 12), helped me to consider the importance and legitimacy of 'practitioner voice'.

Overall, the factors I looked at helped to support my choice of a research design, including my preferences for:

1 qualitative interviews that could be interpreted
2 inclusion of participants who had suitable knowledge and experience of the research focus
3 an invitation for participants to take part in the research and be informed of its focus

From my consideration of the issues discussed in this chapter, I decided that framing the research as a qualitative interview study would be an optimal approach. This would enable opportunities for quality engagement with experienced practitioners that could engender their perspectives on the research focus and enable me to gain valuable insights on practice. I consider the subject of research participants further in the following chapter. While my understanding of the research context is supported by 'close connection with the professional sphere in which the research is undertaken' (Costley 2019: 29), I am aware of the dynamic context of early years practice and the necessity to remain alert and responsive to factors that could affect the research design. I appreciated that continuous attention is needed 'to methodological, ethical, and prudential principles, what they might mean in the particular circumstances faced, and how best to act in those circumstances as a researcher' (Hammersley and Traianou 2012: 7).

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has focused on research designing and considered how this was shaped through critical reflection on various influential factors and related ethical considerations. I have considered my positionality as a practitioner researcher and recognised that my responsibility for critical consideration of these factors helped me to appreciate different perspectives on areas of the research focus (Costley 2019). Research designing led to this research being framed as a qualitative interview study. In the next chapter, I present my research design and project activity in more detail.

Chapter 5: Research design, method, project activity and details

5.1 Introduction

This project is concerned with the complexity of integrated working in early years practice and seeks to explore how support for early years teachers' engagement in integrated working can be optimised. In this chapter, I discuss the research design, method, project activity and details that stemmed from the process of research designing that was discussed in Chapter 4. I also discuss further thoughts on ethical issues relating to the research process.

5.2 Research Design and method

From my deliberation on influential factors on the research design in the previous chapter, I had concluded that the research would be framed as a qualitative interview study. This was a suitable choice for the research, as it provides 'a density of information' and is useful 'for understanding the complexities of respondents' experiences' (Weiss 1995: 8). As discussed in Chapter 4, through undertaking in-depth interviews with participants, I sought to embrace practitioner perspectives on the research focus that would be derived from their individual knowledge and experience of professional practice. I wished to 'understand the details of people's experience from their point of view' through quality engagement with participants, and 'see how their individual experience interacts with powerful social and organisational forces that pervade the context in which they live and work' (Seidman 1998: 112). Following Costley (2019: 26), I considered knowledge gained from this engagement with participants could further the purpose of the research:

> *Knowledge produced in the context of application is at the same time conceiving knowledge as a means of advancing practice with utilitarian benefits and underpinning practice with critical discourse on existing knowledge.*

When I was considering participants for the research, I was very conscious of their busy schedules and recognised that the interviews should be arranged in the most convenient manner for participants. While focusing on the subject of interviewing, I stumbled across the 'walking interview' in the literature on interviewing and looked at all the benefits of this innovative research method, which is also known as a 'go along interview' (Carpiano 2009). I was not familiar with these terms in practitioner research and was intrigued to find out more and to take the opportunity to experiment with this method. The walking interview involves researchers walking and talking with a

participant, which enables the researcher to gain an understanding of people's experience and attitudes in their local context; interviewees are prompted by meanings and connections to the surrounding environment and are less likely to try and give the 'right' answer' (Evans and Jones 2011: 849).

One of the advantages of walking interviews is their capacity to see how space is used and understood by the participant; they allow 'the environment and the act of walking itself to move the collection of interview data in productive and sometimes entirely unexpected directions' (Jones et al. 2008: 8). In this way, a walking interview enables knowledge to be expressed in ways that could be missed during a sedentary interview; as Hiim (2007: 106) explains:

> *Involvement, sensitivity, and instinct are just as important as theoretical and intellectual reason. Knowledge is in our bodies, in our ways of looking, in the professional culture, and in the school culture. This means that teacher research requires variety in forms of expression.*

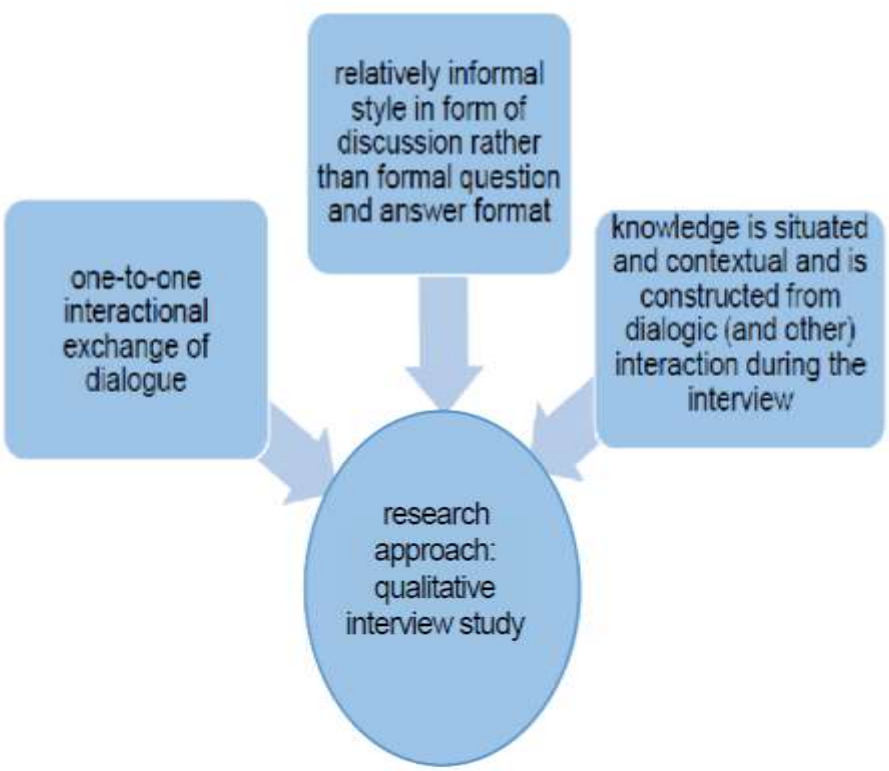
This view is supported by Mason (2018: 181) who advises that crucial aspects of 'ecological characters' can be missed if the researcher fails to see ways in which data and knowledge are being offered by creative aspects of the research process, such as a walking interview. It is important, however, to recognise that careful attention should be paid to any mobility issues, weather conditions and the environment in which the walking interview occurs (Duedahl and Blichfeldt 2020).

The form of conversation that can take place in a walking interview reminded me of tours of the school that I led for prospective parents or other visitors at schools where I worked. I reflected on that experience and recognised that I did not use a prepared script but would draw on the context of the people and activities that were situated within the physical surroundings that were encountered during the tour of the school to create contextualising knowledge for the visitors (Mercer 2000). These conversations would also involve talk about the school's policy and broader values, as I answered visitors' questions; therefore I was drawing on personal characteristics, ecological layers of practice and temporal factors during my reciprocal interactions with the visitors, as suggested by Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model. My reflection on these tour experiences prompted my receptiveness to the walking interview and, from further reading about this method, I decided to experiment with one walking interview as part of the research, as I was intrigued by this method.

At the same time, I was mindful that my engagement with participants and interpretation of their views would be influenced by my own professional experience and knowledge of the subject, as discussed in Chapter 4. As Gardner (2014: 42) explains, ‘we cannot completely separate the personal from the professional or the physical from the emotional and cultural. Who we are is embodied’. Concern about qualitative research calls for the researcher to exercise rigour and reflexivity to help maintain an objective approach to the research process to support the valid collection, interpretation and communication of participants’ data. I recognised that different results might be produced by others using the same approach and while I could not remove my ‘own way of seeing from the process’, I could ‘engage reflexively in the process’ (Radnor 2001: 31). Moreover, I could ‘expose the subjective reading I make [of my engagement with practitioners] and how this relates to specificities of time, space, [and] culture’ (Osgood 2010: 17).

Drawing on Mason’s view of core features of qualitative interviewing (2018: 110), the key aspects of the research design are represented in Figure 5.1.These are couched in ethical considerations that are discussed further in the chapter.

Figure 5.1 Key aspects of the research design and method (adapted from Mason 2018: 110)



5.3 Research participants

Having decided the research design and method, I sought ethical approval from Middlesex University to conduct the research and consent from the research participants. The research approach was underpinned by an ethos that practitioner views matter. I had determined that the research should involve experienced practitioners who had relevant knowledge and understanding of the project focus, as I acknowledged that 'certain categories of individuals may have a unique, different or important perspective on the phenomenon in question and their presence in the sample should be ensured' (Robinson 2014: 32).

Purposive sampling was used to select participants; these were practitioners that I knew or knew of professionally, which facilitated accessibility and ensured they met the criteria that I discussed in Chapter 4. I recognised that participants would have a similar professional background to my own experience so I would need to remain open to their perspectives and ensure my reporting of their contributions to our conversations accurately 'represents participants' realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them' to support the validity of the research (Creswell and Miller 2000: 124).

Participants were located within one London local authority (LLA) that had provision for integrated working. Children's services within the LLA included physical and mental health services, such as early years development checks, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). Other services included specialist nursery provision and social care services. Full details of LLA services are not included in the work, as titles of these services could enable identification of the LLA.

I originally planned to involve six practitioners who had professional status and had experience of working in private or maintained early years settings, as explained previously. However, during the course of the research, I was aware that it would be useful to also talk with practitioners who had more extensive experience of ITT or EYITT and/or post qualifying professional development for early years teachers. This would enable me to gain further insight about how they could be supported in managing challenges relating to integrated working, as this issue had emerged as a more significant area for the research. Therefore, I arranged interviews with three further participants who had substantial experience of initial or post qualifying professional development who could offer further insight on this issue. Details of the research participants are listed in Figure 5.2; further details are not provided, as these were considered to enable participants' identification. The letter 'P' was used to denote all participants, followed by a unique numeral that was assigned to each participant contributing to the research. These symbols were used to protect their identities, while also allowing reference to be made to contributions by individual participants in the work.

Figure 5.2 Details of research participants (P)

In-depth interviews			
Name	**Status**	**Role in practice**	**Role in professional development (PD)**
P1	QTS/EYPS	manager: private nursery provision	EYITT
P2	QTS/EYPS	manager: private nursery provision	EYITT
P3	EYPS	manager: private nursery provision	EYITT
P4	QTS	early years teacher: maintained provision	QTS

P5	QTS	early years teacher: maintained provision	QTS
P6	QTS	early years teacher: maintained provision	EYITT/QTS
P7	QTS	former headteacher: maintained primary school with nursery	significant experience of ITT and post qualifying PD
P8	QTS	former headteacher: maintained infant school	significant experience of ITT and post qualifying PD
P9	QTS	former teacher: early years maintained provision	significant experience of ITT/EYITT and post qualifying PD (previous experience of EYPS initial and post qualifying PD)
Walking interview			
P10	EYPS	manager: private nursery provision	EYITT

5.4 Research activity

The individual interviews and the walking interview proceeded as planned with the participants' informed consent (see Appendix B). The arrangements for the interviews were determined with individual participants and an indication of the estimated time required for the interview was provided and adhered to when conducting the interviews. While the participants were experienced practitioners, I could not assume that details of the project subject were unnecessary; I ensured they had clarity about the nature of the project and explained how their participation could contribute to realising its aims. I also encouraged participants to ask questions about the project and explained how they could withdraw from the process.

I prepared a loose set of key questions to help frame the interviews, which could be used flexibly to elicit participants' views on the research subject (see Appendix C). The interview questions sought to explore their professional knowledge and skills about how early years teachers might be supported to engage in integrated working. Participants were also asked about challenges early years teachers might encounter in integrated working and how they could be supported to manage challenges in their practice. I ensured there was scope in the interviews for participants to expand on their responses and I followed up on interesting points they raised to enable further details to emerge, as I was seeking 'thick descriptions' (Geertz 1973, cited in Bryman 2016: 384).

There are different approaches to undertaking a walking interview (Carpiano 2009); in my case, the nursery manager led the process and I had no set questions beforehand. However, there were opportunities to ask questions as we walked round the setting and had conversations about the provision, as well as talking with any staff or children we encountered on the way. As with the sedentary interviews, it was useful to record the walking interview with the manager's prior consent; this allowed both of us to focus on the walking experience as we covered all areas of the setting, including the outside area.

Kara (2017: 141) suggests that if 'you enjoy talking with people and hearing their stories, you will probably enjoy doing some interviews for your research'. This is an important point as it helps to focus attention on the form of interaction with participants during the interview. I aimed to demonstrate genuine interest and to listen attentively to participants' views throughout the interviews and sought to encourage their participation so they felt comfortable in the interview context (Costley et al. 2010). Overall, I found the interview process with participants was enjoyable and interesting, as well as being very helpful for the research.

According to Radnor (2002: 60), the main skill needed to conduct interviews is 'active listening'; it is termed 'active', as the interviewer needs to provide an environment that encourages the participant 'to talk freely and be clearly understood'. Examples of strategies to promote this environment include posing 'neutral and non-threatening questions' and asking the participant to give an example of what they mean (ibid). I sought to create a conducive interview environment that would support participants to feel at ease and also ensured that I thanked participants for their contributions.

By using audio-recording equipment during the interviews, with the participants' consent, I was able to record their response while remaining attentive to their facial expression and body language, which helps to demonstrate active listening to 'not only the person's words but their whole message' (Kara 2017: 142). This also helped me to be alert to any discomfort that the participant might be experiencing so I could take prompt action to address the situation, if necessary. I used appropriate body language in the interviews, such as maintaining eye contact, nodding my head, demonstrating a relaxed posture and making short utterances, such as 'hm-hm' to encourage open dialogue with participants and help them feel relaxed (ibid).

I considered how I might respond to participants if they talked about something that was upsetting or shocking; if this should occur, Kara (2017: 142) advises that the researcher shows emotion, as 'the interviewee will be reassured by your humanity'. Although, there were no shocking responses, it was important to consider how I would act in such a situation. Floyd and Arthur (2012: 176) suggest that it is possible that the inside-researcher's knowledge might be at variance with the participant's views; in such circumstances, they suggest challenges to factual issues are likely to be acceptable but advise against 'drawing attention to possible face-saving devices' as this could instigate harm to the participant. This situation did not materialise in the interviews but, again, it was helpful to have thought through my responses to likely events to minimise any likely harm to participants.

While I ensured that participants gave consent to their interview being recorded, I also checked they still felt comfortable about recording equipment being used before starting the interview, as the 'process of recording has a bearing on the freedom with which people speak' (Denscombe 2003: 177). I took action to safeguard participants' interests; for example, by protecting their personal and institutional identities and maintaining participant confidentiality. Ethical considerations are integral to professional practice in education. I also drew on my knowledge and experience of professional conduct in practice during the research process; for example, when encountering any non-participant children, staff or parents who were present at early years settings I attended during the research process. However, whilst I have prior knowledge and experience of ethical issues in education research and professional practice, which helped me to identify and address ethical issues concerning the research, I recognised that I should not be complacent about these and I sought to remain attentive and informed about 'all the ethical issues that your research presents you with' (Kara 2015: 55) throughout the course of the project. Ethical considerations regarding data collection and other aspects of the research are discussed further in the final section of the chapter.

5.4.1 In-depth Interviews

The principle tool for data collection was the use of in-depth interviews to gain participants' perspectives on integrated working and explore how they thought early years teachers could be supported in their engagement in integrated working practice. Feedback from a pilot interview I undertook with a colleague revealed some minor changes to initial planning were required, which I implemented. The pilot provided some indication of time that would be required for the interviews to be completed,

which was approximately forty-five minutes. I gave participants details of the expected time of forty- five minutes for the interview in view of their busy schedules and ensured I did not exceed this time. I also discussed the research focus and checked if they had any queries about the research before starting the interview. Details of the length and location of the interviews are included in Figure 5.3; interviews with P2 and P9 had been arranged to be undertaken in person; however, these arrangements needed to be amended and the interviews were undertaken by phone.

Figure 5.3 Details of length of interviews with research participants and their location

Name	Length of interview	Interview location
P1	45 mins	private nursery provision
P2	40 mins	phone call
P3	45 mins	private nursery provision
P4	40 mins	university
P5	40 mins	school
P6	45 mins	university
P7	45 mins	school
P8	45 mins	university
P9	45 mins	phone call
P10	45 mins	Walking interview: private nursery provision

Bryman (2016: 384) observes that 'researchers are encouraged to produce what Geertz (1973) calls 'thick descriptions', which are 'rich accounts of the details of a culture'. Through the use of in-depth interviews that enabled conversations with participants and by remaining attuned to their contributions, I sought to accrue detailed perspectives from participants that would provide 'thick descriptions' to enrich the research process. Guidance questions for the in-depth interviews are included in Appendix 2; however, as discussed previously, I sought a flexible approach that allowed participants to express themselves freely, as I did not wish to curtail their responses.

This research approach resonates with Mercer's (2000: 15) view of the significance of language; he suggests it provides opportunity for people to think collectively, which,

in turn, allows joint creation of knowledge and understanding. Language facilitates the creation of 'intellectual networks for making sense of experience and solving problems' (ibid***).*** Language is key to the qualitative research process; seeking practitioners' experience of integrated working in early years provision necessarily involves use of language, as their social reality cannot be identified separately from language they used to explain this. Radnor (2001: 16) suggests 'it is through our language, [that] we are capable of reconstructing experiences other than our own'. Therefore, I needed to appreciate how I used language, engaged in dialogue and made sense of others' use of language, as these actions had the potential to influence the form and direction of the research and even distort the findings. As Edwards (2010b: 162) advises, I sought to achieve a balance between 'engaged commitment to the field and the capacity to offer an informal and research–based interpretation of it'.

5.4.2 The walking Interview

As discussed above, I was intrigued by the notion of a walking interview, as described in the literature, and wished to experiment with this method to see how the experience of the form of a walking interview could work in the context of this research. Fortunately, an opportunity arose to undertake a walking interview with a nursery manager at a private nursery in the LLA selected for the research. The interview proved to be a unique experience and I reflect further on the outcomes of my experience of this method in the final chapter of the work.

I provided little direction to the participant during the interview and used open-ended questions during our conversation; this left the participant free to comment on whatever they saw fit to point out (Carpiano 2009). The participant was in control of the process as they 'led the way' during the interview and freely engaged in conversation with me, as well as children and staff we encountered on the way. I needed to consider additional factors to a sedentary interview, such as the weather conditions for ethical and practical reasons (BERA 2018), as the setting's outdoor environment was included in the interview; however, weather conditions proved to be suitable. The walking interview provided a 'means of enhancing the contextual basis of qualitative research' (Carpiano 2009: 265) and, as the interview took place when the nursery was fully operational, I also viewed this method as rendering the research visible to others who were present in the setting community.

The participant led the whole process of the walking interview and highlighted features of the setting that they felt were of particular interest and importance. This has interesting implications for practitioner research, especially where there may be issues of hierarchy between the interviewee and interviewer. There was a clear focus on aspects of context that were encountered on the 'walk', which acted as prompts for the participant. The walking interview helped to initiate a conversational style of interview and focused attention on the 'here and now' of the live context of practice. I discuss the walking interview further in Chapter 7.

5.5 Further thoughts on ethical considerations

Whitmarsh (2012: 302) suggests most codes of ethics are underpinned by three principles:

- Respect: for persons, protecting the person's autonomy,
- Beneficence; maximising good outcomes for science, humanity and the individual , whilst avoiding or minimising unnecessary harm, risk or wrong
- Justice: reasonable, non-exploitative, fair behaviour

In terms of the first principle of respect, I recognised the need to ensure participants felt their views would be respected and that I showed appreciation for their contribution to the research. It was important to engage in respectful dialogue with participants not only during the course of the interviews but in all communication with them and to treat their views respectfully when reporting the research outcomes. Creating a 'dialogic relationship' (Whitmarsh 2012): 305) is not only essential when communicating with participants; it is an intrinsic aspect of my professional role. Costley at al. (2010: 5) advise it is important to demonstrate 'an acknowledgement of the culture of your community of practice' through your actions and 'respect for the values of the organisation, its purposes and ways of doing things'. As mentioned previously, in view of the research subject and my own affiliation to education, I also needed to ensure I did not indicate a biased perspective of primacy of education over other disciplinary areas of practice that are associated with young children's services; this could influence participants' responses and also indicates disrespect of the research subject of integrated working. Palaiologou (2012: 126) refers to the need for 'ethical thoughtfulness' in relation to integrated working, as this has ethical implications for professionals, as well as children and families involved in the process.

Bryman (2016) reports similar areas of ethical issues to Whitmarsh's (2012) principles. He suggests four main areas related to ethical consideration of research participants; likely harm to them; an absence of informed consent; an invasion of their privacy, and any involvement of deception. Harm 'may be physical, psychological or social' and risk assessment of the research should involve both likelihood and severity of harm (Brooks et al. (2014: 29). I sought to protect participants from any harm that might have arisen from their involvement in the project by maintaining a duty of care towards them. The research does not involve any experimental approaches or include any interventions, which could potentially cause harm to participants (Hamersley 2017). However, I recognised that interviews with early years practitioners about their knowledge and experience of integrated working had the potential to raise sensitive issues for them. For instance, questions might evoke participants' memories of particular episodes in their practice that may have been challenging for them, such as a safeguarding issue for a child in their care. I needed to anticipate such a situation might occur, remain attuned to research participants' responses and ensure that I made no unreasonable demands of them (Middlewood and Abbott 2015). I also recognised the importance of remaining mindful of the sensitive nature of integrated working when communicating with research participants.

I was aware it was also essential to avoid becoming involved with participants at a personal level, as this can lead to unintended and unhelpful consequences that could not only be detrimental to the participant and others, but might also be harmful to the researcher and their research project (Walliman 2005). Additionally, it is important to have awareness of power relationships that could affect the relationship between the researcher and participant. Gibbs and Costley (2006: 245) advise that where the former might be perceived by the latter to be in a more powerful position, the researcher requires an 'ethic of care' towards the participant, which helps to regulate the 'notion of power' in the relationship. An 'ethic of care' is also 'a critical aspect of practitioner research to avert the possibility for exploitation' (ibid).

Middlewood and Abbott (2015: 71) note the importance of confidentiality and anonymity to ensure privacy for research participants and warn that 'off the record' conversations about participants should not occur. As noted above, participants needed to be assured their data will be stored confidentially, they will remain anonymous and not be identified throughout and beyond the research process.

The fourth main area of ethical issues identified by Bryman (2016) was deception. I recognised the need for adherence to the principle of informed consent, which 'arises from the subject's right to freedom and self-determination' (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 350) by explaining the aims and process of the research clearly so participants understood the purpose of the study and how their views might contribute towards the work. I also recognised the importance of conveying participants' data and authors' views accurately and fairly when referring to their texts in the work. Kara (2017) advises that researchers have an obligation to read texts carefully and seek a sound understanding of the literature so they do not misrepresent an author's views.

The researcher should also consider the extent of the accessibility of their work and aim to present their work clearly to the reader (ibid). Fox et al. (2007: 155) suggest that practitioners should find 'the right voice' in which to present their work, which should represent the 'essence of the study', as 'once the work is in the public domain, it is impossible for the practitioner researcher to retrieve it' so decisions about voice 'should not be taken lightly'. To help address these ethical issues, I engaged in reflexive practice throughout the research process. I was not seeking a 'single reality' (Denscombe, 2003: 134) about integrated working practice but rather an understanding from salient actors about key issues related to the research focus. I was aware that I needed to be mindful of the potential impact on the research of my own conceptions and values throughout the research process so that the project findings would be trustworthy. Therefore, I sought to act within 'a reflexive frame of reference' (Radnor (2002: 25) to support an objective stance to the research and valid outcome to the project.

5.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have considered the research design method, activity and details; this has involved discussion of participant sampling, data collection and further ethical considerations for the research. I have explained how I sought to gain authentic knowledge from practice that would support my understanding of the complexity of the research phenomenon through respectful dialogic encounters with experienced practitioners. This required consideration of my consistent use of respectful and open language with participants. I now look at analysis of the research participants' data in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Analysis

6:1 Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the analysis of data from the interviews with the research participants and explain how the research data was analysed. When considering ethical issues at the end of the last chapter, I referred briefly to Fox et al.'s (2007: 155) view that practitioner researchers should find 'the right voice' in which to present the work, which should represent the 'essence of the study'. I recognise the notion of finding 'the right voice' in this chapter as an integral aspect of the research for two main reasons; firstly, my intention is to be respectful to participants and demonstrate an 'ethic of care' (Gibbs and Costley 2006); and, secondly, seeking 'the right voice' contributes towards the 'ethical validity' of the work, which 'enhances the research itself' (Groundwater-Smith and Sachs 2007: 122). Therefore, I sought to maintain a critical and open approach to analysis of the data that is discussed in this chapter.

6.2 Analysing the research data

I used thematic analysis to identify key themes that emerged from the participants' responses in the interviews (Yin 2016). The recorded interviews were transcribed and I explored these transcripts carefully to gain a broad perspective of the participants' views (see Appendix 4 for sample transcript). I aimed to maintain an 'ethic of care' (Gibbs and Costley 2006: 245) when conducting the interviews with research participants and when transcribing and analysing the interview data. This does not imply 'a sentimental approach to research' but is concerned with the researcher's fulfilment of their obligation to 'meet their caring responsibilities'; moreover, for the practitioner researcher, a 'personal moral deliberation is central to research ethics' (ibid).

I recognised how invoking an 'ethic of care' to 'safeguard personal and moral' relations with others in the research was a highly appropriate course to follow, as a practitioner researcher (Gibbs and Costley 2006: 239). Citing Gilligan's (1982) notion of an 'ethic of care', Fullan and Hargreaves (1991: 22) observe this approach is central to early years teachers' practice, where 'actions are motivated by concerns for care and nurturing of others and connectedness to others'. I was conscious of my responsibilities to others engaged in the research process and that the project itself is concerned with the subject of early years teachers working collaboratively with

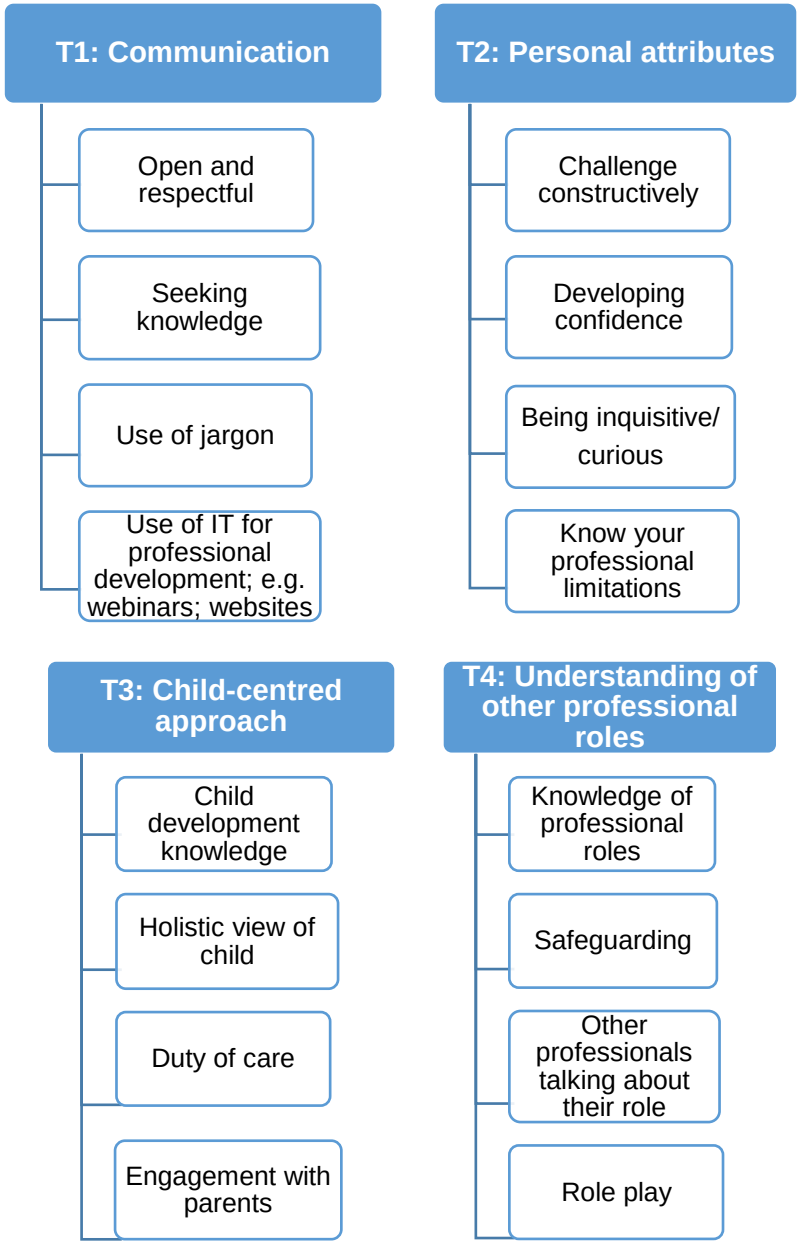
other professionals to support the development of children and their families. In thinking about the intersection of my practitioner and researcher roles, I began to see myself as a 'practitioner↔researcher', as my roles became more connected to each other. Moreover, through assuming a 'more reflective orientation', I sought to delve beneath the surface of the research subject, 'questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and engaging with contentious issues' (Doncaster and Lester 2002: 95).

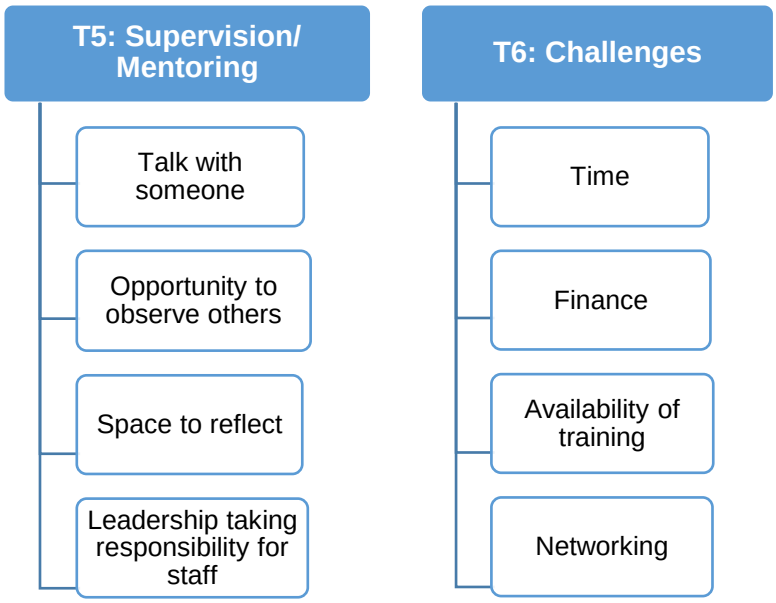
A sense of integration between my professional and researcher roles was supported by my reading of Atkinson-Lopez' (2010) account of their research of indigenous perspectives of early years education and care within indigenous and non-indigenous centres in Victoria, Australia. This account offered a model of the approach that I wished to assume during the research process, as it demonstrates an intention for genuine and respectful communication with participants and interpretation of their views. As Atkinson-Lopez (2010) indicates, I started by reading and rereading the interview transcripts to become more familiar with their contents. Using codes, which label or tag features of the research data that 'are regarded as salient by the researcher in a meaningful and systematic way' (Brown and Scaife 2019: 226), I then started to mark and label the text. I kept the labels tentative at this stage; Seidman (1998: 108) warns that 'locking in categories too early can lead to dead ends'. Following Yin's (2016: 198) model, I initially labelled the research data using Level 1 'open codes' that I considered were associated with the compiled data. I then started to combine some of the Level 1 codes into different groups of Level 2 category codes (ibid). This second stage of the coding process sought to 'develop broader patterns of meaning or superordinate themes' (Brown and Scaife 2019: 226) This led to the identification of Theme 3, 'Child-centred approach' (see Appendix E1 for example of the theme's coding process).

The emergent categories were then grouped into further abstract themes by triangulating the varying responses (Denscombe, 2003). As I constructed the connections and themes from the participants' interview data, I sought to avoid the risk of creating predetermined categories and themes, rather than allowing them to emerge from the participants' views that were represented in the interview transcripts (Seidman 1998). It was important to review the themes in relation to the research questions and revisit them against the interview data and check for researcher bias, as the process of thematic analysis is subjective (Brown and Scaife 2019). It was also helpful to discuss the emergent themes with my critical friend who was well-positioned to provide advice, as they were outside of the project.

Six themes emerged from this process, which each had four categories or sub-themes; these are shown in Figure 6.1. The six main themes are: Communication (T1); Personal attributes (T2); Child-centred approach (T3); Understanding of other professional roles (T4) ;) Supervision and mentoring (T5) and Challenges (T6).

Figure 6.1 Emergent Themes and sub-themes from the interview data (T1-6)





I also read and reread the data from the walking interview conducted with P10 so I could become more familiar with its content. I then followed the same coding process that I had used with the data from the sedentary interviews (Yin 2016: 198), as shown in the example of coding T3 'Child-centred approach' in Appendix E1. The coding of the walking interview validated the coded data from the sedentary interviews (see Appendix E2 for an example of the coding process used for the walking interview data).

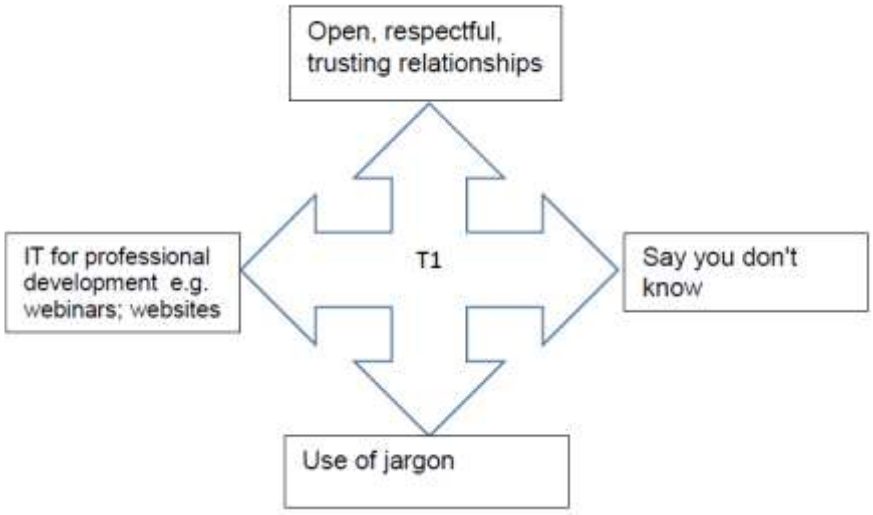
6.3 Overview of Themes 1- 6 (T1 - 6)

Findings from the data show that communication is a significant aspect of integrated working. Responses indicate support for a participatory approach to integrated working through such communicative practices as parents and professionals sharing their knowledge of the child. Respectful communication was seen as essential for the development of trusting relationships between key actors involved in integrated working. Findings also indicate that being child-centred is uppermost in the mind of the early years practitioner who practices in the context of boundaries and challenges of integrated working, while all the time seeking to learn and develop their professional understanding. Access to supervisors or mentors was perceived to offer early years teachers opportunities to articulate problems encountered in practice, while personal attributes of bravery, curiosity and confidence could support early years teachers to serve as active agents in practice in the best interests of the child.

6.4 Theme 1 (T1): Communication and its four sub-themes

Participants emphasised the importance of different aspects of communication that were considered to be central to integrated working. The findings suggested an environment of open and respectful dialogue supports collaborative work and the formation of trusting relationships between the child and their family, colleagues and other professionals would enable early years teachers to access and share different perspectives of the child. The four sub-themes for T1 that emerged from the data are shown in Figure 6.2 and are discussed individually below.

Figure 6.2 T1 Communication and its four sub-themes



6.4.1 T1 Sub-theme 1: Open, respectful, trusting relationships

T1, sub-theme 1 was a recurrent aspect of the interview data; participants' responses projected an image of the early years teacher's spoken and written communication with parents, colleagues and other professionals that was characterised by open and respectful dialogue. Participants suggested the teacher should not only impart clear and accurate information about the child but should do so in a sensitive and respectful mode with all key partners involved in integrated working:

> *To be able to write about what they're seeing and what's happening; that's important and to be accurate.* (P1)
>
> *You have to have a trustful working relationship.* (P5)
>
> *I think the key competencies is going to be communication, at the end of the day, not only communication with families but communication between the different services which is difficult.* (P6)

It's about communicating with other professionals. In EYTS there is a standard about communicating with everybody you would communicate with and includes other professionals. So that's important in terms of professional respect…communicating, sensitively, effectively, respectively (P9)

Responses focused on integrated working processes rather than outcomes for children; open and respectful communication was perceived to support relational aspects of practice, enabling the early years teacher to gain broader perspectives of the child and their family:

Communication, being totally open and respectful. Appreciative of difference so being able to understand how it might be from that parent's perspective as well. (P2)

They're [the early years teacher] with the children all the time so they really think they've got the greatest knowledge. In many ways they may have but it's about being open to other perspectives. (P9)

Some participants saw open and respectful dialogue as essential for developing and maintaining trusting relationships:

I don't expect other services to be able to instantly fix a problem or instantly get me a statement or instantly do this for a child but as long as there is constant communication and everybody does have that and everybody feels confident that they know what they're doing, what their role is at that time, why would you not trust each other and care for each other and respect each other? (P3)

I learnt very quickly that the kind of head I wanted to be was the kind of head people could trust and I wasn't going to be critical. (P7)

6.4.2 T1 Sub-theme 2: Seeking knowledge

Participants drew attention to the need for early years teachers to raise queries if they needed reassurance or information about an aspect of their own or others' role in integrated working. The findings suggest that a lack of knowledge was not viewed as a weakness by participants; rather, they saw measures such as seeking clarification of information or requesting support with provision for a child as a positive strategy on the part of the teacher:

I think to be open, honest, and not to be afraid of not knowing but to be able to ask to use your own initiative, of course. Not to be over dependent but to be able to actually ask. (P1)

The other thing is to encourage them to be questioning all the time, actually asking and not feeling foolish about asking questions because why do you ask questions? Well I believe for two reasons; one is because you want to know

something or you want reassurance that what you think you know is actually what you do know, and even naive questions you should encourage (P8)

6.4.3 T1 Sub-theme 3: Use of jargon

Participants indicated that professional jargon used by different professionals in integrated working might not be understood by all those involved in the process; however, the responses suggest that use of jargon would not be a problematic issue for the early years teacher, as its meaning could be perceived:

I think we have to be really mindful of the jargon and jargon changes doesn't it and people become very concerned that don't know what they're talking about but I'll go along with it because I'll get it eventually. I know I've been in meetings and thought what does that mean and then eventually I've realised. (P1)

I don't think jargon is a barrier in the sense that if you have a graduate, you have knowledge; the jargon side of it, maybe if there are connections with this true multi-agency fluidity within the early years sector, then I think that becomes less of an issue because they become familiar with it. (P4)

6.4.4 T1 Sub-theme 4: Use of IT for professional development; e.g. webinars and websites

The findings indicate that participants saw IT could be used as a communication tool by those involved in integrated working; one suggestion in the data was the setting's use of video observations of children that support shared assessment of the child's learning over time:

The observations that the team here do are recorded; they do video recordings of children that are then entered onto an online learning journal and from that they will make assessments. (P1)

Videos could also be used as an information source for teachers' professional development for integrated working practice. For instance, there was a suggestion in the data that professionals from different disciplines could make videos or arrange webinars about their specialist roles that could be viewed by early years teachers. These could help to extend teachers' understanding of the range and roles of professionals who might be involved in integrated working:

And then in training what we try to do is get people in to talk to them that were other professionals, if you like; it's not always easy because it's people's time and obviously that time is stretched but I do think there's some way of doing it whether that's online, getting people to make very short videos about what their role is and what they do, involve people in online webinars, that kind of thing. (P9)

Another participant suggested the use of websites to help early years teachers update their knowledge of policy and local services that would support their engagement in integrated working:

> *Government websites are main sources of information on keeping up with legislations and knowing how to connect with their LA and having strong links with them* (P4)

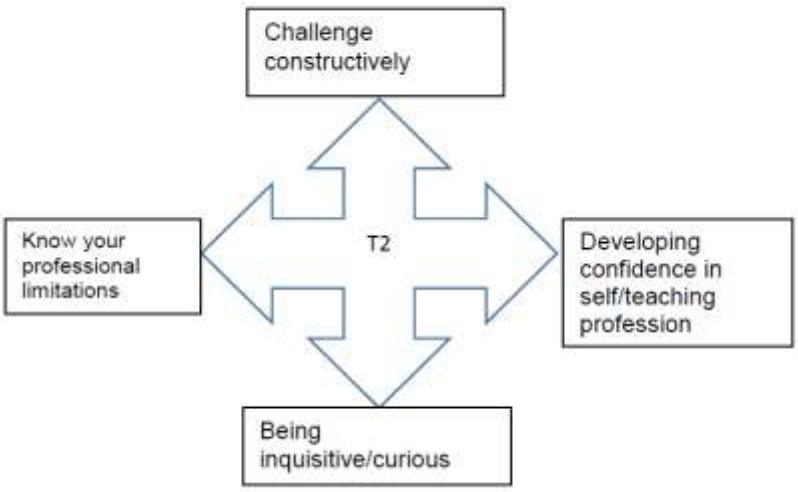
Email communication was also seen to enable effective sharing of information:

> *So it's about being able to have a conversation, even if it's through email because we all live very busy lives, just have an email group where you know it's buzzing and people are just constantly sharing messages and those key messages are being shared because everybody is constantly updating all of the partners in that process.* (P3)

6.5 Theme 2 (T2): Personal attributes and its four sub-themes

Participants' responses that related to T2 referred to early years teachers' behaviours, skills and attitudes that were seen to facilitate their effective engagement in integrated working with parents, colleagues and other professionals. Data relating to these attributes suggested the early years teacher was someone who would not be daunted by people or events that might impair their capacity to fulfil their professional role and act in the best interests of the children in their care. The four sub-themes for T2 are shown in Figure 6.3 and are discussed individually below.

Figure 6.3 T2 Personal attributes and its four sub-themes



6.5.1 T2 Sub-theme 1: Challenge constructively

The first sub-theme for T2 derived from the interview data related to participants' image of the early years teacher as an active agent who can constructively challenge ideas of others involved in integrated working, if they do not perceive these to be beneficial for the child:

> *Definitely someone ([early years teacher] who challenges things - encourage them to critically reflect on and critically analyse and not just take – 'OK this is what the EYFS says' – 'these are Development Matters' - actually, constructive criticism is good and I think it's a good disposition. I think naturally myself I'm quiet, I'm not someone, I shy away from confrontation - or that's just my character. I understand that we're all different but actually having the well-being of the children we care for at the forefront of our minds should be the spur we need to challenge and move forward.* (P4)

However, the data also suggests participants recognised that contesting ideas or strategies for the child might be problematic for the early years teacher:

> *I think that's a big challenge, being brave enough to say I'm not sure about this.* (P2)
>
> *Learning how to challenge in an appropriate way but checking the way you should do it, could do it.* (P9)

6.5.2 T2 Sub-theme 2: Developing confidence

The second sub-theme, 'developing confidence' is closely related to the previous sub-theme 1. The data indicates the early years teacher's need for confidence when contesting the views of parents or other professionals involved in integrated working, if these are at variance with the teacher's own knowledge and perception of the situation in hand:

> *The confidence to work with parents, who can be challenging, the confidence to work with other professionals who may be challenging. To hold onto our own professional roles and to say this is what I know, this is what I've seen and I want this particular piece of information taken seriously.* (P2)
>
> *So it's this idea of you're not afraid to speak up in a meeting for example.* (P6)

6.5.3 T2 Sub-theme 3: Being inquisitive and curious

The data indicated that participants' awareness of the benefits of the early years teacher having an inquisitive or curious disposition for engagement in integrated working, which was seen to help them to critically think about issues and explore them further. Participants' views suggest this approach could be supported through teachers' professional development:

> *I think that [being inquisitive] comes with higher education where you get dialectic thought and you're able to critically think, you're able to challenge things more and look at both sides of the coin.* (P3)

> *The flavour of professional development is to hold onto the taste of always being inquisitive. It's vital that I equip them with the inquisitiveness – it's very easy to not know what's on your doorstep unless you know what to look for.* (P4)

6.5.4 T2 Sub-theme 4: Know your professional limitations

While participants' views project an image of the EY teacher's role of being an advocate for the child in integrated working, they also indicted that the teacher needs to be aware of their own limitations in terms of their knowledge and experience as a practitioner and to express their awareness to others involved in the process:

> *Being able to admit when they don't know something because we can't know everything about everything* (P2)

> *The willingness to accept that you may be wrong, you may be mistaken and that other peoples' expert opinions may not coincide with your own.* (P5)

> *I think you realise that it's not that you aren't able to cater for that need because there is any weakness in yourself - actually come to a point to say, 'do you know what, it hasn't got anything to do with me, it is actually that the child needs something else'.* (P6)

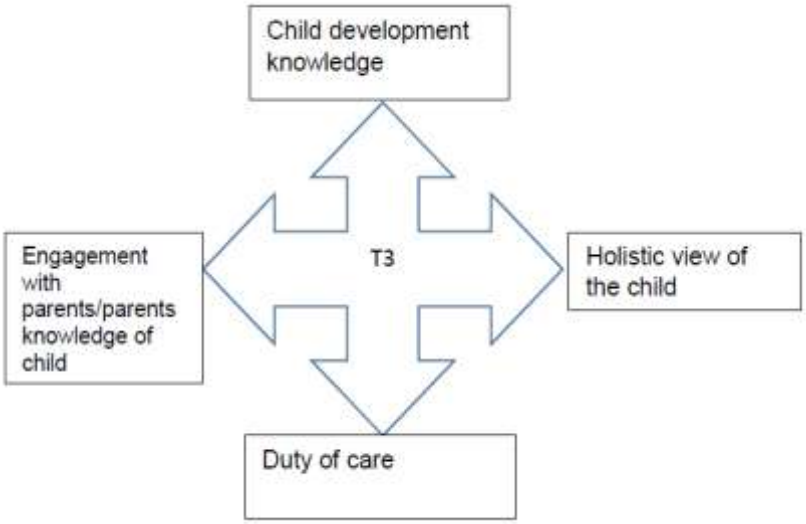
> *I think that's really important knowing your professional limitations and it's not wrong to say this is not something I can do. Again, NQTs should be able to say 'I don't feel able to do this'. So that's a competence really isn't it? There has to be a line where people say 'No I can't do'; 'I haven't got enough experience'; 'I've never done this before'; 'I need a lot of support before I do this'. That's okay and it's got to be seen as okay. Good leaders will support people won't they?* (P9)

6.6 Theme 3 (T3): Child-centred approach and its four sub-themes

The third theme to surface from the data was a 'child-centred approach'. The interview data emphasised the early years teacher's focus on the child in integrated working practice. Their professional action was seen to be informed by their knowledge of theoretical views of child development and their knowledge of the holistic development of children in their care. The data suggests the early years teacher's work is underpinned by their professional integrity and their sense of a duty of care

for the child and their family. The four interrelated sub-themes for Theme 3 are shown in Figure 6.4 and are discussed below.

Figure 6.4 T3: Child-centred approach and its four sub-themes



6.6.1 T3 Sub-theme 1: Child development knowledge

The findings suggest participants saw the early years teacher drawing on their knowledge of child development when undertaking their professional role in integrated working. Two participants' reference to the work of Bronfenbrenner also suggests they compared his theoretical view of the layers of influence affecting the child's development with the notion of integrated working.

> *So it's really important that you find out about that child's true context and the family...you sort of think of Bronfenbrenner...and how that affects that child.* (P1)

> *I think the idea should be that it's [integrated working] child-centred. If we look at Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems and we look at the fact that the child is at the centre, I mean that as long as you're working in partnership with all the other partners, we're working with our parents, we're working with the other professionals in the community, we're also working with the wider community as a whole to ensure that the outcomes for the children are the best that they can be.* (P3)

> *I'm very keen on Vivian Gussin Paley's work. At first I found it quite difficult to do but after the group got used to it we began to practise more and more. (P10)*

Participants also saw the early years teacher's engagement with other professionals in integrated working provided opportunities to broaden their own knowledge of children's development:

> *Challenging their understanding of children's development....I certainly feel that having the opportunity for professionals from outside to come in and give some input is definitely useful.* (P4)

> *I went to visit the special school and saw them in action; that was a powerful learning experience as far as I was concerned.* (P5)

6.6.2 T3 Sub-theme 2: Holistic view of the child

The data revealed participants thought the early years teacher brings a broad perspective of 'the whole child' to integrated working. The teacher's holistic view of the child was perceived to be drawn from their sound understanding of the child's interests, strengths, needs and overall development. Participants' data also indicated they saw the teacher as someone who is open to supporting the child's whole potential:

> *I think if you have a clear vision of what we want to make the lives of these children better, we want them to be happy and thrive throughout life, if everyone is on board with that vision it should come naturally that everyone is able to communicate together and work towards the same goal because if it's child-centred you always would be working towards the same goal.* (P3)

> *Not set limited expectations on children, so how can we keep our minds open to the fact that children might be able to surprise us, should be able to surprise us. As a teacher that was my whole way of working.* (P7)

> *Instead of just being part of the child's learning there are lots of different aspects of the child* (P8)

It was suggested by one participant that other professionals may not have a holistic view of the child due to the nature of their roles:

> *They [other professionals] are very, very specific in their knowledge, it's very deep but more narrow and I think their priorities are going to come from that they're not necessarily going to see the holistic child. They're more likely to focus in on whatever it is that's their specialist area* (P6)

Whereas another participant indicated the teacher could gain a more holistic view by working with a health professional, which would be beneficial for the child's outcomes:

> *So I'm hoping the integrated review will help Health Visitors and education where it's given more efficiently so hopefully again we will get the improved outcomes for children.* (P2)

Findings also indicate that the teacher could extend their holistic view of the child by listening to them; this involved taking notice of their behaviour:

> *So listening to the children's views - spoken and unspoken – because children's behaviour is a way of listening.* (P7)

> *Respect, openness, child's voice; listening to the child but not only what they say because with small children it might be how they behave.* (P9)

6.6.3 T3 Sub-theme 3: Duty of care

The third sub-theme of T3 that emerged from the data was 'a duty of care'. This embodied a notion of the teacher who acts as a caring professional, has sound integrity, and could contribute to integrated working on equal terms with other professionals:

> *Holding onto the core duty of care that we have as a practitioner so understanding the respect that's required and the professionalism.* (P4)

> *You've got to be open to the needs of all the children. Every child that you're responsible for deserves the best that you can give them.* (P5)

> *They [children] need to feel no one's giving up on them because too often too many people give up on kids too soon* (P7)

> *You are bound by certain responsibilities and legal responsibilities that you have* (P8)

> *Not to lose the fact that we are care providers; we need to have that love generally to enjoy what we're doing and we need to ensure it is fun for the children otherwise it just becomes process orientated.* (P10)

6.6.4 T3 Sub-theme 4: Engagement with parents

The final sub-theme of T3 concerns participants' view of the importance of the early years teacher's engagement with parents in integrated working. The data suggests participants considered the teacher's and parents' mutual sharing of knowledge of the child was desirable, as this helped to ensure appropriate support could be made for the child:

> *There's a lot of power in being a parent because you understand the child because you're with them 24/7 and you'll see things we don't see so it's just having that respect as well and ensuring that you're taking that time to listen to the parents views and values.* (P3)

> *I think liaising with the families and the parents is very important; having those kinds of skills* (P5)

All the time there's got to be a focus on collaborative working with the parents or the families. (P8)

The early years teacher's engagement with parents was also viewed by participants as a way to offer support for parents:

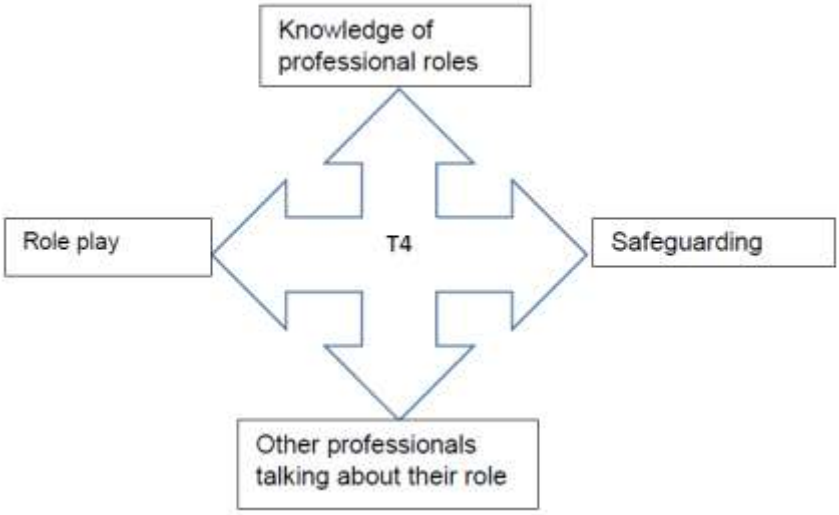
Pretty much now families are quite fragmented so they haven't often got people nearby so often they will come to the school if they are worried about something. So you get people who will come and talk to you about all sorts of things I think because they feel it's a kind of community space where you can come and do that, the more open you are to that, the more people come. (P7)

The parents need an awful lot of support; there's loads of stuff out there but I think it tends to be probably not as accessible as it could be to the parents who need it. (P9)

6.7 T4: Understanding of other professional roles and its four sub-themes

The fourth theme that emerged from the data relates to the importance of early years teachers' understanding of the work of other professionals who provide children's services in integrated working. The data indicates that teachers' awareness of other professional roles can be enhanced through different measures that could be included as part of pre- or post-qualifying professional development. Suggestions from participants' data included the early years teacher having opportunities for direct or indirect interaction with other professionals; exploring the salient role of safeguarding children and participating in role play scenarios that include different professional roles. Through such activities, the teacher was seen to further their understanding of the expertise of other professionals they may encounter in integrated working who might be involved in supporting the child. The four sub-themes for Theme 4 can be seen in Figure 6.5 and are discussed further below.

Figure 6.5 T4: Understanding of other professional roles and its four sub-themes



6.7.1 T4 Sub-theme 1: Knowledge of different professional roles

The first sub-theme of T4 related to the early years teacher's knowledge of the roles of different professionals who could be involved in providing an integrated network of support for the child in integrated working. Participants' views suggest that the teacher's deeper knowledge of these roles would support them when working collaboratively with other professionals and enhance their understanding of the particular perspectives and contributions that different professionals bring to integrated working:

> *Understanding of one another's roles and expertise so people can work together in a way that's efficient and timely.* (P2)

> *They should be going to regular training and having links and contacts - but actually if there were opportunities for other professionals; police and social workers, health workers, paediatricians to have some sort of -not necessarily that you have children with those needs - it's that wide* (P4)

> *Is it not just exposure to the other agencies and more of an understanding of what the other agencies do? If you have more understanding about the training these people have been through, the language they speak, what their priorities are because their priorities are not going to be the same* (P6)

> *It would be really good to have some joint training of trainee social workers and trainee teachers, where they cover a topic and they're covering it together in their course. (P9)*

6.7.2 T4 Sub-theme 2: Safeguarding

The second sub-theme of T4 was safeguarding, which is a key issue for integrated working. Findings from the data showed that participants thought the early years teacher should be supported in their role of safeguarding. Their suggestions indicated the need for teachers to understand action that may be required to manage a safeguarding issue and to appreciate the consequences that might ensue in the event of necessary action not being taken:

> *Staff have to come prepared for supervision and would have identified any families or children they would want to be talking about, so that would be picked up on there. Safeguarding would be at the top of the agenda but any other concerns would follow from that.* (P2)

> *You need to have a good understanding of professionalism and our role in safeguarding. You need to have a good understanding of the consequences if you might not follow up on things… if you're following your safeguarding practices and it doesn't become a ticking box exercise, it becomes something fluid in your mind that you understand it's dynamic and you need to constantly adapt to it, I think you'll be fine.* (P3)

One participant suggested that teacher training could include opportunity for early years teachers to explore the significance of sharing information in integrated working and the likely consequences that could occur when information is not shared amongst the relevant people involved:

> *Does everybody understand about whistle blowing, about sharing information? I think actually in the training, tragic cases need to be covered, to know what happened, if there isn't a transfer of information, for example.* (P9)

6.7.3 T4 Sub-theme 3: Other professionals talking about their role

The third sub-theme of T4 was the notion of other professionals who are involved in integrated working talking about their roles. This is closely related to sub-theme 1, though focuses on the engagement between the teacher and other professionals. Participants valued the opportunity for early years teachers to hear about particular resources that might be accessible or ways in which the child could access more specialist help than could be provided by the individual agency of the teacher:

> *Just people coming in and talking about their role and the sort of support they can signpost trainees or students to, the sorts of resources that might be available for them and even talking about referral routes because that's all key to underpinning their understanding.* (P2)

So I think training, initial teacher training of any kind, I think it's really important that they actually have an understanding of what is available, what are all the jobs that people do, the roles that people take, just at a basic level, finding out, researching, maybe speaking to other colleagues about whoever they've ever had engagement with. I think often they really don't know. (P9)

6.7.4 T4 Sub-theme 4: Role Play

Role play was identified as the final sub-theme of T4. Data from some participants suggested that early years teachers' engagement in role play could support their understanding of the particular roles of professionals who might be engaged in integrated working. The data revealed one participant suggested that teacher training might include investigation of serious case reviews of a child's death through the medium of role play so teachers could consider the roles of different professionals who were involved at the time with the individual child. Engaging in role play was thought to extend the teacher's understanding about how particular events unfolded in the case review from the perspective of a particular professional role:

You mean within their training? Actually the value of role plays (P2)

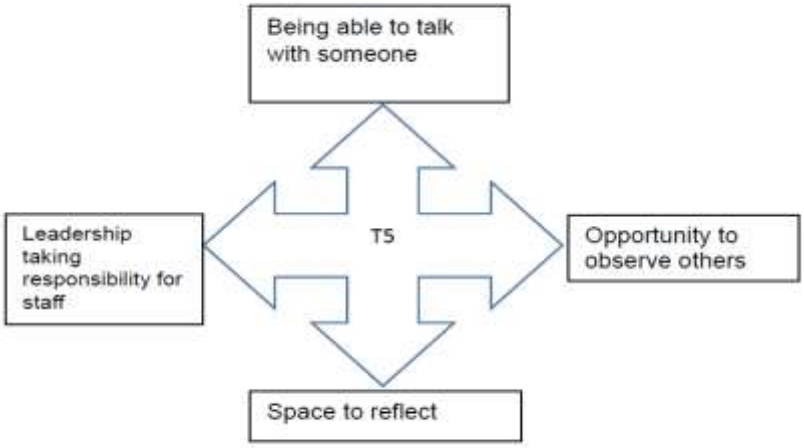
I think it's almost like getting inside the skin of those professionals, having more information about what it is to be a language therapist or something like this. (P6)

Serious Case Reviews should be included and then training could involve some sort of role play type scenarios where different people take different roles around a case. They have to put themselves in the mind set of somebody who had this role. (P9)

6.8 T5: Supervision and Mentoring and its four sub-themes

The fifth theme that emerged from the data was supervision and mentoring. This reflected the dual terms of 'supervisor' and 'mentor' that were used by participants when referring to an experienced staff member who could support the early years teacher's engagement in integrated working. The data reveals that participants also thought the teacher could be supported by observing experienced practitioners' engagement in integrated working and through individual or collective engagement in reflective practice that allows opportunity for retrospective review and evaluation. The data also indicated that setting leaders should take some responsibility for early years teachers' professional development in the area of integrated working. Figure 6.6 shows the four sub-themes for Theme 5, which are discussed further below.

Figure 6.6 T5: Supervision and Mentoring and its four sub-themes



6.8.1 T5: Sub-theme 1: Talk with someone

The first sub-theme involved the early years teacher's opportunity to talk with a supervisor or mentor about a particular concern they had relating to integrated working. Findings suggest the supervision or mentoring role might include reassuring the early years teacher that their planned course of action was appropriate to follow or supporting them to manage a challenging issue in their practice. The data also suggested that participants were not sure that supervision or mentoring to support the teacher's role in integrated working occurred in practice:

> *So within my own setting we would be using supervision and that would be the main arena where concerns would be discussed.* (P2)

> *So I think it kind of almost needs somebody which could be a mentor, I don't know who this person would be; it could just be a colleague. Someone to just have an opportunity to have time with other people to discuss it; to help you through so that you know you are doing the right thing. (P6)*

> *It's not about interfering it's just kind of, like you would do with the children, just checking in, tell me how it's going that sort of stuff.* (P7)

> *I think helping them work collaboratively again is a way that you help them take on challenges because they're not in it on their own. They've got to feel safe and secure about sharing issues, whether it's with a line manager or each other.* (P8)

> *Supervision I suppose as well, I mean there's that as well. Does it really happen as much as it should?* (P9)

One participant highlighted that the role of supervisor might be compromised at the end of a busy day from undertaking their own role in the setting; this could mean they may not be well-positioned at that point to offer effective support to others:

> *I've noticed it in myself, especially in a supervisory role working with children, it is really full on, it's very hard work but very rewarding but it's hard work. When you've had a really busy day you're not in the best capacity to talk to somebody and I can recognise this* (P3)

The data also indicated that the supervisor or mentor in the setting also needed to be supported to undertake their role:

> *They [mentors] need professional development too. Not just to be experts in what they're doing but also in order to be experts in how to help other people, which is a different set of skills.* (P8)

6.8.2 T5: Sub-theme 2: Opportunity to observe others

The second sub-theme for T5 that emerged from the data related to the early years teacher having an opportunity to observe or work alongside experienced practitioners engaged in integrated working in the form of an apprenticeship model. Participants indicated that this could support the teacher in their role; for instance, to make appropriate judgements or prepare for a meeting about a child:

> *One of the best ways to do it is by working alongside other people who have already learned how to make those judgements. Working alongside other people who mentor, exploring scenarios but again one of the difficulties about all of this is it's no good doing it if you do it before they're ready to do it, if you see what I mean.* (P8)

> *So that's one thing for settings and schools to think about in their support for their newly qualified or training teachers, how they can learn from experienced teachers and practitioners by sitting in and gradually beginning to take a part, perhaps by preparing notes about a child for a meeting.* (P9)

6.8.3 T5: Sub-theme 3: Space to reflect

The third sub-theme of T5 related to the early years teacher's engagement in reflective practice about their role in integrated working; the term 'space' in the sub-theme title is intended to encompass both time and space for reflective practice, as indicated in the participants' data. Engaging in reflective practice individually or with others was perceived to enable the teacher's critical evaluation of their role and to support development of their understanding of appropriate responses to the child's needs:

We can't be in this profession without being reflective. (P1)

I also get them to do a lot of reflective journals about how things went... so when they do their parents' meetings and also when they're working with professionals often I'll give them a self-reflection form and I'll say I want you just to really think about this week and jot down some ideas about how it went and things that could have gone better and also things you're really proud of. (P3)

But actually the value of reflection - that's the power I think - it's important to stop and have that space. It links to not necessarily being busy for the sake of being busy - it's actually working smart in a way because you've had that opportunity to reflect collectively or your own mental space to have a think about what and why you do what you do. (P4)

Going out to other places, it enables you to reflect on the practice (P5)

6.8.4 T5: Sub-theme 4: Leadership taking responsibility for staff

The fourth aspect of this theme concerns leadership in the early years setting taking responsibility for staff in terms of their well-being and professional development to support their engagement in integrated working. The data revealed that participants perceived the early years teacher's engagement in integrated working could be supported through a workplace ethos that is underpinned by a collaborative approach to practice and an appreciation of the efforts of all staff members:

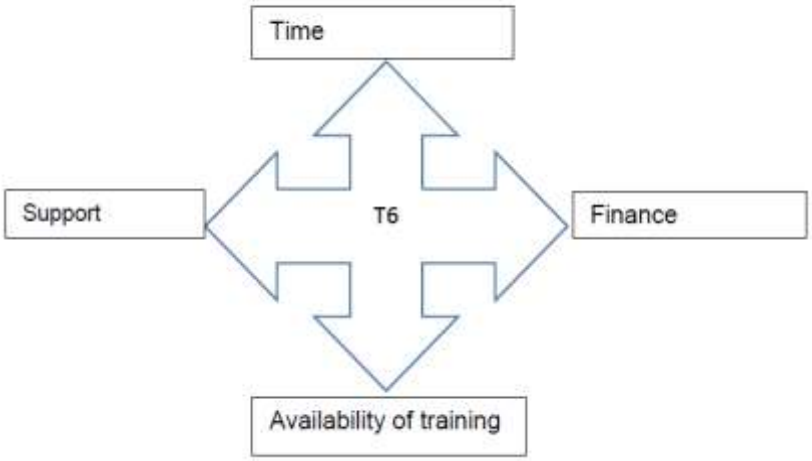
Trying to establish a culture where it's a collective endeavour for everybody to improve rather than hero leader who comes in cap and tights. It is all about trying to support everybody to grow like you do as a teacher but doing that as a collaborative approach. It does take leadership, the kind of leader that encourages collaboration. (P7)

Well I think one of the things, as a leader in a setting, is that you have to demonstrate to your staff that you value them and one of the ways you do that is by treating them like professionals. (P8)

6.9 T6: Challenges and its four sub-themes

T6 was the final theme that emerged from the analysis of the data; this related to 'challenges' that could affect early years teachers' effective engagement in integrated working. Participants' response pointed to the need for adequate resources of time and finance, while relevant training and networking opportunities to support their engagement in integrated working was a further issue raised by participants. The four sub-themes for T6 are shown in Figure 6.7 and are discussed individually below.

Figure 6.7 T6: Challenges



6.9.1 T6: Sub-theme 1: Time

The data revealed participants thought that the early years teacher's capacity to act collaboratively with others in integrated working could be challenged by structural considerations, such as having insufficient time to undertake their role amidst their other commitments as a teacher. Availability of non-contact time was thought to be required for administrative tasks, such as making telephone calls or updating their records. Non-contact time was also seen to enable the teacher to undertake visits to other settings or meet with other professionals involved in integrated working; it was thought these activities could be compromised if the teacher had insufficient time to undertake them as part of their role:

> *You can't expect them [the teacher] to do a full time job and then on top of that do all these other things.* (P5)

> *Appreciate that everything takes time. So they have to have support in being able to maybe come away from the children and actually have some time, if they're writing up reports or making telephone calls, anything that they have to do they've got to be given the time to do it.* (P6)

> *It's so easy to get carried away on the needs of day to day firefighting, sorting this out, sorting that out so you actually have to have the resources and the time planned in and the people who have those responsibilities to make them happen.* (P8)

The issue of time was not only viewed as a challenge for the early years teacher; participants thought parents' own pressures of time could affect the teacher's opportunity for contact with them:

Finding time and a place to talk to someone confidentially, being able to say to a parent who may be in a very big rush we need to sit down and talk about this or document this. (P2)

Those [parents] that are rushing in the evening and may not have time for formal feedback. (P10)

The data also indicated that the early years teacher's opportunity for engagement with other professionals might also be affected by issues of time:

Also it's kind of this idea of the time scales and timetabling of these other individuals. They're more likely to work from 9 to 5 and they'll book you in at any point in the day that fits nicely in the diary whereas we don't work like that; we know the children have their lunch, you can't have anyone come at lunchtime. (P6)

The people that we're talking about that work in these diverse roles don't have a lot of spare time in their professional lives. But it would be to everybody's advantage if everybody knew about what they did and how they did it. (P9)

6.9.2 T6: Sub-theme 2: Finance

The second sub-theme of T6 was finance; participants indicated that funding constraints could potentially limit the early years teacher's capacity to effectively engage in integrated working. For instance, the data indicated there could be prohibitive costs when seeking advice from other professionals; this was seen as particuraly challenging for settings that served areas of social disadvantage:

Money is always going to be an issue, it's always going to be a factor, again I think it's just about finding cost effective ways to do it that are sensible and reasonable. (P3)

So with regards to this multi -agency working and the access to professional support; advice comes at a cost often so those centres where you're in areas of low socio-economic status, often the staff you employ in those areas are also struggling and so ideally they're the types of centres that should have access to all of these professionals but unfortunately I believe it's not. (P4)

6.9.3 T6: Sub-theme 3: Training

The issue of training requirements was identified as the third sub-theme of T6. The findings indicate that participants thought early years teachers required particular training opportunities to further their knowledge about integrated working practice:

I feel there needs to be more actual practical experience whilst you're being trained (P1)

You need workshops; you need opportunities to discuss how things are done in different settings, different experiences (P6)

There needs to be an awareness of what's available because, depending on where you are working, whether it's in a local authority which has a lot of resources or if you're working in an academy chain that's got access to resources and who's responsible for providing those resources. How easy is it to get them, for example, if you need a speech therapist for a child? How do you go about accessing that? And then you also need to have another level above that about who's going to be referred to in order to get the resources. (P8)

6.9.4 T6: Sub-theme 4: Networking

The fourth sub-theme for T6 was identified as 'networking'; this was closely related to sub-theme 3, as the data indicated that training was seen to enable opportunities for networking with other professionals involved in integrated working. One participant indicated that a lack of opportunity to network with others could be challenging, as this could inhibit their access to support from others for themselves and the children in their care:

Reflecting on the different settings I've worked in and students I've met along the way, I remember that feeling in the beginning that I was a bit of an island - to almost fight against the grain to make those networks and to find out what other professional input I could have to support me and the well-being of the children (P4)

6.10 Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the thematic analysis of the participants' interview data and identified six emergent themes; these were 'communication'; 'personal attributes'; 'child-centred approach'; 'understanding of other professional roles'; 'supervision and mentoring' and 'challenges'. The chapter has also explained the respective sub-themes for each of the six emergent themes and includes relevant examples from the participants' data. In the next chapter, I will present the findings, integrated discussion and recommendations.

Chapter 7: Findings, discussion and recommendations

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I employ the four elements of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006) as a frame for exploring the six emergent themes and their respective sub-themes following analysis of the participants' views in Chapter 6. I look at these themes in relation to published literature on the subject and consider their implications for supporting early years teachers' engagement in integrated working, which is the focus of this research. The chapter starts by considering the subject of reciprocal interactions[11], which constitute the first element of the PPCT model and are viewed as 'the driving forces of human development' (Rosa and Tudge 2013: 252).

7.2 Reciprocal interactions

Introduction

The thematic analysis of the participants' data highlights that the early years teacher's reciprocal interactions with the child, with parents and with colleagues and other professionals in integrated working involve open and respectful communication, which supports the development of trusting relationships between these key actors. These views correspond with findings from Dalli's (2011) study that indicate supportive engagement and respectful communication with others are essential to promote and sustain the teacher's effective relationships with parents, colleagues and other professionals. In their national evaluation of Sure Start service provision, Anning et al. (2007: 4) also acknowledge the importance of a culture of respectful communication as an empowering tool for both service users and providers. In this section of the chapter, I explore salient factors from the six emergent themes regarding practitioner interactions and consider these factors in relation to relevant literature on the subject; I then consider their implications for supporting the early years teacher's engagement in integrated working.

[11] The terms 'reciprocal interactions' or 'interactions' are used in this chapter in place of the term 'proximal processes' to represent the first element of the PPCT model.

Discussion

The thematic analysis indicates participants highlighted the need for respectful communication within the early years setting; for instance, some emphasised the importance of the practitioner listening to the child to further their development:

> *So listening to the children's views, spoken and unspoken - because children's behaviour is a way of listening* (P7)

> *Listening to the child but not only what they say because with small children it might be how they behave* (P9)

> *It's not just about the parents' feedback, it's the children's* (P10)

These responses correspond to the view of being 'relationally responsive' to the child (Payler et al. 2016: 23) that involves attending to the child's 'bodily and vocal communication'. This perspective is supported by Cherrington's (2018: 318) notion of relational pedagogy that 'positions relationships at the heart of the curriculum' and requires the early years teacher to be 'fully attentive and listen carefully to children'. There is 'a focus on the quality of interactions between children and their teachers', which promotes their 'academic, social and emotional growth' (Pascal et al. 2019: 40). Dalli's (2011: 178) research further highlights the importance of listening to the child by referring to the early years teacher's 'sensitivity and responsiveness to children's cues' as an aspect of early years professionalism.

However, while attention has been drawn to the importance of listening and being responsive to the child for many years (UN 1989; DCSF 2008a; Clark and Moss 2011; NCTL 2013), policy initiatives can sometimes seem to thwart this approach. For instance, as discussed previously, Bradbury (2019: 824) reports practitioners' use of Baseline assessment was felt to distract them 'from the key job of building relationships and rapport with children'. Moreover, from their research with early years practitioners, Simpson et al. (2017: 185) found that a 'pedagogy of listening was stymied' by a 'dominant technocratic model of quality in the early years and austerity measures within the context of its delivery'. These views from the literature suggest the early years teacher's 'unique dialogic role in relationship with young children in providing integrated services in collaboration with other professionals' (Payler et al. 2016: 23) could be inhibited by policy measures that sometimes appear to be contradictory in the reality of practice.

The importance of teachers' communication with colleagues and other professionals is recognised within the Teachers' Standards (DfE 2011) and the Teachers' Standards (Early Years) (NCTL 2013). P9 referred to the latter standards when commenting on teachers' respectful communication with other professionals:

> *In EYTS there is a standard about communicating with everybody you would communicate with and includes other professionals. So that's important in terms of professional respect…communicating, sensitively, effectively, respectively* (P9)

P9's view is supported by Wong and Sumsion (2013: 345); they advise that effective integrated working in early years practice requires 'professional integrity'; they suggest, for instance, that if practitioners do not communicate with each other regarding a situation that is raising concerns, then 'improved outcomes are unlikely, no matter how strong the inter-agency links are'.

Other participants note that respect and trust were features of professional relationships in integrated working:

> *I think it's about mutual respect, I think the underlying issue is trust.* (P3)

> *It's that mutual respect - valuing each other* (P4)

> *You have to have a trustful working relationship.* (P5)

These views indicate that communication between different professionals in integrated working is grounded in mutual respect, trust and understanding, as identified by Barnes et al. (2018), as shown in Figure 3.6. A potential factor that could disrupt a shared understanding in communication is the use of jargon (Brown and White 2006). Participants expressed mixed views about its use; for example, P1 and P4 did not perceive use of jargon as a problematic issue:

> *I think we have to be really mindful of the jargon and jargon changes doesn't it and people become very concerned that don't know what they're talking about but I'll go along with it because I'll get it eventually. I know I've been in meetings and thought what does that mean and then eventually I've realised* (P1)

> *I don't think jargon is a barrier in the sense that if you have a graduate you have knowledge of it.* (P4)

However, P2 and P3 view use of jargon as a more challenging issue:

I suppose not understanding other people's jargon, so sometimes trainees have said someone said this and I didn't really understand what they meant and they weren't brave enough at that point to say I'm not sure I understand that. (P2)

It's [jargon] a huge barrier. (P3)

While there was some difference of participant opinion about the use of jargon, as cited above, the literature mainly focuses on concerns about its use. For instance, Greenfield (2011: 86) advises a 'shared language makes communication easier and brings down barriers, easing boundary crossing'. Conversations are reliant on participants 'adopting, or creating, a common frame of reference for considering available information and defining what they are trying to achieve together' (Mercer (2000: 45). The use of 'a common frame of reference' is supported by Nutbrown (2018: 127) who advises that the 'development and adoption of a common language is crucial to successful and effective multi-disciplinary working in the interests of young children and their families'. This perspective of language use aligns with Vygostsky's (1978) concept of language as a tool for joint creation of knowledge and understanding. Language is also positioned as a 'tool or artefact' in Leadbetter et al.'s (2007: 90) diagram of the 'Form of work undertaken in integrated working' (cited in Figure 3.5). This positions language as a common resource for those involved in the process of integrated working and contributes to realising agreed actions and outcomes for the child, rather than associating language to an individual's use, which may be problematic to other key actors and potentially inhibit implementation of integrated working policy.

Some participants refer to the significance of the practitioner's open communication with other professionals to share knowledge and perspectives about the child in support of their development:

The whole thing about the context of the child and their needs being met and understood; we're working with other agencies that we can all work together, that has only got to be for the well-being of that child. (P1)

Anybody who is involved with children as a teacher, they're very involved with the child all the time, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they see everything. I think that's probably where one of the barriers comes from, education side; they're with the children all the time so they really think they're got the greatest knowledge. In many ways they may have but it's about being open to other perspectives. (P9)

The notion of open communication is viewed as a crucial aspect of effective teams, as it enables team members to freely discuss pertinent issues with each other, facilitating the resolution of any conflicts and supporting collaborative decision-making (Briggs 1993). According to Melasalmi and Husu (2016), early years practitioners construct their professional knowledge and understanding through the process of reciprocal interaction, so professional communication that is focused on practice is crucial to their effective participation with children, families and other professionals.

These views are supported by Blackburn's (2016: 336) research at an early years centre for children with complex needs, which found professionals from different disciplinary areas share their 'distinctive professional perspective' of the child's development; this provides an opportunity for professionals 'to learn with and from each other' and also provides an overall view of the child's holistic development. Hopwood and Edwards (2017) suggest that while professionals should aim to avoid any conflict or confusion when engaging with each other's contributions, this should not mean that any disparities between their views need to be eliminated; rather, they could work with these differences and explore what this means for their collaborative tasks. This is important as clarity with others about individual professional motives is crucial when building common knowledge as a shared resource (ibid.).

Participants also refer to practitioner interactions with parents. Some thought these entail a willingness on the part of the practitioner to impart information about the setting's provision and be receptive to parents' perspectives about their child:

> *Communication, being totally open and respectful. Appreciative of difference so being able to understand how it might be from that parent's perspective as well.* (P2)
>
> *I think liaising with the families and the parents is very important; having those kinds of skills* (P5)
>
> *Often they [parents] will come to the school if they are worried about something so you get people who will come and talk to you about all sorts of things I think because they feel it's a kind of community space where you can come and do that, the more open you are to that the more people come……and that builds trust.* (P7)
>
> *They [parents] need to feel part of the learning; parents are the children's first educators; it's important they feel engaged in what the nursery is doing as well and we're in tune with them.* (P10)

These responses correlate with views in literature on the subject that indicates genuine engagement between parents and their child's educators affords mutual

support for the child's development (Sylva et al. 2004; Whalley et al. 2013; Goodall 2015; Hopwood et al. 2016; Robinson 2016; EEF 2018).

Interestingly, Bronfenbrenner (1990: 36, quoted in Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2011: 94) also advocates the benefit of this approach for the child's development:

> *The effective functioning of child-rearing processes in the family and other child settings requires establishing ongoing patterns of exchange of information, two-way communication, mutual accommodation, and mutual trust between the principal settings in which children and their parents live their lives*

Bronfenbrenner's (1990: 36) perspective can be associated with the use of the Pen Green Loop (cited in Figure 3.10) at the Pen Green Centre for children and their families, which is used to support the development of respectful and trusting relationships between parents and staff and facilitates open and regular communication about children's learning and interests at home and at the centre (Whalley and Dennison 2007).

However, although analysis of the data reveals participants' endorsement of practitioners' open and respectful interactions with parents, some participants refer to challenges when realising this process in practice; for example, P8 noted:

> *But of course it's quite difficult to have a real partnership with parents because you are an institution. You are bound by certain responsibilities and legal responsibilities that you have; you can't just say well let's collaborate and you decide some things and we'll decide other things because it's not going to work in practice, and yet all the time we espouse this notion of partnership with parents. So I think you have to manage expectations around those kinds of issues because it's quite easy for people to have false expectations about how that's going to work.* (P8)

Potential challenges to the development of effective parental engagement are acknowledged by the EEF (2018: 9) who state there is limited evidence on how schools effectively engage parents and schools can find it challenging to effectively influence parental engagement; they advise:

> *Schools should be optimistic about the potential of parental engagement, but cautious about the best approaches — reviewing and monitoring their activities to check that they are having their intended impacts.*

Participants also note that the early years teacher's focus on the child's welfare and development could involve the need to challenge parents or other professionals:

actually having the well-being of the children we care for at the forefront of our minds should be the spur we need to challenge and move forward (P4)

we do have to challenge parents and carers and other professionals (P9)

P4's and P9's views are supported by Sidebotham et al.'s (2016: 202) report on serious case reviews from 2011 to 2014; they advise that a professional's approach with parents should be 'grounded in the centrality of the rights and needs of the child, while being sensitive but not colluding with the needs and views of the parents'. They also suggest practitioners need to adopt authoritative practice while also maintaining an empathetic approach when working with others (ibid.).

Reciprocal interactions: Implications for supporting the early years teacher's role

The discussion of factors arising from the thematic analysis and literature relating to reciprocal interactions implies that the early years teacher should be encouraged to incorporate open and respectful communication and promote the development of trusting relationships with all those concerned with the child's development in integrated working. Participants highlighted the importance of the teacher listening to the child and there is widespread recognition in the literature of the importance of attentive and careful listening to the child (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva 2004; Fleer 2009; Payler et al. 2016; Howard et al. 2020). However, literature also indicated the early years teacher's preferred mode of interaction with children may be affected by contradictory policy measures, as discussed above (Simpson et al. 2017; Bradbury 2019).

Participants' views about effective forms of interaction with parents are supported by literature on the subject; however, the EEF's (2018) report on parental engagement points to the need for further exploration on the efficacy of approaches that support parental engagement. Participants' views about interactions with other professionals are also supported by the literature; for instance, the professional standards for early years teachers with EYTS (NCTL 2013) and those for teachers with QTS (DfE 2011) both refer to teachers forging 'positive professional relationships'. However, while there is encouragement to 'forge relationships', there could also be further consideration in policy guidance about practitioner interactions with colleagues and other professionals who are involved in supporting the child's development (Armistead et al. 2007).

A further implication that can be drawn from the above discussion concerns the importance of leadership practices for supporting early years teachers' interactions with key actors in integrated working. For instance, by promoting effective communication that involves active listening, leaders help to ensure the setting community have a shared understanding of its principles in terms of practice, policies and procedures and these are consistently applied (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007). Leaders' promotion of digital technology can help to sustain interactions with others and enables joint planning and review through use of online tools (Hargreaves and O'Connor 2018). Moreover, the early years teacher's efficacy in integrated working could be supported by leaders enabling teachers to explore strategies, such as co-produced services (Whalley 2013) that offer ways in which mutual and respectful engagement between parents and professionals could be promoted, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Leaders can also play a pivotal role in supporting the early years teacher to manage challenges in their role in integrated working; for instance, P9 suggests that 'it's about senior managers in all of these services taking responsibility for all of their staff'. In support of P9's view, Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007: 22) explain that 'effective leaders play a key role in the process of establishing a community of learners and team culture amongst staff'. For instance, leaders could facilitate opportunities for teachers to observe colleagues' interactions with others or view video recordings of practitioner interactions and then reflect collectively on the experience (Cherrington and Thornton 2015). This reflection could support early years teachers to manage tensions in their role, such as those created by seemingly contradictory expectations about practice within the policy context (Simpson et al. 2017).

7.3 Personal characteristics

Introduction

I now explore aspects from the six emergent themes concerning personal characteristics, as the second element of the PPCT model. Thematic analysis of the participants' data reveals that the early years teacher should have confidence, though also know their professional limitations, be inquisitive and reflective, and be knowledgeable about child development and other professional roles. I discuss these aspects of personal characteristics in relation to relevant literature on the subject, and then consider some implications for supporting the early years teacher's engagement in integrated working.

Discussion

The participants' data suggests the early years teacher's role in integrated working is underpinned by their professional integrity and their sense of a duty of care for the child and their family; for instance, P4 observed:

> *Holding onto the core duty of care that we have as a practitioner so understanding the respect that's required and the professionalism.* (P4)

P4's observation relates to Noddings' (2005: 147) view of practice that is based on an 'ethic of care' for the child. In early years practice, an ethic of care 'is a form of ethics focusing on feelings and relationship, rather than explicit codes and principles' (Taggart 2015: 381). This perspective contrasts with modernist views of early years professionalism that are recognised as being more bureaucratic (ibid). These dual perspectives of early years practice could be seen as a potential barrier to integrated working, as they could inhibit parents' and professionals' clear understanding of approaches used in practice; moreover, Campbell-Barr (2018: 82) suggests 'a lack of a coherent language for the ethic of care limits its articulation and distribution'. This is problematic for effective integrated working, as the adoption of a common language is crucial for effective multi-disciplinary practice (Nutbrown 2018).

Participants' data also indicates that the early years teacher should have a child-centred approach; for example, P3 and P5 explained:

> *I think the idea should be that its child centred* (P3)

> *You certainly have to be much more aware of the child holistically and the needs of the child, which are not necessarily just to do with the education.* (P5)

Sidebotham et al.'s (2016: 202) report on SCRs from 2011-2014 advocates a child-centred approach to safeguarding contexts; as discussed in Chapter 3, the report suggests professionals should consider 'both the voice of the child and the needs of the family'. This view aligns with the policy guidance, 'Working together to safeguard children' (DfE 2018: 10) that advises practitioners 'to see and speak to the child; listen

to what they say; take their views seriously'. However, Cherrington (2018: 328) notes that a child-centred emphasis in early years professional documentation has reduced focus on the teacher's role and that 'teachers' understanding of their role will be strengthened if future resources position teaching more explicitly and centrally within the teaching/learning relationship'. This positioning could enhance the early years teacher's professional confidence and support their professional judgement (Helsby 1999) that helps teachers to 'assess the most appropriate course of action' in any particular situation' (Pollard et al. 2014: 71). This is a pertinent consideration for early years teachers' role in integrated working.

Analysis of participants' data reveals that P2, P4 and P6 all consider early years teachers require confidence for their role in integrated working; for example, they state:

> *The confidence to work with parents, who can be challenging, the confidence to work with other professionals who may be challenging. To hold onto our own professional roles and to say this is what I know, this is what I've seen and I want this particular piece of information taken seriously.* (P2)

> *I guess it's instilling that confidence in them that actually yes there are procedures to follow but we're all human and whoever is part of that system, there are people who do not follow those right procedures but as professionals, as individuals, we should go beyond and do what we have to do.* (P4)

> *So it's this idea of you're not afraid to speak up in a meeting for example.* (P6)

These perspectives about confidence relate to Nutbrown's (2012) view that the early years practitioner needs to feel confident in their engagement with other professionals in integrated working. The need for a confident attitude is also noted in guidance on professional action in safeguarding contexts (Sidebotham et al. 2016: 201); this suggests the need for 'professional authority', which involves confidence and competence and enables professionals 'to adopt a stance of professional curiosity and challenge from a supportive base, rather than relying on undue optimism'. Authoritative practice enables professionals 'to be curious and exercise their professional judgement in the light of the circumstances of particular cases' (ibid).

Feelings of confidence can be enhanced by professional learning (Keay et al. 2019); for example, Vandekerckhove et al. (2019) explain how a leader's use of coaching supports staff at an early years children and family centre 'to grow professionally', while Rogers et al. (2017: 44) suggest that steps involved in coaching, such as goal-setting, seem to be 'more likely to help educators overcome challenges, stay motivated and stay on track as they pursue goals'. A coaching approach could also involve the use of technology; for example, use of interprofessional video-based coaching (Lofthouse et al. 2016) that supported a nursery teacher to feel more able to make reliable language assessments and participate in more constructive conversations with other professionals, as discussed in Chapter 3. However, it is important to note that it is 'the type and quality of interaction' between practitioners and their coaches that is a key factor for their effectiveness (Rogers et al. 2020: 181).

While a confident approach is advocated by participants and is supported in the literature, analysis of participants' data also identifies that the early years teacher should be aware of their own professional limitations and seek support, if necessary, as P1 and P8 explained:

> *I think to be open, honest, not to be afraid of not knowing but to be able to ask to use your own initiative. Not to be over dependent but to be able to actually ask.* (P1)

> *The other thing is to encourage them to be questioning all the time, actually asking and not feeling foolish about asking questions because why do you ask questions? Well I believe for two reasons; one is because you want to know something or you want reassurance that what you think you know is actually what you do know, and even naive questions you should encourage.* (P8)

Opportunities to share concerns are important, as they facilitate the development of professional confidence (Payler and Georgeson 2013b). Thematic analysis of the data indicates participants feel the early years teacher could be supported to share concerns through supervision or mentoring:

> *So within my own setting we would be using supervision and that would be the main arena where concerns would be discussed.* (P2)

> *So I think it kind of almost needs somebody, which could be a mentor, I don't know who this person would be; it could just be a colleague. Someone to just have an opportunity to have time with other people to discuss it…..to help you through so that you know you are doing the right thing.* (P6)

It's not about interfering it's just kind of, like you would do with the children, just checking in, tell me how it's going, that sort of stuff. (P7)

Participants' references to mentoring or supervision are supported by Payler and Georgeson (2013b) who suggest an assigned mentor could offer guidance about professional communication in integrated working. Carter's (2015: 12) review of initial teacher training (ITT) also advises that 'high quality mentoring is critically important for ITT'. However, as Hammond (2015) explains, the mentor's own mentoring skill needs to be considered to ensure the early years teacher has effective support.

Analysis of participants' data also indicates the early years teacher might encounter challenges in their relationships with others in integrated working, which could obstruct the process. For instance, P9 referred to potential difficulties in professional relationships:

It's about relationships and making sure that; you know a lot of the problems in multi-agency working have come in the past from professional barriers. (P9)

Supporting P9's view, Greenfield (2011) advises that professionals from different fields of practice may have different values, perceptions and priorities that can be a barrier to relationships in integrated working. The early years teacher could be supported with managing relationships through a practice–based approach to interprofessional education, such as through engagement in role-play activities with other professionals that could enable them to learn about different professional cultures or engage in discussions about different professional roles (Payler et al. 2008).

Reflective practice is a further strategy that the early years teacher could employ to support their role in integrated working. Analysis of the participants' data reveals reflection is valued; for instance, P4 commented:

But actually the value of reflection - that's the power I think - it's important to stop and have that space. (P4)

Literature on the subject of reflection supports this participant's views; reflection is seen as essential for teachers' learning (Boylan 2018) and supports the early years teacher to gain a fuller understanding of their own actions and responses to others (Cable and Miller 2011). Using a model of reflection could enhance this process; for

example, Campbell-Barr's (2019: 98) model that is shown in Figure 2.5 promotes focused reflection on areas of practice that are aligned with Bronfenbrenner's different ecological layers. This model could guide the early years teacher's reflection towards specific contexts of practice and enable them to see the interplay between these contexts (ibid.). Furthermore, the early years teacher could be supported through their participation in a community of practice that fosters the process of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger 1998). For instance, the community could explore tensions that could occur in integrated working, which could help the early years teacher to be reflexive about challenges encountered in practice and consider how they are applying agency in their emotional responses to others (Yarrow 2015).

The thematic analysis also highlights the importance of the early years teacher's inclusive approach when working with the child, their parents, or colleagues and other professionals:

> *I think you have to be inclusive in the sense that you've got to be open to the needs of all the children. Every child that you're responsible for deserves the best that you can give them.* (P5)
>
> *The idea I think as well that everyone's view is valued.* (P6)
>
> *An inclusive manner and not set limited expectations on children* (P7)

These participants' views resonate with Hammick et al.'s (2009) advice that an inclusive approach is important for effective teamwork in integrated working. Vandekerckhove et al. (2019: 95) recommend that practitioners should demonstrate an 'enabling, welcoming, participative and inclusive work attitude', which facilitates working 'as part of a more diverse team' and reaching out to so-called 'hard-to-reach families'. This approach is also advocated by the EEF (2018: 7) for collaborative work with parents; they state:

> *Start by assessing needs and talking to parents about what would help them support learning… communicate carefully to avoid stigmatising, blaming, or discouraging parents. Focus on building parents' efficacy.*

Collaborative work with parents in integrated working could involve strengths-based approaches that are 'broadly inclusive of the family and community (Fenton et al.

2015: 32), as discussed previously in the work. However, Whittington and Whittington (2015) warn that assumptions that an issue can be readily resolved by a strength-based approach should not be made; for instance, a safeguarding issue may require a more extensive approach to support the child and their family.

Participants also consider the importance of teachers' knowledge for integrated working, highlighting the areas of child-development, professional roles and the range of support that could be available for a child; for instance, P1 observed:

You sort of think of Bronfenbrenner…and how that affects the child. (P1)

The literature on professional knowledge for early years practice advocates that a range of knowledge and expertise is required; for instance, Mathers et al. (2014) discuss the importance of knowledge about child development for practitioners working with children under three years. Literature also highlights that it is important to consider not only the breadth of knowledge that should be acquired but how knowledge is then applied in practice (Campbell-Barr 2019).

Personal characteristics: Implications for supporting the early years teacher's role

The thematic analysis of participants' data reveals an array of factors concerning the early years teacher's personal characteristics. For instance, the analysis of the data reveals participants refer to the early years teacher's duty of care that relates to Noddings' (2005) notion of 'an ethic of care'. Exploration of the literature on this concept revealed Cherrington (2018) contests a central focus on the child's activity within a child-centred approach that detracts attention away from the role of the teacher. This presents a potential barrier to the early years teacher's participation in integrated working, as their role could appear unclear. Cherrington (2018: 328) suggests it would be timely to explore the teacher's role more fully and 'examine the extent to which initial and ongoing teacher education programmes explicitly foreground teacher thinking, metacognition, and reflection'. Similarly, when reviewing participants' data relating to Theme 3, 'Child-centred approach', cited in Figure 6.4, it is useful to reflect on Campbell-Barr's (2018: 82) perception of a lack of coherent language concerning the concept of an 'ethic of care' and that competing perspectives about early years professionalism have the potential to inhibit parents' and professionals' understanding of approaches to early years provision. Therefore, it would also be useful for early years teachers to explore these perspectives further in initial or post-qualifying professional development opportunities.

Analysis of the data also reveals participants thought the early years teacher could be supported with their role in integrated working through development of professional confidence and through building effective relationships with others in integrated working; suggestions for enhancing these aspects of their practice include role-play activities with other professionals and opportunities to engage in discussions about different professional roles (Payler et al. 2008). The early years teacher's development of reflective practice and engagement in a community of practice are also highlighted as useful strategies to support their role in integrated working. Professional development activities should seek to enhance the early years teacher's 'professional confidence' and 'professional authority' (Sidebotham et al. 2016: 201) to help teachers manage challenges they may encounter in integrated working to support the efficacy of their contribution to the process.

7.4 Resourcing (as an aspect of context)

Introduction

I now consider the thematic analysis of the participants' data concerning 'Resourcing' as an aspect of context, which is the third element of the PPCT model. I look at the data in relation to published literature on the subject and consider implications for supporting early years teachers' engagement in integrated working.

Discussion

The thematic analysis of participants' data indicates some consider the early years teacher should be supported to have an understanding of different professional roles and processes relating to integrated working; for example, P2 and P4 observe:

> *Just people coming in and talking about their role and the sort of support they can signpost trainees or students to, the sorts of resources that might be available for them and even talking about referral routes because that's all key to underpinning their understanding.* (P2)

> *They should be going to regular training and having links and contacts - but actually if there were opportunities for other professionals; police and social workers, health workers, paediatricians to have some sort of -not necessarily that you have children with those needs - it's that wide* (P4)

These participants' views on how the early years teacher could develop understanding of other professional roles are supported in the literature; for example, King et al.

(2017) consider how joint training sessions and interprofessional meetings promote professional understanding. Developing an awareness of different professional roles and their unique expertise helps professionals to value the contributions of other professionals in integrated working (Carpenter and Dickinson 2016).

The participants' data also indicates the importance of the early years teacher's understanding about different professional cultures; for instance, P6 noted:

> *Is it not just exposure to the other agencies and more of an understanding of what the other agencies do? If you have more understanding about the training these people have been through, the language they speak, what their priorities are because their priorities are not going to be the same.* (P6)

Jarvis and Trodd (2008) explain how practical activities in interprofessional education can facilitate practitioners' learning about different professional cultures, as discussed in Chapter 3. Supporting this view, Barnes et al. (2018) advise that provision of joint training for staff from different services fosters understanding and helps to reduce mistrust or rivalry between professionals when working to achieve planned outcomes in integrated working.

The analysis of participants' data also reveals that some participants consider digital technology could support the early years teacher's collaborative working; for instance, P3 refers to use of email to support sharing of information, while P9 suggests that the early years teacher's understanding could be supported by the use of webinars or videos made by professionals from different disciplinary areas:

> *So it's about being able to have a conversation, even if it's through email because we all live very busy lives* (P3)

> *Getting people to make very short videos about what their role is and what they do, involve people in on-line webinars, that kind of thing* P9

These observations about application of digital technology are supported by Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018: 137); for instance, they suggest use of online tools 'can sustain professional relationships and interactions' and support 'collaborative planning and review'.

The issue of availability of resources was also identified from the analysis of participants' data; for instance P1 and P8 stated:

I have to then take the approach of what's in the best interests of that child and the best interests of the rest of the children...The integrated working is only as successful as the resources that you have to make it successful. (P1)

There needs to be an awareness of what's available because, depending on where you are working, whether it's in a local authority which has a lot of resources or if you're working in an academy chain that's got access to resources and who's responsible for providing those resources. (P8)

These participants' views concerning availability and access to resources in integrated working are considered in the literature. For instance, the issue of uncertainty about resourcing is one of the barriers to integrated leadership that is identified by school and children centre leaders (National College 2009: 18-19), as shown in Figure A1. The reduction in Children Centre (CC) resourcing since the UK recession of 2008 has had a significant impact on access to CCs. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Social Mobility Commission (2019) report that somewhere between 500 and 1000 CCs have closed due to local authority funding cuts and CC services have been reported as 'hollowed out' by Smith et al. (2018: 4). Moreover, Urban and Dalli (2012: 170) observe that integrated working might be affected by competition between services 'for recognition and scarce resources'.

The analysis of the data and the literature also identify the significance of the setting leader in supporting the early years teacher's role in integrated working; for instance P3 and P7 observed:

I support the workshop, and the idea is the practitioners in the room identify what the parents are interested in by having conversations with them. P3

Those principles of leadership, which are about empowering and engagement and listening and building agency. (P7)

Well I think one of the things, as a leader in a setting, is that you have to demonstrate to your staff that you value them and one of the ways you do that is by treating them like professionals. (P8)

Participants' comments on the role of leaders to support early years teachers' integrated working can be related to Forde et al.'s (2006: 168) notion of 'collaborative

decision-making', which supports consistency of provision and also 'promotes ideas of community and of community ownership of professional policy and practice'. This can support the early years teacher to make sense of situations and seek solutions with others (ibid).

Leadership support for collaborative practice in early years provision is also discussed by Payler and Georgeson (2013a: 52); they argue that the potential to 'act to provide interprofessionally designed and implemented care and education for young children is a shared rather than individual capacity in settings'. The leader's promotion of a culture that encourages people to feel valued aligns with Mausethagen's (2013: 21) view that teachers perceive the notion of being valued and being emotionally supported by their colleagues and the wider school culture 'as encouragement to be an effective teacher'. Leaders also play an important role by supporting 'a positive work culture, are accessible to them, listen to them, value them as professionals, recognise their work and support their autonomy (Ofsted 2019b: 7).

Resourcing (as an aspect of context): Implications for supporting the early years teacher's role

Discussion of the participants' data and related literature on the subject of resourcing indicates that early years teachers could be supported to develop their understanding of different professional roles, expertise and professional cultures through a range of activities, such as visits by different professionals to training sessions. The use of digital technology could support access to other professionals. For example, use of online webinars or videos where professionals discuss their respective roles could support the early years teacher's understanding of how professionals from different services contribute to integrated working. The use of technology is supported in the literature; for instance, Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018: 137) suggest use of online tools 'can sustain professional relationships and interactions'.

The early years teacher could also be supported through pre-or post-qualifying training opportunities that aim to develop understanding of how they might access resources to support integrated working, as discussed in Chapter 3. However, it is also important for them to gain a realistic understanding about what could be available to avoid raising false expectations about resources (Hood 2014).

Support for the early years teacher's engagement in integrated working can also be provided by leaders of practice who promote a culture of collaborative working in

support of the child (Forde et al. 2006). Leaders can also help to mitigate pressures that the early years teacher might experience due to issues, such as limited funding and prevent teachers from feeling such barriers to their work are a personal failure on their part (Yarrow 2015).

7.5 Time (and its limitations)

Introduction

I now discuss analysis of participants' data and related literature concerning the final element of the PPCT model, which is Time (and its limitations) and consider implications for supporting early years teachers' engagement in integrated working.

Discussion

The thematic analysis of participants' data indicates how the issue of time might affect the early years teacher's role in integrated working. For instance, P5 notes that the teacher's capacity to undertake their role might be obstructed due to their other commitments as a teacher:

> *You can't expect them [the teacher] to do a full time job and then on top of that do all these other things.* (P5)

P5's view aligns with Simpson et al.'s (2017) perspective that sufficient time and staffing are needed to allow the practitioner scope to develop relationships. Similarly, P6 suggests that the teacher would need some non-contact time to manage administrative tasks required for integrated working, such as making telephone calls or updating reports:

> *Appreciate that everything takes time. So they have to have support in being able to maybe come away from the children and actually have some time, if they're writing up reports or making telephone calls, anything that they have to do, they've got to be given the time to do it.* (P6)

These participants' perspectives align with Vandekerckhove et al.'s (2019: 108) recommendations regarding time in their report on integrated working:

> *service providers, leaders and managers should facilitate the provision of time and resources for integrated working, including frequent, meaningful communication among services; e.g. by providing child-free hours to create*

time for reflective practice, team meetings, case reporting, exchanging experiences, training and coaching.

Analysis of the participants' data also indicates the need for organisation of time; for instance P8 observes:

It's so easy to get carried away on the needs of day to day firefighting, sorting this out, sorting that out, so you actually have to have the resources and the time planned in and the people who have those responsibilities to make them happen. (P8)

This perspective is supported by Hall (2005) who advises that organisation of time is one of the main barriers to integrated working. Jelphs and Dickinson (2008: 107) suggest that time needs to be allocated for 'teams to be teams' so they form an effective relationship. Participants' data also revealed that people other than the teacher might lack time to engage in integrated working, which could hinder its progress towards agreed goals. For instance, parents' lack of time could be an issue, as P2 and P10 observe:

Finding time and a place to talk to someone confidentially, being able to say to a parent who may be in a very big rush we need to sit down and talk about this or document this. (P2)

Those [parents] that are rushing in the evening and may not have time for formal feedback. (P10)

This issue could be supported by leaders who 'have a genuine understanding of families' lives' and 'prioritise engagement' with parents (EEF 2018: 10); this could encourage early years teachers' efforts to engage with parents who appear to have limited time to talk with staff.

A further obstruction to the early years teacher's role in integrated working could be delay in provision of services for the child; for example, P3 observes:

But sometimes when you're supporting a child, for example with complex needs and the system isn't fast enough and the child isn't receiving the support and you're working with other partners and things are delayed and sometimes you're not having the same communication, it's not effective and

you can see things being delayed and ultimately your fear is this child is not going to get the support they need. (P3*)*

This perspective is supported by Hood (2014) who explains that an optimistic view of integrated working may not align with complex situations that are experienced in practice.

Time (and its limitations): Implications for supporting the early years teacher's role

Overall, participants' data and related literature on the subject indicate that the early years teacher could be supported by a realistic allocation of time to undertake their role in integrated working so other aspects of their role are not adversely affected. Furthermore, the teacher could be supported with access to non-contact time, where needed so that administrative tasks, such as phone calls to other professionals could be undertaken in office hours (Vandekerckhove et al. 2019).

Support may be required with organisation of time so that this is used effectively; for example, to enable the teacher to arrange meetings with parents who may not be able to attend at allocated times (Hall 2005). There should also be an acknowledgement that delays could occur in the process of integrated working (Canavan 2009) so times set for managing tasks should be planned appropriately to avoid unrealistic expectations being communicated to others involved in the task (Simpson et al. 2017). This would help to avoid undue pressure on the team.

7.6 Walking interview

As discussed in Chapter 2, Miller et al.'s (2012) study on professionalism explores the lived experience of early years practitioners working in different cultural contexts. The study found the practitioners' view of themselves as early years professionals was formed by the 'immediacy of their roles' and there was 'an emphasis on relationality as a key aspect of being a professional' (Urban and Dalli 2012: 161). Similarly, the 'in-situ' nature of a walking interview offers the scope to explore the lived reality of practitioners and their relationality with people and objects in their context of practice (Lynch and Mannion 2016), while 'leveraging qualities, such as enhanced embodied understanding, participant empowerment [and] rapport-building' (Duedahl and Blichfeldt 2020: 439).

My experience of undertaking a walking interview for this work was very positive. From my perspective as a researcher, I experienced this as someone who did not need prompts, as there were environmental prompts that promoted fluid expression. I also felt that the walking interview helped me to relax into deep listening and a reflective mode. Although much of the data from the walking interview could be seen as similar in content to the other interviews, P10 used 'I' more frequently than participants did in the sedentary interviews (please see appendices E1 and E2). Overall, the walking interview had a more spontaneous quality than the sedentary interviews; it had a qualitative difference in that the participant made more use of the subjective, which conveyed their personal values as part of their professional values. This does not imply that the other participants were unable or did not wish to express their personal values in a similar way to P10 but that the formality of the sedentary interview may have prevented this occurring.

Exploring the walking interview in this work reminded me of a visit I made to a nature kindergarten in Scotland in 2009 with a group of early years professionals who were interested in developing the outdoor environment at their respective settings. We spent a large part of the day in the kindergarten's outdoor space engaged in activities, such as making shelters from natural materials. I was not aware of the concept of the walking interview at the time but I believe the visit would have been a suitable opportunity for using this interview when moving around the nature kindergarten with the practitioners; for example, to gain a greater understanding of their experience of being in the outdoor environment. From my experience of the walking interview, I believe it enables the researcher 'to listen to, respect and take seriously others' being and lived experiences' (Duedahl and Blichfeldt 2020: 455), and I will be exploring further use of the walking interview in future research.

7.7 Summary

The four elements of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model offered a helpful structure for the discussion of the six themes and their respective sub-themes; this enabled me to maintain a rigorous approach to my exploration of the analysis of the data, thus supporting the validity of the research. The corpus of data table (Figure F1) resonates with the literature, indicating an alignment of participant choices of vocabulary used in their interviews with key terms found in the literature.

Overall findings from this study highlight that the early years teacher's role in integrated working is complex; proficiency to collaborate effectively and responsively with others requires additional layers of expertise as well as the specialist knowledge and skills associated with their professional role (Edwards, 2010a; Cumming and Wong 2012). Support for the early years teacher needs to be correspondingly dynamic. The literature on professional development reveals that brief one-off sessions are not effective and professional development is needed throughout the teacher's career. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the implications for supporting the early years teacher that are detailed above should be regularly reviewed to ensure their relevance; as Campbell-Barr (2018: 85) highlights:

> *Clearly, ECEC professionalism is a combination of initial training, time in practice and continued professional development, it is not a fixed state. Exploring the knowledge-base therefore is not about defining it as a non-adjustable entity. The social character of knowledge highlights its fluidity. Rather, exploring the knowledge-base is to develop a greater understanding of what it constitutes and how ECEC professionals give meaning to their daily practice.*

This project sought to explore what can enhance support for early years teachers to achieve integrated working practice. Figure 7.1 shows where and how the initial research aim and objectives have been addressed within the project.

Figure 7.1: Table to show where and how the research aim and objectives have been addressed

Aims and objectives	Project chapter where aim/objective is addressed	How the aim/objective is addressed
The **aim** of this particular project, which has the potential to contribute to its purpose is to explore what can enhance support for teachers to achieve integrated working practice.	Chapter 3	Through exploration of literature base
	Chapter 5	Through the research activity
	Chapter 6	Through analysing the participant data
	Chapter 7	Discussion of data and findings
Objective 1: To enhance my knowledge by critically reviewing policy and legal frameworks and professional and academic literature relevant to integrated working within early years provision.	Chapter 1	Exploring contexts of early years policy and practice
	Chapter 3	Through exploration of literature base
	Chapter 4	Exploring influential factors on choice of research design
Objective 2: To gather data from professionals in the sector boundaried by experience and location	Chapter 4	Exploring research design and choice of participants
	Chapter 5	Through the research activity
Objective 3: To analyse the data and contextualise it in existing literature and seeking resonances across and between experiences of established practitioners, as well as my own	Chapter 6	Through analysing the participant data
	Chapter 7	Discussion of data and findings

7.8 Contributions and recommendations

Contributions

1) This project has its roots in my professional concern for supporting early years teachers' engagement in integrated working policy and practice. I agree with the notion that the likelihood of replicating the process of practitioner research 'in its entirety is relatively difficult' due to the scope of this research and the 'transient nature' of educational practice (Hall and Wall 2019: 74). The previous discussion of early years education policy and practice in this work illustrates the pace of change that can occur within the space of one or two decades, such as the rise and decline of Children Centre provision that was discussed in Chapter 3. However, there is 'wider resonance' (Mason 2018: 245) discernible from the findings of this work. Moreover, as a professional, I believe that single practice-based projects have the potential to collectively contribute to the wider sphere of practitioner research and support the development of professional knowledge.

   Through its purpose, focus and its involvement of experienced practitioners, this project responds to Hiim's (2007) call that:

   > *Research must attend to the situation, the context, the functions, and the purpose. Practical challenges, involvement, 'interruptions', and considerations must be used as the basis for the systematic development of professional knowledge ….practice and theory melt together in a critical project.* (Hiim 2007: 112)

2) In considering the contribution of this project, I recognise that 'attending to the situation' (ibid.) can involve a range of novel research processes. Almost by accident I used the 'walking interview' in this work; I was intrigued by the nature of this interview and wanted to experiment with it in the research. Overall, the walking interview was fascinating to use; I believe it has untapped potential and would like to explore its use further in educational practice and contribute to the growth of innovative research methods. As noted below, I also recommend its use as a novel and versatile research tool. This research was completed before the global pandemic but in the context of the ensuing lockdowns and restrictions that have come into play, there is an opportunity to explore new research methods and see how they work in practice. For instance, innovative methods could help to address concerns about the 'What Works' approach to research, which has been contested for 'its narrowness' and 'accompanying linear 'evidence-into-practice' model'; this has led to the question about 'what does – or should-count as evidence and on

whose authority' (Boaz et al. 2019: 373). Using the walking interview could help to extend the question of 'What Works?' to 'How, Why, When and Where does it work?'

3) This work draws on Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model as a main framework for the project. The PPCT model has been used previously by researchers to support discussion of research (O'Toole et al. 2014; Jaeger 2016; Perry and Dockett 2018); however, at the time of writing, the PPCT model has not previously been applied to research on the early years teacher's engagement in integrated working. Therefore, the application of the PPCT model in this work offers a unique contribution to practice, as it focuses attention of the model's influential factors on the subject of the early years teacher's role in integrated working.

   The consistent use of the PPCT model in this work has also served to enhance the trustworthiness of the research approach by using 'one of the most comprehensive and researchable frameworks available to behavioral and social scientists' (Hayes 2021:511). In particular, the model helps to highlight the importance of the early years teacher's effective use of reciprocal interactions with the child, their parents, colleagues and other professionals that helps to enhance the process of integrated working. This suggests professional development should enhance opportunities for teachers 'to engage with a range of educational discourses and discursive repertoires' (Biesta et al. 2015: 638) to further their effective utilisation of reciprocal interactions in integrated working. This, in turn, would help to acknowledge early years teachers as valid contributors to practice and policy development rather than 'the passive receptacles of policy' (Ozga 2000: 7).

4) The mapping in the tables in Chapter 3 offers a further contribution to professional knowledge and practice; these tables provide distilled and accessible details of perspectives from the literature on the subject of integrated working in early years practice. From my immersion in the literature, I have also produced an extensive reference list for this work, which is a resource for both education researchers and practitioners.

Recommendations

Drawing on my experience of the project and its findings, I make the following recommendations:

Recommendations for my own practice

1) The research has confirmed my concern with the subject; however, the literature has offered me ways me to articulate this more effectively; the project has given my professional view more credibility, as this had been substantiated by the project. As a practitioner, I will use my learning from undertaking the project to drive through key issues from the project to influence the curriculum for which I am partly responsible.

2) I would like to experiment further with using the 'walking interview'; I enjoyed using this method and wish to explore its use further, as I believe it engenders a freer approach to interviewing and there is untapped potential in its use in early years education and beyond.

3) I will be applying my learning from the project to other roles that I have in education:

   - As a member of the management committee of the Centre for Education Research and Scholarship (CERS) in the Education Department, I contribute to CERS activities and events, such as contributing to programmes for visiting academics and practitioners from the UK and beyond.
   - I have been invited by the Dean of the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education at Middlesex University to be a member of the CPD/Knowledge Exchange Hub group and have started to explore the potential of integrated learning activities with colleagues from Health and Social Care departments.
   - As an external examiner for a teaching training programme at another University where I am invited to contribute suggestions for developing the programme.
   - I am involved in a planned publication on the research subject

Recommendations for colleagues in the early years sector

1) I recommend colleagues carefully consider the role of reciprocal interactions in integrated working practice. There is a focus on the early years teacher's interactions with the child in practice guidance, which is related to promoting their

academic development (Sylva et al. 2004); however, there is less focus on the form of the early years teacher's interactions with parents, colleagues and other professionals in the professional standards and other practice literature. Therefore, colleagues working on HE early years professional programmes and in practice are encouraged to explore ways in which this aspect of practice could be enhanced, as noted above in the implications for practice.

2) I encourage the use of technology as a useful area to explore for enhancing professional work in integrated working; for example, using virtual reality as a tool in professional development to enhance practitioner response to challenges.

3) A further recommendation is that practitioners engage in individual or group reflection on the key elements of the PPCT model. For example, by using Campbell-Barr's (2019: 96) reflective model that is cited in the work, which helps to focus reflection on the 'complex realities of practice' by concentrating on different contextual layers related to practice.

4) I recommend exploring the notion of relational work across the different groups; such as children, parents, staff and external colleagues, looking at common and different factors that concern relational approaches with these people.

5) I also recommend looking at the wider field of support for early years teachers, as provision is not limited to a single service overall (Kay et al 2021). The issue of disparity between the role of the early years teacher with EYTS and their counterpart with QTS is a significant issue that is occurring 'amid demands on the sector 'to increase the number of suitably skilled and qualified staff in order to raise attainment through high-quality early education' (Rogers et al. 2020: 156). Moreover, the EYT cannot access the forthcoming early career framework for teachers, as this is currently only accessible to teachers with QTS (DfE 2019). While this differential in conditions of service between the two roles is not yet resolved at the time of writing, it is pertinent to consider ways of leveraging wider support for the role of the teacher with QTS and EYTS, as Traunter (2019: 833) advises:

> *A re-conceptualisation of professionalism in the sector is now overdue, more importantly the voices of those working in the sector need to be heard to generate a more comprehensive perspective of professionalism for ECEC*

In Figure 7.2, I have included some suggested actions for pre-and post-qualifying development for early years teachers that are based on the implications for practice that were detailed earlier in the chapter. Figure 7.2 maps the suggested professional development activities against the professional standards for QTS and EYTS and provides a rationale for the inclusion of the activities. This project is concerned with supporting the role of the early years teacher in integrated working; therefore, all the suggested activities are focussed on enhancing the teacher's role, which, in turn, aims to support the development of the child. Finally, Figure 7.2 recommends a likely timeframe when the suggested professional development should occur.

Figure 7.2: Table to show suggested professional development activities for the teacher

TS	*EYTS*	*Suggested enhancement to pre- and post–qualifying professional development to support engagement in integrated working*	*Rationale for inclusion*	*Professional development stage when suggested enhancement occurs*
8	2, 6, 8	Enhance use of reciprocal interactions; i.e. explore ways of communicating respectively between a range of key actors within an early years context	Current training focusses on practitioner interaction with children - broaden practitioner skills of interactions with key actors - focus on respectful relationships that promote wellbeing and academic and social development of all children	ITT and EYITT
8	6, 8	Opportunities for teachers to be involved in role play scenarios representative of their broader commitments e.g. speaking to a parent in a challenging environment	- enhance the confidence of teachers and further their professional authority - increase understanding of roles of different professionals and range of services and resources - develop transferable skills to apply to new situations - learning and support from the expertise of	ITT, EYITT and post-qualifying

			experienced colleagues/coaches/ mentors	
8	7 and 8	Incorporating the use of technology within training i.e. use of informative videos, webinars and VR	- raise teachers' awareness and knowledge of professional roles and agencies - broaden focus of training on disciplines other than curriculum - update teachers with technology developments as learning resource and tools that could be applied to their own practice	ITT, EYITT and post-qualifying
4, 5 and 6	4 and 6	Training on how to source and evaluate effective resources	- teachers feel overwhelmed by volume and range of resources providers. - make more effective use of teacher time and funds as teachers are more discerning regarding quality and applicability of resources. - build a community of teachers that pool skills and knowledge to select and promote effective resources	ITT, EYITT and post-qualifying
8 and Part Two	4 and 8	Teacher allocated time with mentor/coach to access broader support	- teachers can access pastoral support from mentors/coaches who are attuned to their mental health and wellbeing - mentors and coaches support reflective practice	ITT, EYITT and post-qualifying

Recommendations to researchers

1) As discussed above, employing Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model to the subject of this project at the time of writing is a contribution to research, as it offers a unique application of this model. It supports focused attention on influential factors that affect human development and could be applied to contexts other than integrated working in early years practice.

2) Furthermore, the tables in Chapter 3 of the work offer different perspectives on integrated working in the early years context. The reference list offers further suggestions of texts.

3) The use of the walking interview in this work is another recommendation from this project. Having found it intriguing to use, I would like to recommend it to others so they can explore its benefits too. In particular, I believe it would be useful where there could be concerns about hierarchy in the interviewing context.

4) In terms of authors who have informed the project, I would recommend Cherrington's (2018) work, as it has supported my thinking about how the focus on child-initiated play has unwittingly shifted attention away from the teacher's role in practice. This is pertinent to research on areas such as teacher agency, though it is also not limited to that subject. Campbell-Barr's (2019: 97) reflective model is a further recommendation.

7.9 Dissemination Strategy

1) I aim to present findings from this work at the University's annual Learning and Teaching conference later this year. Preferably, this would be as part of a collaborative presentation to reflect the subject and also to emphasise the relational aspect of the work.

2) I was invited as a guest speaker at a round table discussion on children's mental health and well-being at the 2020 Bright Start Conference 'Early Years Excellence in Practice' for the MENA region. This took place in December 2020 and was attended by over 700 attendees from forty-three different countries. I drew on my learning from the project in this presentation.

3) I presented my research to colleagues at a CERS session in March 2020; I plan to present at another CERS session in autumn 2021 and will be looking for further opportunities to present my findings.

4) I am also working on a chapter on collaborative working for an edited book.

7.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the analysis of the participant data in relation to the literature base. This enabled implications for practice to be discerned. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model has been employed to organise the discussion of the analysis of the data. This continued approach of applying the PPCT model in this project enhances its coherency and rigour. The chapter elucidates where the research aim and objectives have been addressed in Figure 7.1 and has considered the trustworthiness of the research and its findings. The project's contributions and recommendations have been detailed and Figure 7.2 shows suggested professional development activities for the early years teacher that are a product of an evaluation of the current professional standards for QTS and EYTS. A rationale was developed with teacher professional development in mind that would support the broader role of engagement in integrated working and the suggested activities are mapped against the QTS and EYTS professional standards in Figure 7.2. The chapter concludes with a strategy for disseminating the research findings to enable the outcomes of this project to be shared with the professional and research community.

Reflection

Introduction

In this section of the work, I reflect on my experience of undertaking the project. I also consider some 'community conversations' that occurred during the project, which provided me with an opportunity to have conversations with practitioners, academics, policy-makers and others who have an interest in the focus of the project. These conversations supported the development of the project and have helped to shape the project outcome.

Undertaking the project

Undertaking this professional doctorate (DProf) has been a unique experience. It has been defined by a sense of connectedness to practice, which has been affirming. There have been other connections. Firstly, to the academic world of doctoral research. Initially undertaking a DProf within the University's 'Institute for Work Based Learning' (IWBL) enabled me to start my doctoral research journey with people from an array of interesting practice-based roles.

The project is closely connected to my university role as a tutor working with students who are based in schools. Time spent in research events at the University or elsewhere, has provided further points of connection, as I have developed my work and heard the voice of others sharing their research.

I have co-authored a book on early years professional practice whilst undertaking this project; this has generated more connections and supports dissemination of my work to a wider audience.

Though the written project is completed, I look forward to further connections, as I go forward to the next stage of my research.

Community Conversations

As suggested by Boud and Tennant (2008: 304), community engagement supports the need for doctoral work and other aspects of learning and teaching in universities 'to learn from workplaces outside the academy as much as we desire to contribute to them'. 'Community Conversations' have provided me with 'real-world' opportunities as a candidate on a professional doctorate to develop 'the depth of criticality in research areas and the ability to convey ideas as coherently and compellingly as possible', which are indicators of professional research (Eastman and Maguire, 2016: 356).

Community Conversation: EECERA Conference Presentation, Dublin City University, September 2016

Context

In September 2016, I presented some initial thinking on my research project at the European Early Childhood Research Association (EECERA) conference at Dublin City University.

The EECERA conference theme of 'Happiness, Relationships, Emotion and Deep Level Learning' provided a focus to explore links between aspects of young children's cognitive and socio-emotional development. This focus is relevant to the area of my research project, which is concerned with integrated support for a child's holistic development. My conference presentation was entitled 'How can practitioners be supported to work on early intervention programmes within multidisciplinary teams?' and the conference organisers included it with two other individual papers in a ninety minute symposium on 'Early Intervention Strategies'. All three papers proved to be extremely well-matched and I felt there was a coherent thread to the whole symposium.

The particular focus of my presentation for the EECERA 2016 Conference was 'Early Intervention (EI)', which can be defined as 'Intervening early and as soon as possible to tackle problems emerging for children, young people and their families or with a population most at risk of developing problems' (Sharp and Filmer-Sankey, 2010: 2).

In my presentation, I referred to the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2016) online Early Years Toolkit that summarises educational research on effective pedagogical approaches and early years interventions in terms of their supporting evidence, cost and impact on children's learning. However, my presentation cautioned the justification of social investment in early years provision, as this could provide a narrowed perspective 'to the benefits in terms of the return on the state's investment, and losing sight of the inherent benefits of, and social justice arguments for, provision of services for children and support for families' (Clarke, 2006: 702).

The EECERA presentation and subsequent discussion with the audience enabled me to deepen my knowledge and understanding of the research subject through my engagement within a community of practice, which is characterized by three interdependent constructs: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). The experience enabled me to critically engage with the

material I presented and to develop ‘authority as an originator of practice to debate matters on an equal footing with others in the field or profession’ (Costley and Lester, 2012: 260).

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Community Conversation 2: Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL) conference, Middlesex University, June 2017

In June 2017, I collaborated with a programme colleague to develop and present a poster at the Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL) conference at Middlesex University, London. The poster’s title was: ‘BA (Hons) Learning and Teaching: for Teaching Assistants working in a diverse range of educational settings’. It explained pedagogical approaches to the BA Learning and Teaching programme and its relationship to student progression and employment needs. This was relevant to an audience who were particularly interested in practice-based learning. The poster included photos of student activities to demonstrate examples of student engagement.

I also developed and delivered a workshop with a colleague at the Annual Learning and Teaching Conference at Middlesex University in September 2017 that focused on communities of practice that were discussed above. During the workshop at the Conference, we gave attendees a task that would require them to work collaboratively to illustrate the theoretical view of communities of practice (Wenger 1998). I believe that sharing teaching and learning practice on the programme with a wider audience helps reflection on practice and encourages new ways of thinking about students’ experience and progression by being focused on the programme and pedagogic approaches.

Community Conversation 3: Visit by a group of sixteen early years teachers from the Early Childhood Association in Finland to Middlesex University, November 2015

I liaised with a colleague to arrange for a group of sixteen early years teachers from the Early Childhood Association in Finland to visit Middlesex University in November 2015. This was an opportunity to share knowledge about practice with visiting academics and practitioners and enrich understanding of education theory and practice in our respective countries. I developed a presentation with my colleague for the visiting group and liaised with local schools and early years settings to arrange

visits for members of the group. I also arranged for Middlesex students to meet the group so they could learn more about early years practice in Finland and share knowledge about practice.

These ‘community conversations’ have all contributed to the development of this project.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Possible barriers to leadership of integrated working and solutions to achieving leadership of integrated working

The barriers in the table below were identified by school and children centre leaders and their children's services partners at a symposium on building effective integrated leadership (National College 2009: 18-19) They are arranged into four themes: *People; Roles; Outcomes and resourcing; Power and advocacy*

Figure A1: Possible barriers to leadership of integrated working (National College 2009: 18-19)

	Theme 1	**Theme 2**	**Theme 3**	**Theme 4**
	People: Trust and belief	*Roles, responsibilities and accountability*	*Outcomes and resourcing*	*Power and advocacy*
A	Lack of staff commitment	Timescales too tight	Unsure about future shape and direction	Unclear lines of responsibility
B	Relationships not secure or established	Hiding behind policies and procedures	Unsure how each agency can contribute	Managers not lowering the drawbridge to let others in
C	Silos exist everywhere	Body of evidence does not exist yet	Lack of vision	Poor co-ordination of budgets
D	Lack of trust and understanding	Actions not followed up	No clarity about targets	Element of competition between agencies
E	Individual responses not followed through	Deadlines missed or ignored	Boundaries of personal judgment not clear	Influential people not convinced by the message
F	People staying purely in role and not stepping up	Unknown balance between strategic, operational and tactical actions	Conflicting objectives slow or stall activity	Information and knowledge are not shared

The table below details approaches to managing the barriers that are shown in Figure A1. As above, these approaches were identified by school and children centre leaders and their children's services partners at a symposium on building effective integrated leadership and are arranged in four themes (National College 2009: 18-19)

Figure A2: Solutions to achieving leadership of integrated working

	Theme 1	**Theme 2**	**Theme 3**	**Theme 4**
	People: Trust and belief	*Roles, responsibilities and accountability*	*Outcomes and resourcing*	*Power and advocacy*
A	Ensure key players are on board and understand their contributions	Build meeting structures to ensure efficiency and effectiveness	Explain thresholds and show what these mean in practice	Remove bureaucracy from system and simplify things
B	Take personalities out of the picture	Consider the views of all, especially children and young people	See the bigger picture and take a holistic view	Be willing to let go - don't be precious about individual roles or resources
C	Build resilience in people and their communities to tackle problems	Pilot projects to show outcomes using joint funding or pooled resources	Define the common thread from the child to leadership	Match resources to risk
D	Understand the transition stresses for all staff when change occurs	Define roles and be clear about who is doing what, when and with whom	Understand the connectivity across targets	Use distributed leadership models
E	Build bridges and understand the perspectives of others	Focus more on outcomes and less on process	Set realistic expectations and be clear about the future	Involve people who can act now