Inclusion in the Early Years:

An exploration of the dilemmas of difference, roles and partnerships in the operationalisation of inclusive practices for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability.

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the inclusion of children with special educational needs, as enacted in the daily decisions early years educators make. The tensions associated with the 'dilemmas of difference' (Norwich, 2008, 2009, 2014) pertaining to children's placements, the stigma associated with their identification and the pedagogical provisions on offer are well documented in research related to compulsory education but have not received the same level of attention in early years.

This research project sought to explore these matters but was not constrained by them. Through the adoption of a social constructivist approach, it endeavoured to reflect upon the collective decisions formed and operationalised through 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 2000). The collaboration between early years educators, parents and other professionals is considered a prerequisite for the operationalisation of inclusion. Yet, their roles and partnerships in the perpetuation of tensions have not been researched adequately. By encasing the perceptions of educators into their institutional and cultural context this study aims to provide a situated account of inclusion and exclusion in the early years.

The research adopted a multiple case study approach and utilised interviews and focus group discussions with Special Educational Needs coordinators and Early Years Educators, who were deployed in a range of settings that reflected upon the diversity observed in early years provision. The combined data corpus was analysed using thematic analysis. The stories and narratives of the participants illustrated critical events that aimed at exposing the moral dilemmas and challenges they experienced while implementing inclusion in partnership with parents and other stakeholders. At the same time, their stories brought to the fore examples of inclusive practices that were governed by an ethics of care and an adherence to child-centred pedagogy.

The findings of this research indicate that early years educators resolve dilemmas through a flexible 'continuum of provision' approach (Norwich, 2008a). Their views simultaneously demonstrate traditionalist attitudes rooted in a medicalised model of (dis)ability and beliefs

that are cognisant of the barriers that are erected by entrenched hegemonic discourses (Thomas and Loxley,2007) and institutionalised practices. While adhering to governmental dictates, they acknowledge the failure of the system to cater for diversity and internalise this failure as their own. Partnerships with parents and other professionals are characterised by conflict and plagued by structural, cultural and interpersonal barriers (Payler and Georgeson, 2013). Despite the challenges faced by early years educators in the enactment of inclusion, they approach matters critically and reflectively and reveal their 'craft pedagogical knowledge' (Black-Hawkins and Florian, 2012) which promotes inclusive learning in a capable manner. They also demonstrate the capacity and willingness to expand their professional roles in an effort to assist children, parents and families in navigating their way through a highly complex and bureaucratic process.

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This study would not have been possible without the support of so many people. My sincere thanks go to my supervisors, Dr Helen Bovill and Dr Nicola Bowden-Clissold, whose guidance and support throughout this process has been invaluable.

Dedication

To my son, Ethan-you have made me a better person and educator. Your uniqueness and ability to view things differently have been the cornerstone upon which this study rests.

To my mother, whose unwavering belief supported this process and my father, who instigated and promoted my love of writing from an early age.

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List of Acronyms

EYFS: Early Years Foundation Stage

CAMHS: Child, Adolescent and Mental Health Services

ECEC: Early Childhood Education and Care

EHCP: Education and Health Care Plans

EYP: Early Years Professional

EYT: Early Years teacher

Nasen: National association for special educational needs

NNEB: National Nursery Examination Board

NVQ: National Vocational Qualification

OFSTED: Office for Standards in Education

PVI: Private, Voluntary and Independent

QTS: Qualified teacher status

SALT: Speech and Language therapist

SEND: Special Educational Needs and Disability

SENDCOs: Special Educational Needs and Disability Coordinators

WHO: World Health Organisation

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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

Once a reception class teacher told me, referring to a child with special educational needs attending a mainstream class that "he could not think outside the box" and that she could foresee where her pupils would be in twenty years' time, based on their current skills, abilities and overall achievement. I disagree; the child could think outside the box in a way we never could and had a perception of the world that was uniquely different. In our role as educators, we are often the ones who create the boxes and choose to fit children in them based on certain traits or characteristics. In doing so, we fail to acknowledge their potential, their true capabilities, and their contribution to our settings.

Clough and Nutbrown (2004, p.201) have suggested that 'routes to inclusive education are not accidental' and I realise that subsequent experiences in my personal life and educational career have motivated and inspired me to explore the tensions that arise from the implementation of inclusion. My research into inclusion aims to delve into the personal perceptions of early years educators and explore if the tensions described between the 'rhetoric' of inclusive directives and the realities of inclusive practices are present among early years educators (MacKenzie, 2011).

The outcomes and effects of teacher expectations and biases on children's performance have been well -documented, since the seminal research of Rosenthal (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1992). Jussim and Harber (2005, p.131), having conducted an empirical synthesis of research on teacher expectations reported that 'some powerful self-fulfilling prophecies have been found especially in students from stigmatised social groups.' I feel that the concept of a predetermined educational fate and future for children in our care should be construed as socially and morally unjust. Bourdieu (cited by McNiff, 2013) stated that the formal education

system is the most powerful aspect of the culture as means of social reproduction. Although stopping the perpetuating cycle of educational and social inequality altogether may be utopic, it is important to reflect on our own practice as educators and how our beliefs and practices may contribute to the reproduction of inequality.

The perceptions and experiences of inclusion of teachers have been explored in length over the last forty years; initially taking the form of research into their attitudes towards integration and, as inclusion became tautological with the quest for equity and social justice (Thomas, 2013), the terminology of research studies was adapted accordingly to reflect the socio-political changes dominating the educational agenda. The vast majority of studies into integration and inclusion employ quantitative methodology and aim to establish the links between various internal aspects (educators' training, gender and years of experience) and external factors (school culture, grade of class taught, provision of support and resources) in the formation of attitudes and opinions (Avramidis *et al,* 2000, Avramidis and Norwich 2002).

In deploying solely quantitative methods, the researchers aim to establish the causalities between these factors, and yet could miss out on documenting the complexity and nuances associated with the concept of inclusion, as this is embedded and enacted into specific educational contexts. Avramidis *et al* (2000, p.195) state:

> The interrelationships of the complex concepts of `SEN', attitudes and `inclusion', the social desirability factor and cynicism towards questionnaires among some teachers are some of the reasons for rejecting an exclusively quantitative approach.

In recent years, researchers have called for 'bricolage' or qualitative studies to be conducted in an effort to present a more holistic picture of inclusion which is placed within the sociocultural, political and institutional contexts, within which the actual process and practices of inclusion and exclusion are enacted. (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002)

Despite the increasing attention and importance that early years education and learning have assumed 'through a watershed of government initiatives in recent years'(Clough and Nutbrown,2004) and the onus placed on the development of a well-qualified workforce to address the individual needs of all children, it is paradoxical that very little attention has been placed on ascertaining the views of young children's first educators, in an effort to understand the complexities and barriers associated with the process of inclusion. Dalkilic and Vadebonceuer (2016, p.19) note the discrepancy and lack of research in the early childhood

education domain and acknowledge that early years practitioners are often the first educators to implement inclusion and thus 'have a significant impact on children deemed to learn differently from their peers'. It could be claimed that the process of inclusion starts in early years and cascades upwards; 'getting it right' at this early stage can have a 'domino' effect in the personal life and future education of young children and pave the way for a stronger transition into subsequent schooling levels.

In some respects, aspects of early years practice such as the alleged play- centredness of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017) in combination with the high staff: child ratios stipulated in the EYFS guidelines could be seen to be conducive to good inclusive practices. Where certain conditions are met, such as a culturally diverse and stimulating environment that takes into consideration individual learning needs, early education constitutes 'de facto inclusive education'(Clough and Nutbrown,2004,p.197). However, conditions are not created on their own: the individual practices and pedagogy subsumed within these conditions are operationalised by the early years educators and their interactions- thus their roles, beliefs and interactions with other stakeholders in the production of inclusion become crucial.

In the same way that a 'return to basics' approach is called upon to establish the root of an established problem, a return to early years could help us learn about good inclusive practices, observe them in their in their infancy and teach colleagues from the bottom up. Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou (2006) utilise Sergiovanni and Starratt's 'onion skin' model, and assert that inclusive practices constitute outer surface structures; the root of the behaviour is deeply buried into our beliefs and assumptions, which in turn shape our values and eventually emerge as practices (Carrington, 1999). Unless we understand or challenge these assumptions, modification of behaviours or practices will merely be tokenistic efforts to patch up inclusion (Wedell, 2008).

The process of inclusion and exclusion in this study is approached from a socio-cultural perspective, and supports the notion that inclusive views and subsequently the practices that stem from these, are entrenched in our cognition, through our interaction with previous and existing societal structures. They are further affected by politics, financial and educational directives and the legislative context underpinning practices.

Hansen (2011, p.92) questions why a child with special needs may be included in one classroom but excluded in another. The answer ultimately lies in educators' individual perceptions of inclusion. However, educators do not work in isolation-they form educational 'communities of practice' whose actions become the sounding board, which determines individual perceptions and actions (Altrichter, 2005).

Educational communities are inclusive to the extent that the diversity of learners does not pose a threat to the community's coherence. The perceived 'limit' of this diversity is ultimately down to the educator's decisions, which are embedded into the community's values and norms. Their decisions are permeated by their personal perception of what constitutes a community of practice and their individual tolerance to diversity. In adopting this approach, it becomes critical that we examine how ''teachers construct categories, teaching and classroom because it is these constructions which decide the boundary between inclusion and exclusion.'(Hansen, 2011, p.95).Equally, it is crucial to examine how communities are fostered to expose the relational inequalities (Thomas, 2013) between stakeholders within the context of educational and professional partnerships. In our strive towards understanding inclusion, it could be claimed that it is equally valid to develop an understanding of its otherness; exclusion and the barriers that reify it.

1.1 The Rationale of this Study

My study will emphasise inclusion in the Early Years and ascertain Early Years Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinators' (SENDCOS) and Educators' experience of inclusion through their own stories and narratives. It will further examine the ideological struggles or barriers they may face in facilitating an inclusive environment for children with special needs and how the 'dilemmas of difference' as described by Norwich (2008, 2014) may affect decisions pertaining to the placement of children in their settings.

The dilemmas of difference are related to the ethical tensions educators experience when they have to make decisions relating to children's education and care; Berlak and Berlak in 1981 set out to map the complexity of the schooling processes in an effort to highlight the 'relationship of everyday schooling choices to one's own personal choices and to the broader

social and political policy issues'(p.24). Their quest led them to the formulation of the 'language of dilemmas' which revolved around teacher's control, the curriculum and societal assumptions.

Colnerud (1996, p.628) stressed that dilemmas were inextricably linked to the professional ethics of educators and further research was warranted to develop the 'ethical competence' of teachers. His research identified a set of norms that guided and affected teachers' decisions: ethical interpersonal norms, internal professional norms emanating from tasks, institutional norms, social conformity norms and self-protecting norms. He asserted that the clash of personal and institutional norms leads to ambiguity and teachers 'suspending their sense of moral responsibility in relation to pupils as a result of the continuous compromises they make to institutional and collegial norms' (1996, p.634).

Norwich (2014) claimed that ambiguity is underpinned by a disparity of values; commonality of provision is being driven by the values of solidarity while differentiation is spurred by the value of individual respect-both values are equally significant and considered positive and morally uncontested. Yet one is likely to dominate unless, as Norwich suggests, we adopt a pluralistic framework that endeavours to encompass and accept a multitude of perspectives. In doing so, there lies the possibility of the irreparable loss and sacrifice of values.

Research on inclusion has mainly focused on inclusive practices in primary and secondary schools, pertaining to issues related to curriculum differentiation, the location of a child's placement and the benefits or drawbacks of the statementing process for children with special needs. Preschool education for children with special educational needs has not received the same level of consideration by the research community. Despite a plethora of government initiatives over the last twenty years, early childhood education - particularly in non-maintained private or independent settings –remains a fragmented area of policy and practice (Moss, 2014; Lloyd, 2015).

Although studies clearly indicate many potential benefits of high quality early childhood educational experiences (Sylva et al,2004),the ECEC sector has been neglected due to its confused 'educare' identity(Hohmann,2007); the negative implications it has acquired through policy and practice, framed within a complex quasi-market context, have resulted in disparate practices and distinct hierarchies of educators(Osgood,2012) .

Whilst placing an emphasis on early identification, the SEND Code (DfE,DoH, 2015) provides little guidance relating to the organisation of high quality, early educational provisions for children with special needs. Early years educators often receive minimal support – usually in the form of short training courses - and yet are expected to possess the appropriate skills, knowledge and expertise to identify the needs of a child, provide support to their parents during what may be a particularly traumatic period of their life (Rogers, 2007) and offer educational provisions addressing the child's learning and personal and social development. Moreover, educators are expected to possess the knowledge, skills and capacity to establish effective partnerships that support children through a holistic consideration of their strengths and needs (Kyriakou, 2009). Inclusion does not happen in isolation but is operationalised in and through communities of practice. (Wenger, 2000)

It therefore becomes an imperative that we view inclusion through the relationships and partnerships built between educators, parents, their children, and professionals, if we are to gain an insight into the workings that reify inclusion and exclusion in practice. Thomas (2013, p 474) asserts that the notion of inclusion in the twenty-first century should revolve around 'a range of matters concerning learning, community, identity and belonging' and this study aims to amalgamate and explore these elements in an effort to enrich our knowledge of inclusion.

It is my contention that the inclusion of children with special educational needs in nursery settings has not been given sufficient attention – it remains theoretically and empirically underdeveloped. My studies aim to build an improved understanding of the challenges early years educators encounter with the underlying ambition to facilitate a robust network of support for early years educators and parents and a more fulfilling start in the educational life of children with special educational needs.

1.2 Research Questions

My research questions have been inspired by Norwich's research into the 'dilemmas of difference' (2008, 2014) and aim to explore how the triptych of location, identification and curriculum is perceived by early years educators.

My study will further seek to explore early years' educators' views on inclusion in practice and give them opportunities to provide stories that bring the realities of inclusion and exclusion to the fore. Through the educators' stories and narratives, I aim to explore their roles, and analyse their partnerships with parents and external professionals and the potential barriers that are erected during the operationalisation of inclusion in early years education.

The following research questions guide this study:

- What are educators' views on the placement, identification and curricular provision for children with special educational needs?
- As part of this study, I further aim to look into practitioners' views of the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) in relation to assessment and practice to establish how curricular diversity and inclusion are interpreted in pedagogy.
- What are the challenges and barriers early years educators face in operationalising inclusion through educational and multiagency partnerships and how do these affect their roles?
- How do they adapt their roles in response to their interactions with other partners to support the inclusion of children with SEND?

To enable the reader to gain an understanding into the complex landscape that frames inclusive practice in the early years, it would be beneficial to contextualise early childhood education and care within the historical, political and educational framework that governs and underpins it to frame the perceptions of early years educators. The encasing of the study into its societal context will provide an insight into educators' own unique understandings and views, as they have developed in response to their interaction with the institutions within which they are based (Holland and Lave, 2009) and in partnership with the various stakeholders that are involved in the operationalisation of inclusion.

1.3 Choice of participants and Limitations

The participants in this study constitute a purposeful or purposive 'sample'(Coyne, 1997;Morse, 2000; Sandelowski, 1995); they were selected on the basis of their knowledge and possessed experience as early years educators who provided care and educational provisions for a diverse range of children, including children with special educational needs at the time of the research. The majority of participants were known to the researcher through professional networks or had collaborated with the researcher in their role as SENDCOs to facilitate transitions for children between settings. One of the SENDCOs volunteered through an advert placed in the minutes of an early years' steering group organised by the researcher's university. The focus group participants were staff deployed in the workplace setting of the researcher and thus constituted peers and close contacts. The majority of the focus group participants had worked with the researcher for a number of years and could be considered friends as well as colleagues. The cases were selected on the basis of their capability to provide rich, in-depth information (Emmel, 2014) on the phenomenon of inclusion in the early years.

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project (Sylva *et al*, 2004, DfES) noted the link between the deployment of highly qualified staff and the provision of a higher quality of education for young children that resulted in better educational outcomes. As I was seeking to incorporate examples of good inclusive practices and pedagogy, I intentionally selected settings that were classed as good or outstanding by Ofsted during the period of the research.

Given that all settings selected were considered good or outstanding, it could be inferred that the staff deployed in the settings would be better qualified although the link between Ofsted outcome and staff level qualification was not explored in this study and thus remains tentative. All the participants in the study were qualified educators: seven possessed degrees and qualified teacher status (QTS), one held a Foundation degree, three held Early Years Teachers' status and four held National Vocational Qualifications or an NNEB in fields related to early years. Of the fifteen participants, two held the postgraduate SENDCO award and a third was working towards a Master's degree qualification at the time of the study. In this respect, the participants could not be classed as a 'typical or representative' sample of the early years sector and neither was this the intention. Thomas (2011) advocates against claims

of typicality in a case study as such claims are unlikely to contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon under observation, in this case inclusion and exclusion. There was however an effort to include a range of settings that reflected upon the diversity of early years provision with the purpose of providing opportunities for cross-case comparisons (Thomas, ibid) between public funded and private provision.

The only claim to representation that this study could make pertains to the gender of the participants; fifteen of the sixteen participants classed themselves as female and one as male. Thus, the sample could be claimed to be reflective of the early years workforce population, which is predominantly female (Osgood, 2013). The composition in respect of diversity was limited; the sample was homogeneous and all but one of the participants were white. Two of the participants classed themselves as White European, one identified as being of Mixed Other origin, while the remainder of the participants identified as White British. Kitzinger (1995) stresses the significance that the utilisation of ethnically and class diverse groups may have upon the exploration of the various parameters associated with individual and collective experiences. Future studies would therefore benefit from the recruitment of a diverse population of participants, who could highlight specific matters that relate to inclusion and exclusion and may provide more diverse, culturally- nuanced accounts and narratives.

In the same vein, the participants in this study were all early years educators and, although their perceptions may resonate with other professionals in the sector (Thomas, 2010), they could not account for the variability of views that other professionals or parents of children with special educational needs could offer. The recruitment of other professionals and parents in future research could result in multidimensional accounts of practices and frame partnerships and roles within a wider encompassing frame.

1.4 Chapter Structure

This chapter introduced the research topic, set out the rationale behind its choice and highlighted the research questions that guided this study.

The second chapter aims to provide a historical account that frames the development of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) initiatives within an educational and political context; it explores how specific legislative directives in recent years have shaped the expectations and roles of educators in educational and multi-agency partnerships. It further seeks to examine how these dictates shape inclusive practices in early years.

The third chapter provides a reflective account of the concept of inclusion, as framed and institutionalised by the historic context, the SEND legislative directives and the political decisions that have led to its inception, theoretical formulation and practical implementation. It provides a contextual background that highlights the dilemmas of difference in relation to research and early years practice. In addition, it outlines and analyses the theories that underpin disability and examine how these emerge and materialise in early years.

The fourth chapter reviews the methodology and methods that were deployed to support this study; it delves into the ontological and epistemological beliefs that shaped and reformulated my epistemic endeavours. In addition, it focuses upon ethical issues related to positionality and participants' treatment.

The fifth and sixth chapters review and analyse the findings of this study and link them to a bricolage of existing theories; they are heavily focused upon the educators' stories and narratives and aim to expose the nuances and complexities of every day practice and the strategies educators utilise to overcome ideological tensions and establish partnerships with parents and other professionals.

This study concludes in Chapter seven, with a synopsis of the main findings and debates the policy implications that arise from this research at different levels. A number of policy recommendations are proposed that aim to address the concerns raised by the participants.

Chapter 2

2. Opening Comments

This chapter contextualises inclusion in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), by providing historical and political information, which help frame the early years education sector within past and extant socio-political frames .It explores the implications various educational and legislative initiatives have on practice and workforce qualifications and how these directives impact the implementation of inclusion in the early years. It analyses the roles of the parents and other professionals in the enactment of partnerships for inclusion and their historical evolution through recent times. It outlines successive governments' dictates and the potential challenges faced by all stakeholders in the operationalisation of inclusion.

2.1 Introduction to the Early Childhood Education and Care Context in England

It could be claimed that childcare and early childhood education provision in England constitute a confused and idiosyncratic area of policy; for the best part of the last fifty years there has been ambivalence and delays on behalf of successive governments to establish and legislate an educational or care policy framework that addressed the working requirements of parents and the benefits of educational provision for the under-fives (Lewis, 2013). This resulted in the country lagging behind its European counterparts with regards to governmental incentives that allowed working parents, mainly mothers, to return to work and children to attend educational provision that challenged and stimulated their development. The distinction between early years education and early years care became obscured by the late 1990's and the two merged and were framed within a dual 'educare' (Ball and Vincent, 2005; Hohmann, 2007) political and legislative purpose, which rendered it an unusual market.

This peculiarity potentially hinders the implementation of inclusion and other educational initiatives. It is worth considering how an area which appears to be suffering an 'identity crisis', plagued by cuts in funding (Lloyd, 2015), a lack of appropriately qualified staff workforce (Nutbrown, 2012), and further fuelled by a torrent of policies and initiatives introduced by different governments(Clough and Nutbrown, 2004), could establish a strong foothold, and move to an era where the circumstances are such that will allow it to implement inclusion and other educational directives successfully.

2.1.1 The History of Early Childhood Education and Care in England

The Children Act 1989 which came into effect in 1991 aimed to amalgamate the different services for children under eight years under one umbrella and diminish the 'Cinderella effect' (Page, Clare and Nutbrown, 2013, p. 3) associated with daycare services; the latter were operating under the auspices of Social services and considered inferior to nursery education which was inspected by the Education Department. Prior to the Act, the Education Reform Act of 1988 had introduced a national curriculum for children from the age of five onwards and instigated the market conditions associated with school achievement that persevere to this day.

The emphasis on personal choice was evident in initiatives such as the childcare voucher scheme (Page, Clare and Nutbrown, 2013) that was implemented in childcare settings in 1996 with the aim of funding state education for four- year olds while promoting parental choice.

The advent of the Labour government in 1997 initiated a turning point in the childcare policy arena, which up to that time was a 'neglected area of public policy.'(Vincent and Ball, 2005, p.558).The National Childcare Strategy (DfES, 1998) acknowledged the importance of increasing childcare places for working parents while the Ten Year Strategy (HMT, 2004) focused on the quality of childcare and educational provisions on offer; both initiatives set out an ambitious plan for the expansion of nursery places and affordable childcare.

The childcare voucher scheme was replaced by universal early education during the Labour government, which was operated as a direct provider subsidy, initially for eligible four- year

olds and eventually for children aged three years upwards. Initially, the size of the entitlement was limited to 12.5 hour weekly but pledges were made to increase this and target disadvantaged two -year olds.

Under New Labour, the creation of Sure Start Local Programmes was hailed as a significant development, which aimed to provide joined-up, multi-agency provisions. These eventually materialised into Sure Start Children's Centres with an aim of providing educational and care provisions and wrap around services targeting the most disadvantaged children in areas of poverty (Lewis and West, 2016). While children's centres aimed to 'break the cycle of disadvantage' (Simon and Ward, 2010 p.7) and set the foundations for the preparation of disaffected cohorts of young children for school, nursery and early childhood care was mainly governed by private day-care settings. During the decade between 1990 and 2000 private day-care settings quadrupled to cater for the increasing number of parents returning to work (Vincent and Ball, 2005).

The exponential rate at which early years settings multiplied aimed to create varied choices and cover the childcare demands through extended operational hours, creating a very 'peculiar market', that sold a product which was both unique and value laden (Vincent and Ball ,2005). Despite the enormity of the initiatives and expenditure instigated by the Labour government, critics were sceptical about the extent that these policies addressed their original goals (Moss, 2014) or were tokenistic approaches that were limited to policy settings and instruments (Lewis, 2013).

By creating similar quasi-market conditions, as the ones commonly found in schools, successive governments placed the choice of early years' childcare and education into the individual family domain, making the selection of early years' settings an essentially personal choice. These competitive conditions were further exacerbated under the subsequent Coalition and Conservative governments, which through their focus on parent subsidies and attempts to deregulate the sector (Lloyd 2015), continued to place the onus of the selection of appropriate education and childcare provisions upon parents having particular implications for those navigating inclusion.

The pledges of the Labour government to increase the free entitlement were fulfilled by the Coalition government in 2010 and further incentives were introduced to honour the previous

government's attempts to target disadvantaged two-year olds (Lloyd, 2015). Although the Conservative government that succeeded honoured the pledges of the Coalition government by doubling the education entitlement, the 'extended' entitlement offers targeted working parents who fulfilled certain employment criteria to the detriment of working- class parents and job seekers. The challenges parents of disabled children face have been documented extensively in government and research (Kagan *et al,* 1999; Audit Commission, 2003; Abbott and Jessiman, 2014) and point to a requirement for flexible childcare and early education provision that is well funded, provides outreach support and offers opportunities for active engagement between staff and parents.

The childcare model of provision offered in the UK contrasts those offered in some other European countries, where early childhood education is perceived as a public good and is predominantly offered through public settings. The UK model is heavily market- driven and consumer- led and poses affordability risks for a significant proportion of parents, who are unable to pay the fees and claim retrospectively, thus deterring from its main aim of enabling parental participation in employment (Lloyd,2015).

With the exception of children, who are considered to be 'in need' of early years care and education, due to impoverished backgrounds, and are able to attend children's centres, the education of care of younger children from middle class backgrounds is mainly catered for by the private market.

In this market and, despite the efforts of the government to provide financial assistance towards nursery fees through the childcare element of tax credits, some parents and particularly the parents of children with disabilities are priced out (Lloyd, 2015).Lewis (2008, p.503) noted that high childcare costs made it likely for some parents to choose their childcare provision 'on the basis of cost rather than quality'.

Lloyd and Penn(2014) distinguish between three main policy rationales that drive the development of childcare and early education policy from the era of the New Labour to the end of the Coalition government in the UK: the social mobility rationale which focuses on the transformation of children's futures through the provision of a high quality of education from an early age, the socioeconomic rationale that concentrates on families' improvement of conditions through the acquisition of employment, and the social justice rationale which aims

at bridging the gaps in attainment of disadvantaged populations, including children with special needs and disability. Despite successive governments' pledges to promote the social justice rationale, efforts have been sidelined through an adherence to the standards agenda which endorses attainment over inclusion.

Lloyd (2015) notes the fragmentation of services and provision, which was evident prior to the advent of the Labour government and perseveres to this day. Early education in England remains centrally funded while the subsidies provided to working parents originate from the Department for Work and Pensions thus perpetuating the division between care and education. Successive governments appear to focus on one or a combination of the various policy rationales without altering the structures to achieve an effective re-organisation.

Moss (2014) notes that both the Labour and subsequent Coalition governments have aimed to centralise the early years sector through the introduction of a common curriculum and inspection regime while undermining their own efforts through the intense marketisation of the sector. This has resulted in a deeply fragmented terrain, which serves to reinforce inequalities among parents and children rather than meet the needs of the most vulnerable young children. There are clear links between disadvantage and SEND (DCSF, 2009; Norwich 2010; Thomas, 2013); the current system of ECEC provision exacerbates the challenges faced by parents and young children and erects barriers in the operationalisation of inclusion.

2.1.2 Curriculum

Simultaneously with the rapid developments in childcare legislation, the educational agenda associated with early childhood provision and preschools featured prominently in successive governments' goals.

The Education Reform Act of 1988 introduced a Curriculum for children in primary and secondary education. The curriculum's content and appropriateness came under heavy criticism (Nutbrown, Clough and Artherton, 2013) for its narrowness (Wedell, 2008) and focus on attainment. Shortly after the introduction of the Curriculum the Rumbold Committee (DES, 1989) Report proposed a flexible framework which combined education and care and offered appropriate opportunities and experiences to young children under five. The inception of the

current curriculum can be traced back to the funding arrangements for three to five-year olds, which introduced the Desirable Outcomes of Nursery Education (DfEE,1996). The Desirable Outcomes acted as an assessment framework for inspection and provision for government funded settings and focused on literacy and numeracy, paving the way for the introduction of Baseline assessments upon school entry. These assessments were eventually abandoned in favour of the more holistic approach to children's development offered by the Foundation Stage Profile. (Nutbrown, Clough and Atherton, ibid). The beginning of the century witnessed the introduction of the Birth to Three Matters: A Framework to Support Children in the Earliest Years. (DfES, 2002) The framework supported the education and care of younger babies and stressed the significance of the bond between educators and young babies. (Nutbrown and Page, 2008)

The Education Act 2002 extended the national curriculum to incorporate the curricular provisions for the under-fives. Following a number of high profile legislative acts, including the Every Child Matters(DfES,2004) and the Childcare Act(DfES,2006) the requirement for a holistic curriculum that merged education and care services with multi-agency professional working led to the establishment of the Early Years Foundation framework.(Roberts-Holmes,2012) The Early Years Foundation Stage (QCA/DfES 2000, 2008) became statutory in 2008 and incorporated the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage and the 'Birth to Three Matters' guidelines issued in 2002, into one document. The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Assessments (DCSF, 2008) became statutory in the same year and replaced the former baseline assessments introduced in 1998.

In 2011, the Tickell review evaluated the implementation of the EYFS in the early years sector. Tickell (DfE, 2011, p.57-59) proposed that 'alongside the three prime areas of learning: personal, social and emotional development, communication and language and physical development, four specific areas were added: literacy, mathematics, expressive arts and design, and understanding the world'. The review further advocated the streamlining of the 'Development Matters' (DfE, 2012) document and the early learning goals associated with it as well as the EYFSP (Early Years Foundation Stage Profile). With regards to inclusive education the review recommended that 'the EYFS is made more explicit about the different approaches to assessment that practitioners may wish to consider for those children with

special educational needs' thus inferring that the documentation or assessment practices in place were vague or inappropriate for a proportion of children(Tickell Review,2011,p.33).

Moss notes (2014) that despite the efforts to simplify the EYFS, the new developments made under the Coalition government were imbued by notions of targeted interventions and school readiness. Lloyd (2015) attests to the centralised efforts of the government to regulate the quality of provision. Despite the efforts to improve the quality of the provisions in the sector, the disparity of the ECEC system counteracts the implementation of unified approaches across a sector that presents with large inequalities in provision and workforce deployment. These inequalities impact negatively on the provision of children with special educational needs; the implications on the availability of childcare places, quality of provision, and the challenges parents face will be discussed in the subsections that follow.

2.1.3 Workforce qualifications

The growth in early year settings necessitated the development of a qualified workforce who would staff the new settings and successfully put into pedagogical practice these new directives. However, there were problems with the recruitment and retention of early years staff (Vincent and Ball, 2005) which were associated with the poor working conditions and the minimum salaries provided (Moss, 2014). The Ten Year Strategy (HMT, 2004) set the foundation stone for workforce reforms through its emphasis on 'quality not just quantity' in childcare and early years education.

Although the remodelling of the childcare workforce was initially instigated through the Ten Year Strategy (HMT, 2004), a subsequent Independent Review commissioned by the Coalition government and conducted by Cathy Nutbrown (DfE, 2012) resulted in similar findings stressing the need to professionalise early childhood educators. In the recent past, the early years workforce mainly consisted of women, paid minimum salaries (Vincent and Ball, 2005), qualified at national vocational qualification levels. Given the significance studies have drawn on the positive short and long-term outcomes of good nursery education (Sylva et al 2004), it appeared paradoxical that early years educators deployed in the private, voluntary and independent childcare sector (PVI) did not possess qualifications equivalent to teachers in

maintained nursery schools. This asymmetry between the significance of the role of the early years educator and the qualifications required to be deployed in the sector was noted by Nutbrown (2012, p.5), who stated: 'I am concerned that the current early years qualifications system is not systematically equipping practitioners with the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to give babies and young children high quality experiences'.

In response to the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE, Sylva *et al*,2004) report's recommendations for graduate staff deployment in nurseries, the labour government's plans to improve the early years workforce qualifications took the shape of the transformation fund -this was pumped into local educational authorities from 2006 onwards in an effort to assist non-maintained settings to recruit or train graduate staff to undertake managerial roles. The fund coincided with the introduction of Early Years Professional status, a postgraduate qualification which could be obtained through study and work routes depending on the prior qualifications of the candidates. The transformation fund remained in place and was reintroduced as the Graduate Leader fund during the period of 2008-2011, during which an additional £305 million was invested into the upskilling of the early years workforce (Mathers et al, 2011).

Since the advent of the Coalition government and the subsequent Conservative government election, the fund earmarked for the development of the early years graduate force was reduced and eventually ceased. The Conservative government continues to support the professional development of staff, yet the support offered is only qualified and not matched by funding (Lewis and West, 2016). The Early Years professional role has been replaced by the Early Years Teacher qualification which requires the fulfilment of standards resembling the PGCE teaching standards; however there remains a lack of parity in salary and status. Stringent entry requirements (GCSE levels in Maths and English) were introduced for entry into the national vocational qualification courses in 2014, thus aiming to provide a higher calibre of early years educators, but were abandoned following a consultation in the early years sector (DfE, 2017) that indicated that 77% of providers had significant difficulty in recruiting practitioners as a result of the directive. The GCSE entry requirements for Maths and English were thus substituted by the Functional skills qualifications with the purpose of alleviating the recruitment shortage.

Despite the efforts to upskill and professionalise the early years workforce, a survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers conducted in 2016 (DfE), stated that 17 % of sampled group- based and 10% of those aged 25 or over earned less than the national living wage. When considering the centrality of the roles of early years educators in the identification and provision of early intervention to support a young child with suspected needs and their parents, it is worth exploring how an early years educator apart from 'tackling a task that is inappropriate for the level of pay received, is also dealing with the complexity of meeting the demands of inclusion'. (Wedell, 2005, p.8)

2.2 Multi –Agency Partnership Working

A milestone in the early years sector was the introduction of the 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) (DfES, 2003) framework which aimed to establish a collaborative approach among early year services to enhance developmental and welfare outcomes for all young children. The initiative published partly in response to the Laming Inquiry (2003) into the death of Victoria Climbie constituted a sea change in governmental policy. The 'Every Child Matters'(ECM) agenda was enshrined into the Children Act 2004 which made arrangements for the appointment of a Children's Commissioner and called upon local educational authorities to make integrated multi-agency provisions for children. Tutt (2007) noted that inclusion and the ECM agenda were complementary as their focus was the establishment of appropriate extended services around the child which would contribute to five outcomes: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being. In addition, the ECM Agenda emphasised the concept of additional needs thus highlighting that social inclusion was not limited to specific populations but encompassed a wider group of children, whose personal and socioeconomic barriers contributed to their vulnerability.

The Childcare Act of 2006 which ensued was heralded as the first one of its kind, solely focused on improving the outcomes of the ECM agenda, while providing sufficient childcare for working parents and improving parental information services. (Norman, 2009). It also highlighted the requirement to provide sufficient childcare for parents with disabled children 'so far as is practicable' (HMP, Family and Childcare Trust, 2014, p.5).

The achievement of collaborative parent, practitioner and external professional partnerships is considered the hallmark of effective inclusive practice; through the acquisition of the expertise that the various stakeholders bring to this relationship the goal is to provide a holistic and comprehensive frame of support for children and their families and support them in achieving long and short-term outcomes.

Mc Connelogue (2011, p.54) supports the concept of trans-disciplinary working as:

> A team around the child made up of a range of disciplines, each maintaining their professional specialism, whilst collaborating to produce a coherent assessment and formulation of a child's difficulties and to construct ideas for intervention informed by all relevant expertise.

Despite the acknowledgement of multi-agency partnerships as critical in the success of inclusion the mechanisms by which such interactions can be effective are not clear; in addition, there has been a dearth of research in relation to multi-agency partnership working in the early years.

The lack of research is contrasted to an increased call by successive governments to implement early intervention in an effort to narrow the gap between children's attainment (Allen, 2011). In the case of children with SEND:

> When carrying out their duties under the Children and Families Act 2014, local authorities must do so with a view to making sure that the services work together where this promotes children and young people's wellbeing or improves the quality of special educational provision'. (SEND Code, p.25 DfE ,DoH 2015)

Payler and Georgeson (2013) assert that 'inter professional working involves practitioners from different professions working in an integrated way on a shared task'. Although a shared task is what binds the team of parents, practitioners and professionals together, there are various aspects of the complex interactions that serve to distance them. Shared aims or collective preferences are considered pivotal (Tutt, 2011; Rose, 2011) but the means by which these aims are interpreted into practice for the child may be disparate.

Tutt identifies a number of obstacles (2011, p.72) in the facilitation of collaborative multi-agency partnerships: complexity of management, lack of funding, competing priorities and conflicts of interest being the most important. These will be explored in depth in the sections that follow.

2.2.1 Partnerships for Inclusion and Conflict

The interdependence of actors can become an origin of conflict in the implementation of inclusive practice. The identification of a child's learning difficulties, the adoption of the appropriate intervention tools or educational plans to meet their needs and the process of the child's educational, psychological and medical assessment presupposes the involvement of local educational authority representatives working in collaboration with professionals from various disciplines, educators and the parents and/or child, where applicable(Commons,2019). The personal notions, professional self-concept and preconceptions about inclusion these "actors" bring to the table, in combination with their personal interests, framed within an institutional and socio-political context that places significant financial and resource restraints upon them, often results in conflicts(White and Featherstone,2004;Salmon,2004; Griffin,2010; Abbott *et al*,2005).

These conflicts sometimes pertain to the local authorities' lack of funding or disagreement over the conduct of statutory assessments (Commons, 2019), which invariably dictate whether a child with special needs will receive an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) and appropriate financial support (Norwich, 2014a). This leads to the creation of considerable tensions in the partnership of the authorities with the schools and the parents, which result in SEND tribunals (Commons, 2019).

The concept of backward mapping (Elmore, 1980) offers the scope of identifying specific behaviours of micro implementers and utilise the difficulties they face to analyse and subsequently alter the policy. Based on these difficulties, future policy may be formulated to address these basic issues encountered at the lower levels. Elmore proposes (1980, p.605): "the analytic solution offered by backward mapping stresses the dispersal of control and concentrates on factors that can be indirectly influenced by policy makers; knowledge and problem solving ability of lower level administrators, incentive structures that operate on the subject of policy, bargaining relationship among political actors".

The SEND code (2015, DfE, DoH) although clear in its aspirations on inclusive practice diverts responsibility and ultimately accountability of its pragmatic and practical interpretation to local authorities and schools. “Local authorities have considerable freedom in how they work together to deliver integrated support that improves children’s and young peoples’ outcomes” (p.44) For example, it is for local authorities to develop the “local offer” in consultation with all stakeholders and actors involved in the inclusion process that will determine the organisational structure and operationalisation of the services and provisions for schools, providers, parents and children.

This has resulted in local educational authorities resuming an organisational structure that is compatible with their financial restrictions (Commons, 2019) and coherent with the educational, social and economic agenda within their micro-contexts. These underpin the considerable variations in inclusive educational practice observed from one local authority to the other (Sales and Vincent, 2018; Curran *et al*, 2017).

2.2.2 Multi agency partnerships in the early years

There has been a dearth of research focusing specifically upon early years multi professional partnerships (Payler and Georgeson,2013); the emphasis of the few research projects conducted mainly target children’s centres which were envisaged as hubs for the provision of integrated work and targeted support for children and parents in disadvantaged areas (Allen,2011).

A study conducted by Hall (2005) explored the collaborative practices between speech and language therapists (SALT) and early years practitioners. The educators in this study felt that more communication was needed to enhance existing collaborative working practices. They reported factors, outside the SALTS’ control such as rigid organisational structures and time constraints plagued their partnerships. They referred to the increased workloads of therapists which resulted in poor relationships. The different modes of service provision between health services and education were misunderstood. Therapists were expected to identify and prioritise cases on the basis of need under the guidance of a medical model of impairment. Early years practitioners on the other hand expressed a desire to have regular access to a

named person, practical advice and relevant information on children. They felt that training together and having the opportunity to observe therapists in practice would be beneficial and enhance their professional knowledge. In the absence of a referral due to the delays associated with increasing workloads, there was a pressing need for advice and reassurance from therapists that the strategies implemented were appropriate (Hall, 2005). The study highlighted the need to reconceptualise the roles and relationships between the two professions, provide better resources and facilitate opportunities for joint training.

Payler and Georgeson's (2013) study on interprofessional partnerships in the early years noted a discrepancy between the capabilities of practitioners employed in children's centres and other private settings: the former appeared accustomed to working in multi-agency teams and, despite funding cuts, were overall positive about partnerships while the latter reported sporadic communication, lack of opportunities for training and a denigration of their contribution by external professionals. The researchers concluded that educators in children's centres roles had been 'scripted' to work as members of teams and thus their roles and responsibilities were accorded equal status to other professionals. Educators in the PVI sector were constrained by the institutional barriers imposed by their organisations, which limited opportunities for training and experiences of collaborative work.

The SEND Code of Practice (DfE, DoH 2015) emphasises the importance of parents and children only having to 'tell their story once'; this necessitates the development of certain preconditions that are considered to form the cornerstone of effective multiagency partnerships. Effective and clear communication enables all stakeholders to share information (Abbott et al, 2004; MCConkey, 2005). This may take the form of regular meetings, easier access within and between agencies and various professionals, and steering groups that set joint agendas and targets.

The setting of clear and realistic aims and objectives (Sloper, 2004; MCConkey, 2005) which are shared enables all professionals to develop a coherent agenda that prioritises the needs of the children and enables all involved to develop well- defined roles and responsibilities. Hellawell (2017) and Edwards et al (2010, p.31) note that the new responsibilities create spaces for action that involve work at the boundaries of the health, education and social sectors. This in turn led to 'distributed expertise': the capacity to work with others to both expand understandings of the complexity of a child's trajectory; and to respond to that

complexity in ways that recognise the priorities of others'. For early years educators to achieve the expansion of roles described by Edwards *et al* (2009)**,** they have to be enabled by institutional structures where there is strong leadership and a 'commitment by both senior and frontline staff' (Sloper, 2004, p.575) to support the strategic implementation of the new protocols. This involves adequate resources, including time allocation and opportunities for team building.

The undertaking of the practices and the fulfilment of the conditions prescribed above should lead to the establishment of respectful agency cultures that share and espouse similar professional ideologies. However, this ideological alignment may be hard to achieve among professionals of diverse backgrounds that have historically been used to working within very different contexts. Research by White and Featherstone (2005) noted that despite the co-location of CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), paediatric and social work professionals, the different agencies retained their distinct professional identities and sustained rigid mind-sets and ritualised ways of working. Boundaries within and between roles and professions appear to become institutionalised and can lead to fragmentation of services and power imbalances (Griffin, 2010).

It becomes evident that the complexity associated with interprofessional partnerships requires robust system organisation at macro and micro level which can support capacity building within early years settings and schools (Mulholland and O'Connor, 2016) and promote the orchestration of inclusive services. The SEND code places the onus upon local authorities to establish joint commissioning services which take into account the views of parents, children and other relevant networks and organisations in establishing joint services between education, health and social care; the means by which these collaborations come into fruition remain vague and subject to variations between authorities-thus are likely to lead to secondary policy formation.

2.2.3 Intersection of stakeholders' roles

The operationalisation of inclusion leads to an intersection of multiple stakeholder roles, which are firmly embedded in a social and institutional context and are affected by the

participants' gender, race and class. Osgood (2012) has analysed extensively the formation of the role and identities of early years educators against the background of successive governments' attempts to professionalise the early years workforce (Vincent and Braun, 2010).She theorises that the workforce has been portrayed as lacking in academic ability, professional image and robust training that would enable them to fulfil the role effectively (Nutbrown, 2012).Further the prerequisites of the role have been undermined by an adherence to a maternal discourse that emphasises caring, emotionality and nurturance over actual knowledge of pedagogy; such attitudes have exacerbated the negative preconceptions associated with the role of the early years educator and have led to its undermining and rejection as a widely acknowledged professional occupation.

The poor salaries and relatively low academic demands placed upon entrance to childcare vocational courses have attracted mainly working-class women to the profession (Colley 2006). Several of the students attending childcare courses in college reported disengagement during their school years and viewed a career in childcare as a redemptive attempt which allowed them to set straight their poor academic records and engage in a profession that was perceived as morally worthy (Vincent and Braun, 2011).

The successive governments' perseverance and initiatives has led to the development of a three-tiered structure consisting of qualified teachers, early years teachers (who do not possess qualified status) and nursery nurses who hold vocational qualifications. The plethora of qualifications has in turn resulted **in** a disparity in working conditions: the former two groups hold relatively privileged posts in schools and children's centres, which offer relatively favourable conditions, while nursery nurse trained practitioners tend to be mainly deployed in private day nurseries which are characterised by poorer conditions and high staff turnover (Osgood 2012).

The rapid marketisation of childcare has led to the creation of a 'peculiar market' (Ball and Vincent, 2005) which is focused on selling love and emotionality (Colley, 2006); the lack of adequate childcare places has made it competitive and consumer driven. It is under these complex conditions that the quality of early years pedagogy is shaped and inclusion materialises in response to the funding and customer requests.

Children's centres and nursery schools are considered as predominantly focused on serving the needs of disadvantaged communities and working-class parents with the aim of providing intervention and better opportunities for employment (Anning, 2005). As these settings offer free or funded places they are more often associated with ethnically diverse communities and parents of a lower socioeconomic status. Private day nurseries on the other hand charge substantial fees and thus tend to attract middle class parents who are in full time employment and look for longer days/childcare provisions to enable them to meet their career requirements. Paradoxically there appears to be a mismatch between provider offer and consumer demand with private day nurseries being operated by the least qualified staff while catering for middle-class parents. Nursery schools and children centres on the other hand are better funded and most likely to deploy qualified teachers or early years professionals, who serve the requirements of predominantly working-class parents. (Osgood, 2010). The lack of analogy is not restricted to class and race but encompasses mismatched cultural beliefs and values by parents and educators. (Anning, 2005)

Consequently, the partnerships that materialise between educators and parents have been purported as antagonistic or governed by hidden tensions. (Osgood 2010; Vincent and Braun, 2010;Hohmann,2007).It is within this landscape that interactions between early years educators, parents and external professionals take place-they intersect and lead to contextualised 'hierarchies of knowledge'(Runswick-Cole and Hodge, 2008) and the formulation of roles which are governed by fluidity depending on the specificities and contextual variables that frame the interactions.

2.3 Educational Partnerships with Parents

2.3.1 A Brief History

The SEND Code (DfE, DoH, 2015, p.20) places a duty upon local authorities to involve parents and children in decision making, both at a strategic and personal level:

> 'Local authorities must ensure that children, their parents and young people are involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support and about local provision'.

Although the code infers a participatory model of practice, relationships between parents and educators are characterised by tensions and conflicts. (Todd, 2007; Runswick-Cole and Hodge, 2008).

The notion of parental involvement is encountered in government directives as early as 1967, when the Plowden report (DES, 1967) emphasised the involvement of parental information and communication, aspects of educational partnerships that remain relevant to this day. The Bullock report in 1975 called for parents to become involved in their child's learning of literacy and encouraged parental input into children's learning by encouraging parents to help children with language activities (Todd, 2007).

The Warnock Report (DES, 1978) appeared to embrace a more participatory model of parental participation, dedicating a chapter to parents and stressing the importance of equal partnership. It coined the term 'parents as partners' (Hellawell, 2018) thus bringing to the forefront the notion of the parent as a driving force rather than passive recipient of professional advice. Despite this, the relationship envisaged appeared to focus mainly on superficial issues such as communication generated mainly by the schools and inferred that parents were in need of support and practical help to overcome their children's difficulties (Todd, 2007)

Following the advent of the New Labour government, the emphasis upon meeting the needs of parents, supporting them and encouraging parental choice appeared to defy the discourse advocated by the previous SEN code (DfES,2001) for a reciprocal relationship(Todd,2007).Parents were put under the spotlight, perceived as in need of advocacy while simultaneously placed in charge of selecting appropriate education. Their roles appeared complex, demanding and contrasting.

The Lamb Inquiry in 2009 highlighted the lack of parental confidence in schools which was exacerbated by the poor quality of communication and called upon local authorities and schools to make information on provisions and SEND policies clear and ensure these are publicised, setting the foundations for the current Code's(DfE, DoH,2015) statutory requirement to produce a Local Offer.

Preceding the current Code of Practice, the white paper 'Support and Aspiration' noted that parents were dissatisfied with the existing arrangements in place and let down by an 'impenetrable, bureaucratic system'(DfE,2011).It proposed placing the parents in control of the inclusion process while transferring responsibilities to frontline professionals with the aim of making the processes associated with the identification and assessment of SEND more transparent and user- driven(Norwich,2014; Hellawell,2018).

In response to the findings generated by the Lamb Inquiry (2009) and in view of the widely reported parental dissatisfaction in the system (Ofsted 2010), the SEND Code (DfE , DoH,2015) introduced the requirement for the publication of a Local Offer. The Local Offer calls upon authorities to provide accessible information on local provisions and support for children and families with SEND, which is responsive to their requirements and aspirations while highlighting the engagement of the stakeholders in its production so that is relevant and meaningful. Norwich (2014a) questions the extent to which the Local Offer can be compatible with the individual user system underpinning the special educational needs system and asserts that the complexity of the SEND system can make the special educational needs terrain hard to navigate, even with the offer in place.

2.3.2 Models of Parent Partnerships

The literature on parental partnerships is replete with various models that set out to conceptualise the level of involvement expected of parents and reflect upon the power differentials between parent and educators (Murray and Mereoiu 2016; Mcneilly et al,2017; Hornby and Blackwell,2018). Hellawell (2017) provides a historic evolution of the various models that have governed parental participation over the years: the expert model designates parents as professional recipients of knowledge, the transplant models foregrounds partnerships in a context where parents are expected to implement the feedback and advice received by the relevant experts. The informant model sets parents in a position that acknowledges that their feedback on the child is important and should be input into their observation and assessment process. These models are considered outdated and indicative of a parent deficit approach (Hellawell, 2017).

In recent times, these models have been replaced by the empowerment model which seeks to involve both parents and professionals in mutual decision making although the professional is still seen to retain overall control of the process by setting the parameters that frame the process (Tveit,2014)**.** The negotiating model focuses upon the interchanging roles between the two stakeholders as they negotiate towards a common goal. The consumer model perceives parents as decision makers who have the ability to make informed choices about their child's education (Hellawell, 2017). This model is particularly relevant to early years and education settings, which operate under quasi-market conditions that force parents to select settings on the basis of their specific requirements and work circumstances. Equally, for parents of children with SEND, choice can become troublesome, due to significant geographical variations in provision between educational authorities in combination with disparate funding arrangements that may serve to limit choice (Flewitt and Nind, 2007). Finally, a dual-expert model infers equality between partners with parents holding valuable knowledge on their child (Runswick-Cole and Hodge, 2008).

The role of the parent is nuanced and multifaceted and the expectations set upon them are demanding and multifarious. The intensification of parental and practitioners' obligations in inclusive practices has been researched by Hellawell, (2017, p. 415) who investigated the conflict between various models of collaborative practice which reflect upon partnership as linear and conflict- free, and the actual pressures the prescriptions of the code exerted upon parents and practitioners:

> Immense demands are being placed on parents to select and evaluate educational provision, act as an advocate, fight to get the child's requirements met and support the achievement of high academic standards.

2.3.3 Conflicting Parental Partnerships

The previous sections have encased parental participation in recent SEND legislation and have outlined the various parental partnership models in place, that denote a disparity in the levels of involvement and the status accorded to parents. These complex interactions will now be

framed within historical contexts governed by societal norms and values to analyse the source of potential conflicts in educational partnerships.

Runswick-Cole and Hodge(2008) noted that the interactions between parents and educators in their study were governed by 'hierarchies of knowledge' that privileged professional knowledge over parents, who were relegated to the role of informant-they were expected to share their knowledge of their child with the aim of ascertaining their medical condition or diagnosis. This frustrated some parents and incentivised them to become experts in their child's condition to counterbalance the power differential inherent in the relationship. Parents' refusal to cooperate or condone the interventions devised by medical professionals is often perceived as denial on their part to accept their child's condition. Lalvani (2014) problematises the historical discourse that permeates the concept of denial. Parents are perceived to grieve the loss of a normal child (Rogers, 2007) and thus the concept of the defective child is brought into existence. Both the parents and the child are viewed with a philanthropical lens, the former because they are perceived to be suffering psychologically, as they negotiate their way through the stages of the grief model (Kubler-Ross, 1973) while the latter suffer due to their pathology.

Lalvani (2014) traces the origins of this thinking to historical notions that ascribed the blame for a child's conditions to their parents. In the 20th century, Leo Kanner borrowing from post-Freudian analytical frameworks linked the emergence of autism to mothers who were emotionally unavailable to their children. Although medical and educational thinking has evolved, the traces of the special educational needs episteme remain (Thomas and Loxley, 2007) and have permeated our cognition. Although the notion of denial is dismissed by Lalvani (2014), other theorists (Rogers, 2007) who parent children with disability acknowledge 'the parent in denial' discourse as an internalisation of the societal norms which 'expect mothers to produce perfect babies' (p.142). The shock and stress a parent may experience when they encounter the news of their child's difference, framed within a societal frame which views disability as a personal tragedy, does take its emotional and psychological toll on parents. Rogers (2007) calls for tailored support, enhanced awareness and respite rather than a dismissal of these feelings.

The professional expert's advice, although may be viewed as helpful for some parents who seek a diagnosis for the purpose of receiving the scarce funding tied to SEND(Hodge,2005),

creates partnerships which disempower parents. Parental contribution into the meetings that inform the assessments of their child is often described to be limited to remarks that articulate consent with that of the experts. (Runswick-Cole, 2008; Todd, 2007; McLeod *et al*, 2013). The notion of parental compliance thus becomes an essential element of partnerships. This in turn leads to an unequal partnership where the professional expert retains control. As they are perceived to be in charge, the onus then falls upon educators to initiate or moderate partnerships (Tveit, 2014). Broomhead (2018, p.443-446) reported that practitioners in her study perceived themselves as 'solely responsible for developing and maintaining partnerships'. Parents were expected to exchange information on a daily basis but practitioners were not dependent upon them-nor did they feel that they had to gain their trust to carry out their duties. Despite this, the establishment of trust and consistent communication is perceived as the cornerstone of effective educational partnerships if they are to flourish (Todd, 2007; Runswick-Cole and Hodge, 2008; Broomhead, 2018). This can be facilitated through the sharing of information during regular meetings. Often meetings with a range of professionals can be particularly daunting for parents who do not possess a knowledge of the complexities of the system associated with the assessment and diagnosis of special educational needs. Hodge (2005) reports that the lack of transparency on behalf of professionals made parents in his study feel that the panel of experts conducting children's statutory assessments were colluding to present a consensual agreement without providing the reasoning behind their decision-making. Hodge (ibid) advocates that honesty is crucial throughout the process of a child's assessment.

Todd and Jones (2003) highlight the significance of a caring attitude and empathy towards the parents as essential humanistic prerequisites in educational partnerships. Their participants reported that medical professionals' emotional detachment had led to traumatic experiences, which tainted their partnerships. As a result of the lack of emotionality, some mothers went on to display a resistant approach that aimed to assume an advocacy position for their child.

A study by Ng et al (2015) highlighted that medical practitioners were willing to support parents but felt that this role should primarily befall the parent. The formulation of roles in response to the complex exchanges become evident and govern partnerships. Hodge (2005) asserts that partnerships should focus on ascertaining the challenges parents and educators face in supporting children, in an effort to reflect critically upon partnerships.

Although the educational partnership rhetoric is enshrined in legislation, it presents with complexities that require educators to be reflective of the power differentials and develop skills that will enable them to establish and enhance partnerships. Educational partnerships in the early years have been described as complex as they are underpinned by different beliefs on behalf of both parents and educators of what constitutes appropriate parenting (Hohmann, 2007). The disparity of values in combination with contradicting policy discourses, which on one hand emphasise equal partnerships and on the other present the parent as a consumer, prevent the formulation of shared notions of meaningful partnerships (Cottle and Alexander, 2014). Studies by Hohmann (2007), and Cottle and Alexander (2014) point to the development of a congruence of values as a prerequisite in harmonious partnerships. Tveit (2014) on the other hand, advocates the notion of deliberation in parent-teacher dialogues. Deliberation is characterised by respect, reciprocity, equality and no use of coercion. Her study highlighted that agreement is not vital in all cases; what is more significant is the opportunity to build positive relationships based on informal discussions that take into account divergent perspectives.

2.4 The role of Early Years SENDCOS and Educators

The diversity of qualifications observed in the early years sector is a bi-product of the various initiatives and government directives observed over the years which primarily aimed to improve the quality of teaching and pedagogy; equally they could be viewed as an obstacle to inclusive practice as they prevent the establishment of training addressed at a specific level.

Despite the advancement in the provision for School SENDCOS facilitated through the Legislative and Educational Acts, the role of the Early Years SENDCO appears to be lagging behind. A report published by the Preschool Learning Alliance in 2004 (Reynolds and Young, DfES) investigating the role and duties of Early Years SENDCOS noted that they assumed multiple roles within their setting. Often, they were the setting managers or early years practitioners as well as undertaking their SEND duties simultaneously. As a result, they were

subjected to significant time pressures with the majority of participants reporting they did not have allocated time to complete paperwork and often had to take work home. The majority of SENDCOS did not have a job description associated with their role and were therefore unclear as to the extent of their responsibilities. Despite the confusion, the majority of SENDCOS felt that they were experienced and possessed the necessary qualifications and skills to fulfil their role. A significant number of SENDCOS felt they would benefit from regular refresher course to enable them to keep abreast of developments in education and legislation. The minority of SENDCOS, who had not accessed training, identified barriers associated with lack of training in their local area and inability to obtain cover to attend training events. Despite the majority of participants accessing relevant training, they stated they did not feel confident in their abilities to implement their knowledge into practice.

Additional findings indicated that SENDCOS felt that their contribution was not valued by teachers and other external professionals and their role was not viewed as demanding. The report called for the government and other agencies to develop comprehensible job descriptions for Early Years SENDCOS and establish the role of the SENDCO as a sole responsibility for early years educators. Although it is crucial for SENDCOS to have job descriptions that reflect the basic requirements as set by the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2014), it has to be accepted that such a generic job description would only provide a basic insight into some of their daily duties. Cowne in 2005 (p.65) analysed the constant and emerging roles of SENDCOS to establish new aspects of the roles following the implementation of the 2001 SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001).

The new SEND Code has altered aspects of the role, in light of its growing emphasis on early interventions and the request for assessment to take place within specified timeframes. Ultimately, for the role to be meaningful, it has to be contextualised and adapted to the individual setting's organisational structures and reflect on the settings and local authority's policies rather than produce a 'one size fits all' job description. Szwed in 2007 (p.439) reflecting upon the role of primary school SENCOS called for the role to 'be worked out by practitioners themselves in accordance to the context within which they operate'. This rings true in the case of Early Years Educators, due to the idiosyncratic nature of the approach of private non- maintained settings to inclusive practice, based on the organisational and resource limitations imposed by the setting itself and the local educational authority. When

job descriptions are shaped, they have to be realistic and take into account the requirements of the EYFS and the SEND Code but adapt these to the specificities of settings and local authorities.

The Preschool Learning Alliance report (Reynolds and Young, DfES, 2004, p. 41-43) also called for SEN (Special Educational Needs) placements during training, applicable and accessible training for early years educators and the provision of core funding from local authorities to accommodate cover during training. The issue of training and opportunities for professional development is particularly pertinent in the case of early years educators and SENDCOS in view of the findings of the Nutbrown Review (2012) which questioned the rigour and depth of early year qualifications and asserted that the existing qualifications did not equip practitioners with the knowledge and skills to provide high quality educational experiences for babies and young children (2012, p.5).

This 'anomaly between the significance of the SENDCO and Early Years Educator role and the lack of training' (Layton, 2005, p.53) has to be redressed in the Early Years through innovative and creative approaches to training that would allow all practitioners, regardless of the level of their qualification, to reflect on their practice and acquire new skills. In 2005, Kearns argued for the significance of accredited prior experiential learning in setting learning (APEL) projects for practitioners that are relevant to their workplace and substantiate learning through 'hands on' experiences. Such training opportunities and long -term learning projects could prove very beneficial for Early Years SENCOS and provide them with recognised, fully accredited qualifications. The delivery of APEL training could be adjusted to the different levels of qualifications practitioners possess to provide experiences and training that are meaningful and relevant to the learners and correspond to their identified training requirements.

2.5 Early Childhood Education and Inclusion

In the centre of this ever-changing landscape still remains the matter of the purpose of childcare and early childhood services. Although maintained and non-maintained nursery

providers fall under the auspices of the Office for Standards of Education and as such are still required to implement the Early Years Foundation Stage and other educational directives, their purposes appear to differ greatly – the responsibilities and duties of the latter appear to remain care rather than education focused (Moss, 2014). The lower level qualifications possessed by staff in combination with the minimal funding received by the local educational authority place pressure on the settings to facilitate inclusion under basic conditions. The purpose of several private settings in particular is to make a financial profit; in striving to achieve this in the current economic climate, the welfare and educational provisions for the children can often be seen to be of lesser importance. This almost exclusive private market poses a threat to the implementation of inclusion.

The Parliamentary Inquiry into the Childcare for Disabled Children in July 2014(HM Parliament, 2014) reported that parents of disabled children are often charged higher than average fees. They have to negotiate with providers and local educational authorities for places for their children. 41% of parents in the survey reported they cannot access their 15 hours of free entitlement. Furthermore parents felt that 'mainstream childcare was not inclusive due to poor understanding of making reasonable adjustments' (2014, p.5).In addition, the report stated that there 'was a significant shortfall of knowledge, skills and confidence in providing quality early years care and education to disabled children in the childcare and early years workforce'.(p.6) The report further commented on the discrepancy between the enhanced responsibilities of maintained early years settings to support inclusion in comparison to non-maintained providers. There were 19 recommendations as a result of the report. The 13th recommendation states:

> 'The statutory SEND Code of practice requirements for maintained nursery providers to report on the admission of disabled children should apply in a reworked form to private and independent settings' (p.45)

The report highlighted incidences where children were not accepted in nurseries or were given reduced hours of the free entitlement to allow the setting to provide adequately for them. This has been common practice in some local authorities and in early years settings specifically. This is a form of inclusion or exclusion 'by default' which is not questioned or redressed by parents, as the settings are private and not subjected to the same statutory duties under the SEND Code (DfE,2015) regulations.

Reports from New Zealand, which is governed by similar anti-discriminatory legislation, have also found similar exclusionary practices. Parents of children with special needs are advised to reduce their hours because their child is unable to cope with the requirements of the 'long' nursery day when it could be claimed that it is the lack of infrastructure of the setting and preconceptions of the early years workforce that prevent the child from attending or accessing their free entitlement (Purdue et al, 2011). To resolve this matter, there is a necessity of moving towards an early childhood educational reform. There should be a move towards a 'universal early childhood education' provided by the government in maintained and non-maintained early years settings which are well funded and staffed by highly qualified staff as is the case in other West European countries (Lewis and West,2016).

2.6 Concluding Comments

This chapter presented a picture of ECEC as a fragmented terrain, vested in a complex 'educare' identity, and overwhelmed by an incessant succession of government initiatives that simultaneously sought to de-regulate and re-regulate the sector. These have resulted in a sector which is permeated by great disparities in relation to the provision on offer for young children, particularly children with special needs and their parents. The lack of relevant training, poor pay and challenging working conditions exacerbate the workforce inequalities observed. These specificities construct a 'defective' workforce and lead to inequitable partnerships between early years educators and professionals. Partnerships with parents appear equally troubled as they often rest on philanthropic sentiments that undermine the reciprocity of collaboration and aim to present parents as being 'in control' despite underlying discourse and research that point to the contrary. Within a field that lacks the appropriate infrastructure and is based on the premises of consumerism and driven by market powers, the inclusion of children with special educational needs is neglected and the quest for equity becomes of lesser importance.

Chapter 3

3. Opening Comments

This chapter provides a critical historical account of the evolution of the concept of inclusion since the Warnock Report and the advancements in the field of Special Educational Needs from the advent of the New Labour government to the Conservative years. It reports on research related to inclusion and focuses upon matters related to the dilemmas of difference: educators' perceptions of the significance of the location, identification and curriculum provisions for children with special needs. It concludes by briefly exploring the theoretical models that underpin our understanding of (dis)ability and explores how these are interpreted within early years practice and permeate decisions related to children's placements, diagnoses and pedagogy.

3.1 From Integration to Inclusion: A Brief History

Inclusion has dominated the UK educational agenda since 1997 when the 'Excellence for All document' (DfES, 1997) placed inclusion in mainstream schools in the agenda(Siles, Lawson and Parker,2007).Its seeds however were sown in the 1960s during the civil rights movement (Thomas, 2013) and were further embedded into the legislative and educational system in the 1970s when the Report of the Committee into the Education of Handicapped Children (1978) introduced the term Special Educational Needs. This advocated the locational, social and functional integration of children, previously considered as uneducable, into the generic educational system. The concept of 'special educational needs' aimed to move away from the categorisation of children and distance educational thinking and practices from the notion of handicaps. Handicaps inferred to a 'within a child' deficit that prevented children from learning in regular settings and lay a responsibility on the local educational authority to make provision for children who required it while ensuring the term 'embodied a positive statement of the type of special provision required'. (1978, p.45). It acknowledged the needs of some

children to additional support that would be based purely on their educational requirements rather than their diagnosed conditions.

The three aspects of the term integration, as adopted by the Warnock Committee (DSE,1978) equated to children adapting to existing provision in regular or mainstream schools to various degrees (Avramidis and Norwich,2002). Locational was the most superficial form of integration, with social implying that the children could develop social interactions. Functional referred to a child developing a sense of belonging and identity in the school community and advocated the relevant training of teachers and educators to enable them to plan, teach and deliver a curriculum that would allow some of the children to participate. More insidious to this concept of integration, according to Florian (2005, p.30), was the notion of normalisation; children with special needs were not appreciated as unique learners but expected through integration to learn 'how to join in the mainstream, how to become like the others.' Warnock (2010) counteracted that claim by asserting that the original report was meant to normalise special education rather than individuals and in this respect was system-oriented rather that individual focused.

Integration continued to place the onus on the child being transformed rather that widening its focus to examine the possibility of a whole system or school transformation. In the case of a failure in integration the blame would therefore be conveniently placed on the child or the characteristics derived from their (dis)ability. In this sense 'integration did not define what had to be done instead of segregation' (Thomas, Walker and Webb 2005, p.22) and thus continued to view the child as a misfit failing to identify the responsibility of the educational system and its contribution towards the exclusion of children with special needs. In this respect and despite the best efforts of the Warnock Committee to depart from the medical model of disability, which prescribed remediation approaches to rectify the characteristics associated with a child's pathology, integration continued to rely heavily on special education. Particularly in the case of children with more complex needs who would not be able to fit easily into pre-existing school structures and pedagogies.

3.2 Developments in SEND legislation in England during the New Labour Period

In parallel with the rapid developments pertaining to the childcare policies and the introduction of the EYFS, the Labour government introduced a number of initiatives which aimed to bring the special educational legislation and education in line with international initiatives (Norwich, 2014a). In 1997, the Green Paper 'Excellence for All' (DfEE 1997) signalled a change in the direction of inclusive education pledging a commitment to a 'reappraisal of the way that special needs were met' (DfEE, 1997, p.7) and aiming to align inclusive education with the directives set by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) which emphasised the inclusion of children with special needs in their mainstream neighbourhood school. At the same time, the inclusion agenda widened to include children with special and additional needs into the concept of the inclusive pedagogy. The commitment of the Labour government to the inclusion of children in mainstream schools and settings appeared unequivocal:

> Inclusion is a process by which schools, local education authorities and others develop cultures, policies and practices to include pupils. With the right training, strategies and support nearly all children with special educational needs can be successfully included in mainstream education.
>
> (DfE, 1997, p.2)

The quest for the inclusion of all children in their local mainstream setting was further strengthened through the Disability Discrimination Act in 1995 and its incorporation into the educational system through the Special Educational Needs and Disability Discrimination Act (SENDA) in 2001 (Norwich 2014;Lloyd,2004).Despite the embedding of disability legislation into the education sector, the Labour's efforts have been characterised as emphatic on 'initiatives rather than a coherent and well-grounded set of policies'.(Norwich,2014a)

In 2001, the SEN Code of Practice (DfES) introduced the graduated approach and set out clear guidelines for the identification, assessment and multi-professional partnership approach to support children with special educational needs. The introduction of Individual Education Plans aimed to set targets that supported children's progress through specific and measurable strategies .Lloyd(2008,p.227) questioned the benevolence of these plans and asserted that

they assumed a deficit approach that set children with SEN for failure given the high standards promoted by the attainment agenda.

The Labour government's emphasis on standards and attainment appeared to clash and contradict its allegiance to the full inclusion agenda (Glazzard, 2013). The 2004 publication 'Removing Barriers to Achievement'(DfES,2004) highlighted the government's ongoing commitment to inclusive education through the removal of barriers to learning, the implementation of early intervention, the improvement of partnerships and the rise of expectations and achievement. Lloyd (2008, p.228) noted that while all these initiatives were laudable, they were permeated by an adherence to the standards agenda which is preoccupied with 'compensatory and deficit approaches aiming towards the normalisation and standardisation of groups rather than contributing to the 'denormalization of institutions.'

In the UK, a Select House Committee Report (2006) was set up to examine the processes related to the SEN code of practice(DfES, 2001).The group of cross-party MPs highlighted the confusion pertaining to the terms inclusion and special needs, the lack of confidence reported by parents in the statementing process and the insufficient training provided to teachers. Despite the recommendations, the Government utilised evidence collected through the Ofsted's survey 'Inclusion: does it matter where pupils are taught' (July 2006) which reported significant improvements in SEN provision. The additional expenditure spent on resourcing to support children in mainstream schools, the improvement in local authority performance in meeting deadlines for statutory assessments and the reported positive outcomes achieved by vulnerable groups of children were seen as sufficient grounds to forego a fundamental review. However, a number of additional reports (Lamb Inquiry, 2009, Ofsted 2010) were commissioned in an effort to declare the government's ongoing support to inclusion in education.

3.2.1 Inclusion Internationally

In the last thirty years there has been an increase in activity in the inclusive educational field in this country and internationally, which culminated in the Salamanca World statement issued by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1994) which was signed by delegates from 92 countries and 25 international organisations, thus placing inclusion in the heart of the international educational agenda and creating the requirement for 'schools for all'.

The UNESCO's convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2006 acknowledged that people with disabilities were subjected to discrimination (Article 24) and stipulated that: 'Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability' (UNESCO, 2015, p.6). The convention conceptualised an inclusive school, where the participation of children with disabilities would not be restricted to their mere presence in the same classroom; rather it aimed for an inclusive environment where difference would be weaved into structures and children with various abilities would benefit from mutual participation and interaction.

3.2.2 SEND Policy and Practice in England: Coalition and Conservative years

The focus on mainstream inclusion dissipated with the election of the Coalition government. However**,** the need for an overhaul of the Special Educational Needs Code (DfES) was acknowledged with the reports commissioned by the previous government justified as catalysts in this decision (Attwood, 2013). Despite this, David Cameron's speech on ending the 'bias to inclusion' was seen to signify a persistence upon sustaining special schools and specialist strategies for teaching children with SEND. Runswick-Cole (2011 p.114) dismissed the concept of 'bias to inclusion' and purported that 'while the language adopted by New Labour had an inclusive rhetoric, this rhetoric was underpinned by conceptual incongruities that undermined the process of inclusion.'

The Coalition Government's Green Paper 'Support and Aspiration: A new Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability' (2011, DfE) appeared to propose a radical reform of the special educational needs system (Norwich 2014; Attwood, 2013) which focused on a single unified system of assessment for children and young people with special needs, a new process of identification, emphasis on school choice and the introduction of personal budgets. Local authorities were expected to publish a Local Offer outlining the provisions for children with SEND and their families. The Children and Families Act (CFA, 2014) which ensued reiterated the government's commitment to early intervention, enhanced collaboration between services, greater control for parents and children, enhanced participation of stakeholders and the provision of a high quality of services (Norwich and Eaton,2015).

The new Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (DfE, DoH 2015) came into force in September 2014, superseding the last code of practice issued in 2001 and setting the new framework in action. Under the new legislation, integrated educational, health and social services are expected to operationalise their provisions to meet the needs of children identified as having special educational needs from the start of their life and into their adulthood. The statement of Special Educational Needs was replaced by the Education and Health Care Plans, the graduated approach was substituted by a new approach to identification and assessment and the user driven model of provision advocated by personal budgets was established. Although the feedback from Pathfinders prior to the introduction of the Code appeared positive and indicated increased levels of parental satisfaction (Norwich and Eaton, 2015), an Ofsted review published in 2018 was damning (Ofsted, 2018). It reported that a large number of local authorities were not meeting their statutory responsibilities towards children with special needs, there was a lack of coordination among services, a disparity in the quality of EHCPs issued, a rise in the number of exclusions of children with special educational needs and a widening in the achievement gap between these children and their peers (Ofsted, 2010; Hoskin, 2019).

Another matter the SEND code has failed to address is a conceptualisation of special needs based on 'coherent models of special needs and disability' (Norwich, 2014a, p.420) and has dissipated its focus on social inclusion. This vagueness in relation to its guidance about assessment and identification has been as an attempt to deregulate practice at ground level

(Norwich 2014a) and transfer accountability to schools (Norwich and Eaton, 2015). The divulging of responsibility to teachers and other professionals, coupled with Ofsted's hesitation to regulate schools' quality of provision and admission and retention procedures in relation to children with SEND and other disadvantaged populations, has led to unlawful practices and an increase in complaints made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2018/19(LGCSCO report,2019). In view of the most recent evidence, the Code's aspirations in regard to the social inclusion of children with special educational needs and the measures schools can adopt to remove barriers appear tentative and invariably lead to the 'ghosting' of children (Lehane,2017; Norwich, 2014a).

Norwich (2014a) asserts that the new Code further fails to resolve the issues that were identified in previous committee reports; the circular 'Assess-Plan-Do-Review' approach merges the previous levels of School Action and School Action Plus into the designation 'SEND support' without providing conceptual clarity as to the means of identifying children who require SEND support. This has been posing a problem for school SENDCOs, who experience difficulties in distinguishing the conceptual demarcation of SEND support when providing 'additional to' or 'different from' provision for children (Wedell, 2015, 2017; Curran *et al*, 2017).Moreover, for children designated as 'SEN support' who may not require an EHCP, the support is reliant upon the quality of schools' supportive measures, which may vary greatly.

Norwick and Eaton (2015) claim that the change in nomenclature from statement of SEN to Education and Health Care Plans has not affected a procedural change; the provisions for health and care services are included in an EHCP only if related to the educational needs of a child. A recent report by the House of Commons (2019) noted the disparities in quality observed among local authorities since the transition from statements to EHCPs; they reported that in some cases, statements were simply 'copied and pasted' into Plans. Furthermore, there was no input from health and social care services thus reinforcing the notion that the changes were superficial not procedural. The report (House of Commons, 2019) advocated a culture shift and called upon the Department of Health and Department of Education to resume accountability for 'silo' working and disjointed practices. While establishing that accountability lay primarily with the Departments of Education and Health, the committee accepted that the lack of funding was a significant contributory factor in the failure of the system. The report asserted that the extension of the SEND code into adulthood

was not assessed appropriately by the Department for Education which failed to link their financial provisions with those in Adult Social Care to provide a seamless transition into adulthood for young people with special educational needs.

The refusal of the Department of Education and Health to assume accountability resulted in local authorities, parents and teachers left to 'police the system' (House of Commons, 2019, p.15). Equally, local authorities were called to task for their failure to comply with the legal prescriptions of the Code. The report called for the establishment of accountability mechanisms that would allow parents to report local authorities to the Department for Education in cases of non-compliance.

Overall, the report further painted a picture of patchy inclusion, which stressed the lack of health care professionals who can support children and the challenges parent faced in navigating a highly bureaucratic system. The report called for the establishment of a neutral role, that of Co-ordinator (2019, p.19) to lead and orchestrate interagency contributions and support parents during the process of an EHCP request.

3.3 Towards a Definition of Inclusion

Inclusion is a radical concept (Nilholm, 2007) which is not preoccupied with parts of the educational system but signifies a reformed educational provision that can cater for the full, diverse range of children's needs. A point of divergence among theorist and educators, which essentially determines the functional enactment of inclusion, is the matter of how one perceives special educational needs and (dis)ability and the purpose of the educational system. These perceptions essentially influence the stance one adopts towards the education of children with SEND in regular or special schools and whether they perceive a placement as inclusive or exclusive based on the specificities of its practices.

Norwich (2014, p.496) identifies a number of key themes that imbue inclusion in education:

- Accepting and valuing all
- Not leaving anyone out
- School re-organisation

- Promoting fraternity
- Enhancing equal opportunity
- Listening to unfamiliar voices
- Active participation in school life
- A process without end
- Not an end in itself, but a means to an inclusive society

It becomes evident from the themes above that inclusion is multi-dimensional (Hornby,2015) and multi-faceted(Norwich,2010) and has been historically conceptualised through various theoretical lenses; initially as matter of individual pathology(Thomas and Loxley,2007), a societal or human rights issue(Thomas,2013), a social model of disability or a communitarian approach(Dickson,2012). One aspect of inclusion that all theorists agree upon is the fact that there are 'many tensions and challenges' (Thomas and Loxley, 2004, p.134) paving the way towards an inclusive education system. A road that one could claim is obstructed by the attitudes and beliefs of educators, the inefficiency of the current schooling establishment and the dominance of societal views that undermine and perpetuate the concept of children with special needs as 'deviant', in need of remedial educational support so that they can be normal and eventually become assimilated into the system.

Educational inclusion appears to be an elusive concept, one that has been characterised as both a 'troubled and troubling' field of educational research by Allan and Slee (2008). 'Troubled' because its theoretical definition and practical implementation is highly contested as it is underpinned by sociological, epistemological and ontological paradigms and assumptions that often appear to clash subsequently leading to practices that can be interpreted in various ways, depending on the approach one espouses when examining them. This 'troubling' ethical project, Slee (2008) asserts, has narrowed its focus as it has become heavily fixed on the locational and curricular specificities of the education of students with SEND thereby dissipating its original impetus as a virulent social political movement that could ultimately lead to an educational reform which will deconstruct the current types of 'regular' schools and create new, 'irregular' educational establishments.

Shyman (2015, p.351) claims that 'inclusive education is an exceptionally broad term encompassing all individuals to one degree or other, efforts to define it require broad strokes

and wide applications while maintaining very specific verbiage'(2015, p.351). The concept of educational inclusion has become a 'buzzword' (Evans and Lunt, 2010; Dunne 2009) which despite its popularity and acceptance as an ideal among educationalists does not materialise unequivocally into learning and teaching practices. It means different things to different people and this leads to as many and diverse versions of inclusion as there are people to be included (Nutbrown, Clough and Atherton, 2013). This lack of clarity about inclusion has been noted (Sikes *et al,* 2007; Glazzard, 2011) and has dominated educational thinking, philosophy and practice for the last twenty years.

It could be asserted that inclusion cannot be de-contextualised from the specific socio-political environment within which it materialises and therefore there are many facets of inclusion which in the own unique perspective of their implementers are valid and just. The lack of a commonly accepted theoretical definition of pedagogical inclusion and its limits (Hansen, 2012; Evans and Lunt, 2010) could be construed as problematic, yet it invariably gives rise to studies and educational research, which aim to develop understanding and ameliorate the current schooling system and the norms, values and pedagogical practices that underpin it. In this respect, this bifurcation of perspectives essentially serves to improve the educational lives of children with special needs, stems from 'hearts in the right place' (Warnock, 2005) and could therefore be construed as an ongoing process in educators' efforts towards social justice.

The concept of inclusion as an ongoing process, one without an end has been embraced by theorists (Hansen, 2011; Thomas and Tarr 1999; Booth *et al*, 2006) in the effort to present inclusion as a visionary process which aims towards an ideal society, yet is plagued by barriers that hinder its realisation and limit its potency. Inclusion as a concept may present with no limits (Hansen 2011) but in practice its implementation has been subjected to a number of conditions. These 'conditional' responses are encountered extensively in research, normally related to the variance of the type of children's need and point to the challenges observed in practice. Croll and Moses (2000) present inclusion as an ideology, one that assumes the moral high ground but claim that 'at the day to day level of thinking that informs educational policy its position is much less secure' (2000, p.2).

Nutbrown and Clough (2006, p.42) refer to 'narrow' and 'broader' definitions of inclusion which are embodied and operationalised through practitioners' beliefs and practices. Thus,

reifying various versions of inclusion that assume diverse meanings and set different priorities, based on individuals' perceptions, preconceptions and prejudices as these have been shaped within the current sociohistorical and political nexus. Narrow concepts of inclusion appear to be pre-occupied with the rights to education of cohorts of students with special educational needs, focusing mainly on matters pertaining to the location, 'labelling' of students and the pedagogical methods adopted when teaching. Broader definitions encompass all oppressed groups and identify the role of the extant and historical educational and social systems in reproducing and perpetuating inequalities and enforcing hierarchies (Thomas and Loxley, 2007; Thomas, 2013). This widening of the target population, to include all vulnerable children or children at disadvantage is one of the aspects that distinguishes inclusion from functional integration, as described in the Warnock report (Thomas and Tarr, 1999). Despite the dismissal of the locus where children are based as merely a 'specificity' in the limitless spectrum of nuances associated with inclusion, it has never the less become synonymous with integration and later with inclusion; the 'mainstreaming' of children (placement of children in their local regular school) has become tautological with the concept of inclusion advocated by the Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994, p. 11):

> The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognise and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organisational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of special needs encountered in every school

This concept of 'regular' or ordinary school versus special schools should not be confused or considered as merely limited to the question of geographical location; it entails the notion of schools being organised in a manner which serve heterogeneous individuals, create diverse cultures and communities and dismiss the dominant discourses that have been woven into the special education system establishment .It is imperative, that in the absence of a whole school reform, the 'dilemmas of difference' (Norwich, 2008,2014) associated with the location, where the teaching and inclusive practices are enacted, are analysed extensively to unveil the values and belief systems that drive different perspectives(Carrington 1999;

Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou,2006). Particularly as the existence and purpose of special schools has been widely dismissed by a fraction of inclusionists, as means of segregation and exclusion.

3.4 The Dilemmas of Difference: Placement

In 2005, nearly thirty years after the influential report and subsequent Education Act 1981, Warnock issued the pamphlet 'Special Educational Needs: A New look' (2005). This reflected upon the legacy and the educational impact of the original report and addressed what Warnock felt were the detrimental outcomes that the report had on the educational lives of children with special educational needs. The opinions expressed were considered by some as a recantation of previous views, which lamented the fact that 'inclusion had taken a foothold on our society', as a direct effect of the report. The insistence upon inclusive education at all costs had overlooked important issues and led to children being 'physically included but emotionally excluded from schools (2010, p.32).

Warnock (2010) expressed the view that, for some children locational inclusion will amount to no more than the superficial locational integration of children in the same building, where they would be bullied relentlessly, due to their differences or eccentricities. She proffered the examples of children with autism who may become the target of others' jokes or children presenting with emotional and behavioural challenges, who hinder other children's learning. She examined the concept of inclusion in the context of the Educational reform of 1988, which introduced the curriculum and created market driven standards by which schools were judged on the basis of children's attainment. Warnock(ibid) deemed that, within this climate, the panacea to the physical inclusion but emotional exclusion of children with SEN would be the establishment of small 'specialist' or 'special' schools for children whose needs were too complex and who were consequently deemed to fail in mainstream schools. Warnock envisaged these schools as emotional and physical havens for children, where their individual educational needs would be addressed by specialists while protected from the outside world. She proposed that statements of SEN or EHC (Education and Health Care Plans) would serve

as passports and required for children to attend these schools, conferring a higher status to such institutions as they would be accessible by few while the staff expertise would serve the local community. Slee (2008, p.101) criticised the conceptualisation of children with special needs as helpless individuals, in need of salvation, and professed that the 'heightened anxiety of parents would lead them to regard it as a privilege for the child to attend such schools.' Moreover, these beliefs detract from the reorganisation of institutions by focussing on the child and thus normalise inclusion and exclusion (Lloyd, 2008) rather than questioning assumptions and destabilising norms.

3.4.1 Conditional Inclusion: the 'yes...but' perceptions

Croll and Moses (2000) conducted research, which formed part of a study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and examined the views of head teachers and Local Educational Authority Officers on inclusion. The findings indicated that, although all participants were supportive of the idea of inclusion they professed serious reservations when it came to the implementation of inclusion within a school context. Specifically, the severity of children's educational needs or their specific conditions was presented as a determining factor in the selection of the location of a child's education. According to the interviewees: 'some children presented difficulties which was unreasonable or impossible to expect them to deal with in regular settings' (2000, p.6)

The findings of other studies have produced similar results with Evans and Lunt in 2002 reporting that Principal Educational psychologists and Health, Social and Educational professionals reported 'a positive view of what special schools can provide and a lack of confidence in the capability of mainstream schools to replicate this' (2002, p.7).This lack of confidence was attributed to a multitude of factors such as the attitudes of educators, resourcing difficulties and other limitations in school provision. However, such findings served to further question the implementation of inclusion into educational reality and present 'full inclusion' as a utopia (Shakespeare, 2014).

The concept of inclusion in principle, subject to a number of preconditions was found to be prevalent among early years educators in a nationwide research that explored the perspectives of early years educators in the UK. (Clough and Nutbrown, 2004). The majority of practitioners interviewed indicated they agreed with the notion of inclusion in principle but felt that successful inclusion was dependent on the child's difficulties. The participants felt that resourcing and support played a key factor when including young children in the setting.

'Conditional' inclusion is not only reserved for children with complex learning needs but appears to be widespread in the case of children who display emotional and behavioural challenges. Clark et al (1999, p.163) refer to the 'intractable problem of behaviour' which in the views of educators was seen to divert scarce resources from children who may genuinely need them to children who are considered to 'play up'. A recent study (Warming, 2011) conducted in a Danish municipality as part of an evaluation project on improving inclusive pedagogy in preschools, reached similar conclusions. Preschool teachers felt that 'acting-out' children hindered the process of inclusion in their classes through their behaviour outbursts; they did not comply with class and behavioural expectations and monopolised their attention, which resulted **in** introverted or 'well-functioning' children been ignored. Warming noted that the participants' 'unspoken ideas about appropriate child behaviour' (2011, p.237) complied with middle-class norms and identified children, who refused to comply with these norms due to (dis)ability, resistance or lack of cultural capital, as problematic.

3.4.2 Inclusion and Exclusion in the Early Years

In the early years, there is a shortage of specialist early years settings or nursery schools that may cater for children with complex needs thus making it difficult for parents to secure a place in a neighbourhood nursery. A research conducted recently (2017) by the Study of Early Education and Development (SEED): indicated that: 'Parents were typically positive about the amount of early years provision for SEND in the local area, although options did appear to be more limited for children with complex needs.' For example, one parent, whose child had severe development delays and a physical disability consulted the local authority's disability support service when looking for early years care. The parent was offered a choice of three specialist settings; however, for one the child would only qualify for a nursery place, and

would not be able to progress to the school the nursery class was attached to, for another, the setting was an hour to an hour and a half's drive from the child's home, leaving the third as the only viable option.'

Similar studies indicating exclusionary practices have been reported in other countries worldwide. In New Zealand, despite the government's commitment and compliance with the international and national legislation set out by the Human Rights Act 1993, Purdue at al (2001) describe incidents, where children in rural parts of the country, were excluded from attending based on their child's disability. In the case where parents managed to secure a place in a local early years setting, there was an organisational system of excessive 'power and control' (Purdue et al, 2001), set in place that dictated certain preconditions to secure a child's ongoing presence and attendance in the setting: children's aides had to be present and teachers had the right to say 'enough is enough'.

It is evident that the location where a child is based is not restricted merely to the issue of the geographical location but encompasses the attitudes of educators, their training, the curriculum that is on offer, the type of knowledge it promotes as well as its capacity to address the wide range of children needs encountered in the student population and in the population of children with SEND in particular. Darragh (2007 p.167) endorses the view that 'inclusion and natural environments are not places, but rather represent a philosophy that guides practitioners as they work to support equity for all children'.

3.4.3 Inclusion: a matter of values, rights or efficacy?

If education is about learning alongside and with your peers or co-constructing knowledge within a learning community in preparation for joining the wider social community in future, then the purpose of education revolves around developing a sense of belonging(Thomas,2013) and actively participating in generating learning within one's small community (Norwich, 2014; Warnock, 2010).

Hornby (2015) interprets this notion of community belonging as one of a homogenous community of peers who share similar interests and similar (dis)abilities rather than peers 'of

the same chronological age' (p.241). Evident in this conceptualisation is a dismissal of a bigger picture; that of a heterogeneous community of learners which is reflective of society rather than a separate and autonomous sub-community. Essentially this claim pertains to the goals of education rather than the structure of the school or the organisation of curricula (Norwich, 2014). Hornby (2015) and Warnock (2005, 2010) assert that the school is a 'means to an end' with the end being the inclusion of children in society after they leave school. Given that school is part of society and subjected to similar norms and values that govern society, it is worth considering why children should be sheltered from this wider picture and prevented from joining more than one community.

Furthermore, who is to make the decision as to when, if ever, these children would be deemed 'ready' to join. Wenger (2000, p.242) asserts that 'combining forms of membership in multiple communities into one's experience is a way to expand an identity'. The belonging into one community, particularly one that is segregated, or marginalised, as special schools can be and which has not built bridges into the regular school could therefore be restrictive for children. Based on Wenger's claims that identities shape the social structures we live in, it could therefore be extrapolated that the 'partial' or marginalised identity (Wilde and Avramidis, 2011) children with SEND develop will be fed back into the social system and perpetuate this cycle of segregation. Wenger (2010, p.239) reaffirms this notion by claiming that 'we define ourselves by the communities we do not belong in as well as the ones we do' and proffers that 'sometimes identities can be self -defeating'.

The development of an identity and the progression to feeling widely accepted as part of a group cannot stem purely from the placement of children in the same ordinary school; it requires the identification of potential barriers that may hinder all children and children with special needs in particular from reaching the ultimate goal of 'full inclusive participation' which comprises of physical presence and emotional acceptance in an establishment.

Warnock (2010) advocated the inclusion of children in the common enterprise of learning, not necessarily 'under the same roof' but wherever they can learn best. Her statements brought the issue of the location of inclusive education once again to the forefront of educational debate and dominated future publications and discourses, sparking an outrage among a fraction of theorists who have come to be known as 'full inclusionists', and view the

placement of children in special schools as a segregationist approach that perpetuates exclusion. Full inclusion is spurred by a commitment to equal opportunities and the advocacy of children's human rights to education.

Whereas, for some theorists (Cigman, 2007; Low ,2007 ;Hornby,2015), locational inclusion may be part of a continuum(Norwich, 2008) which incorporates placements in mainstream schools with resource base units, withdrawal for a period of time to allow individual support time or even placement in special settings, this is inconsistent with the purpose of inclusion for others. Theorists who advocate full inclusion support the placement of children in a mainstream settings at all times. Lorna Idol (2006, p.3) states that inclusion entails:

> The provision of services to students with disabilities, including those with severe impairments, in the neighbourhood school, in age-appropriate general education classes with the necessary support services and supplementary aids both to assure the child's success-academic, behavioural and social-and to prepare the child to participate as a full and contributing member of the society.

Norwich (2014) asserts that advocating this absolute version of locational inclusive placement could be incompatible with other values; the most central being the child's and parental rights. He acknowledges the tensions between different Articles of the UNESCO Rights of the Child (1989). For example, Article 12 states that children who are capable of forming their own view should express their view freely in all matter affecting them (including schooling) with the views being given due weight depending on the maturity and age of the child. Article 3 emphasises the child's best interests and the parents' rights as guardians in ensuring these. Article 5 reiterates the parental right, duties and responsibilities while Article 19 states a commitment to the safeguarding of the child from abuse and neglect. Based on the multiplicity of these values, a child's or parents' preference for a segregated setting would constitute an appropriate inclusive choice, if they felt that such an option would offer the best opportunities for the child to flourish, fulfil their educational potential and/ or protect them from bullying. Lindsay (2007, p.18) distinguishes between negative and positive forms of freedom. Negative freedom constitutes freedom from barriers, manipulation while positive freedom focuses on freedom to make an informed choice based on one's wishes. Hornby (2015) adds to the debate by distinguishing between human and moral rights and supporting that it is not sufficient to consider what children are entitled to but equally what would be

morally right to do. It could be claimed that what is 'morally' appropriate for a child to do is dependent on a number of variables and it could be difficult to ascertain the dominant variable in this moral decision. Low (2008) asserts that, although education is a right, inclusive education is not an absolute but a qualified right that individuals have the right to avail themselves of, if they so choose. Whereas he states an overall support towards the goal of inclusion and the placement of children with impairments and SEN in mainstream schools he feels that full inclusion should take place ,where it is 'humanly possible'(2008,p.6).He refutes what he sees as the unsubstantiated points made by the Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education(CSIE)that fully inclusive education is more cost efficient and retains that there could be 'greater efficiency inherent in the better targeting of specialist resources towards pupils with special needs, made possible by the existence of at least some special schools'.

Besides the question of cost efficiency, another approach to locational inclusion examines the efficacy of full inclusion provisions and the academic and social benefits associated with placement for children with SEND and their peers. Following a literature review of various studies and meta-analyses of inclusion, Lindsay (2007) concludes that all studies examined 'fail to provide clear evidence for the benefit of inclusion'; they tend to examine aspects of inclusion but the effects of full inclusion on children are statistically weak and focus on certain parameters, such as social or academic effects to the exclusion of more generic outcomes. They are pre-occupied with the 'how not the why' (Lindsay, 2007, p.19). He advocates caution for future studies in an effort to prevent what may be correlations between various factors in the quest of inclusion to appear as causal in its emergence. He calls for rigorous research that ascertain whether the rights of children in inclusive education are met effectively. Although Lindsay's call for rigorous empirical research is justified, such research may be very complex as it needs to focus on the longitudinal outcomes on all areas of a child's development in combination with their emotional and psychological well-being and contextualise the outcomes within the framework of a specific school. The variables involved are so many and yet again, there could be danger of simplifying findings or measuring concepts that are simply immeasurable.

In the quest for inclusion, some theorists have called for further empirical research to take place to establish whether there are certain applications of inclusion that generate better outcomes for children with SEND (Norwich, 2007; Lindsay 2008). For others (Booth, 1996)

inclusion remains a human rights issue, a concept which is driven by moral values and could therefore not be contested -its benevolence does not have to be proven by empirical findings.

Norwich (2014) analyses the distinction between the ideological purity and impurity, utilising a poem by the poet Archilochus that stated that the' fox knows many things while the hedgehog only one thing' (p.500) The fox identifies that there may be tensions and challenges in the adoption and implementation of a concept and retains a wide field of vision; the hedgehog on the other hand with his narrow vision can only see and accept one value. Inclusion as a concept is underpinned by various values, some of which may be seen as complementary while others as opposing. In trying to create a coherent approach to inclusion, these values may clash or overlap in places and in order to develop a symbiotic relationship, there may be some 'irreparable loss' (Berlin, 1990 cited in Norwich 2014) sustained by all ideologies involved. This study aims to embrace and explore the plurality and diversity of values observed in early years practitioners' view, not as 'ends in themselves' but as means of gaining an insight into an unknown area and mapping out some next steps in early years inclusion.

3.5 The Dilemmas of Difference: Identification

Equally contested to the concept of educational inclusion appears to be that of 'Special Educational Needs and Disability' which has sought to equally differentiate and amalgamate children into the educational system; the aim of simultaneously identifying a child's individual needs while ensuring that the school's ethos, pedagogy and organisational structures are meeting these needs, within a manner which does not single a child out, can be a complex and perplexing process. Despite theorists arguing that the term of Special Educational Needs may have outlived its usefulness (Williams *et al*, 2009) it currently remains the cornerstone of educational inclusion, in that it is by virtue of the existence of children who have been assigned this term, that inclusive provision or the quest for a better version of inclusion exists. Warnock (2005, p.19) felt that in coining the term in 1978:

The committee could reduce the obstacles a child might encounter in his learning, we thought we would move away from the medical model of diagnosis, that is of identifying certain named condition such as 'mental subnormality' or 'maladjustment'.

This move away from the medical model of disability which entailed the categorisation of children based on their handicaps could be seen to signify two points in terms of thinking: firstly it identified that the medical terms in existence led to the stigmatisation of individuals and were enshrined in outdated practices and secondly that the aim of education was to ensure these individuals' rights were secured by means of providing them with an educational placement or appropriate education. At the same time as departing from the medical model of need, the term imposed a responsibility on the local educational authority to provide the appropriate schooling that was necessary to meet the needs of the individuals identified at that time as uneducable, namely those with more complex or severe needs. In later years, referring to the concept of Special Educational Needs, Warnock (2010) expressed regrets that in creating the term, there grew a tendency to label all children with SEN as a homogenous group, without due attention to the specific educational needs that arose from their individual learning difficulties or conditions. As an example, she referred to the varying needs between a child who has Down's syndrome and a child with a physical disability that requires them to use a wheelchair-their individual pedagogical needs are completely different, yet they both have the same label. Dyson (cited in Warnock 2010 p.19) encapsulates this dilemma as 'fundamental contradiction in education systems in the UK between 'an intention to treat all learners as essentially the same and an equal and opposite intention to treat them as different'.

Norwich(2010) asserts that the term special educational needs did not overlook the individualities of the children; the completion of Individual Educational Plans or Progress plans ,as they may be known, since the introduction of the SEND Code(2015 DfE, DoH), provide and continue to reflect on an interactional model of disability which assessed individual children's strengths, ascertained areas of development and devised strategies, teaching methods and resources required to support the educational progress of children. In this respect, the term is holistic as it takes into account the learning difficulties that an individual child may experience (individual model) and views these within the contextual framework of their learning and teaching. In doing so, it incorporates the child as an individual

and acknowledges the social factors and barriers that contribute to the manifestation of their educational difficulties. This is consistent with the bio-psycho-social model advocated by the World Health Organisation. (WHO, 2007).

A review conducted by Ofsted (2010) into Special Educational Needs and Disability found that the term special educational needs was not as narrow; rather it was used too widely at that stage and 'that some pupils are being wrongly identified as having special educational needs and that relatively expensive additional provision is being used to make up for poor day-to-day teaching and pastoral support. This can dilute the focus on overall school improvement and divert attention from those who do need a range of specialist support'.(Ofsted ,2010,p.9).Ofsted clearly embraced a stricter definition of special educational needs as means of actually deterring professionals' overreliance on funding resources rather than placing emphasis on improving teaching. This view that, by expanding the label not only do we deny children with difficulties what is rightfully theirs but compromise their learning, is shared by other theorists (Peterson, 2009).

Thomas (2013) problematises the designation of special educational needs as a rigid characteristic ascribed to a group on the basis of the reliability of testing and assessments. An exploration of the means by which difference and attainment have been constructed in a competitive educational system, which promotes strict notions of success or failure, becomes pertinent and should guide our quest for social justice (Lloyd, 2004; Thomas, 2013).

A thorough and holistic understanding of the child, as the one advocated by the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage), rather than the use of slow progress as an indicator of special educational needs is required to ensure that teaching for all is enriched. Schools according to the same report tend to over identify children as having SEND in an effort to extract allocated funding from the local authority. Inasmuch as the early year sector is concerned this tendency to widen special educational needs identification could be associated with the growing emphasis placed on early identification and intervention (Allen, 2011). It could equally be attributed to early years educators and educators in general not possessing significant experience, training or lacking in self-belief; they consequently over rely on resources to compensate for their perceived lack of knowledge (Ekins *et al*, 2015).

3.5.1 Challenges in labelling

The transience of certain diagnoses and their designations as cultural artefacts rather than established medical conditions as well as the potentially demeaning consequences of labelling for individuals has been debated extensively (Shakespeare,2014; Moloney, 2010) and has been a contentious issue. Are these conditions real or created within a cultural and historical frame for the purposes of the categorisation of certain populations; certain conditions such as mild learning difficulties exist on a spectrum and their limits or deviations could be claimed to be socially constructed. What is there to be gained by identifying children and what could be lost if we don't? Terwel (2006) advises that caution is exercised when it comes to assigning rigid characterisations to groups or individuals and suggests that we must question what is real or socially constructed and who benefits or suffers from categorisation.

For the families or educators of children with SEND, the diagnosis may initially come as a relief or appear to provide them with an insight into certain actions or behaviours; it is also likely to assist them to deploy specific educational strategies that are meant to address some of the behaviours associated with the condition (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007; Arishi *et al, 2017)*. However, there is no magical method or solution or even a singular pedagogical technique that will be effective for all children (Norwich and Lewis, 2004). The focus on the medicalisation of various conditions infers that certain children populations are homogeneous and will respond to the same treatment. This 'one size fits all' approach (Watson, 2012; Mills, 1998), which is predominantly linked to the medical model ignores the person and sees only the condition. Young children are defined by their (dis)ability rather than impairment constituting one of the multiple aspects of their personality (Darragh, 2007).

3.6 Dilemmas of Difference: Curriculum

In the case of the early years curriculum and practice, elements of the social model of (dis)ability can be found in its overarching principles: the notion of the 'Unique Child' promoted by the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017) and 'Development Matters' (Early Education, DfE, 2012) non-statutory guidance which acknowledge that every child is a capable learner from an early age. It could be claimed that the concept of the 'Unique Child' could be

seen to embed the social model of inclusion and promote the development of diversity and distinct identities, had the rest of the non-statutory guidance not linked to chronological goals, associated with typical development. The importance of the social model in educational terms is that, in its attempt to break free from the pervasiveness of the deficit model, it focuses on compensatory strategies that target 'extrinsic to the child' factors; at a micro level these involve pedagogy, school environment ,teacher training, parental wishes and educators' attitudes. Thus, the focus is on facilitating an 'Enabling Environment' (DfE, 2017) that will promote the principles of full inclusion instead of individualistic approaches to learning. The social, cultural and educational barriers to inclusion in the early years warrant further analysis, if we are to develop a good understanding of preventing exclusive practices from occurring. In the absence of a whole school reorganisation, the social model serves a crucial function in that it questions the validity of practices at a micro level and exposes policies and sociocultural contexts that frame inclusion and exclusion at macro level-thus it could lead to the development of new practices that could upset the 'ecology of exclusion'.

In the early years context, the 'Enabling Environment' aspect of the EYFS (DfE, 2017), which constitutes one of the cornerstones of effective learning is a direct acknowledgement of the gravitas of social factors and their impact on children's overall participation and learning. At a macro level, the enabling environment is underpinned by the policies and legislative acts that govern the operation of schools and early years' settings. It therefore turns inclusion into a collective responsibility and duty assumed by society at large, and in the case of children with SEND by the educational establishment, rather than an attempt to address individual impairments associated with learning difficulties or other conditions on an individual basis.

Equal importance has been given to the 'Positive Relationships' dimension of the EYFS which promotes a holistic understanding of a child's development based on the establishment of good partnerships with parents. Parents are promoted as equal partners and 'experts', who can provide valuable information that enable practitioners to bridge the gap between home and setting learning and develop an in -depth understanding of a child's strengths and interests.

3.6.1 The EYFS and assessments

It could be claimed that the EYFS through its focus on dispositions and play-based teaching and learning (Roberts-Holmes, 2012) provides an elasticity that allows practitioners to develop opportunities for all children to take part in a range of open-ended activities that could incorporate personalisation to meet the needs of various children. In practice, however requirements such as cohort or individual child progress tracking, set expectations for practitioners to identify progress against specific goals in the prime and specific areas of a child's development (Bradbury, 2019). Children with SEND are likely to 'fall short' of these expectations and additional or differentiated plans are subsequently drawn to address developmental delays. Although these plans are mainly formative, the progress check at the age of two measures children's development against 'typical standards' with the aim of intervening early to prevent delays by the time the child progresses to school. Such practices are seen to promote school readiness and resort to a 'tightening' of the curriculum. (Runswick-Cole, 2011, p.116)

Terwel (2006) criticises the practices of tracking and asserts that their outcomes are likely to have negative effects on lower achieving students who have been found to 'perform better in heterogeneous classes' rather than classes that routinely stream children based on ability. A recent longitudinal study conducted by De Haan et al (2013) explored the benefits of universal and targeted preschool classrooms on educationally disadvantaged children's academic skills in maths and literacy. The results indicated that disadvantaged children's academic abilities benefited more from their exposure to classes where the composition of the population was varied in terms of socioeconomic and ethnic cultural variables. The authors attributed the academic gains to exposure to peers who had better language and literacy skills. It could therefore be inferred that, given low-achieving children' s sensitivity to contextual classroom factors including learner diversity, inclusive early years classes could provide the best start in life for children with SEND.

3.6.2 The flexibility of the EYFS

Notwithstanding the criticism related to the tightening of the curriculum imposed by formal assessments, the EYFS is meant to be a play-based curriculum and there appears to be flexibility with regards to the means and strategies practitioners will deploy to engage children's interest while taking into account individual and group differences. The stipulations of the EYFS could therefore be weaved into the Universal Design for Early Childhood Education (UDECE) (Darragh, 2007) which is based on Urie Brofenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory and advocates the inclusion of all children into early childhood settings. The UDECE has strong correlations with the EYFS; it is underpinned by three principles which are evident in the curriculum guidelines: multiple means of representation, engagement and expression which lead to equity and accountability. In the early years the multiple means of representation pertain to the educational approaches and strategies that underpin learning; children should have the opportunity to experience a well thought- out balance between child and adult based activities that are offered through meaningful and stimulating play-based experiences. Engagement should occur as practitioners get to know their children, identify their characteristics as unique learners and plan activities or provide opportunities for extending their learning on an individual and group basis. Children are encouraged to express themselves in a variety of creative ways that enhances their communication skills, enables and interactions with peers and educators and allows for creativity. Educators are accountable to parents and governed by the overarching principles of the EYFS and the standards underpinning it. On the face of it, the early years fulfil all the criteria that could enable inclusive education to flourish and to act as a foundation upon which primary and secondary schools can learn from and build their practices accordingly.

The perceived elasticity of the EYFS and the fewer academic restrictions placed upon children and educators in combinations with the freedom of play-based learning could assist the merging of the core and differentiated curriculum (Kaplan, 2013) in ways that are not easily achievable in the formal school years, due to the excessive academic demands imposed by the primary and secondary curricula. The early years sector could therefore become a leader in effective inclusive practice, a breeding ground from which inclusion will escalate. In the same manner that early years educational experiences are considered an essential foundation

for life (Tickell review 2011, p.4), the early years sector can become the foundation of exemplary inclusive education.

Despite the limitless opportunities for learning a play-based curriculum can present, the EYFS (DfE, 2017) has come under criticism. The 'Development Matters' (Early Education, DfE,2012) document serves as non-statutory guidance and could be seen as an aid that enables practitioners to plot children's development against the prime and specific areas of learning. However, the Tickell review (DfE, 2011, p.32-33) highlighted discrepancies in its utility; some practitioners used it as a bible and exhibited overreliance in their practice. The review noted that the early learning goals were used as a checklist by some practitioners while others criticised the use of corresponding age bands; particularly in the case of children with SEND some of these goals may be unrealistic or omitted during children's development.

Eke *et al* (2009, p.172) assert that 'rather than accept that children tend to learn naturally through play', the EYFS seeks to impose 'order and system' on the child. The 'Development Matters' (DfE, Early Education, 2012) acts as a precursor or 'stepping stone' to the Early Learning Goals that children have to achieve by the end of the reception year. As a result, it could be claimed that practitioners have to plan and organise activities with the 'end goal' the achievement of these unrealistic, in some case unachievable goals. Children who are not on the appropriate developmental trajectory could be seen to fail or are set for failure before they even start school. The linear trajectory inherent within the 'Development Matters' certainly disadvantages children whose development and progression is non -linear or atypical. Furthermore, it underestimates the value and significance of play as a 'stand-alone process' which is not aimed at an end product (Palaiologou, 2017). Following the revisions proposed by the Tickell review, the amended 'Development Matters' document has retained the chronological age bands associated with developmental goals, although a footnote added, advises that they exemplify typical development. Some educational authorities have amended the Development Matters and created versions specifically adapted and addressed to children with SEND in an effort to counteract the disablist rhetoric associated with a framework that adheres to Piagetian notions of development and acknowledges progress purely in relation to pre-established, normative standards.

To improve our observation and consequentially the planning and assessment process in early years, it would be beneficial to incorporate additional elements of the socio-cultural theory, which forms part of the EYFS (DfE, 2017) themes into practice. This would provide us with the opportunity to concentrate on children's strengths and extend upon abilities and skills that can be acquired and achieved with the appropriate support and guidance during play. Moreover, it would focus on the environment and its contextual and cultural nuances in an effort to bring the children's 'polyphony' of voices to the fore. (Palaiologou, 2017)

3.7 Theoretical Models of Disability

3.7.1 The Medical Model

The medical or individual model of disability has dominated the fields of psychology, sociology and special education for the best part of the 20th century -it became entrenched in culture (Areheart, 2008) and formalised through the establishment of special schools or residential and care homes for children with SEND and complex needs. More crucially, it has created an epistemology or paradigm, a theory of normality and normalisation that has affected the perceptions of professionals and educators and has shaped the forms of pedagogy and the teaching methodology addressed to children, who fall outside the normal developmental range. Thomas and Loxley (2007) trace the emergence of the medical model to the beginning of the 20th century, when the emergence of Darwinism led to the establishment of scientific and empirical methods as the most credible means of explaining the natural world as well as human functioning. The development of psychometrics asserted that intelligence could be measured and metamorphosed the conceptions about human ability and functioning. If intelligence could be measured, then so could humans and their quotient could become means of calibrating whole populations and distinguishing 'clever' from 'stupid' or the gifted from the untalented. The prevalence of psychometrics was evident in the Hadow report (Board of Education, 1931) which focused heavily on 'psychological test of educable capacity' and specific tests that could detect mental deficiency and thus ensure that children, who fell

under the category, were expediently transferred to special schools. In the meantime, the concept of social Darwinism and eugenics had become prevalent in Europe. However, intelligence was considered to be a hereditary fixed trait rather than a feature of a person that is relative and malleable and could therefore be transformed through the provision of stimulating educational experiences and the wider exchanges and interactions with one's social environment. In education, the accepted knowledge that 'special' children belonged in special school governed the educational episteme until the 1970's when the Warnock committee challenged medical categorisation.

Unsurprisingly, children with special needs were not only seen as the responsibility of special schools; their pathological traits required paediatric and psychological support; only special teachers and specific behavioural methods could rectify the symptoms associated with their specific conditions. In recent years, the rigid concept of the learning deficit that cannot easily be rectified resulted in special schools being considered by some as 'places of containment' (Warnock, 2010) and falling into disrepute.

The fields of cognitive psychology and behaviourist applications flourished in the first half of the 20th century; the new approaches were governed by the genetical determinism associated with Piaget and highly prescriptive methods were devised in an effort to remedy the undesirable traits that children with special needs exhibited. Thomas and Loxley (2007) criticise the highly prescriptive teaching, learning and assessment methods, such as Doman Delacato and Direct Instruction, that arose from this episteme and support the notion that essentially children subjected to these forms of teaching would have benefited more from 'teachers and parents working in collaboration …….without the parents being given any special training in the techniques tutoring' (Tizard et al, 1982, cited in Thomas and Loxley, 2007, p.28).

Essentially, the legacy of the medical model has been the focus on the 'defective' individual and their condition; in practical terms, schools and other educational settings are seen to play a limited role in the instigation or perpetuation of disability and special needs-their role is focused mainly on the eradication of certain symptoms, traits or behaviours. This takes the form of individual support, which focuses on a child's weaknesses or delays in development, in relation to the normal patterns of development stipulated in curricula. In recent years, the medical model of disability has been considered outdated and juxtaposed with the social

model that emphasises predominantly the barriers to learning and the elimination of these socially constructed obstacles, in an effort to combat exclusive practices (Shakespeare, 2015). The classification of children under medical categories, propagated by the medical model, served to emphasise the dichotomy between normality and abnormality and difference became synonymous with inferiority in skills or intelligence (Campbell, 2013). Areheart claims (2008, p.183) that 'despite the general trend toward social constructionist accounts of identity, and in particular, the shift to a social model of disability among activists and academics, society seems to have retained a medical paradigm for understanding disability'. This medical paradigm has resulted to the formation of the concept of 'ableism' (Kumari, 2013) on behalf of non-disabled people who have come to view difference as inferior.

The medical paradigm appears to have gained momentum with the resurgence of specific behaviourist interventions in the United States, which are aimed at treating the symptoms and eliminating the behaviours associated with certain conditions. Shyman (2016) questions the ethicality of these interventions, which present certain conditions as a medical problem that needs to be treated accordingly so that individuals may be cured from their ailment. The conflation of certain conditions with an identity that is tautological with the syndrome has been highlighted by Moloney (2010): 'people are portrayed or may portray themselves as having Asperger's syndrome or even as being an Aspy'. Therefore, autism is not seen as just one of the many elements which constitute the identity of a child or adult but becomes that element which defines them. The medicalisation of conditions, such as autism which may have biological or neurological bases but their diagnosis is 'medically questionable' (Moloney 2010, Shyman 2016,) and are often based solely on a clinician's diagnosis can lead to a fixed label but unsubstantiated benefits for the individuals. The equation of a person's identity with their condition is not limited to autistic spectrum disorders but encompasses all other conditions-particularly within an educational context-conditions such as dyslexia, or ADHD which tend to be diagnosed on the basis of subjective clinical tests and do not have a medically proven biological basis (Keenan and Meenan 2012, Wolraich 2006).

3.7.2 The Medical Model of Disability in Early Years

The medical or deficit model of disability can permeate the practices of educators which tend to interpret all behaviours a child exhibits on the basis of their diagnosis or condition thus ignoring the bigger picture. Macartney and Morton (2013) conducted a research study in a preschool in New Zealand which examined the experiences of two parents whose children had special educational needs. The setting operated within the context of Te Whariki, an early years curriculum that emphasises the importance of sociocultural learning and knowledge co-construction; the practitioners are encouraged to develop a holistic picture of a child's development in collaboration with the children's parents while taking into account the sociocultural context of the wider community and enabling children to participate fully in their school. The assessment of one of the children, by a speech and language therapist in the setting unmasked an unwillingness on behalf of the specialist to contextualise her responses and behaviour within the social frame of the interaction; rather it highlighted the child's inability to remain on task and proposed strategies to improve their lack of attention. The researchers concluded that even within that enabling environment, the views of the educators were firmly embedded within a narrow or deficit model of disability that prevented them from seeing the children as active learners, who are capable of making meaning: 'Viewing a child's 'impairment/s' or 'deficits' as the defining influence on his/her behaviour, participation, and learning decontextualises learning and teaching and diverts attention from the multiple influences on a child within the socio-cultural environment'(Maccartney and Morton,2013.p.784)

The medical model pathologises (dis)ability and presents this picture of a child as an 'other' on the basis of divergence from the norm .A recent study on the perspectives of early years educators on inclusion conducted by Dalkilic and Vadenboceur(2016) seemed to 'reinforce that isolation'(p,24) and explored the sense of vulnerability that the child faced and the educator experienced, the former on the basis of their difference and the latter on account of their insecurity in their ability to approach or meet the needs of a child. In 'othering or pathologising' tends to lie an inherent inequity and power differential between those deemed to be 'experts' or 'professionals' and the person in need of educational or medical help (Shyman 2016; Thornton and Underwood, 2012). The educators are expected to devise a

progress plan that sets goals that aim to normalise a child's behaviour and fits in with the developmental goals set by the curriculum; the decisions on the goals do not necessarily take into account the children's interests and are made based on the requirement to minimise the gap between a child's current attainment and set norms in terms of the expected attainment for his chronological age. In the early years context, as the children are young and may not be able to express their opinion, the parents are consulted in the process of target setting-given that most parents are not familiar with the curriculum or the complexity of the SEND system (Norwich, 2014a), the educator is therefore expected to take the lead and make appropriate suggestions that will enable both parties to set relevant short-term goals for the child. This could be a fruitful partnership, if the educators are not driven by antithetical personal or professional agendas steeped in educational and legislative contexts, and both parents and educators are able to accurately identify what is beneficial and more importantly relevant for the child so that they can make their learning meaningful. Clark et al (1999, p.169) claim that schools and by extension nursery settings could be seen as places 'where complex interests intersect' and reaching an agreement as to the most beneficial pedagogical course of action, when factoring in all the participants' views may be impossible.

3.7.3 The Social Model of Disability: Identifying Barriers to Inclusion

The social model of disability emerged in the 1970's and was largely attributed to sociologist Mike Oliver, who incorporated the seminal work of Paul Hunt and Vic Finkelstein, as promoted through the Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation(UPIAS), into a conceptual model or tool that aimed to move away from the individualistic perspective promoted by the medical model of disability into a new and radical understanding of disability as a purely social phenomenon(Thomas,2012;Reindal,2008;Shakespeare,2014 Danforth,2001). The onus of the disability does not befall or originate within the person who has the impairment but is attributed to societal and cultural structures, organisations and mechanisms that construct barriers which essentially transform a person's impairment into a disability. The model infers that impairment in itself, is not restrictive; it is society that

imposes these restrictions in the form of physical, organisational or cultural barriers. Therefore, responsibility for the emergence of disability becomes collective.

The social model has been developed and adapted further and branched into two different social models: the social constructionist model borrows from the postmodernist and critical theory approaches and focuses on the reproduction and perpetuation of disability as a result of cultural interactions within societal contexts. The second model- known as social creationist-has Hegelian and Marxist roots and views disability as a product of socio-economic conditions within a historical context governed by power structures (Reindal, 2008). The original social model is more virulent according to Thomas (2012) as it has retained the elements of social oppression firstly described by Finkelstein and Hunt and presents the 'social relational' complexities of disability that emerge and are created during the interactions between disabled and non-disabled individuals. This model sets the scenery for the conceptualisation of 'disablism', a bio-psychosocial combination of factors that take into account restrictions caused by personal impairment as shaped within an interactional context.

The attempt of the social model to break the causal link between impairment and disability (Thomas, 2012 Reindal, 2008; Shakespeare 2014) was hailed as a conceptual neoterism underpinned by ideas of social oppression. It provided disabled people with the justification and motivation to fight their cause, as other stigmatised groups of individuals had done in the past, with the aim of removing the barriers that limited their ability to function or enjoy the same rights as other individuals. In addition, it promoted the development of an identity which was not steeped into shameful experiences (Shakespeare, 2014) or notions of helplessness. The social model of disability infiltrated policy and educational provision in 2004 with the publication ' Removing Barriers to Achievement'(2004,DfES) during the New Labour government's era, which acknowledged that socially constructed school barriers such as educators' training, excessive paperwork, a lack of effective partnerships between professionals and parents hindered the operationalisation of inclusion. Although a significant policy in its clear inception of social barriers as detrimental in the enactment of inclusive practices, its critics claimed that its recommendations focused mainly on assisting children to jump over rather than deconstruct barriers. (Lloyd, 2004, p.234). This constitutes a valid point, yet the understanding of barriers is crucial as it could lead to a disturbance in the synergy of

the current system. In the field of education, the seeds of the social model are evident in the work of Skrtik et al (1996), Ainscow (2006) and Slee (2008), who call for a deconstruction of the ordinary school and the reconstruction of an 'irregular' school that is barrier- free and able to cater for a diverse range of children. The creation of a fully inclusive school or setting could pertain to the removal of specific materialist barriers or a whole school reorganisation. Clark et al (1997) herald the emergence of the 'organisational paradigm' which views special educational needs as culturally constructed artefacts which can be traced to schools' internal structures and practices; their exploration and disturbance could lead to the development of a 'more inclusive technology'(Clark *et al*,p.159).

3.7.4 Removal of Barriers

The removal of barriers presupposes a deep understanding of the school's or setting's organisational structures (Schein 1996), in an effort to identify the form that inclusive and exclusive practices may take and can be seen to aid the promotion of inclusion as an ongoing process rather than an event (Booth et al,1997). An argument often raised by theorists supporting full inclusion in 'mainstream' schools or 'responsible' inclusion in a range of settings, is whether the removal of some barriers would actually facilitate full inclusion. For example, by abolishing physical barriers, we are able to include children with physical impairments; however, in some cases the removal of barriers is not sufficient or easily achieved. Norwich (2014) and Shakespeare (2014) assert that certain barriers may be easier to alter than others. The literacy or numeracy goals associated with the EYFS may be inaccessible for some children with complex or profound needs-even though the personal goals for each child may be facilitated through differentiation in the early years. Norwich (2014) claimed that removing these standards at school age would have negative consequences on the education of the other children. Some of these academic barriers could be overcome in the early years if the curriculum remains play focused and the purpose of the educational experiences on offer remains detached from the school readiness agenda.

Even in the case of barriers that could be overcome there appears to be some residual resistance to change (Clark *et al*, 1999) that could be associated with a multiplicity of factors; settings and schools comprise various stakeholders who bring with them differing views as to

how inclusion is operationalised and enact their views in their practice accordingly thus leading to a plethora of inclusive pedagogies. Pedagogies may be restricted under various school administrations or contexts and within the inspection framework operated by Ofsted which focuses heavily on measuring achievement for all children, particularly children with special needs. In a study of inclusive pedagogies in primary schools, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) reported on the restrictions imposed upon teachers by 'ability grouping' which dilutes or offers a simplified version of the curriculum for learners in the lower ability sets. Lloyd (2008, p.232) discusses the implications of teaching a 'lighter version of curriculum' to learners with SEND in terms of the lower expectations set for these groups in a market-driven environment where 'achievement is measured against a reduced curriculum and personal targets'. The diluting or oversimplification of the curriculum should not be a concern in the EYFS(DfE,2017) inasmuch as play should be acknowledged as a creative, non-linear, process, free of constraints, that cannot be oversimplified due to its unique function to learning. However, its increasing use as means of assessment (Palaiologou, 2017) can lead to the creation of barriers for young children.

3.8 Concluding Comments:

This chapter has provided an overview of the SEND legislative developments during the Labour and Coalition/Conservative governments and has discussed the initiatives introduced by the SEND Code of Practice and their implications for the field of special educational needs. Despite the rhetoric of a radical overhaul in the field, there remains a conceptual vagueness in relation to inclusive practice. The ambivalent discourses promoted by the Code fail to satisfactorily resolve the issues raised by the House of Commons (2006) and Lamb Inquiry (2009) in relation to inclusive processes. The transfer of accountability to settings could serve to 'other' children with special needs in the process. I have theorised the concept of inclusion in relation to the values underpinning it and have considered the potential barriers associated with the location, identification and curriculum that continue to plague the formulation of inclusive practices in schools and early years settings. Although the sociocultural values underpinning the curriculum in early years present with the potential to implement inclusive

pedagogical practices, assessments and pre-determined learning goals appear to prevent their materialisation (Bradbury,2019).

Chapter 4

4 Opening Comments

This chapter focuses on the methodology espoused and the specific methods deployed in this study. It explores the adoption of an ethnographic case study approach and the reasoning behind its selection. A change in the direction of the study caused by the emergence of critical events in my workplace is considered as an opportunity for reflection and evaluation.

The reasoning that underpins this research and its contribution to phronetic knowledge (Thomas, 2010, 2011) in the field of early years inclusion is discussed. The constructivist epistemology and ontology espoused entail notions of emancipatory and political strands that aspire to create insights into an inequitable terrain where values, attitudes and interactions are encased in deficit notions of children's ability, parenting and educators' professionalism.

The particulars of the methods employed are evaluated critically, and my status as an 'insider' as well as the ethical implications that arise from this position are revealed.

4.1 An Ethno- Case Study Approach to Research

This research is conceptualised as a case study, due to the nature of the research questions that appeared to be consistent with the characteristics ascribed to case study research. The research sought to explore and describe the perceptions of SENDCOs and Early Years Educators on matters relating to inclusion and exclusion in the early years, discover the exogenous and endogenous sociocultural factors that affected inclusive practices and partnerships, and establish the challenges and specificities of the role of the early Years SENDCO. Swarnborn (2010, p.25) asserts that 'if the impetus for our research project lies in some broad, familiarising questions about a social process doing a case study seems to be a fitting approach'.

Case studies have been described as 'intensive' rather than 'extensive' approaches to epistemic inquiry as they tend to examine social processes and phenomena mainly at a micro,

rather than macro level and aim to provide rich and in-depth accounts and insights into a phenomenon as experienced and perceived by an individual or a group of people (Yin 2014; Swarnborn, 2010; Gerring, 2007).

Yin (2014, p.16) asserts that 'case studies investigate a phenomenon in its real- world context, where the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident'. This definition subscribed to my research aims, which focus on exploring and describing inclusion and exclusion within naturalistic settings that capture 'contextualised' and 'situated' accounts and descriptions of the social process under study. Furthermore, it accurately encapsulated the nuances of the phenomenon of inclusion and exclusion, which cannot be clearly extricated in a spatial or temporal manner from its wider sociohistorical context.

Although Yin (2014) views case study as an exploration of a 'spatially delimited' contemporary phenomenon which provides a snapshot or picture of the phenomenon at the given time of the study, Swarnborn (2010, p.9) adds an element of historicity as it attests to the case study's ability to describe the evolution of a phenomenon as it develops in the case under study. This is particularly pertinent in the case of educational inclusion, as its establishment in policies and legislative acts, which has been presented in detail in the literature review section of the thesis, is an integral aspect of its current implementation in early years and has resulted **in** distinct pedagogies which cannot be comprehended in isolation.

Leading theorists claim that case study should not be linked to a specific research design or associated with a positivist or interpretivist paradigm (Yin 2014, Gerring, 2007);it is characterised by its methodological flexibility and its 'research design must have a purpose that is defined by the inference it is intended to demonstrate'(Gerring, 2007 p.71).However in educational research, case study has come to be predominantly perceived as an approach that is closely linked to the qualitative paradigm 'providing a genre that focuses on small groupings and attempts to answer questions about contexts, relationships, processes and practices'(Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, p.23)

Despite the fact that I had been a 'practising educator' and had unrestricted access to an early years setting, it never occurred to me to deploy a case study design that was based in the setting that I was associated with and deployed ethnographic techniques. Parker -Jenkins (2018) coins the term 'ethno-case' study to describe an enquiry that borrows elements or

methods from both disciplines yet does not subscribe fully to the requirements of ethnography. During the course of my research, events unfolding at my workplace instigated me to reconsider my reluctance towards ethnographic study and I came to embrace it as an approach. The significance of critical events (Webster and Mertova 2007) and their contribution to educators' development will be discussed in subsection 4.3.1. As a result of these critical events which centred around inclusion and exclusion, I made the conscious decision to incorporate my setting into the study. I felt that the study would be enriched through the introduction of specific accounts that captured the evolution of critical pedagogical events and their contribution to inclusion.

Upon reflection, I felt that my initial reluctance to adopt an ethnographic element to my study was down to a number of reasons: ethnographic case study has come under increasing scrutiny in the last years due to its perceived lack of rigour, its adherence to an epistemology which is considered to simplify the processes associated with phenomena and its focus on prolonged periods of immersion in the field (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Parker-Jenkins, 2018; Smith and Hodkinson, 2009).The latter point was not of concern as my immersion in the field had been very long. There were however some crucial divergence points that had distanced me from claiming that this study has a purely ethnographic focus: ethnography's epistemological adherence to social facts being 'real' independently of the researcher and their context, is inconsistent with a social constructivist epistemology.

These views have been challenged by relativist theorists (Smith and Hodkinson, 2009) who cannot subscribe to criteria that judge knowledge and social reality as 'transcending the contingencies of time and space'. As my study was in quest of the inter-subjective meanings of colleagues and their social realities as shaped by a complex interplay of factors within a historical and social context, I could not view my findings as the only truth but one of the multiple truths available on the subject.

Another critical point of divergence between ethnography and educational case study are the assumptions that the researcher would lack familiarity with the contexts and situations to be studied (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013 p.6). Ethnography calls upon the researcher to immerse himself into the culture yet retain a distance or 'detachment' (Parker-Jenkins 2018) that enables him to interpret acts and assign meanings to the social processes observed

although he is not an insider and cannot therefore claim a deep and meaningful insight into the 'language' and cultural nuances of a group or community of practice

Despite the dissonance, emerging approaches to educational case study have been deeply 'impacted by notions of ethnography' (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013 p.6) and the immersion of educators in the field during their engagement in case studies is a convergence point. In addition, ethnography's focus on people and the valuing of personal and collective accounts resonates with me.

Finally, ethnography and critical ethnography in particular is permeated by an emancipatory quest that aims to challenge the current status quo and provide advocacy to specific groups. **This is** particularly pertinent in the case of studies such as this one which aims to understand inclusive and exclusive practices and support practitioners in adopting and facilitating a more inclusive approach attitudinally and practically (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, Parker-Jenkins 2018).In striving to position my approach, I embraced the open and pluralistic view supported by Parker-Jenkins(2018p,23):

> Trying to maintain a rigid distinction between ethnography and case study is unlikely as both concepts overlap and draw on related techniques so it could be more useful to turn this round and ask how do we approach research ethnographically

4.1.1. The 'typology' of this case study: setting the boundary; subject, object and reasoning

Case study, although widely acknowledged as an approach, which is methodologically flexible (Yin, 2014; Gerring, 2007) often lacks the organisational coherence (Thomas, 2011) required to formulate a cogent and cohesive research design.

The lack of conceptual robustness has led Thomas (ibid) to propose a new typology, which aims at offering clear classificatory schemata that establish an analytical framework that guides researchers from all disciplines.

Stake (2006) and Thomas (2011) concur that case studies are guided by their emphasis on particularity; they constitute physical or conceptual entities that are bounded by 'spatial,

temporal or organisational boundaries' (Thomas, 2011, p.512) which clearly demarcate them and establish them as the 'subject' upon which the study rests.

The subject of this case study comprises Early years Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators and Educators; the professionals involved constitute 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998,2000) which are bound by the geographical location (South Gloucestershire and Bristol) and their professional context (Early Years Practice and Inclusion).Stake(2006) asserts that single case studies in multicase study research are of interest because they are nested within a wider collection, which is categorically bound through a common characteristic.

This case study could be considered multiple in that several SENDCOS and Early Years practitioners contributed to it; this allows for cross-case analysis or comparisons between the educators' views and the characteristics of the settings they represent. Notwithstanding the use of comparison which is valuable in distinguishing certain characteristics that may be advantageous for the process of inclusion, the elements or 'subjects' of this case study are nested under the' integrity of the wider case'; that of the profession of SENDCOs and Early years Educators in the Bristol and South Gloucestershire area, who have experienced and implemented inclusion and exclusion in the early years and have formulated their roles in response to a torrent of government directives.

Furthermore, the participants or 'subjects' of this case study represent early years settings that may be different by virtue of their funding arrangements, operational status or organisational characteristic; however, they are placed well to explicate the functioning (Stake, ibid) or 'object 'of this study. This case study does not purport to be typical of the early years sector but represents its wide variations in an effort to engulf and detail the differences and complexity observed within it.

In establishing a subject, it is often noted, researchers fail to clearly identify an analytical framework or 'object' which the case exemplifies (Thomas, 2011). The object in this study revolves around inclusion and exclusion in the early years, and the manner in which the 'dilemmas of difference' (Berlak and Berlak,1981; Norwich 2008,2009,2014) are reified in early years education .These phenomena are framed within complex parameters or variables, which are diachronic and ,although this study offers a snapshot of the attitudes and pedagogical practices as conceptualised by the educators at the time of the study, the

evolution of the aforementioned allude to the element of historicity proferred by Swarnborn(2010) in the previous section.

Cases are selected on the basis of different reasoning which can vary widely depending on whether the researcher is seeking a case on the basis of its key interest, the proximity (physical or professional) to the case or the capacity of the case to illuminate different aspects of a phenomenon. (Thomas, 2011)

The selection of the case study in this research study was based on my professional immersion in the early years sector, which constitutes my own area of work and expertise .I therefore felt that I was in a good position to contextualise the responses of the participants, analyse their decisions and the events that led to their formation or were generated by their approach towards the 'dilemmas of difference'.(For a fuller discussion on the researcher's positionality, please refer to section 4.7). In addition, the subjects who participated in the focus groups of this study came into focus, due to their 'key-ness'(Thomas,2011) and their ability to describe the evolution of the phenomenon as it was evolving in their setting.

Case study in this research was selected on the basis of its 'analytical eclecticism' (Thomas, 2011) and its capacity to study objects through the utilisation of a plethora of designs which were not solely compatible with the research questions but offered methodological flexibility .The latter enabled deviation from predetermined designs, and supported a pluralism of choices which were not constrained by an adherence to strict epistemological and ontological criteria. The case study could be claimed to exist in constant dialogue with the researchers' beliefs and aims and it is shaped by their choices rather than the other way around. It fits different epistemological and ontological convictions and becomes a malleable tool or approach. In addition, case study in recent years has become tautological with a different type of reasoning which does not strive for generalisation but utilises theory as thinking tool; case studies could be described as 'theory- testing or theory- seeking, theoretical or atheoretical' (Thomas, 2011) but are characterised by a dynamic interaction between subject and object which sheds light into various dimensions of complex phenomena.

The characteristics of the case study appealed to my research aims; they allowed for the re-design of my study and review of my methods as the process of the research evolved and advocated a truly reflexive approach that enabled me to expand upon my research questions

and embrace the messiness of conducting a qualitative study with peers. The changes in methodological directions and the case study's capability to embrace methodological polytheism are discussed in the sections that follow.

4.1.2 Case study and Theoretical Reasoning

Case study allows for an inductive or deductive approach to theory development(Yin,2013) which complemented the research questions that I had formulated .Some of my questions were based on the 'dilemmas of difference'(Norwich,2008,2014)- a pre-existing ,established theory .Equally, I aimed to explore the challenges and ascertain the pedagogical inclusive and exclusive practices occurring in early years settings during the formation of partnerships, an area of studies which remains theoretically and empirically under researched(Payler and Georgeson,2013).

While qualitative paradigms are mainly associated with an inductive style of reasoning and quantitative with a deductive logic, this study aims to overcome this dichotomy by adopting the concept of abduction which is characterised by a 'constant dialectic between inductive and deductive theoretical development' (Pearce 2012, pp 832-833).On this basis, this study assumed a dual descriptive and exploratory focus as it tried to fill in knowledge gaps associated with existing theory and explore new areas by constructing the challenges and pedagogical practices early years practitioners and SENCOs employed in their daily practices.

The generalisability of case study constitutes a methodological anathema, particularly among social researchers ascribing to a positivist paradigm, who assert that the evidence collected through the observation of a single case study cannot be generalised across a larger population or fully interpret a phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Gerring (2007, p. 20) states that the 'additional implication of case study is that the unit under focus is not perfectly representative of the population'. Despite the limitations associated with the small number of the sample, researchers still aim for generalisability in case studies or at least the inference that the findings apply to a larger population. Thomas (2011a, p.22) concurs and notes that from

'experiment to ethnography, it is the generalising and generalisation that hold appeal for social scientists.'

Case study, as most other forms of social epistemic enquiry is preoccupied with the development of theory and notable theorists in the field advise that 'to overcome the barriers to theory development, one should try to prepare by reviewing the literature' (Yin, 2014, p.39).This leads to the formulation of research questions that are concise and, in some cases could aim to build upon existing theory propositions and test previous theoretical hypotheses. Although this study aims to build upon existing theories and understandings of inclusion, it is not preoccupied with theory development; rather it aims towards the evolution of phronetic knowledge in the field of educational inclusion. (Thomas, 2010, 2011a)

Case study was therefore not selected purely on the basis of the flexibility of the methods that could be encompassed within it or its compatibility with research questions but because it allows for the development of a specific and particular type of reasoning (Thomas, 2010, 2011).

The theoretical assumptions of this study embrace Thomas's assertions (2010, 2011a) that the generalisation of knowledge is incompatible with the unpredictability of the social world and the inconsistencies observed in the enactment of relationships of interdependence within specific and particular contexts. Although occurrences and patterns cannot be duplicated, given the variability of the contextual factors framing them which constitute them as unique, they 'bring together stories from one's horizon of meaning but understood from one's own' (Thomas, 2010, p.579).

The concept of phronesis (Thomas, 2010, 2011a) thus becomes pertinent and guides the exploration of human research endeavours; phronesis is preoccupied with the tacit of craft knowledge of the educators and aims to provide exemplary knowledge. Thomas (ibid) stresses that exemplary knowledge does not revolve around models of practice that have to be followed, due to their epistemic supremacy. It is built on a 'contextualised knowledge into practice' approach that provides relatable interpretations of pedagogy that lead to the exploration and understanding of a problem and its resolutions on a micro level. Thomas (2010, 2011a) proposes that phronesis is undergirded by some key components which, when joined together lead to 'causal narrativity' (Abbott, 1992 cited in Thomas 2010). This study

purposefully deploys educators' narratives to tell stories which can be linked to the experiences of colleagues in the field.

4.1.3 The Key Components of Phronetic Case Studies

Thomas (2010) advises that researchers deploying phronetic study should adopt a questioning stance that allows them to observe, notice and become surprised by findings that may be unexpected; they should be guided by inquisitiveness rather than a quest of generalisation. This in turn could lead to 'eureka moments', instances where the researcher deploys explanatory frames through their own observations and analysis; these are not necessarily linked to pre-existing theory but hermeneutical and contextualised interpretations. In the same vein, Citton (2012) laments the domination of theory in academia and maps out the attempts on behalf of researchers to disentangle themselves from it. He traces the evolution of theory from its 'prehistoric era', during which the efforts to systematise knowledge and present it as objective met with repeated failure, to the post-modern area which renounced theory and its attempts to govern a practice. He proposes that instead of dismissing theory altogether, we 'pursue it through other means' (2014, p.56) His pluralistic framework embraces four dimensions: accounting, modelling, storytelling and speculating and this is the path this study aspires to follow. Accounting involves the aggregation of data and the distinction of patterns across a vast array of heterogeneous information with the aim of identifying patterns. This practice is compatible with the deployment of thematic analysis as a method but is not constrained by it.

The findings of this study are embedded in narrative diachronicity (Thomas, 2010) which examines them within their historical context and comprehends how they were formed in dialogic responses to a series of historical, political and educational events (outlined in the literature review). This is comparable to Citton's (2012) modelling dimension, which is closely tied to accounting but denotes historicity as causal explanations are presented. Both dimensions described are placated by theory from above which distances itself from practice and retains its orthodoxy.

The study is guided by the exploration of the particular and accepts that, although views and perceptions are historical, they are specific to the framework within which they occur, and are thus highly idiosyncratic. It utilises rich narratives and descriptions to bring the values, emotions and feelings of the participants to the fore (intentional state entailment) and aims to explore these in depth (Thomas, 2010). The research further seeks to acknowledge divergence or 'breaches' from other studies and explain how these occur on the basis of the phronesis of the inquirer (Thomas, 2010, p.580). My insider status has allowed me to develop 'context sensitivity' related to early years inclusive practices which will resonate with readers and help them make sense of their own experiences. Through the stories and exemplary knowledge of the 'wayfarers' (Citton, 2012, p.58) the distance between theory and practice is minimised and the research follows the paths to culturally situated and acquired knowledge.

Finally, I strive to narrate and expose findings that will present with analogies to readers' own pedagogical practices, enabling them to transpose their experiences through the observation of similarities and differences between the study and their own praxis. Citton's (2012) last dimension, speculating presupposes reflexivity; it looks beyond the reality experienced in an effort to imagine a new or better world. In this case the stories and narratives of the participants will be utilised not to merely describe the tensions, challenges and the roles as they are shaped in the dialectic between practice, historicity and context but to envision a better reality for children, parents and educators in the field of inclusive education

4.2 The Adoption of a Social Constructivist Epistemology

Research often aims to make a change and improve not only our knowledge but our practices. The critical and questioning approach aligned with a radical social constructivist paradigm resonates with me as it leads to the formulation of a study that has emancipatory and political strands; an integral part of inclusion, which ultimately leads to a quest for social justice for young children with special needs and their families. This study aims to disentangle itself from the simplistic notions of a 'defective' workforce, whose anachronistic attitudes impact on the pedagogy of children, who in turn require 'remediation', and parents whose defective parenting has contributed to their child's needs. Although these concepts permeate the

narratives they are acknowledged as an oversimplification and ascribed to a complex system that perpetuates inequality (Thomas and Loxley, 2007).

Lawson et al (2006) call for the introduction and establishment of alternative approaches based on narratives and autobiographical accounts to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of educators. They advocate that on matters relating to social justice issues, such as inclusion and exclusion it is pertinent that one adopts a more critical stance that takes into account the history of how special educational needs science and episteme came to be accepted as an orthodoxy. Thomas and Loxley (2007) trace the advent of the medical model of special needs to the beginning of the 20th century, when the emergence of Darwinism led to the establishment of scientific and empirical methods as the most credible means of explaining the natural world as well as human functioning. The knowledge generated at that stage came to be part of norms and values and became assimilated into human personal and social reality; it subsequently became objectified and institutionalised through schools and other educational establishments (Berger and Luckmann, 1971).Berger and Luckmann discuss how the institutionalisation of features have come to be viewed as 'social constants' (1971, p.97).These constants are passed from generation to generation as realities without being questioned . The human expressivity may be best acquired in a face-to face situation but extends beyond this as 'objectivations' serve more or less as 'enduring indices of the subjective processes of their producers, allowing their availability to extend beyond the face-to face situation in which they can be directly apprehended'. (Berger and Luckmann, 1971, p.49)

The pedagogical actions and practices educators and children engage in are objectified and real in their daily lives; it is how educators interpret these practices that is socially constructed. The uncontested nature of inclusion, its acceptance as a moral value, a construct of benevolence cannot be disputed although its implementation has been debated extensively. However, the ascriptions or interpretations of educators, the thinking behind what is inclusive or exclusive is relativist and incumbent upon a complex interplay of factors, as these are formulated within a micro and macro matrix. This matrix consists of the sociocultural and historical context that perpetuate the notions of inclusion and exclusion. It is further permeated by the active role these conditions and contexts have assumed in reproducing these practices (Hacking 1992).This unique understanding that a social

constructivist epistemology offers, when entwined with special educational needs policies and practices, sheds light on the more insidious aspects of inclusion: it explores and questions the entrenched hegemonic practices in operation that aim to perpetuate certain systems. Thomas (2013) calls for a new psychology or critique of difference that 'gives insights into the mechanisms by which inequality and contrastive judgement construct difficulty and closure on learning' (p.473). Slee (2008) concurs and addresses the holistic aspect of inclusion when he calls for a deconstruction of the regular school and the construction of new irregular schools.

4.2.1 A Social Constructivist Epistemology and Ontology

A social constructivist epistemology, in contrast to positivist paradigms, does not strive for the discovery of a universal truth nor does it advocate its existence; it is a quest in search of the processes and subjective meanings that people assign to their life and the process of how they come to construct their own subjective realities. (Hyslop-Margison and Strobel, 2008). Constructivism has come under increasing scrutiny, particularly by researchers on the opposite end of the continuum(positivism) for its lack of methodological rigour and its adherence to a different set of tools or techniques for the verification of its own, unique 'truth conditions'. Pouliot (2007, p. 360) asserts that 'constructivism would certainly benefit from 'engaging more systematically and coherently with methodological issues.' Borrowing from Adler and Guzzini, Pouliot (p.361) describes constructivism as a metatheory that is based on three tenets:

- Knowledge is socially constructed-an epistemological claim
- Social reality is constructed-an ontological claim
- Knowledge and social reality are mutually constitutive-a reflexive claim

On the basis of these tenets, social constructivist epistemology and ontology according to Pouliot (Ibid) merge or become two sides of one coin; both embrace the significance of the social construction of multiple realities. This acknowledgement however is not to serve as an excuse for foregoing the establishment of certain criteria that can enhance the trustworthiness of social constructivist research nor should knowledge obtained through such

research come to be seen as of 'lesser significance'.Hyslop-Margison and Strobel(2008) argue that knowledge should be grounded in evidence while Pouliot(2007) advocates that findings can be 'sobjectified' through the implementation of an authentication system that allows for the constant alternating between 'experience-near' and 'experience-distant' evaluation of findings. Pouliot (ibid) asserts that the process of 'sobjectification' adopts a non-linear journey, during which a researcher explores participants' subjective realities, objectifies them through contextualisation, and proceeds to further encase them in a temporal and spatial frame (historicization).

4.3 A Qualitative Multiple Triangulation Research Design

Having established my epistemological beliefs, I carefully reviewed the design of my research to embrace an approach that would be compatible with my research questions, which focused heavily on a rich, detailed analysis of educators' narratives in an effort to provide an understanding of a complex phenomenon. King and Horrocks (2010, p.8) claim:

> If we take the idea of knowing as the basis for elaborating on the differences between qualitative and quantitative research, we can hopefully make clear the fundamental issues that underpin the justification for a specific approach.

My research questions sought to prioritise the 'why and how' of inclusion (Yin 2014) by encasing descriptions and views within a sociohistorical frame that examines the genesis and progression of a phenomenon. Furthermore, they aimed to provide situated accounts of inclusion which, although could be heavily focused on the topical element of a phenomenon, are intensive in their approach and detailed in their exploration (Crowe et al, 2011). I therefore concluded that a purely qualitative set of methods would be more suitable to my research questions and aligned closely with my epistemological beliefs. Having re-examined the overarching aims of this research, I prioritised the exploration of the phenomenon of inclusion and its contextualisation to acquire in-depth, rich narrative accounts rather than a 'quantifiable' bulk of data, which although may serve to generalise some facets of inclusion, would detract from its essence (Avramidis and Norwich 2002, Lawson et al 2006, Sikes et al 2007).

Avramidis and Norwich(2002), in a review of literature pertaining to teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, noted that the vast majority of studies conducted deployed Likert-type scales to ascertain how certain variables, such as age, gender or training affected teachers' approaches to the education of children with special needs; in focusing on the quantification of data they omitted to include the 'emic' perspective and failed to present a more holistic representation of teachers' attitudes as shaped within the societal interactions and formulated within the complex environment that cultural institutions such as schools operate.

I had always envisaged that my case study was going to employ multiple methods, a position acknowledged as an aspect of rigorous qualitative research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007) in examining a phenomenon. The combination of multiple methods to study the same phenomenon is designated as 'triangulation' (Lambert and Loiselle 2007, Thurmond 2001, Natow 2019) and although their administration may be seen to strengthen the complementarity of findings, it is equally acknowledged as a methodological minefield due to researchers' failure to identify and explain how the use of each method aims to support the collection of the evidence (Farmer et al, 2006; Morse, 2015).

The research design method combined a concurrent administration of interviews and focus group discussions. The parallel implementation of focus groups and interviews has been associated with a social constructivist paradigm and is seen to bridge the gap between micro and macro realities. Lambert and Loiselle (2007, p.230) advise researchers to be explicit about the reasons they combine different qualitative methods and state that the reasoning behind this integration usually relates to 'pragmatic reasons, the need to compare and contrast participants' views and strive for data completeness'. Farmer et al (2006 p.378) concur and state the primary purpose of triangulation is to explore convergence, complementarity and dissonance. Qualitative researchers often utilise triangulation as a term to promote 'convergent validity' without paying due attention to explaining how the findings instigated through each approach have been constructive in the analysis of the phenomenon (Farmer et al 2006, Lambert and Loiselle, 2007).

Barbour (2007) and Lambert and Loiselle (2007) prefer the term crystallisation rather than triangulation, as it implies that the methods deployed examine a phenomenon from different

angles (Barbour, 2007 p 47). Natow (2019) concurs and notes that multi-method utilisation is compatible with a social constructivist epistemology, as it promotes the comprehension and integration of participants' multiple understandings and subjective realities. Tobin and Begley (2004) agree and assert that triangulation should not be used for the purpose of contrasting or confirming findings-they embrace an approach that accepts that there is no space for a fixed or rigid point, against which other points should be measured.

4.3.1 Critical Incidents

I feel it is important to explain the procedural information behind my choice of employing multiple triangulation in an effort to render the process transparent and explore how complementarity of findings can enhance the quality of this study (Tobin and Begley, 2004). Initially the purpose of this study was to employ a solely methodological triangulation in the form of the concurrent administration of focus groups and interviews; the findings from each method was meant to be used to provide a different lens into the phenomenon of inclusion. It was intended that some of the SENDCOs participating in the focus group discussions would be selected to participate in subsequent interviews, in an effort to obtain information on meso and micro level practices and delve into the microcosm of inclusive and exclusive early years pedagogies. The same groups or persons were therefore expected to take part in both methods. This decision was quickly overturned following a series of events that took place in the setting I was closely associated with, which prompted me to expand my data sources.

Recruiting participants for my interviews proved to be a relatively straightforward process, due to my status as in 'insider' educator who had been working in an early years setting for a number of years. The practicalities of organising and inviting participants to take part in the focus group discussion proved much harder than I had originally anticipated (Barbour and Schostak, 2005). This was mainly down to matters pertaining to logistics and convenience: the interviews were all held during working hours at the educators' settings or offices while the focus group discussions had to be held out of hours, in an appropriate, specified setting of the researchers' or participants' choice.

While planning the interviews and focus groups discussions, a number of children with complex educational needs had commenced their attendance at my workplace nursery. The inclusion of the new children in the nursery appeared to create a number of pedagogical and ethical dilemmas among the educators in the setting. As the leader in charge of the operational and pedagogical provisions, the practitioners turned to me for support and guidance on inclusion. As the process of inclusion in my setting was escalating, I felt that it would be appropriate to adapt my research to encompass it. The significance of critical events has been debated in length by Webster and Mertova (2007) with relation to narrative inquiry and their importance in accelerating learning and promoting teacher development has been noted. Moreover, the elicitation of critical incident narratives serves to unveil personal experiences that are not constrained by 'politics, authority, and institutions or laws and regulations' (Colnerud, 2015, p.351). It was at that point that I made the conscious decision to broaden my case study's participant population. The events unfolding acted as a catalyst in the triangulation design I put in place to support my study. I deliberately sought to include two 'data sources' (Yin, 2013, 2014) or respondent populations, who shared a common characteristic (Early Years Practice): Early Years Practitioners and SENDCOs. Thurmond (2011, p.254) asserts that a 'variance in events, situations, places and persons add to a study because of the possibility of revealing atypical data or the potential of identifying similar patterns.' Swarnborn (2010, p.30) advises that 'the first steps are tentative and we should be able to change direction'.

Diversions are allowed and I felt that in this case, they would prove to be beneficial to my research as the phenomenon under study was occurring and evolving in my presence. Given that focus group discussions and interviews are seen as two distinct and separate methods that tend to elicit different information (Lambert and Loiselle 2007), the aim of this study is to synthesise the data derived from the two methods and the two populations in a manner that enhances the story of inclusion and exclusion in the early years. While adhering to the social constructivist epistemology criteria, it was equally important to establish means of enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings to ensure the research methods and processes were flexible enough to allow the different stages to overlap and interact so that they guide the exploration while remaining robust.

4.4 Method and Data Source Triangulation

Focus group discussions are normally associated with the reflection of the 'meso-zoom' of a phenomenon: the interactions between participants provide an appropriate forum to discuss the implementation of new policies and interventions and the efficacy of practices (Brotherson 1994, Barbour 2007).Morgan (1996, p.139) adds that an additional benefit of focus groups is the ability to allow the researcher/facilitator to 'observe the extent of the consensus or dissonance between participants'. Particularly in the case of the exploration of complex or sensitive constructs, the deployment of focus groups and interviews concurrently appears to be favoured by researchers in the field of educational studies and have been used to assess the quality of early years intervention for children with special needs and their families (Brotherson, 1996).

Interviews are generally lauded as better means of following up on findings generated through focus group discussion; they provide the micro- zoom perspective of a phenomenon and allow participants to discuss sensitive issues in depth and with greater clarity, in a situation where controversial opinions may be easier to express, due to the lack of criticism or clashes that a group situation may generate. In their purest form, they constitute a dialogue, an interactional and reciprocal exchange based on mutuality- 'they give voices to the many' (Kvale, 2006, p.481). Barbour (2007) advocates the implementation of interviews, particularly in situations where the researcher is seeking participant stories or narratives as they allow for a story to unfold without the possible disruptions, questioning or challenging that may interrupt their progression, within a group environment. The use of data triangulation/crystallisation in this study is characterised by the use of two respondent groups (Farmer et al, 2006). The focus group discussions were conducted with the early years' educators in a single setting with the aim of capturing attitudes towards inclusion during a relevant critical event. Thus, it could be claimed that the study broke with tradition in that the focus group discussions focused on the micro-zoom and the specificities of the phenomenon on 'ground level'. The interviews, on the other hand, were conducted with Early Years SENDCOs deployed in seven settings/organisations that represented the variations occurring

in early years provision (private/independent and local authority/ early years centres) and concentrated on the meso-zoom depiction of the phenomenon of inclusion. Despite the focus and intentionality of each method on exploring elements at different levels, I am fully aware that both methods can combine and elicit findings that are framed within their own unique context and therefore levels and contexts merge to capture a multifaceted insight into inclusion and exclusion in the early years.

4.4.1 Interviews

Name of Participant	**Age range**	**Qualification**	**Type of provision**	**Frequency and Duration of Interview**
James	25-34 years old	Bachelors' degree in Education,QTS	Private Day Nursery	Once/1 hour
Sian	25-34 years old	Bachelors' degree in Education,QTS	Private Day Nursery	Once/40 minutes
Hayley	45-54 years old	Bachelors' degree in Education,QTS	Children's Centre	Once/45 minutes
Anna	25-34 years old	Bachelors' degree in Education,QTS	Local Authority	Once/1 hour
Mary	25-34 years old	Bachelors' degree in Education,QTS	Children's Centre	Once/45 minutes
Patricia	55-64 years old	NNEB	Independent Nursery	Once/1 hour
Samantha	25-34 years old	NVQ3	Private Day Nursery	Once/40 minutes

Table 4.1-Interview Participants

The seven interviews conducted took place at the participants' work place at their own request and my suggestion, for the purposes of convenience, and in an effort to ensure that the interviewees felt comfortable as they were based in their familiar surroundings. The

interviews lasted from 35 minutes to an hour. The table below provides details of the participants (Table 4.1).

I had conversed on the telephone with all interviewees in advance, had discussed my study and offered to provide them with additional information; in addition, I had emailed across the consent forms (Appendix A) and, in the case where requested, the interview questions (Appendix B). I arrived at the early years settings on time and introduced myself to help the participants feel at ease (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). In some cases, I was invited into the setting and had the opportunity to spend time with the early years practitioners and children while waiting for the interviewee to become available. I felt that time in the field provided a good opportunity to build rapport and trust with the interviewee and their colleagues, prior to the interview (Pitts and Miller-Day,2007). My interest in their settings fostered a genuine reciprocity in the relationship and helped me contextualise their contributions.

Prior to commencing the interview and the recording, I had summarised the consent forms to the participants and explained that the interview was going to be recorded. I also provided the interviewees with the opportunity to decline to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with in an effort to ensure that I did not exert undue pressure (Rubin and Rubin 2012). While preparing for the recording I briefly discussed my background and answered any questions the interviewees had posed in relation to my research and my work as an early years manager in an effort to make them feel at ease (Anyan, 2013).I realise that interviews are artificial situations and can be daunting for novice researchers(Peters,2015) and participants, and made an effort to consider practicalities prior to the interview situation(ensure recorder was in working order and out of sight etc.). I made the conscious effort to not keep my note taking to a minimum during interviews, as I felt that it may have distracted the interviewees and I wanted to ensure that they felt that they had received my undivided attention.

The interview questions were semi-structured (Appendix B); participants were told that there was no time restriction that would hurry the dialogue, and they were asked to express their views, without having to utilise specific SEND related terminology, in an honest manner. (Anyan,2013 p.3). Kvale (2006, p.480) asserts that 'interviews attempt to understand the world from the subjects' point of view and unfold the meaning of their lived world' .He contrasted interviews to the quantification of data produced through surveys and advocated

qualitative interviews located within a feminist paradigm, which occur within a dialogical framework, where interactions are framed within a caring and sensitive context that aims for mutuality of interactions. Equally, he acknowledged that not all interviews are benevolent although they can be masked as such; he referred to the manipulative potential and the 'asymmetries of power' observed during some interview situations. Granted that there is a power differential between interviewer and interviewee, I made a concerted effort to minimise the asymmetry (Kvale 2006) through a number of steps: the interviewers had the opportunity to select when the conversation started or ended and set the pace of the interview. Although the questionnaire was semi-structured, I refrained from following the order of the questions and provided the participants with opportunities to proffer examples of practices and professional stories. I listened carefully and ensured my responses were meaning-oriented (Kvale, 2011) and related to the participants' narratives. I realise that an interview is classed as an 'instrumental dialogue' (Kvale, 2006, p.484) and the agenda is pre-set by the researcher who seeks answers and narratives. Despite this, I made an effort to be an attentive listener and refrain from 'manipulating the dialogue' (Kvale, 2006) or asking ambiguous questions that may cause confusion. I ensured that the questions asked were open-ended and did not 'restrain participants from bringing up a story they wanted to share'. (Anyan, 2013, p.3). Throughout the interviews, I resumed and maintained an open and honest stance paying attention to participants' language and non-verbal cues to ensure that they appeared comfortable and the interview constituted a positive experience (Kvale, 2011), where they were given centre stage and their experiences and stories were valued and appreciated.

When the interviews ended, I asked participants if they had any questions or any other information, they would like to add to give them the opportunity to seek clarifications on any ambiguities or further explain specific opinions or points raised. My aim throughout the interviewing process was to establish a 'responsive interview' (Rubin and Rubin 2012, p.36) based on a relationship of trust and reciprocity which was conducive to the co-construction of meaning and compatible with my social constructivist beliefs.

4.4.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Participants

Name of Participant	Age range	Qualification	Type of provision	Attendance Frequency
Edith	35-44 years old	Bachelors' degree in Education, QTS	Independent Day Nursery	3 focus groups
Beatrice	25-34 years old	Bachelors' degree in Education, QTS	Independent Day Nursery	3 focus groups
Lyra	25-34 years old	Foundation Degree in Education	Independent Day Nursery	3 focus group
Phillippa	35-44 years old	EYT	Independent Day Nursery	1 focus group
Georgina	25-34 years old	EYPS	Independent Day Nursery	1 focus group
Sara	55-64 years old	NNEB	Independent Day Nursery	1 focus group
Elizabeth	35-44 years old	EYT	Independent Day Nursery	1 focus group
Amy	35-44 years old	NVQ3	Independent Day Nursery	3 focus groups

Table: 4.2-Focus Group participants

The implementation of focus groups discussions in early years or education for the purposes of eliciting educators' view on inclusion has been used by other researchers(Brotherson 1994;Glazzard, 2011) and are considered as very effective means of obtaining a multiplicity of views on early years intervention programmes ;they have been deemed to be an efficient method in examining in 'what ways attitudes are changing in regards to the full inclusion of children with disabilities into early childhood programmes'(Brotherson, 1994,p.104)

Providing an insight into an event or a process as it is evolving (Barbour 2007, p.12) was particularly pertinent in the case of the early years setting under study, which was undergoing a transformative process during the period of the implementation of the focus group discussions, due to the educators' effort to facilitate a more inclusive environment and the challenges they perceived they faced during that period. Focus groups have been credited as being capable of not simply capturing responses to 'events as they unfold' (Barbour, 2007, p.12) but equally 'encouraging participants to engage in a process of collective 'sense making' (Nel *et al*, 2014).

Nel *et al* (2014) utilised focus groups discussions to explore teachers' views on inclusion. A subsequent feedback session indicated that the teachers had found the exchange of ideas really helpful; it facilitated a learning platform that allowed them to relate their experiences and make constructive comparisons between practices. The capacity of the focus groups to allow researchers to observe exchanges and the levels of agreement or dissonance has been noted by Morgan (1996) who considers this aspect to be one of the particular strengths of focus groups. This process can be particularly illuminating for a researcher who deploys a study that has an ethnographic focus as it is not often that researchers are given the opportunity to observe the genesis and progression of an event; expressing and airing views can be 'cathartic' (Barbour, 2007, p.12) as well as emancipatory for some participants.

In contrast to interviews, where the researchers' agenda (Kvale, 2006) tends to dominate the exchange and interviewees may present themselves in a positive light and generate accounts they perceive to be sympathetic to the interviewer's views, focus groups appear to have the opposite effect. According to Vaughn *et al* (1996) and Barbour (2007) if the environment of the focus group discussion is perceived to be non-threatening and provides anonymity, participants can override the researcher's agenda and focus on matters more salient to the group as a whole-thus eliminating social desirability bias. This appeared to be the case with the focus group discussions I conducted. As participants were well acquainted and knew each other prior to the focus group sessions, they appeared to be at ease; feeling they were in a supportive environment among colleagues who would not ostracise them on the basis of their views. Discussions flowed organically and focused heavily upon their narratives and contributions, possibly to the detriment of the questions I had formulated.

Schostak and Barbour (2005) advocate that focus groups should be as close to real-life professional groups to engage participants and support meaningful exchanges. The dialogic exchanges developed during the focus group discussions were very natural; they were more often characterised by a convergence of opinions yet there was a fluidity that allowed participants to object, raise questions and express strong views and opinions, which may have not been possible in an interview situation. Such occurrences are characterised as 'agonistic interviews' (Kvale, 2006) and have the capacity to overturn power differentials and produce different types of knowledge. Brotherson (1994) and Barbour (2007) argue that the focus group sample does not need to be homogeneous but the existence of similarities in background may create a better environment. The composition of my focus group sample and the fact that participants were colleagues created a natural ecology that could be hardly replicated in a group of individuals, if they had been randomly selected.

As with interviews, the four focus group discussions took place in the early years setting under study, after working hours, and lasted 1-1.5 hours (Brotherson, 1994). Participants were allowed to join the discussions in accordance to their availability. Four participants joined three times while the other four joined once (Table 4.2). New participants joining had the opportunity to tell their stories first, if they chose, to ensure new voices and stories were heard and valued equally.

Each focus group session commenced with an introduction of the research and reiterated its aims; following the end of the first session, subsequent sessions began by recapping what had been discussed. This allowed participants to reflect upon the previous group session and express consensus or dissonance (Morgan, 1996) in relation to views and opinions that had been expressed before. The short period of time that elapsed between the convention of the group sessions could be considered critical as it allowed opportunities for reflection; in some cases, participants expressed the view that their opinions had changed following the exchanges and interactions they had with their colleagues, and they became sceptical about their former convictions.

Vaughn *et al (*1996) suggest that focus group discussions are not merely conducive to the expression of attitudes but actively encourage their formation; the focus groups' contribution to different 'kinds of knowledge' is discussed in detail in the section that follows.

Each focus group session aimed at discussing and exposing the ethical conflicts the educators faced (Tirri and Husu,2002) in their efforts to implement inclusion but were not focussed solely upon the 'dilemmas of difference' (Berlak and Berlak,1981;Norwich 2008,2009,2014) but expanded to examine the barriers erected and the sources of their ethical problems.(Tirri and Husu, ibid). Often these 'sources' revolved around relations and served to expose the breakdowns in partnerships and unveiled matters relevant to the roles and identities of educators.

In this respect, each focus group session could be considered unique and autonomous in that it evoked different discussions and considerations; equally sessions were 'fluid' and took into account or challenged previous convictions .Therefore ,discussions merged and could be seen as a continuation of a dialogue that provokes and evokes a range of emotions, which lead to agreements or disagreements, and illustrate the challenges faced by educators when attempting to implement policies based on their own and their community's 'ethics of care' Tirri and Husu,2002) .

There is disagreement as to the optimum number of participants a focus group should entail; Morgan (1996, p. 146) argues that smaller groups are more appropriate when discussing sensitive or emotionally charged topics while larger groups worked better with neutral topics. Barbour (2007) adds that a maximum group of eight is considered challenging enough. Based on my experience, I agree that a larger number could be overwhelming for a novice researcher particularly in the case where participants were not familiar with each other and the researcher/facilitator. I found that the small number of participants elicited in-depth conversation which would have not been possible in a larger group due to the dynamics of the interaction. All discussions were audio recorded (Brotherson 1994) although I endeavoured to keep some notes of salient points raised as there was a brief period overlap between the audio recordings and the transcriptions; thus, the aim was to note some patterns or potential themes raised and bring them back when the subsequent groups convened so that participants could elaborate further or clarify vague points.

There is no consensus as to the level of control the researcher or moderator should exert upon a focus group discussion (Brotherson, 1994; Morgan, 1996; Barbour, 2007) and how control impacts upon the generation and progression of a discussion. An interview protocol creation is advocated (Brotherson,1994) to consider and decide upon the practicalities prior

to the convention of the groups .My focus groups discussions comprised fewer questions for two reasons: firstly three of the focus group convened consecutively and allowed for rigorous exploration thus the participants were not limited to answering questions within the scope of only one session .Secondly the interviews' questions sought out to explore the challenges of the role of the SENDCO as well as matters pertaining to inclusion, whereas the focus groups focused solely on issues related to the dilemmas of difference and the specific challenges related to inclusion as it evolved in the setting.

Despite my familiarity with the participants, I found it beneficial to set some ground rules (Brotherson, 1994) in place- these stated that participants were encouraged to speak one at a time although they were allowed to question their colleagues after they had finished speaking .I further explained that there were no right or wrong answers and encouraged all participants to express their views freely and with candour. I found the focus groups to be less structured with regards to questioning and I adopted the role of the facilitator, asking fewer questions compared to the interviews and allowing participants to take turns in responding and interacting with each other while I listened attentively. However, as Morgan (1996) cautions the role of moderator is complex and nuanced. There were occasions where the topic veered off in directions that were not relevant; when that happened, I gently guided the dialogue back to the topic while ensuring it maintained some relevance to what a participant was saying. The fact that I knew the participants assisted greatly in my understanding of the specific group dynamics; I was aware there were certain participants, who were more likely to monopolise discussions and I made a concerted effort to give all the participants the opportunity to speak and equalise participation as much as possible.

As in the case of the interviews, ethics remained a priority and all participants signed the consent forms prior to taking part. Although the participants were known to each other which for some researchers (Brotherson, 1994) leads to a compromise of anonymity and confidentiality, the idiosyncrasies of the specific group: the fact that this was a very close-knit group, an established team who had been working together for a number of years and had come to respect each other despite any differences in attitudes, ensured that such breaches were very unlikely to happen.

Although the synergy of a focus group as a special quality has been disputed (Morgan 1996) its contribution to eliciting a secure learning platform which can generate spontaneity of

expression should not be underestimated, particularly in its capacity to reflect accurately upon the multiple working realities of practitioners.

4.4.3 Focus group discussions: Different kinds of knowledge?

The preference for focus groups as a method for qualitative research over other types of qualitative data collection has been debated extensively (Vaughn *et al*,1996; Morgan, 1997; Duggleby,2005; Kitzinger 1995; Barbour,2008) although there does not appear to be consensus as to whether they constitute a more in-depth form of qualitative data collection compared to other qualitative methods.

There are, however, some definitive strengths, which make them appealing to researchers and were particularly pertinent to the aims of this research. Focus group discussions have been characterised as a particularly efficient method of quickly generating a substantial quantity of rich data in relation to the topic of interest of a study, in a relatively short period. Notwithstanding the 'quantity' of data on offer, the information and findings generated from focus groups discussions are particularly fitting for studies that aim at exploring how attitudes are formulated in interaction with others within a social context (Barbour,2008). Although inclusive and exclusive practices stem from values and personal perceptions, they are affected and framed by personal interactions and institutional participation. Focus groups provided the opportunity to observe how group interactions may lead educators to take action or make decisions 'in consort with others.' (Vaughn *et al*, 1996)

Morgan (1997) notes the prevalence of focus groups in matters relating to attitude formation and decision making. As this study focused on the formation of the attitudes of educators and the impact of their decisions on complex matters related to inclusion and exclusion, the knowledge generated by the focus groups 'honed in' on decisions that may have been unobservable in naturalistic setting observations. By analysing and rationalising the reasons behind their decisions and the complex parameters that framed those, the educators shed light into complex thought processes that may be too 'habit-ridden' or institutionalised into early years practice to explain unless you are confronted with the ability to do so in an open manner. In this respect, focus groups have been hailed as a method, which provides

participants with opportunities to participate directly or indirectly 'in the process of analysis'. (Kitzinger, 1995, p.3)

The environment of focus groups, when resembling a naturalistic context as was the case of the focus group discussions conducted in this study, can result in 'supportive, helping interactions' (Duggleby, 2005).These are thought to produce a 'loosening effect' (Vaughn et al, 1996) upon participants who feel that they can express controversial views as they are among peers, who will not judge them and will be sympathetic to their plight. This appears to be the case in this study. Although some of the views expressed may have been aligned with a more traditional or medicalised views on inclusion, it was refreshing to be confronted with honest and candid views rather than scripted answers, which allude to policy talk (Dunne, 2009) but are devoid of meaning. Group discussions can be more conducive and effective in relation to 'taboo' or sensitive topics, as the more outspoken members of the group can 'break the ice' for more reluctant participants. (Kitzinger, 1995.) In addition, the synergy of the group can expose and sustain the expression of emotion; strong feelings can in turn lead to the proposal of solutions or resolutions to dilemmas. This was evident in the focus group in this study; often participants offered alternatives to the pedagogical queries raised in an effort to alleviate ethical and practical issues.

In contrast to individual interviews, which can generate pressure upon participants to reply and answer every question, focus groups provide participants with opportunities for reflection (Barbour,2008); the answers given could therefore be more spontaneous and build upon other participants' views thus generating a stimulating dialogue and debate. This can be more challenging to achieve in a dyadic exchange where vivid or animated dialogue may be misconstrued as confrontational.

Focus groups according to Wilkinson (1998) and Kitzinger (1995) produce data, which are interactive; participants are not extricated from their context and thus the knowledge generated could be deemed more authentic. Wilkinson (ibid) notes that despite the frequent utilisation of focus groups in the generation of data, the findings are often exhibited in research as individual comments. This study deliberately sought to present extracts from the conversations that took place in an effort to not only present the content but equally illustrate the interactional features of the discussion in a holistic manner.

Through the illustration of the interaction as it unfolds, focus groups can capture interactive processes that lead to a better understanding of how social processes are objectified through the performance of social actions (Berger and Luckmann, 1971) and thus unveil the habitus of wider professional communities. (Barbour, 2008). Focus groups discussions could thus be better suited to unveiling common characteristics or patterns alluding to the roles and specific challenges that certain professional groups face thus exposing the idiosyncrasies of professional arenas. By 'tapping into Interpersonal communication' (Kitzinger, 1995) it is possible to expose cultural norms and values that would not be evident in individual interviews or idiographic discussions. As inclusive and exclusive practices and their impact on the roles and identities of early years educators is an area which is under researched in academic studies, the knowledge generated could set the foundations for the review of these roles in pragmatic and conceptual terms.

Workplace cultures and the norms and values that guide decision making within the prevailing 'cultural' parameters could be brought to the fore through opportunities to observe the language, interactional features and the different forms of communication groups utilise. Furthermore, focus groups can be more effective in explicating 'why not' questions (Barbour, 2008). Instead of placing participants into a defensive position where they are forced to justify their decisions and their implications upon others, they are given the opportunity to reflect upon specific approaches or behaviours. On matters relating to inclusion and exclusion, the onus for the failure of policy and pedagogical incentive has often been placed upon educators (Liasidou, 2012), without a thorough analysis of the contextual parameters and wider frameworks that hinder inclusion and perpetuate inequality. Rather than looking for the ascription of blame, focus groups may provide with an insight into actions and decisions that may be considered 'illogical' (Barbour, ibid) yet may appear reasonable, even justifiable to the persons who make these under the specific circumstances applied within given contexts. In this respect, focus groups are conducive to 'collective sense-making'.

Finally one of the strengths of the 'type of knowledge' and findings often overlooked in focus group is their capacity to reflect upon processes and events as they unfold (Barbour,2008); this was particularly pertinent to the case of the setting and focus group practitioners who were undergoing critical events that challenged their ability to facilitate an inclusive environment. The aim of the focus group was therefore placed on the collective stories from

the field and their capacity to shed light into 'unexplored areas' in the same intensive manner that only lengthy observational studies could produce .Often researchers have to observe for lengthy periods of time before such an opportunity becomes available; in this instance, the focus groups provided a close approximation of events and practices which may have been unobservable under other circumstances.

4.4.4 Participants

The participants of the study were selected on the basis of the sample population meeting specific criteria; as the aim of the research was to discern the views of Early Years SENDCOs (Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinators) and Early Years Educators on inclusion and explore the challenges and ethical dilemmas they may face in their quest to implement inclusive practice, the prerequisites set before and during the selection of the interview sample were as follows:

- The individuals were acting as Early Years SENDCOs or have acted in that capacity in the recent past (two years) in a private, voluntary or independent early years provision.
- They were acting as Area Early Years SENDCOs/Early Years Advisors and possessed relevant experience of mentoring or coaching nursery setting SENCOs.

As described in the methods section, the initial set of criteria was adapted following the establishment of the interviews and the population of participants expanded to include early years practitioners/key persons, who had been supporting children with special needs on a daily basis in a single setting and, although were not deployed as SENDCOS, could provide rich and in-depth accounts of inclusive practices (Coyne, 1997). Such amendments to the sample characteristics could be useful as they are likely to present some phenomenal variations of inclusion which may have not been represented by adopting a professionally homogeneous sampling (Malterud et al, 2015).

In the case of the focus groups participants the selection criterion was as follows:

- The individuals were qualified early years educators or teachers who were working with children with suspected special educational needs.

The participants constituting both interview and focus group discussions could therefore be classified as a 'purposeful' or 'selective' (Coyne, 1997;Morse, 2000; Sandelowski, 1995) sample as I sought to intentionally involve individuals in the study, who fulfil specific professional criteria (early years practice), have experienced the phenomenon (inclusion) in practice and are subsequently in a position to provide a wide range of experiences and knowledge associated with the specific field (inclusive early years practice). O' Reilly and Parker (2012, p. 193) claim that 'sufficiency of sample size is measured by the depth of data rather than frequencies and therefore samples should consist of participants who best represent the topic'.

4.4.5. Sample Size and the Concept of Saturation

In qualitative, as in all research, selection and sample size decisions are crucial in the generation of information and have 'a profound effect on the quality of findings'(Coyne, 1997).In research employing quantitative methods, it is generally accepted that a larger number of participants may result in a greater impact and results in greater generalisability of findings, one of the rigour criteria by which such research is normally evaluated.(O'Reilly and Parker,2012).This is not the case in qualitative research-a larger sample does not necessarily lead to more information nor does it guarantee a better or more holistic understanding of a phenomenon.(Boddy, 2016). In case studies in particular, which often focus on the intense and deep exploration of the phenomenon, the quest to present a holistic picture of the phenomenon is considered unrealistic; rather the quest is the capacity of the case study to explore and highlight patterns of this phenomenon or provide directions which future research can follow (Swarnborn, 2010; Boddy, 2016; Thomas, 2011).

O'Reilly and Parker(2012) and Malterud et al(2015) have explored the notion of sample saturation in qualitative paradigms and have noted that its meaning and implementation, in a variety of qualitative research paradigms, have been distanced by its original inception based on grounded theory .In grounded theory, saturation indicates that a constant

comparative analysis between categories has been achieved and the relationship between these has been fully accounted for to enable the researcher to develop a new theory. This concept is incompatible with social constructionist and hermeneutical paradigms which view 'lived experiences' as unique -new ideas may therefore emerge any time a new person is interviewed (O'Reilly and Parker 2012). In an effort to distance themselves from the legacy of quantitative research and the cultural residue associated with it (O'Reilly and Parker, 2012) theorists have produced a new set of criteria that qualitative research should ascribe to, in an effort to resolve the tensions and confusion associated with sample size (Morse 2000, Malterud *et al* 2015). Borrowing from Malterud *et al* (2015) and Morse (2000), this section will debate how the criteria associated with rigour and robustness in qualitative research selection and sampling have been fulfilled in this study. Malterud *et al* (2015) have proposed the replacement of the concept of saturation with that of 'information power' in the context of qualitative research to ascertain the appropriateness of the sample size. Information power comprises of the complex interplay of the following components: the study aims, the sample specificity, the use of established theory the quality of dialogue and the analysis strategy.

Study aims

It is proposed that a broad study aim usually requires a larger sample. Although this research explores a broad phenomenon it is focused on a small population and is looking into specific aspects of the phenomenon: how early years practitioners perceive the dilemmas of difference (Norwich 2008) in relation to the location where the educational provision for children is offered, the curriculum on offer and the benefits or drawback associated with a diagnosis of special educational needs. Thus, it is guided by certain specificities which enable me to compartmentalise the findings under study while exploring new concepts that emerge. As a result, the number of participants on this basis need not be large.

Sample specificity

Malterud et al (2015 p.3) claim that the 'specificity of the knowledge and experiences of the sample determines the number of participants. Participants, who hold an extensive experience of the phenomenon under study, as the ones recruited in this study can provide rich and in-depth narratives and accounts that are relevant to the research questions. Consequently, successful selection results to a need for fewer participants. In addition to this

Morse (2000 p.4) strongly advises that where possible 'shadowed data' is used to provide a wider range of the phenomenon. 'Shadowed data' pertain to participants who are not restricted to their own experiences but report upon the experiences of others thus extending the domain beyond the experiences of one person. The interviews conducted with the seven setting SENCOs all comprise shadowed data thus enhancing the breadth of experiences observed: as the persons primarily tasked with offering advice to families and practitioners when a child is suspected of having special educational needs as well as devising progress plans to support all children with suspected needs in the setting, SENCOs were the best source of shadowed data as they referred to their own experiences as well as the incidences upon which they were called to support other practitioners.

Established theory

The generation of phronetic knowledge does not ascribe to generalisability criteria and eschews the notion of established theory. Although pre-existing and established theory support the researcher and enhances an understanding of a phenomenon, in this case it stands merely as a background upon which theoretical gaps can be filled with craft and tacit knowledge provided by the participants. The knowledge of the relevant theory overall helped in synthesising the findings. Equally, the concept of abduction and phronetic reasoning adopted led me to build knowledge around the findings, once collated.

Quality of dialogue

Quality of dialogue results in clear and comprehensible findings; I feel that the methodical steps I took during the interviews and focus group processes, in combination with my insider positionality, had a significant positive role to play in the process. In addition, the familiarity with the community of practice, its norms and expectations, its language and artefacts cannot be underestimated and aided exchanges, enhanced meaningful communication and resulted to rich and powerful dialogues. I feel that my background and previous training in educational counselling has assisted me greatly in developing my listening skills; throughout the interviews I adopted an empathetic (Clark, 2010), person -centred approach by reflecting upon what the participants said, trying to adopt a less directive approach and forming questions that were relevant and encapsulated the utterances of the SENCOs and Early Years Educators.

Analysis Strategy

A case study has been described in previous sections as an intense study, which is not trying to extrapolate evidence for the purpose of generalisability or replicability. It aims to provide an account of a phenomenon as it develops in a small setting or settings. This study does not make claims to presenting a holistic account or the wide range of the phenomenon but can identify patterns that are characteristic of the phenomenon in that specific unit, contextualise it within a macro context, and thus enrich our knowledge and understanding. In this respect, my study focuses on providing detailed and meaningful accounts and is not reliant upon large samples.

4.6 Thematic Analysis

All interviews and focus group discussions were recorded - the audio recordings were subsequently given to professional registered transcribers, who completed the transcriptions –this was a conscious decision to enable me to focus on my writing. Despite this, I made a concerted effort to listen to the interviews and focus group discussions several times, so that I could familiarise myself with my data corpus, prior to receiving the typed transcriptions. Given that on some occasions, a period of time had elapsed between the interviews/focus group discussions taking place and the receipt of the typed documents this approach ensured that I remained in touch with my research findings.

The data corpus was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006); the approach has been heralded for its flexibility and its capacity to fit into different epistemological and theoretical assumptions. The data set utilised for the purposes of this study comprised the entire data corpus although the analysis was guided by 'specific analytical interests' (Braun and Clarke, 2006 p.79)

As part of the research was based on exploring the prevalence of the established, pre-existing concepts related to the 'dilemmas of difference', as described by Norwich (2014), the analysis initially centred around the triptych of diagnosis, location and curriculum as implemented in early years settings in relation to the education of children with special needs. Although this may be construed as a theoretical or deductive approach to analysis, I equally focussed my

attention on themes or patterns that were related to other challenges faced by early years educators and the enablers that facilitated inclusive pedagogies. The critical incidents unfolding at my workplace setting generated strong emotions(Colnerud,2015) that helped unveil aspects of the educators' roles and identities in the enactment of partnerships which may have not been so prevalent under other circumstances – the combination of the data acquired by the interviews and focus group discussions led to the reformulation of my research questions to encompass the wealth of the dataset .Terry *et al*(2017) advocate researchers revisit their research questions and examine how their analysis corresponds to their initial questions. In my research, this openness led me to realise that the questions were limited and warranted the incorporation of elements specifically related to the roles enacted during educational partnerships. Thus, the analytical process served to refine the research questions and provide a more holistic account of the practices occurring in the settings and the impact on the participants.

The analysis of the data set followed the phases identified by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Terry *et al* (2017). I familiarised myself with my dataset through listening to the interviews. This period of immersion was long but crucial: it allowed me to examine the participants' emotional responses to the questions and the implications of their accounts on themselves (Terry *et al*, ibid) and the other partners in the inclusion process. Some initial notes were made which helped me process the data as a whole and led me to the formulation of generic ideas.

I proceeded to create some tentative initial codes: each data item (interviews and focus group) was examined thoroughly and comments were inserted next to the narratives that aimed to encapsulate my own interpretation at both semantic and latent levels (Appendix C). Notes aimed to highlight all the segments which were deemed meaningful and relevant to the research questions. The initial codes from the data set were subsequently clustered together into provisional themes. Excerpts from each data set were included into corresponding initial codes and a first attempt was made to assign codes into tentative themes.

The construction of themes was aided by simple thematic maps and tables (Appendix D) which were created to assist the process of conceptual clarification. A number of rich themes, which encompassed a multitude of sub-themes were identified and I began to organise these

around central concepts (Terry et al, 2017) with the aim of establishing their coherence and their capacity to connect to other themes while remaining distinct.

Themes were subsequently reviewed for internal and external homogeneity to ensure that they were related (Braun and Clark, 2006) and presented meaningful accounts of the data excerpts they contained. Finally, themes were delineated and re-named to ensure their focus was sharp and cogent. The intention throughout this process was to ensure that my themes related to the experiences of educators and narrated a story that flowed organically and presented plausible and well-argued evidence (Polkinghorne, 2007) that answered the research questions.

Braun and Clarke (2006) advise researchers to ascertain if their analysis will remain at the semantic level, thus examining the narratives of educators, as they are communicated and verbalised or will delve into the latent level thus attempting to interpret the sociocultural and historical framework that created these meanings. As this study is guided by a social constructivist epistemology, it aims to contextualise meanings and perceptions and is thus focused primarily on latent meanings. However, 'semantic accounts' or vignettes will be used intact to offer opportunities to bring the educators' accounts to life and their own voices to the fore.

4.7 My Positionality

Some social constructivists and ethnographers (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Alvesson, 2003) advocate that the positionality of the researcher should allow them to immerse sufficiently into the data, yet retain a certain degree of detachment that will allow them to interpret and theorise the findings accurately and faithfully. This constitutes a point of divergence, in my own research, as my insider positioning presupposes that I have partaken in the creation of the meanings constructed during the process of the interviews and focus group discussions. I therefore feel that I have been responsible for the creation of the conditions that operationalise inclusion and exclusion, particularly in reference to one of the settings, where this research was conducted. The 'pre-understandings' of an insider educational researcher have been viewed as a challenge in the validity of the research

findings, yet an 'insider' perspective could give rise to valuable, 'situated knowledge' that is fully conversant with the complex organisational realities of a community of practice .Further, such knowledge could serve to deepen the understanding of the perceptions and practices of this community, as long as the researcher engages in reflexivity that enables them to question bias or preunderstandings and 'reframe their understanding of situations to which they are close'(Brannick and Coghlan,2007, p.72). Pendlebury and Enslin (2001, p.361) claim that 'where research aims to interpret meanings or improve the quality of people's lives, it is especially vulnerable to abuses of representation, identification and trust'. As my study ascribed to both the goals described, I felt that it was pertinent to consider my position and positionality in this research. Hopkins (2007) states that critical reflection on one's positionality has come to be considered as reflexive obsession, yet acknowledges that it is crucial for researchers to consider their positionality in relation to a number of contextual factors while remaining aware of their own identities and beliefs.

As a working early years educator in a leadership position conducting research in early years' settings, I had previously assumed a 'fixed' insider position which gave me a privileged insight into the communities of practice I came to research. Privileged because my position as an early years' manager as well as an early years practitioner, meant that I did not experience the complexities most researchers come across when they have to negotiate access with gatekeepers (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; O'Connor, 2004; Alvesson 2003). My participants and I shared a similar outlook into the 'realities' of daily educational practice and the language and artefacts that constitute an inextricable and valuable aspect of a community of practice. (Wenger 1998). Some theorists consider this internal status position as pertinent to providing a greater reliability in data interpretation. (O'Connor 2004). Other researchers, mainly to be found among the ethnography paradigm (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) disagree and ascertain that as an insider, you become impervious to your own culture and cannot discern the subtleties that outsiders may perceive when they look at a process through a distant or detached lens. An insider status allows you to build rapport and a relationship of trust (Morse, 2015) that could potentially lead to open and responsive interviews and group discussions; even in cases where insider status is not shared, finding commonalities and ascertaining shared characteristics is thus advocated (O'Connor, 2004; Hopkins 2007) as means of ingratiating oneself with a community. While embracing my insider status, I equally

had to reflect on my positionality through the process of reflexivity (O'Connor 2004) and acquiesce that we all hold multiple identities in the spheres of our daily personal, academic and working lives; some of these identities or characteristics unify us while others distance us from the people we come into contact on a daily basis. This leads to 'presuppositions of insiderness that can be challenged' (O 'Connor, 2004 p.173).

While I remain a practicing educator and I consider this to be my main job, I also hold the post of researcher, who retains responsibilities in relation to my academic colleagues and the readers of this thesis. (Pendlebury and Enslin, 2001). The dual hypostasis should not be considered binary; there is a fluidity and dynamic synergy in this identity which can be used to advocate for minority or under- represented groups or populations. Early Years practitioners have been underrepresented in research and depicted in research and government publications as 'currently lacking' (Osgood, 2009). I therefore felt that my aim through this study is dual yet complex: to improve the lives and experiences of young children with special educational needs while acknowledging the contribution of early years practitioners into this process. As part of this process, my intention is to interpret or represent their narratives or voices in a respectful manner that takes into account the significance of their role and their contribution in the lives of young children as professionals and individuals. I therefore fully intended to subscribe to the advice given by Pendlebury and Enslin (2001 p.369):'Your research must promote human capabilities including agency and choice that are necessary for those who have participated'. Adopting this stance does not refrain from questioning or challenging the perceptions of the participants or unquestioningly accepting what is being said. Alvesson (2003) advocates challenging the assumptions associated with one's working culture by embracing a critical stance that utilises different theories to analyse findings and allowing for 'breakdowns' to occur. 'Breakdowns' allow for the researcher to escape from the 'taken for granted' interpretations of the lived experience of the community of practice in search for latent meanings. I feel that my familiarisation with the literature surrounding inclusion and exclusion and my role as an educator, had provided me with intimate knowledge of the 'topical' inclusive and exclusive practices and a concurrent grasp of the substantive theories governing the special educational needs field, which allowed me to simultaneously transcend and embrace the cultural specificities associated with insider research.

Sikes (2006) is sceptical about the impact of insider research and questions the motivation behind researchers' selection of their topics and the effects it may have upon people's lives. Alvesson (2003, p.180) adds to this scepticism, when he states that 'no setting comes out of ethnographic research unblemished'. This has certainly been a dilemma in my approach towards the ethnographic aspect of this study, which although permeated by a willingness and adherence to 'doing good', made me deeply aware of the impact a misrepresentation of the participants' views may cause. With this in mind, I became increasingly aware of Ellis's (2007) advice to adopt an ethics of care approach that takes into account the relational concerns that arise during my exchanges with participants. Ellis (ibid) asserts that relational ethics may be based on certain fixed universal values such as the advice to 'do no harm' but the encounters of a researcher and their interactions with the persons doing research are influenced by the specificities of the circumstances surrounding them, which cannot be predetermined. Although procedural ethics underpin a researcher's overall conduct, the proximity they develop to the 'researched' cannot be underestimated. Ultimately the depiction of educators' views in my study are guided by an ethics of care that aims to ensure that the working and personal life of those participating directly or indirectly will not be negatively affected. If possible, the interactions with the participants endeavoured to lead to positive changes in practices and an increasing awareness of the importance of self-reflection.

Despite the calls for caution, ethnographic case studies have the potential to break from the tradition of 'downward' research (Alvesson, 2003) and do research 'with' rather than 'on people'; this has certainly been the goal of this study which set out to question the lack of research in early years inclusion despite the significance of early years intervention and its ascent in policy talk (Allen 2011). The literature review of this thesis has problematised the notion of early years inclusion and contextualised it within a sociocultural and educational landscape which is characterised by a quick succession of policies, an underpaid workforce who is tasked with bringing a plethora of vague policies into fruition against a backdrop of funding cuts and government shifts on the inclusion agenda.

A critical and questioning approach does not preclude the respectful representation of the views of a group of people and my aim in this study is to reflect candidly upon attitudinal barriers to inclusion but contextualise these within current educational and policy

frameworks, while capturing the complexity of the role of early year educators, in the process and materialisation of inclusive practices.

4.7.1 Adding weight on another's side of the power equation: researching with peers and colleagues

This section borrows its title from Lee's (Merriam *et al,* 2001) experience of conducting research as an insider and the strategies the participants in her study utilised to equalise the power differentials observed in their exchanges. My conceptual opposition to a strict binary between the positionality of the insider and outsider in a research was discussed in the previous section and the fluidity and synergy of the circumstances we are placed under as researchers were analysed.

Sikes (2006) maps the minefield of conducting research as an insider within one's own institutions analysing the complexities presented by researchers' agendas, the reasoning behind their studies and the academic or other gains that their studies seek to establish, often to the detriment of the participants. Although research in some cases may be spurred by personal gains, insider or outsider research should not in itself be considered inherently malevolent or benevolent for the participants involved, and the knowledge generated through either means should be accorded equal status (Merriam *et al*, 2001).

In the same vein, the naivete associated with neutral or objective research often linked to neopositivist paradigms has been exposed and placed under increasing scrutiny in the postmodernist era. Pillow (2003) asserts 'When objectivity became open to question, the researcher's subjectivity also became open to scrutiny'. The power disequilibrium observed in research relationships has been highlighted by notable theorists (Merriam *et al*, 2001; Pillow, 2003; Sikes 2006; Kvale, 2006) and debated extensively. For qualitative researchers the demonstration of reflexivity often results in a conceptual quagmire. Particularly in ethnographies and in case studies that are permeated by ethnographic elements such as this research, it would be simplistic to deny the differentials of power between myself and my participants, even though there are a number of commonalities which unify us .I essentially class myself as an early years educator who is faced with the same challenges and dilemmas

the participants narrate in their daily practice. However, by virtue of my status as a researcher in the case of the individual interviews with the SENDCOs, and my hierarchical position as a manager in the case of the focus group discussions, my position was privileged: both in terms of my dual status, which may have ascribed a 'higher intellectual status' and my professional role which was hierarchically superior.

Mitigating the power differentials in research presents with inherent complexities: the researcher seeks to conduct their study utilising a variety of methods, which are essentially instrumental; even in the cases of interviews and focus group discussions the conversations are initially guided by the researcher's agenda and although disguised as dialogues they serve a function and act as means to an end.(Tietze,2012)

Kvale (2006) and Pillow (2010) advocate caution when utilising strategies such as member-checking or making claims to reflexivity that supposedly empower practitioners. Although these mechanisms can be laudable, they emphasise that the power lies within the person who possesses the final say and selects to give these options. More often than not, these options are not there for participants to take; they are accorded to them by the researcher.

With this in mind, I made a concerted effort to minimise the power differentials within my research. The steps taken are analysed below and although they may appear tentative, they resulted in exchanges and interactions, which promoted procedural and relational ethics (Ellis, 2007) in a consistent manner, which was 'situated' and remained responsive to contextual nuances.

As a doctoral researcher and a practising educator, I viewed my research as a benevolent project aiming at advancing knowledge in the early years sector. Despite my good intentions, it is undeniable that all research is 'embedded in political and power structures' (Tietze, 2012) and is transformed and situated through interaction and the dynamic roles we resume in various contexts. As a result, this study cannot be dislocated from the context within which it was enacted; it was shaped by it and affected it.

The utilisation of narratives and stories in this study aimed at shifting control and power from the researcher to the participant (Riessman, 2008). Stories and narrations allow the participants to follow their own paths, which eschew notions of predetermined interview structures and allow for spontaneous dialogue, which emanates from the participants' stories

and has to follow their trail of thought. Citton (2012) views storytelling as an 'indisciplined' interpretative lens which refuses to submit to pre-existing analytical criteria; it disrupts predetermined ways of thinking and makes sense of experiences as they materialise through practices.

With regards to both individual and focus group interviews, with the exception of the omission of fillers and repetitions in all participants' transcriptions, their grammar, syntax and phrasing was left intact in an effort to ensure that their own particular voices were brought to the fore. Some stories were shortened but overall, there was minimal editing involved as I felt that it was important for the participants to be able to identify and 'own' their stories as both the participants and readers of the thesis. In this respect, I adopted a Bakhtinian approach to utterances which are seen as dialogic and in constant co-construction between speakers and their contexts (Harvey, 2015).The participants were therefore the 'gatekeepers' and producers of their stories; the majority of focus group participants selected their own pseudonyms, a move which I considered synonymous with the ascription of ownership to their utterances and the authorship of their stories. Allen and Wiles (2016) concur that the selection of pseudonyms by participants is not merely associated with anonymity and confidentiality but has become a matter of voice, power and engagement.

Tietze (2012) claims that, however benevolent a study, the participants and data are often 'objectified' in an effort to produce systematic empirical accounts addressed to the academic community. This research is no exception and although the stories were kept intact their interpretation was dominated by my theoretical allegiance to specific frameworks.

When considering whether to conduct individual interviews or focus group discussions with the participants in my workplace setting, I felt that, as my position was hierarchically higher, the facilitation of focus groups would provide the 'strength in the numbers' (Kitzinger,1995; Barbour,2008) which would alleviate the status differential and allow participants to feel better supported. Furthermore, it detracted the onus from individuals to answer every question thus creating a less pressurising environment. While organising the focus group discussions, I paid particular attention to the composition of the group to ensure that the participants' roles were hierarchically horizontal and participants did not attend the same focus group as their supervisors or line managers.

Participation in both interviews and focus groups was voluntary and only a third of the staff deployed in the setting chose to take place in the focus groups; the continuation of their participation was not necessary and withdrawal was acceptable if their personal circumstances did not allow them to continue. I endeavoured to make the participants feel that their presence was valued and valuable to the research; it was made clear to them that their contribution to the focus groups was based on the wealth and relevancy of their stories and their experiences set them as experts in the area. There were points during the focus group discussions where I felt comfortable to challenge my participants' views; this could be partly ascribed to our familiarity but was more compatible with the dimensions of an 'actively confronting interview' as described by Kvale (2006).Because of the numbers of the practitioners and the familiarity of the settings and context of the meeting, it felt organic to question them on points that were controversial or conflicting without them feeling that the questions imposed specific ideas or personal views upon them. These same participants frequently participated in staff meetings in the setting; they had therefore become accustomed to meeting as a team to discuss operational matters and, although this meeting did not revolve specifically around the setting, the format and familiarity of the participants engendered a similar atmosphere, where members were actively encouraged to listen but equally question, challenge and add items on the agenda.

A matter which preoccupied my thinking throughout the collection of data and the writing of the thesis was that of member-checking (Goldblatt *et al*, 2011; Thomas, 2016; Ellis, 2007) and the benefits of this practice on the study. Depending on the theoretical background of a study, member -checking revolves around giving the participants transcriptions of the dialogue or interpretations of the findings for the purpose of ascertaining accuracy or obtaining validation as to trustworthiness of the interpretation (Goldblatt *et al*, 2011). Although offered as an option, none of the individual interview participants requested a copy of their transcriptions although most of them expressed an interest in reading the completed thesis. In the case of the focus group participants, one of the team members volunteered to read the chapters entailing the findings; her willingness to read the thesis filled me with trepidation. Although the participants' stories were included intact, the interpretation of their narratives were based on my own analysis. Ellis (2007) has advocated ethnographers take their stories back to their participants or being able to justify themselves in withholding elements of their

stories and with this in mind, I felt that it was not only appropriate but actively sought participants' opinions on the analysis. I felt that it was important to have their approval of how the events and narrations were reconstructed in the thesis and 'adequately represented their reality' (Thomas, 2016).This is not a definitive claim as to the validity of the representation of the accounts but an attempt at valuing the contribution of my participants and treating them as equal partners in the co-construction of the meanings (Goldblatt *et al,* 2011).

Notwithstanding the measures taken to address the imbalances of power observed in both cases, Pillow (2003) advocates a reflexivity of discomfort which transcends the simplistic strategies researchers adopt to address the power differentials between themselves and their participants; these techniques according to Pillow only serve to further emphasise the dichotomy between researcher and the 'Other' and demonstrate that power is located within the former. Despite the steps taken to mitigate the power issues, the interpretation of my findings adopts conventional academic language and explicates the phenomena of inclusion and exclusion through the utilisation of theoretical lenses, which may unwillingly serve to distance the participants. Although this has not been the intention, it cannot be negated that for some readers, the thesis may evoke the image of the early years educator, parent or child as an 'other': a specimen under theorisation which can be categorised or scrutinised on the basis of specific behavioural patterns or characteristics.

Equally, and while acknowledging the limitations of specific writing styles associated with academic writing, I would consider this thesis to be a success if it served to challenge the preconceptions of the readers on matters related to early years inclusion and unveiled the deeply entrenched inequalities observed in the system. Instead of seeking culpability in the individuals, this study sets out to map a complex terrain governed by conflicting policy discourses with the aim of exposing the collective responsibilities, which have been forsaken in favour of government-imposed targets that ultimately serve to distance rather than include children and parents.

4.8 Ethics

4.8.1 The Exercise of Autonomy and Respect

Autonomy, hailing from the Greek world 'self-rule' has been mainly associated with medical and health ethics, although it constitutes a quality or capacity in a participant's or respondent's life which encompasses their freedom of action as well as the ability to make independent choices based on the provision of adequate and relevant information within a context that takes into account external and internal factors. (Scott et al, 2003)

BERA (2018, p.4) has thus incorporated a set cores of values in its most recent edition which provide an overarching framework as well as the underpinning concepts that should govern all social research: 'All social science should respect the privacy, autonomy, diversity, values and dignity of individuals, groups and communities'.

This research aimed to operationalise these values and conditions at all stages of the process. I assumed a proactive approach to ensure that my conduct was guided by these principles and that all participants felt valued and respected; furthermore, the research process including the interviews and focus groups were conducted in naturalistic settings which provided ample personal space and a familiarity of surroundings to ensure that the process was constructed as a positive experience by practitioners.

The contributions of the participants are depicted in a manner which is honest, yet remain sympathetic, and enable participants' voices to be expressed and heard (Vainio, 2012) through the process of anonymisation/pseudonymisation which will be discussed in detail in the following section.

I remained aware of 'structural or power inequalities' (BERA,2018, p.6) in my interactions throughout this process and endeavoured to minimise the differential by resuming an approachable and open stance, which entailed the sharing of information and the establishment of prior contact with all participants.

4.8.2 Consent Forms

The researcher obtained signed consent forms from all participants (Appendix A). The consent form for focus and interview group participants entailed the same content and clauses. They described in simple and comprehensible language the aims of the study and the methods I employed to obtain my results (focus groups and interviews) and ascertain the views, perceptions and opinions of a wide range of professionals from the early years sector. The consent forms also explained the importance/beneficence of the study and how the results could be used to advance inclusive practice in early years provision in the future.

The importance of not overwhelming study participants or bombarding them with information that may be irrelevant or off-putting, due to the adoption of complex scientific or academic terminology and language that may not appeal to early years educators, has been taken into account. Alderson (2004) and Wiles et al (2007, p.5) discuss the significance of making consent forms accessible, friendly and attractive to all participants by paying attention to the 'font, style of writing, colour and size of text of consent forms and information leaflets. To ensure the consent forms adopted a relatively informal style, that is in keeping with early years practice and aims to recruit candidates while it covers all aspects of informed consent, the forms were shared with early years practitioners prior to their circulation and were adjusted to reflect the feedback and comments received.

The consent forms offered participants the option to opt out of having anonymized quotations used in the thesis or where feasible, check the content of their quotations prior to publication to ensure they are accurate and reflective of the interviewee's opinions at the time the interview was conducted and are context specific. In the case of the interviewee or a focus group member being unavailable, the consent form stated that the researcher withheld the right to publish the anonymised/pseudonymised quotation, subject to proofing by critical friends or the study supervisor if they deem the quotation is relevant and leads to the enhancement of the study results without inflicting harm or doing injustice to the individual and /or their setting and organisation.

There was a period of two months during which participants could withdraw their consent and their contribution would be subsequently omitted from the thesis. Participants were

informed that, if they wished to opt out, they could do so by providing written or oral notification which could take immediate effect depending on their circumstances and specific wishes. A fixed date of two months following the interview date or focus group meeting discussion was provided after which, their interviews narratives or stories had to be included depending on their significance and prominence in the study so that the results of the research and the thesis writing was not inadvertently compromised or distorted as an outcome of their withdrawal.

4.8.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality

I endeavoured to operationalise the participants' right to confidentiality through the use of the anonymization of the data obtained through the interviews and focus group discussions (Vainio 2012). Research participants' identities were anonymized through the use of pseudonyms. Participants were offered the opportunity to select their own pseudonym; otherwise randomly selected pseudonyms were given by the researcher. Some information related to the educators' age and level of qualifications as well as the type of setting they were deployed was retained.

It is unlikely that the academic readers or external readers of the thesis or publications that may stem from it, would be able to discern the identity of the research participants as the settings will not be identified by name in the study. It would however be possible for members of the focus group or interviewees to identify their colleagues ('deductive disclosure', Kaiser 2009) or for the setting that I was associated with to be recognised. Participants were therefore asked to sign a confidentiality clause that prevents them from revealing or disclosing the identity of their fellow research participants outside the focus group. The analysis of findings includes vignettes or educators' narratives but in a step to further prevent the anonymity participants will only be identified by their pseudonym. In addition, as part of enhancing awareness, I informed participants of the potential audience that the study may be presented upon its completion, to support their understanding of the research's potential level of dissemination and ensure they are comfortable with the possibility that their views/experiences may be shared widely, inside and potentially outside the academia.

I informed participants that the data generated through their discussions or interviews may be shared with my research supervisor(s) but individuals would not be identified by name and the onus of the discussions would be placed strictly on the transcription of data and the results obtained with the aim of better understanding the social phenomenon of early years inclusion instead of ascertaining the characteristics/personal details of the individuals. Wiles et al (2007) claim that debriefing should be considered a good practice as it allows researchers to seek support and clarification on issues that may have arisen. In certain instances, this practice could be beneficial as sharing matters considered emotionally or psychologically challenging could allow a researcher to offload their concerns.

4.8.4 Data Protection

The data collection, storage and transcription complied with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the GDPR, which superseded it in 2018.

The data obtained through the interviews, focus groups discussions were stored safely in a password protected computer or mobile devices. Any data obtained through mobile devices were transferred to a password protected computer as soon as possible. The researcher ensured that no third parties could gain unauthorized access by setting a PIN or password.

To ensure additional protection, data was encrypted and when shared with an approved party the data and encryption key were shared separately.

The data was kept for the duration of the study and until the thesis had been written. After that period, most data were destroyed. Some data entailing information that may be useful for future research projects or publication may be kept longer, subject to approval by the participants. The long-term storage of these data will comply with the strict regulations described above. The original signed consent forms were kept in a locked filing cabinet for the duration of the research project. This step was taken to ensure that the consent form could be produced and supplied as appropriate, in case a participant disputes their consent so that the accuracy of the signature and agreement can be verified.

4.9 Concluding Comments

This chapter endeavoured to provide a holistic and reflective account of this qualitative study. It aimed to formulate a detailed explanation of the beliefs and events that shaped the research, the flexibility that governed its progress and the adherence to an epistemological and ontological framework that was compatible with my values and ensured rigour and trustworthiness .I believe that I achieved my aims while promoting an ethical stance that took into account my participants' right to autonomy and democratic expression. I feel that my research questions and my overall conduct during this study allowed the participants to provide rich and detailed accounts of their tacit knowledge and exemplary understanding. In addition, I strove to provide a platform for self-reflection that challenged my participants' as well as my own understanding and preconceptions on inclusion.

Chapter 5

5. Opening Comments

This chapter relays and analyses the findings in relation to educators' perspectives on the 'dilemmas of difference' (Norwich 2009, 2014). It explores their views on mainstream and specialist nurseries, their perspectives on the diagnosis of young children and the implications their decisions have on parents and children. Their views are linked to theory and examined against the backdrop of legislative and educational frameworks. In addition, their craft knowledge of inclusive pedagogy and the means by which they imbue diversity into everyday practice is brought to the fore through their rich narratives. The chapter amalgamates narratives from both interviews and focus group discussions and presents these in a manner, which aims to create an intriguing, account of the dilemmas, practices and resolutions that the participants employ. Finally, the chapter debates the impact of these dilemmatic approaches on the educators' roles and their efforts to counteract the setbacks encountered.

5.1 Theme Mapping

While theme maps provide an overview of the themes as they develop, Thomas (2017) has proposed an alternative means of constructing a 'theme' map, which provides themes in sequential order and adds representative examples of narratives and discussions that illustrate the themes in a clear and comprehensive manner. Such thematic mapping allows the researcher to bring narratives to the fore and aids the analysis and presentation of findings.

Having conducted the thematic analysis, there were six themes that I focused upon which comprised of several sub-themes (Table 5.1). The first three themes addressed the

practitioners' responses to the 'dilemmas of difference' (Berlak and Berlak, 1981; Norwich 2008, 2009, 2014) pertaining to the placement, identification and curricular provisions for children with special educational needs and disability. The fourth theme revolved around the educators' conflicting feelings in trying to resolve the 'dilemmas of difference' and the conceptual and pragmatic implications their decision effected upon their roles and identities. The themes on the partnerships with parents and external professionals were conceived by educators to be detrimental to the process of inclusion and highlighted the means by which 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998, 2000) are confronted by barriers erected by internal and external processes, which ultimately lead to the breakdown of partnerships. Equally, several enablers were identified and incorporated into the findings.

The first four themes are analysed in Chapter 5, while the themes on Parental and Multiagency Partnerships are incorporated and discussed in Chapter 6.

Examples of thematic maps of the interviews and focus groups discussions are provided in Chapter 6.

Placement	**Identification**	**Curriculum**	**Sense of Failure**	**Partnership with Parents**	**Multiagency Partnerships**
Conditional Inclusion Parental and Stakeholder Values Resource bases and Hybrid Settings	Auxiliary aid for schools Relief, Justification and Stigma Ticket to provisions	Good Inclusive Practice for all Common and personalised provisions 'Development Matters': Not fit for purpose	Roles Training Shared approach	The parent on board The parent in denial	Support for Inclusion Interpersonal and Cultural Barriers Diverging agendas Role expansion

Table 5.1 Themes and Sub-themes

5.2 Specialist schools and nurseries: the relative notion of needs and conditional inclusion

Early years educators in this study suggested that specialist nurseries might be the best option for a minority of children whose needs are complex and cannot be addressed through the strategies deployed in a mainstream nursery (Blackburn, 2016):

> *Where we had the child with Down's syndrome that had come from a setting like that although that is literally one of the very few that we have in the area... I think the only one we have in the local area. The mother had pulled her out because she actually felt that the level of need there was so high that her child was being overlooked because she was not at that high level of need.... Therefore, you've got that challenge of, again, where's that cut-off between what needs to be in that level of specialist provision versus what mainstream can try to provide but with some support from the local authority and I think that is where we came up against it with the child with autism because at the time, they were trying to say, "No, no, no he can cope fine in mainstream".. but mainstream, like us, were saying we are really seriously concerned for his welfare and his safety because he is not coping in mainstream and fundamentally, you know, them saying, "Well there's no spaces anywhere else anyway, so he'll just need to stay put.*
>
> *(James SENDCO)*

James brings the notion of the relativity of needs to the forefront; the first child in the example has been transferred from a specialist nursery school to the nursery because his parent felt that the needs of the other children in attendance in that school were so complex that her child's requirements were consequently overlooked. The second child proffered in the narrative has autism and the setting struggles to support him even though funding is offered by the local authority. Lunt (2007) and Evans and Lunt (2001) stress the dependence of needs upon classroom environments and emphasise that needs are interactive and shaped in relation to the child's exchanges with parents, teachers and the educational environment. This accounts for the discrepancy between mainstream and specialist school placement from

one local educational authority to the other and questions the capacity of the nursery environment to cater appropriately for a diversity of needs.

Therefore, the choice of a specialist or mainstream setting is not only relative but conditional upon the needs of the children; complex medical needs that require specialist support are perceived as challenging, due to the lack of appropriate expertise (Imray and Colley, 2017). In addition, the majority of educators expressed the view that needs are individual, and thus decisions have to be made on an individual basis (Dalcilik and Vadenboncoeur, 2016):

> *I think that so far I've experienced that children... they've come to this mainstream setting and that they do really well here and they make progress with extra help.. If they have a one to one, that can help children to be able to use the whole setting and access all of the provision. I'm not sure if maybe... I'm not saying that specialist nurseries aren't the right thing, but, I think it can just depend on the child's individual needs and what might work for them. I think sometimes because we have 53 children at this setting, this might not be the right setting for some children's needs... maybe because it's a busy environment and the children might benefit more from being in a smaller nursery or a specialist provision with not so many children. So it depends on the child. Definitely, so far, my experience here with children with complex needs, they have managed to be in this setting and they have got on really well. So, yeah, it just depends on the child'.*
>
> (*Sian, SENDCO*)

The allocation of **one- to- one** support or a learning support assistant in the same manner as implemented in schools is considered a prerequisite for the facilitation of inclusion in the case of children who are designated as having complex needs. Despite the enhanced ratios that apply in nurseries, the majority of practitioners have come to view this practice as the optimal means of facilitating an inclusive environment. This is in contradiction with evidence provided by a study conducted by Webster et al (2010 , pp 329-331) which concluded that the impact teaching assistants had on academic skills are negative; the findings indicate that teaching assistants assume the role of the children's 'defacto primary educator' which removes them from the teacher and class. However, it was noted that interactions pupils had with TAs were more 'sustained and interactive'. As the early years' curriculum tends to emphasise the quality of interactions, it could be claimed that the establishment of meaningful relationships

precedes young children's academic development and subsequently forms a meaningful element of their nursery life.

As a result of the historisation of the practice, the deployment of one-to one support, has come to be perceived by some of the early years educators as the golden standard or an inclusion orthodoxy. Furthermore, local educational authorities tend to process and allocate funding, on the basis of a child's duration of attendance and the estimated number of hours of support they may require in a day. Funding has thus become tautological with the deployment of a learning support assistant, possibly due to the practice's institutionalisation as an invaluable practice in schools. Despite its acceptance as a prerequisite by some early years' educators, others questioned its effectiveness or benefits for the child.

> *But the difficulty with that then is the other practitioners getting involved with that child because it can become quite exclusive so that person might have so much of their time just with one practitioner and, in terms of inclusion, they should be linking up with all professionals in all areas. So that, I would say, is a difficulty in this setting with that model. When I go over to the other nursery school, the parent SENCO that I've taken over from has got quite a different approach, so she has the additional member of staff in the room as an extra body.*
>
> *(Mary, SENDCO)*

Mary's account foregrounds the concept of exclusivity in the relationship of the support assistant and the child; she notes the drawbacks and benefits of both approaches; deploying an assistant solely for the child or as an additional staff member can enhance ratios and allows all staff to develop a holistic approach to caring. The role of the learning support assistant or one- to- one as educators frequently refer to learning support assistants, appears to revolve around enabling children to access the environment on offer and it is thus less focused on academic development as it predominantly tends to be perceived in schools. Mary is concerned that unless one of the educators is there to support the child and provide a high-quality interaction, based on the deployment of appropriate augmentative communication strategies, the needs of the child may be neglected.

The findings of this study come into contradiction with research that focuses on the heavy dependency cultivated through the close partnerships that learning support assistants and

children develop (Whitburn, 2013) and the impact on the child's autonomy; possibly due to the focus of early years pedagogy on sustained shared thinking (EPPE, Sylva et al, 2004) dependency is valued and considered central to the child's development.

The lack of this relationship is seen as detrimental to the child's needs. Wilde and Avramidis (2011) highlight that one- to- one support emphasises difference thus singling out the children; early years educators in this study appear to value difference and diversity, the ethical and educational issues associated with the deployment of individual support do not weigh heavily in most of their narratives.

Even when one- to -one support is readily available, there appears to be a limit to the inclusion a nursery can provide according to some of the practitioners:

> *I think it depends on the severity of their needs. I feel as a mainstream nursery, if the child needs aren't that great then they can access the curriculum here and they can access all our resources, but if you have a child who is highly dependent on a one to one, highly dependent on special resources, special toys... then a specialist nursery would be appropriate*
>
> *(Edith, Early Years Professional)*

Edith appears to perceive that there is a limit to inclusion in her room. Despite the children's ability to access an abundance of resources, the offer of appropriate curricular adaptations and the deployment of a support assistant, there is a boundary to the operationalisation of inclusion. If this conceptual boundary is reached, then it is preferable that the child attends a setting that will meet their and the other children's needs more effectively. This 'artificially' constructed threshold of needs appears very vague (Tod and Ellis, 2012), yet acts as a measure against which decisions upon placements have to be made:

> *He is not getting out of the nursery what he should be. So, when we had a visit from the special needs support team, she was saying if he's not getting what he needs from nursery then we are failing him by keeping him just because we want to be inclusive. But, equally, being inclusive doesn't mean keeping a child in a setting that's not meeting their needs, it also means recognising you're not meeting those needs... trying to change, and if you can't change then... accepting the fact that the setting is not right for him*.

(Lyra, Early Years Practitioner)

Thomas and Loxley (2007, p.84) assert that 'heterogeneity is permissible within a specified region of tolerance'. The threshold appears arbitrary in this study and relative to the setting; it is measured by whether a setting can meet the perceived needs of a child. In some of these cases, the children are very young and may not be in a position to communicate their needs- these are therefore discerned by professionals. The notion of 'reasonable adjustments, as promoted by the Equality Act (2010) places a duty upon organisation to make alterations to provide for disabled people; Lyra feels that there is a limit to the changes a setting can make. If these amendments are made and the child's needs are not met then mainstream inclusion has run its course.

Lawson and Jones (2018) note that in recent history, children with complex and severe needs were considered uneducable. When the right of attending school was eventually bestowed upon them, their education was conceptualised as closely entwined with distinct pedagogies with a focus on behaviourist techniques. The remnants of the historical special episteme (Thomas and Loxley, 2007) beliefs in relation to these children remain in place and still influence educators' beliefs. Lyra is concerned that the setting is failing the child due to their inability to meet their needs; what remains unclear is the nature of these needs and how this failure is measured or assessed.

When eventually the educators have to make a decision as to whether a child should attend a mainstream or specialist nursery, they note the negative implications on the nursery and their perceptions of professional effectiveness:

Lyra: There's a stigma attached to saying that you think a child should go to an SEN nursery because people... there's such a heavy emphasis on being inclusive that if you say, "I think that this child would be better suited to SEN nursery", people are going to think that you as a practitioner or a team can't be bothered and don't want to look after him because he's harder work.... but then part of being a good practitioner is recognising it's not right for him.

Beatrice: It's about exploring every avenue before you get to that point.

(Beatrice, Early Years Teacher and Lyra, Early Years Educator)

Beatrice and Lyra note that inclusion has acquired an ethically uncontested status and the decision to transfer a child to a specialist nursery is seen as a failure or incompetency on the part of the practitioners to facilitate an appropriate, inclusive environment. They admit that there is stigma attached to a child attending a specialist setting. Their views are consistent with Warnock's claims (2010) that specialist schools are seen as 'places of containment' but comes into contrast with other educators' views in this study, who purport that specialist nurseries are manned by staff who hold the relevant expertise and offer facilities and resources of a high quality.

Hansen (2011, p.941) asserts that although inclusion is a theoretically limitless concept its practice is limited and bound by specific tolerance levels: 'there needs to be a limit to how much differentiation a community can embrace in order not to pose a threat to its cohesion'. This concept appears to be pertinent in the narratives of the early years' educators, who may appear to have difficulties in theorising the exact 'cut-off' point or higher level they describe, yet they are adamant that there is a limit. The limits proffered in the vignettes have been justified on the basis of a child' s specific disability, the restrictions imposed on the practice by the prescribed ratios and the busy environments operated by the nurseries or the interests of the majority versus the minority of children.

Hansen (ibid) counteracts the arguments used by the early years educators and claims that it is teacher's professional self-concept, which ultimately determines the boundaries to their inclusive practice. Thus, limits are set by the teachers themselves, on the basis of the meaning they ascribe to disabilities but equally on the constructions of teaching and learning and the significance they place on the aspects that can secure cohesion in a classroom. These limits are not solely associated with educators' internalisations but influenced by other internal and external meso and macro variables that shape a culture of inclusion (Avramidis and Wilde 2011; Ainscow and Sandill, 2010); the nursery's leadership, organisation and physical environment as well as governmental policy and directives. These professional choices are embedded in complex sociocultural and institutional discourses, which have to be unravelled, further if teachers' self -concept and meaning making is to be understood. (Hansen, 2011) These discourses are encountered extensively in the themes related to the role of educators, which are analysed in later chapters.

5.2.1 Specialist schools and nurseries: parental choices and stakeholders' values

The selection of a specialist or mainstream school is not purely dependent upon the child's disability, the restrictions imposed by external and internal factors or the practical limits constructed by educators; it is viewed by theorists as a decision, which could be undermined by parental choice and governed by complementing or contrasting rights (Norwich, 2014; Evans and Lunt 2001):

> *I think it's about giving parents a choice because some parents prefer that for their child. Some children may need that, there might be some people that are more specialist in the needs of the child and then the parents would get that choice of what they think is best for their child, they know their child the best. So, there's not an awful lot of choice... like parents might have a choice of three schools for a child, you know, they don't get that opportunity'*
>
> *(Patricia SENDCO)*

Patricia prioritises the views of the parents, who are perceived to grasp their child's needs better and feels that special settings employ well -experienced, staff who hold the relevant expertise and could meet the specific requirements of the child better(Warnock, 2010; Ainscow, 2007;Blackburn, 2016) .Patricia problematises the lack of such schools, which has resulted in children travelling a long distance to attend what she feels is the most appropriate schools for them(SEED Report,DfE,2017). Flewitt and Nind (2007) conducted a study among parents of children with special needs and concluded that parents, regardless of professionals' advice frequently opted to combine specialist and mainstream nursery provision. The study questions early years settings' capacity to offer a high quality of inclusive provision and brings parental lack of confidence in generic provisions to the fore. The matter of parental choice thus becomes significant in the exercise of inclusion. The Lamb Inquiry (DCSF, 2009) highlighted similar issues related to parental confidence in mainstream schools and trust in the statementing process. Norwich (2014a) asserts that key terms such as parental partnership and consultation in successive SEND codes lack conceptual clarity and although the importance of parental contribution in school choice is exhorted and taken into consideration, it does not necessarily form the primary mode of setting or school selection.

Aside from the matter of parental choice there appear to be other factors that influence the parents' and educators' decisions regarding the placement of a child in a specialist or mainstream nursery. These factors are inextricably linked to the values educators and other key stakeholders (parents and external professionals) espouse. Norwich (2014) identifies the values of participation versus protection as an inherent part of the dilemmatic approach to the placement of a child in a setting. The value of belonging, participating in a group, and the sense of feeling valued and accepted (Booth *et al*, 2006) is embraced by several practitioners in this study who view it as synonymous with inclusive practice:

> '*A sense of belonging I think is really important, along with the sense of identity. Children understanding actually their own identity I think is really important, in a sense of belonging, seeing themselves as an individual, seeing themselves as part of their family, as part of different social groups and for some children that's really difficult but I think a sense of belonging and a sense of feeling valued is really important in inclusion'.*
>
> *(Anna, Early Years Advisor)*

Anna and several of the participants in this study embrace a version of inclusion which may not necessarily translate to all children 'being under the same roof' (Warnock 2005,2010) although she stresses that memberships of several groups is valuable; she values their participation above all other values. Anna and several of the educators in this study perceive the practice of inclusion as synonymous with belonging, participating and forming an identity as part of a community of practice (Mortier et al, 2010). It becomes evident from the vignette above that certain values preside over children's mere physical presence in a location and emphasise their active participation and psychological and emotional well-being. They centre on children's development of self and a positive identity that installs them as members in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). Communities of practice are governed by the 'mutual engagement of all, the development of shared repertoires and routines and the joint enterprise of learning' (Lawthom, 2011, p.237). Yet for all to engage in the routines, they firstly have to be allowed into the community and validated as novice learners; more importantly the community's normative assumptions, routines and practices have to encourage participation and value diversity. By setting certain normative criteria, it is possible that certain members of the community will be ostracised:

Georgina: For a room of 20, 30- children, there's got to be some kind of rules..there's got to be some harmony between the group for everyone to have a good day.

Philippa: I think it's really obvious as well when you walk into a setting that has a good behaviour policy that works and is consistently getting through all practitioners and then one that doesn't, in that I can take it back to the beginning of our setting, behaviour was a right nightmare, and the manager at the time just was not being consistent but she wasn't pulling up the staff. I think when you see it working it works so well, even in the children that have got additional needs because they may not get the boundaries to the same extent as the other children but they do get there are boundaries.

(*Georgina, Early Years Professional and Philippa, Early Years Teacher)*

Georgina and Philippa feel that good behaviour is an integral aspect of their community's practice which has a homogenising impact and leads to harmonious relationships; children's and practitioners' inability to grasp the concept of appropriate behaviour and subscribe to the values associated with the community's acceptable behavioural expectations leads to them being marginalised or seen as in need of remediation (Jordan 2008).

The manager in Philippa's setting has to initiate all practitioners of this community into their normative practices so that in turn they can become fully fledged members who can set boundaries for the children who are seen as novices; children with SEND are perceived to be less aware of these requirements but they can still achieve them to 'an extent'. It is evident in the excerpt above that there are certain types of participation in the community, which are rewarded, and lead to teachers and children collaborating in peace. 'Acting out' (Warming, 2011) is not sanctioned and likely to lead to the exclusion of the staff and children who do not grasp the setting's behaviour policy.

Another value that has gravitas in early years' settings and seems to clearly affect decisions regarding placement relates to a child's safeguarding or protection (Norwich, 2014; Dunne, 2009; Maconochie, 2018):

Safety comes first and we have to provide for each according to the needs of this child and the safety of him, because he is not aware of dangers so he will be exposing himself to danger if we have little things (toys) so it will be a choking hazard. We eliminated these

but before we were using these (toy)s with all of them and providing more opportunities to develop for example fine motor skills by manipulating little objects now we are restricting that in the room …

(Edith, Early Years Professional)

The value of protection, which the same practitioners admit, in other segments, may make them overcautious, constructs early childhood years as 'vulnerable' (Clough and Nutbrown,2004; Dalkilic and Vadeboncoeur, 2016) and the child to be in need of continuous protection. Dunne (ibid) asserts that this constructed vulnerability is further affected by government agendas and other directives, which have permeated practitioners' narratives and have been embedded in practices.

These values are not simply embedded in practice but measured and evaluated by Ofsted, the early years settings' inspection provider, which judges various aspects of setting's abilities including their ability to keep children safe and children's personal development, behaviour and welfare. As inspections are publicised, practitioners often feel they have to justify the decisions and their practices to the parents and other stakeholders; their ability to retain an orderly classroom environment becomes pertinent and children who behave in ways that are deemed aggressive are singled out:

I think the parents want an answer, I think sometimes if a parent walks into the room and they see a child who is lashing out, a child who is oversensitive and touchy feely and all of this.. They often look at us as practitioners and say, "Oh, what's wrong with that one?" you know...

(Beatrice, Early Years Teacher)

It is paradoxical that the values of child protection, parental choice and belonging, which would be deemed as ethically uncontested, are subsumed under the rights of the majority versus the minority-they are thus perceived and reconstructed in policy and pedagogical practices in ways, which can serve as justifications to both include and exclude a child. The surveillance imposed by top-down directives and further exacerbated by the marketisation of early years care and education erects barriers in practitioners' attempts to implement inclusion, in an environment where settings' ability to regulate children's performance and

well-being is judged and publicised. Practitioners experience a heightened sense of accountability, particularly in relation to these normative standards, which could be claimed to hinder the operationalisation of inclusion.

5.2.2 Specialist schools and nurseries: resource bases and 'hybrid' early years settings

The educators in this study are adopting a pluralistic stance and veering towards a continuum of provision encompassing mainstream schools, resource -based mainstream provision and specialist school provision; the latter was usually considered as the last resort, when all efforts to meet a child' s needs within mainstream had failed(Warnock 2010).

Some educators supported the notion of children's centres acting as specialist hubs with the purpose of providing expertise guidance and support to mainstream nursery settings (Ainscow, 2007).

> *So, you've got those tensions around saying, "Well this child really needs strategies to help them calm down, sensory overload", and then you've got others, they're saying they need a bit more, they need a bit more 'oomph' and it gets very challenging. So, the needs for specialist centres and specialist provision... I do believe, I think needs looking at carefully but again, unfortunately, we are into this funding dilemma where it is all centrally funded and there is not an awful lot of money to support those... I think local children centres could try and do more, bearing in mind again there are so many of them around, they could really create these little hubs or centres for specialist support*
>
> *(James, SENDCO)*

Jordan (2008, p.13) debates the purpose of specialist schools for children with complex needs and calls for these to be pioneering new pedagogical approaches and acting as teaching excellence centres.

Other educators embrace the concept of specialist bases in mainstream schools and refer to 'nurture groups'; smaller rooms that would offer children, who require sensory breaks, time in appropriately resourced rooms but equally would provide opportunities for children with

SEND to join in with their peers at times. Anna highlights the significance of children coming together and being able to embrace difference-she feels that the complete withdrawal of children would be a loss to their peers. It would lead to them lacking an understanding of the individual and unique ways children develop. Although benevolent, her views and concomitant utilisation of medical terminology to describe the children, may project an image of the 'different child' as a specimen under observation, who is drafted into attendance to enable the 'normal child' to learn about diversity.

> *I think it would be beneficial to have more specialist nurseries and I would like to see the same model that's used in some schools, where we have specialist bases in mainstream schools. I'd like to see more of that happen in a nursery, where actually nurseries have a kind of nurture base where children are able to spend time in smaller groups, have that sensory space, have those sensory breaks, but actually are able to integrate with. Because I think that is a massive part of inclusion that they have the opportunity to mix with all children and vice versa. It's so important for all the other children, actually if we take all the children that have the SEN and put them in a specialist provision, we're going to have a massive disparity because we're going to have a whole host of children who don't understand children's differences, who don't understand that children develop in different ways and that children have Down's syndrome for example, or children have physical disabilities. If we take that away from the mainstream children that would be a great loss. But I do think that actually there needs to be more emphasis on the specialist from an early years perspective, even actually specialist nurseries, but I would like to see it more integrated.*
>
> *(Anna, Early Years Advisor)*

Mary embraces similar views to Anna but discusses the importance of schools being representative of society or recreating a social microcosm (Dickson,2012) to prepare all children for their participation in society when they leave school (Shyman, 2015). Mary feels that all children would benefit from their exposure to peers; for some this would lead to the development of values such as empathy and respect while for other children the fostering of a rich environment and the opportunity to retreat to a quieter place when they choose:

My ideal would be specialist classrooms within mainstream nurseries, just like I do believe in school really. I think if you had no children with special needs or hardly in mainstream provision the downside is that the children that are mainstream level of need aren't seeing that diversity that is a reality of our community, they're not learning that empathy, they're not learning about difference and diversity and valuing individuals, and how they can have those skills of supporting other children and equally, in a specialist nursery, would those children be having the role models of being in a mainstream smaller little version of society I guess, before they go out into the wider world? Are their needs being fostered by observing other children who are playing or speaking or having that richness of an environment where lots of children can be role models for them?

(Mary, Early Years SENDCO)

Although hailed by some practitioners as exemplary practice, the concept of resource bases in schools has been problematised by Wilde and Avramidis (2011, p.98) who refer to the 'ghettoisation' of children who attend such settings, their identity marginalisation and the perpetuation of the special episteme expertise that this 'compensatory approach to provision' creates.

The accounts above could be seen to signify an adherence to a traditionalist view of special needs episteme (Thomas and Loxley, 2007) that focuses heavily on the expertise of certain professionals or the high calibre of the physical environment and provisions in a specialist setting; such thinking has been seen to detract from a culture change and is to an extent focused on remediation or integration. The child is thus expected to fit into a system that remains largely unchanged (Glazzard, 2011; Fyssa *et a*l, 2013). Educators in this study appear to lack confidence in their own skills, knowledge and abilities and acknowledge that their training has not sufficiently equipped them for the role. They therefore would relinquish the care of young children with complex SEND to the hands of the experts, especially if they feel that they are failing to address their needs.

Equally, the narratives of the educators in this study have to be examined within the wider historical, social and educational context that promotes specialised training and impairment related knowledge, which they admit they do not possess-their views coincide with theorists' beliefs who profess that there are some children whose needs are so severe that require

specialist support (Jordan, 2008; Imray and Colley, 2017;Kauffman *et al*,2020) either in the form of resource provision in mainstream schools or specialist schools.

5.3 Diagnosis and Education and Health Care Plans: an auxiliary aid for school transitions

Early intervention is perceived as the most effective means of supporting children with a range of needs (Allen 2011), including suspected special educational needs, in the early years and contribute to improved academic and social outcomes in the short and long term (Guralnick, 2011; Mengoni and Oates, 2015).

The emphasis on early intervention became more prominent in the EYFS (DfE, 2017) with the introduction of the Progress Check at the age of two, which aims to summarise young children's learning but equally highlight potential areas of concerns that may be indicative of a delay or educational needs.

Runswick-Cole (2011) notes the insidious nature of a check that aims to measure children's development in relation to a mean average when they are as young as two. The close monitoring of children's development continues until the end of the reception year with the completion of an EYFSP, which evaluates their progress against a set of predetermined early learning goals.

As a result of the intensification of government, directives that acknowledge early intervention as a crucial means of promoting children's future, early years educators are assigned a position of surveillance (Watson, 2018; Thomas and Loxley, 2007) and feel pressurised to put effective means of support into place that will pave children's transition to school:

> *From a practitioner point of view, you want early intervention just to give that child the best possible chance to reach their full potential. So, there isn't ever an agenda from our point, if we get a child diagnosed unnecessarily... it's always about trying to ensure that they are passed up to school with the ability not to start slip through the net…So, for us the agenda and motivation is just to try and support the schools if we've got any concerns. I do*

also believe that without these diagnoses they don't get the level of support that.. really should just be as good practice within schools. So, I think that's where there's that challenge and that tension because if we had a more inclusive practice in mainstream education I don't think we'd need to be trying to push diagnoses through earlier.

(James, SENDCO)

James asserts that the focus on early intervention would not be necessary, if schools put good inclusive practice for all in place that would provide the appropriate support. James feels that, as this support is not readily available, early years educators are thus tasked with this responsibility of intervening early. The preoccupation with school readiness (Bradbury,2019) and the perceived obligation, on behalf of the early years practitioners to inform schools of their children's specific needs and educate them on the strategies they have in place to support them is viewed as an aspect of good inclusive practice:

They're quite young, so I think that sort of identification of their needs is what we do here along with the outside professionals but I definitely think now as they have their time here and we've applied for EHCP and then when they go to primary school, I think it will be clearer to the primary school teachers that this is their needs and this is what we've been doing so far so maybe they can implement some of that when they go into school as well.

(Sian SENDCO)

Early years educators perceive their roles as significant in making this difference visible by sharing specific groups' or individual children's disparity of abilities with the teacher in an effort to ensure that appropriate interventions are put into place to address their potential weaknesses. Anna notes the pressures placed upon reception class teachers to focus on literacy and numeracy and how the requirement to produce data has resulted in the 'schoolification' (Bradbury, 2019) of reception classes:

I think there's a lot of pressure on everybody but there's a lot of pressure on teachers in particular about data and phonics and all of those kind of things and particularly in terms of Reception classes.. I think that having a diagnosis or having an education healthcare plan gives the teacher the permission to do things differently for that child and to try different

things and to put in different interventions and actually it kind of goes against what I was saying about interventions can't just be for one child!

(Anna, Early Years Advisor)

Anna infers that the emphasis upon curriculum content and context withdraws attention from child-centred learning and affects educators' ability to include (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Strogilos, 2012). Lauchlan and Boyle (2007, p.38) assert that labels can be seen to 'reduce ambiguities and provide clear communication devices for professional exchanges.' In doing so, labelling assists educators to homogenise specific sub-groups of children or populations and ascribe traits that are perceived to be characteristic of their condition or (dis)ability. Anna identifies the inherent value tensions in her statement and acknowledges that it goes against her previous views that children should be treated as individuals, thus clearly demonstrating the conflict between commonality and additionality stances (Norwich 2014).

A diagnosis could be seen to reduce ambiguities and classify the children in accordance to their need, yet it is also highly problematised by some of the early years educators in this study on account of a child's very young age and differential childhood development due to their cultural capital or other factors, which can present in a plethora of ways:

It would be helpful, but, we've got to give all children time...They may not have had an experience of sitting down and having a story with three other children. They may not have had the experience of mum or dad singing songs so it's very hard I think for some children. So, I think we need to give all children time.

(Hayley, SENDCO)

Hayley recognises that the routines of a nursery may not be familiar to some children, who have not been exposed to relevant experiences, and educators should therefore provide time to enable them to gain an understanding of the structures and expectations in place.

The assignment of a diagnosis is not perceived as incompatible purely on the basis of the child's young age; some educators acknowledge that certain labels are ephemeral and may have not even come into existence, if an increased awareness of certain conditions had not reified them into public and social awareness. They question the realness of certain labels (Danforth and Rhodes, 1997):

It depends on the parents, it's not just the child but it's parental views, isn't it? I think sometimes, if anything's so severe, it's going to get diagnosed whether you like it or not. Whereas I think, a lot of things that are borderline, 20 years ago, it wouldn't have even been anything if you see what I mean, it would just be one of those things that that's what that child is like …

(Georgina, Early Years Professional)

The majority of educators in this study expressed the opinion that the issuing of a diagnosis should be dependent upon the severity of a child's condition. Children exhibiting severe traits deemed to benefit from a diagnosis (Warnock, 2010) while children who were considered to have mild educational needs had educators torn. One educator described 'being on the fence' over the decision; several expressed a concern that children who were quieter but not 'labelled', may 'slip through the net' or 'fall through the gaps':

II know in a lot of cases they don't have that (diagnosis), parents feel like it's a constant battle for their needs to be recognised. Because if they're not severe enough, they're not significant and long term is what we talk about, you know, a child will only get an education healthcare plan if their needs are significant and long term, there's lots of other children that fall in the middle of that bracket who do need additional support, aren't severe enough to have an education healthcare plan, and sometimes I think that's the group of children that we need to be the most concerned about because actually they're the ones that need support and intervention but there's so much need in schools in particular where the funding services are cut more and more, actually it's those children that need the support but don't have a recognised diagnosis or an education healthcare plan, that can fall through the gap.

(Anna, Early Years Advisor)

Overall, there appears to be a distinction between the otherwise homogeneous group of children with SEND between the severe 'acting out' children with SEND (Warming 2011) and the mild natured, quieter children; in the case of the former the inclusion ecology of the class is significantly disrupted due to their inability to comply with normative behaviours. Quieter

children on the other hand may be missed out, due to their compliant behaviour; these children cause equal concern to early years educators as they feel that the lack of an early intervention support in their case is likely to lead to academic and personal failure in the future. Watson (2018, p. 137) asserts that children may become 'objects under observation and scrutiny' and this notion is particularly pertinent to the case of children who are considered different and demonstrate a deviance from the normative developmental standards. Their behaviour, whether aggressive or compliant appears to be monitored closely and cause concerns for different reasons.

5.3.1 Diagnosis and Educational and Health Care Plans: Relief, Justification and Stigma

Lauchlan and Boyle (2007) and Broomhead (2013) assert that labels can become means of comfort for parents and families who are finally provided with a medical justification as to their child's difference in behaviour; they actually support the notion that a diagnosis may detract from the attribution of simplistic, equally demeaning labels on the child (Riddick, 2000):

> *I know parents that have gone along the diagnosis route in order to make things easier and they do tend to be parents that understand the education system because actually, if a child has a diagnosis, then it's almost already an acknowledgment that for example lots of children struggle when they go to school and if their child has a diagnosis it almost gives the parent permission … it's about them not wanting the child to be labelled as the naughty child, the child that doesn't listen, the child that can't sit down, and having a diagnosis gives some support behind that.*
>
> *(Anna, Early Years Advisor)*

The diagnosis, although experienced as a comfort, infers that pathology is residing within the child; the children's behaviour is decontextualised and seen as synonymous with their condition (Moloney, 2010; Connors and Stalker, 2007); no effort is thus expended on analysing how multiple social, external variables such as the nursery's physical environment or pedagogy may affect the onset and display of such behaviours.

Early years' educators in this study may favour a diagnosis; equally, they acknowledge that it has come to acquire negative social connotations and stigma is attached to it. However, some express the view that the ascription of stigma or a fixed identity is counterbalanced by the provision of appropriate resources, funding or support:

> *Sometimes it's a relief that the child then has got a label so that they can get the support and the help and the recognition to make life better but at the same time there's also the stigma with it.*
>
> *(Sara, Early Years Teacher)*

Norwich asserts (2014) that in trying to apply a multiplicity of values that can at times be incompatible in educational practice, there is likely to be some irreparable loss; the propensity to single out a child on the basis of their need (additionality), is likely to lead to their stigmatisation. It is through this additionality that funding will be secured that will support the child's inclusion into a common provision. Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2011) note the paradox between enabling support and in the process disabling a child in order to achieve this. Although elements of the two values are complementary, they invariably lead to practices that are contradictory and could be deemed exclusionary.

Effectively a diagnosis has become equated with the provision of funding and invaluable resources (Arishi et al, 2017; Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007; Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2011); particularly in the early years where SEND resourcing is scarce the acquisition of a diagnosis acts as a protective legal clause that opens doors to funding and facilitates interagency partnerships. In addition, a diagnosis is seen as means of getting the parents 'on board' by accepting that their child needs help:

> *From a parent's point of view, though, once they get that statement, they have to accept that their child has an additional need, So, although it is not nice to statement a child from our point of view, because you are labelling them... it is necessary sometimes so that we can access, access the provisions that we need, meet with the professionals that we need, getting the funding that we need and implement one to one support if they need it.. Also, it can help prepare to eventually, grieve, if you can use that word, and come to terms with it... and then they get on board with you and they can help at home as well.*

(Edith, Early Years Professional)

The role of the parent in the operationalisation of the process of a child's referral to external professionals is discussed in depth in the theme related to educational partnerships. The identification and labelling of the child although described as a process, which is not desirable or made by choice, is perceived as necessary and its benefits are not restricted to financial support but are seen to encompass the orchestration of interagency partnerships and can lead to an increase in awareness of certain conditions:

> *Then, you can work around that behaviour. These days in Reception, there's behaviour charts and you don't want your chart to be constantly on that red because they don't understand the social norms. If they've got a diagnosis you know that the teachers can make allowances and they can be like, okay it's all getting too much for you, you need to do this or you need to do that. You know, it would benefit in that fact that people are going to take that into account when dealing with that child.*
>
> *(Philippa, Early Years Teacher)*

Riddick (2000 p.656) asserts that a child may exhibit a behaviour for a number of reasons:

> 'It is only by being able to accurately identify the cognitions (thinking) and the emotions behind the behaviour as well as the more self -evident environmental factors that a reliable and accurate conclusion can be reached'.

The educators in the excerpt above assert that an isolated behaviour may be indicative of a difference but its misdiagnosis or uncertainty about it leads to teachers feeling perplexed and potentially penalising the child-labelling in this case provides the opportunity to make allowances and adopt a more flexible approach. The rigidity of a behavioural policy, which makes allowances, solely on the basis of diagnosed conditions, is inherently associated with a deficit model of SEND, which perceives the incompliance as indicative of pathology. 'Normal' children misbehaving understand the impact of their actions and face relevant repercussions; children with SEND are perceived to behave in a specific way due to their impairment and lack the necessary awareness. In their case instead of repercussions, remediation is required. Thomas and Loxley (2007) claim that once a child is identified as emotionally or behaviourally deviant, the set of school behaviour policies' rules and

procedures are abandoned in favour of an alternative set of practices which are mediated or performed by medical professionals.

Some of the early years educators in this study assert that the stigma associated with the diagnosis or labelling of the child is not intrinsically linked to the diagnosis but sometimes precedes it (Riddick, 2000; Hornby 2015). The child's deviation from the expected normative standards is noted and judged by parents, educators and other children:

> *They know, they are quite aware of... he is not the same..you can see the responses. For example, today, he was picking up food from the other children's plate and the children were so calm... but, if that happened with another child, they would have fought or they would have cried or they would have but with him, they are like, we cannot really do anything because... also, they are so little, they know that there is something...*
>
> *(Edith, Early Years Practitioner)*

A recent study by Watson (2018) concluded that differences in early childhood classrooms are often sidestepped and ignored; the children and young children in the case described above refrain from asking any questions-they realise that there is a marked difference but choose to carry on with their regular routine. They have become accustomed to behaving in a manner, which is constructed as 'normal', and they readily exclude someone who is not 'the same'. Instead of challenging their peer they have learned to ignore him thus perpetuating the imposed 'silences' (Watson, ibid) and discourses of normalcy that permeate their regular interactions and are framed by the institutional context of their setting. The narratives of the early years' educators in this study demonstrate that children with SEND are consistently 'othered', regardless of whether they have a diagnosis or not.

5.3.2 Diagnosis and Educational and Health Care Plans: Ticket to resources and specialist school provision

In her pamphlet 'Special Educational Needs: A New Look'(2005,2010) Warnock advocated the creation of specialist schools that would provide a safe haven for children with statements of special educational needs and disability and would act as centres of excellence disseminating

valuable knowledge to mainstream schools. The notion of statements as tickets, which secure access to specialist schools, was proffered by some of the early years educators in this study:

> *The majority (of parents), I would say, have wanted the EHC because they feel like, if they want to choose a specialist provision; it is like a ticket to that.*
>
> (*Mary, SENDCO*)

An Education and Health Care Plan, places a statutory duty upon the local authority to provide additional support that meets a child's particular educational needs. This legal duty, from the standpoint of educators, is a reassurance that the needs of the child will be reviewed regularly, parental views will be taken into account and monetary support will be forthcoming:

> *And I think it gives them that level of support because there is a diagnosis in place or because there's an education healthcare plan that means actually people have to adhere to that, it has to be reviewed, there are targets on there that have to be agreed by the parents.*
>
> *(Anna, Early Years Advisor)*

The link between resources or funding and the diagnosis of special needs has been debated extensively (Arishi *et al*, 2017; Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007) and appears to remain inconclusive in relation to the correlation between the offer of resources and effectiveness of interventions. Recently the struggles of parents to secure what they feel is a rightful entitlement for their children has been publicised widely in the national press. In the latest Ofsted Annual review (2018), Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's Chief Inspector (OFSTED, 2018 p.13), condemned local educational authorities' ability to adequately support the needs of children:

> Education, health and care (EHC) plans are now in place. However, the quality of these plans is far too variable within some local areas and across the country and contributions from care services to EHC plans are weak.

The historical institutionalisation of statements or EHC Plans as the only means of securing funding and access to joint provisions is criticised by the practitioners, who on one hand refute parental requirements for labels due to the perceived stereotyping of children; on the

other hand they proclaim that their hands are tied and present statements or EHC Plans as a top-down directive, which could not be avoided*:*

Edith: I often think some parents look for a label. I think some parents...

Amy: Put them in boxes.

Beatrice: Yeah, they want to be in this box, they want them to have this label because if they have this label then they might get more support, they might get more access to something in life, but actually a label doesn't do anybody any good.

Lyra: As much as I agree that you shouldn't label a child that is the policy in place by the government. That's what they're doing and we have to follow *that if we want to get help.*

(Edith, Early Years Professional, Beatrice, Preschool Teacher and Lyra, Early Years Practitioner)

Although there appears to be 'passive resistance' (Bradbury, 2014) on behalf of some of the early years educators to subscribe to some of the prescriptions of the SEND Code and the majority of them accept that labels are inextricably linked to stereotyping and stigmatisation, they are willing to forego the negative connotations in favour of what they perceive as the 'key benefit', that of support and funding. (Broomhead, 2013)

Even though the tensions associated with the dilemmas of difference are evident in the practitioners' narratives, the usefulness of diagnoses particularly in relation to children perceived to have severe needs and the benefits associated with early intervention prevail. Practitioners' beliefs are further grounded in perceptions of special educational needs and disability as a child difficulty thus reinforcing a remediation discourse.

5.4 Curriculum: Good inclusive practice for all

The Early Years Foundation Stage (Dfe, 2017) is hailed by some as a child-centred curriculum underpinned by a sociocultural approach to learning .Its principles and rhetoric emphasise the importance of celebrating the child as a unique individual, acknowledging the importance

of partnerships with parents, providing a stimulating environment which enables learning and focusing on the development of children at their own pace (Roberts-Holmes, 2012).

In essence, an early years curriculum should be synonymous with a play-based approach to learning although the prescriptive nature of the accompanying guidance documents that set out the assessment arrangements detract from its child-centredness and enforces a quasi-legal statutory status upon the latter documentation (Eke *et al*,2009). Despite the complexities, some practitioners felt that the curriculum in early years' classes was more flexible and open to interpretation in comparison to the academic expectations set upon reception classes:

> *I think in early years it's probably easier than in school. I think we've got a much more fluid curriculum, I think we've got more space, we don't have to follow the early learning goals in the sense that someone isn't breathing down our neck saying, this child is not achieving this, this child isn't achieving this, you know. We've got a lot more freedom to do what we want and interpret the EYFS in how we feel is necessary, rather than in a school, by the time you have finished Reception you should be achieving this.*
>
> *(Georgina, Early Years Teacher)*

The EYFS (DfE, 2017) stipulates the requirements in relation to the learning and development of the children with specific reference to the prime and specific areas of learning and, although there appears to be some flexibility in terms of the pedagogy and teaching strategies implemented to deliver these areas, there is a set of predetermined early learning goals children are expected to achieve by the end of the reception year. These expectations appear to have permeated early years education and care, which acts as a precursor to formal schooling, with several practitioners reporting its role in the preparation for 'school readiness'.

Nutbrown and Clough (2004) assert that good early years practice constitutes good inclusive practice and that appeared to be the case with a number of settings in this study who implemented pedagogical and teaching practices that met the needs of all the children in their setting while simultaneously taking into account the needs of children with SEND and additional needs. They provided common inclusive practice for all. In the vignette below,

James discusses how the feedback received from a parent of a child with suspected educational needs is used as an opportunity to organise and deliver an activity for all:

> *Mum would keep coming in and say she loves watching video tutorials on make-up and hair: …. so essentially then what we did was, as a way to encourage that language, that communication and her ability to transition and feel comfortable... we resourced some of those block heads with the hair, and the brushes and clips, and bands and.. All sorts of things. Again, we gave her sort of a transition space into nursery with her interest and just giving her that opportunity then to start to use that as a way to develop language with her simple words around what we were doing…it was an opportunity... and other children could join in they did enjoy joining in with hair because naturally, children are sensory..*
>
> (*James, SENDCO*)

James and his team liaised with the parents, ascertained the child's interests and utilised their knowledge effectively by building on this interest through the 'actual resourcing of the environment' (Casey, 2010, p.41). The resources provided were tailored to the learner with the aim of encouraging language development and communication. Mciver et al (2015) acknowledge that the deployment of relevant and meaningful (to the child) strategies can enhance motivation. The provision on offer facilitated a 'shared group experience'(Jones,2004 p.80) which was not restricted to one child but appealed to all children in the preschool; it was planned on the basis of individual interest(additionality) but provided a common ground on the basis of the sensory exploration of materials(commonality).Furthermore, the activity facilitated a smooth transition between the child's experiences at home and school thus allowing her to 'work with the familiar'(Jones ibid) while expanding her experiences in the effort to prompt her to communicate utilising simple language and describing the events taking place.

Good inclusive practice was not always planned meticulously but often focused upon well thought- out, open-ended activities:

> *I really believe that deeply that the more open ended you can make the activities... it challenges their thinking anyway than if you just have a pile of objects. One of our favourite things are just lots of different shaped cylinders and different sizes, and you see the ordering and you can see how they are building and balancing with them, their imagination*

comes in, their knowledge comes into all of that, so you can learn a lot about that child and the children learn from each other because they want to do what their friends are doing so..

(Hayley, SENDCO)

Hayley asserts that open-ended activities instigate children's curiosity, creativity and appeal to their need for active exploration. Essentially the activity focuses on cultivating dispositions (Carr, 2001) such as perseverance, active experimentation and co-operation rather than being target driven or compartmentalising learning into specific areas. It exhorts the importance of structured play opportunities where 'children can learn from each other without too much fear of failure'(Percival 2009).The importance of peer learning in inclusive classrooms has been noted by Black-Hawkins and Florian(2012) who identified that peer collaboration could teach children skills that teachers felt they could not achieve as effectively. The open-ended nature of the activity described by Hayley allowed all children to work at their own pace and bring their own experience and pre-existing knowledge into the group and individual play.

The significance of dispositions (Carr, 2001) is highlighted by other practitioners, who feel that they should constitute the core of the curriculum replacing the prime and specific areas of learning:

I'd like to see, the dispositions and attitudes... I'd like to see that move into being part of the prime areas because I think it's often forgotten and I think, for children with SEN in particular, that characteristics of effective learning are really important because it's about their thinking skills and they may be different. That's about how we'll support their play skills and their lifelong learning, so I think characteristics of effective learning I'd like to see make more of a priority...

(Anna, Advisory Teacher)

Dispositions are not restricted to children's mastered skills but take into account knowledge, inclinations, ability and characteristics that can be cultivated and foregrounded into an environment that promotes and rewards them. The domains of dispositions (taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty, communicating with others and taking responsibility)as described by Carr (2001) share commonalities with the characteristics of

effective learning(playing and exploring, active learning and creating and thinking critically) outlined in the EYFS(DfE,2017).Although these characteristics are meant to shape the activities and educational provision on offer, they remain in the background and are overshadowed by the early learning goals and the pressing realities of the prescribed early years' assessments(Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes,2017).

Good inclusive practice was not limited to activities but encompassed a setting's daily routines and institutionalised practices:

> *It's a free flow... and I think that helps massively and we leave the children because as I said they might have a 5 minute big group time but that's it and if they don't want to join they don't have to because after they would all go into small groups so it won't stand out that they are with someone because the rest of them would go into separate, small groups. So it works quite well, and even during the lunchtime they can be out in the garden, and the zoning as well... so practitioners are in different zones so they're never, like, with a bunch!*
>
> *(Samantha, SENDCO)*

Samantha's setting implements 'free-flow' which gives children choices (Black-Hawking and Florian, 2012; Kurth *et al*, 2015) to select the areas and resources they wish to engage in during their time there. Furthermore, the facilitation of small groups ensures children do not feel singled out (Avramidis and Wilde, 2011) and are given the opportunity to build strong bonds with their key person and their peers. The flexible structure and routine of the nursery is conducive to freedom and autonomy; children can choose to have their lunch outside if they wish and do not have to submit to routines imposed by the teachers.

A study conducted by Adderley *et al* (2015, p.117) in a small school in the North-east of England which focused on children's understanding of factors hindering inclusion noted that power differentials were 'manifested in the teacher's ability to make choices.' The educators in the setting where Samantha is employed have made the conscious decision to relinquish these choices in favour of a fair and equitable social environment; decision-making has thus shifted to the children who are viewed as capable of exercising agency. Carr (2001, p.46) concurs that 'we cannot expect young children to take responsibility where adults control the agenda'.

Despite participants' adherence to traditional views encased within a medical paradigm in relation to decisions affecting the location and diagnosis of young children, their views on curriculum appear to align with a social model of (dis)ability. The examples proffered focus upon children's interests, the provision of stimulating open-ended activities that engender participation for all and the opportunity to offer children choices that put them in charge of their learning and routines.

5.4.1 Curriculum: Common and personalised provision and differentiation

The majority of early years educators in this study refute the belief that children belonging to specific sub-groups of SEND categories should be ascribed the traits associated with their condition or require corresponding teaching strategies or distinct pedagogies that address these perceived characteristics (Thomas and Loxley, 2007):

> *I mean, I think they (practitioners and specialists) know it as well but sometimes it's not like one strategy works for all children on the spectrum... So, it's knowing children as individually as we know all of our children and what works for them and what doesn't.*
>
> *(Patricia, SENDCO)*

Patricia and the majority of early years educators who discuss effective inclusive pedagogy in this study rely upon their unique knowledge and understanding of their child; their relationships with the children have led them to discard a simplistic 'one size fits all'(King-Sears,2008) approach to teaching in favour of a 'trial and error' stance that promotes experimentation and creativity. Percival (2009, p.63) adds that 'children need you to observe sensitively and use what you have learned about them to decide how you care for them'. The practitioners in this study endorse this view and uphold an 'ethics of care' (Percival, ibid) where relationships with children are prioritised and seen to lead to intuitively appropriate strategies. The findings are consistent with Mciver et al's study (2018) which identified the need to keep the learners at the centre of inclusive processes.

Where distinct strategies such as augmentative communication methods (in the case described below, Makaton, a simplified form of sign language for younger children) are

implemented, the educators claim that these should be promoted as common good practice that could enhance interactions between children:

Edith: I do with other children, I do Makaton….

Beatrice : If you do Makaton for all the children as well as the child with special needs then the children will be able to communicate with them, so then you can make that more inclusive. So that child then might not be able to say, "Can I read the book with you?" they might be able to sign, "Book" and the other child will be like, "Oh book, yeah!"

(Edith, Early Years professional and Beatrice, Preschool teacher)

The incorporation of personalised teaching approaches into a common curriculum (and vice versa) is seen to enhance a communitarian version of inclusion, where children are provided with a range of artefacts they could utilise and claim as their own. It is about bridging differences and introducing various means of expression and representation (Eke *et al*, 2009) that bind the community of learners together.

While common provision is exemplified, there is an inherent realisation that for commonality to occur there needs to be awareness of individuality (Norwich 2014)-this is addressed through differentiation:

As a team, we were talking about differentiation and I was saying, "Actually, I find it quite hard to write down the differentiation from my activities because I try to make as differentiated by outcome", because that's the way children are going to learn best anyway, so we're working as a group but they've all got their own materials to work with. They're all using them in a way that interests them... how they use them with your input, you know, is your differentiation.

(*Hayley, SENDCO)*

Hayley offers a common group activity, which provides a variety of resources that children can use as they choose, in a way that interests them; the adult is there to support and guide them. Differentiation is based on outcomes-each child is perceived to acquire different knowledge and benefits in various ways. There appears to be a well-orchestrated scaffolding of learning, where the educator is willing to take a back step when required. Children in this instance become responsible for their own differentiation; what they learn is unique to them.

Hayley's narratives are consistent with a personalised (Sebba et al, 2011) model of learning where children are encouraged to participate actively and construct their own interpretation of a shared event.

In the case where external medical professionals have input into a child's support plan, the educators assume a proactive stance, which aims to incorporate targets into activities in a way that makes them appealing:

> *The speech and language therapist advised us to support, for example, two word sentences with her, so... but also that understanding of a verb, so that 'doing', so rather than have the generic awful picture cards that we had which even included a child cutting their own hair, I don't know why they'd give you that! We had the key person... we took a photo of her doing those things, so, she was sleeping, she was eating, she was drinking, she was sitting. So we did a copy so that the child could also have some ownership over that and have the same pictures at home as well.*
>
> *(James, SENDCO)*

The notion of ownership becomes very powerful in a social and institutionalised context, where the majority of children with SEND are othered. Although this study is, no exception and children have been described as singled out or 'othered' in previous sections, there are practices that actively advocate for their rights and entitlement to a meaningful curriculum, which utilises stimulating resources and discards advice, which is seen as inappropriate. The child is seen as a 'co-investor' (Sebba *et al*, 2011) in their own learning. The key-person, who has established a strong bond with her, acknowledges her right to feel that she has contributed to the process of card making and can share these with loved ones at home.

Commonality of provision with an emphasis on individual needs appears to be synonymous with good inclusive practice in the views of the majority of early years educators in this study. However, there are incidences where educators discuss the benefits associated with differentiation; in some cases, this is conceptualised as offering different activities and resources, mainly within the same space or in a quieter room of the setting:

> *You do have to differentiate definitely, definitely have to differentiate. We do try, we might have an activity as I said, like the attention bucket activity that goes on very quietly while*

the other children are having a story or the other children are having circle time …we would find a quiet space because we can pull the curtains and the other rooms do have a quiet space so we can create a quiet, empty, calm space for that to happen. The same with the additional language, we need a quiet space for them to hear you speaking.

(Hayley, SENDCO)

The children in the narrative described above take part in a 'circuit' of different activities (Cowley,2019); this is a common way of delivering early years provision, where various areas are set up and areas are manned by early years practitioners with the aim of offering small-group experiences. There is still flexibility and children have the opportunity to move from one activity to the other independently. Hayley feels that, on occasion, the brief withdrawal of a child from the room into a partitioned area or another room is justified as it offers opportunities for them to relax and calm down before joining the group. The requirement for quieter spaces, where children can relax and unwind is proffered as optimal inclusive practice by the majority of practitioners.

Norwich and Lewis (2005) have devised a conceptual framework that contextualises the dilemmas associated with teaching children with special needs with emphasising pedagogy and curriculum; they identify two prevalent positions. The general differences position acknowledges that there are needs that are shared by all, are specific to sub-groups or unique to individual children. The unique differences position recognises needs that are common to all and unique to individuals. Norwich and Lewis (ibid) recognise seven distinct combinations encompassed in this framework, four of which entail specific needs (common, specific and unique; common and specific; specific and unique and specific only), two of which include unique (common and unique and unique alone) and one common alone. They advocate that all positions should embrace needs that are unique to individual and common for all and thus discard the other combinations.

Pedagogic Needs

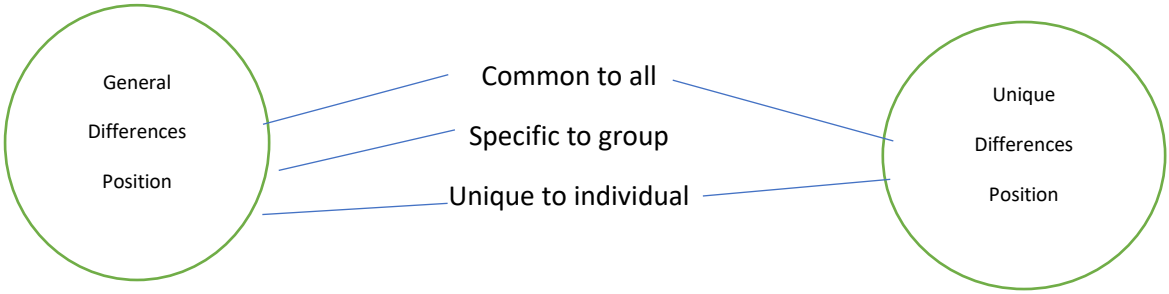


Table 5.2 Source: Norwich and Lewis, 2005

The educators in this study espouse a concept of inclusive practice, which appears to be aligned to a unique differences approach; the activities and routines highlighted in their narratives recognise the commonality of needs while tailoring for the very specific needs of individual children, which are often spurred by their interests. The principles of their provision are common and draw from children's dispositions, they are predominantly based on the same areas of learning, and they are aimed at similar goals and deploy a range of common or differentiated strategies to support all children including children with special needs. The schematic representation below addresses the commonality and differentiation issues in relation to the curriculum. Although it is not encompassing of the depth and breadth of provisions and may not reflect upon the complexities of pedagogical decisions, it provides a framework for reflection.

Option	*Aims/Principles*	*Areas of learning*	*Programme Objectives*	*Pedagogic Strategies*
1	Common	Common	Common	Common
2	Common	Common	Common	Continua of common or Different strategies
3	Common	Common	Different	Different
4	Common	Different	Different	Different
5	Different	Different	Different	Different

Table 5.3 Source: Norwich 1996, Norwich and Lewis 2005

The practitioners in this study appear to veer towards options two and three; the overall aims of the curriculum remain the same with emphasis given to children's active participation and engagement. The areas of learning are defined by the activities on offer although in the early years' domain, these are not as distinct and there appears to be an overlap between various activities. In addition, during small-group time, a range of different activities is on offer, with the aim of providing freedom and choice. The programme objectives or outcomes are described as different and multi-levelled based on children's developmental stage, needs and interests. The educators mainly opt for continua of common pedagogic strategies with an overarching attention to the relationship they establish with the children, which is seen as crucial in ascertaining their authentic interests and requirements.

5.4.2 Curriculum: 'Development Matters' guidelines: not fit for purpose

Eke *et al* (2009, p.149) problematise the notion of a formal curriculum for young children:

> The combination of an official curriculum with an official pedagogy produces ways of talking and learning that are most likely to exclude both the way of talking and the existing knowledge of those least well adapted to 'schooling'.

Their contribution is particularly pertinent to the case of young children with SEND, who are often pictured as struggling to fit into a normative developmental framework, which depicts development as a linear trajectory; children falling out of the 'bell curve' are thus perceived as delayed and in need of intervention.

There appears to be a unanimous condemnation among early years educators in this study of the document and its purpose or usefulness in the process of assessment. It is seen as a document compiled with a specific type of child in mind. When asked about its appropriateness in evaluating the progress of children who learn differently, participants stated:

Beatrice: It doesn't. I think it does not... it was not written for them.

Edith: Any child that has any sort of need, it was not written with them in mind at all

Lyra: Not at all, the EYFS was separate. A normal, in inverted commas, child.

(Beatrice, Preschool Teacher, Edith, Early Years professional and Lyra, Early years practitioner)

The notion of normalcy (Lalvani, 2014) and typical development comes to the forefront again. Bradbury (2019) notes that the 'Development Matters' (Early Education, DfE,2012) guidelines measure the child against a set of normative criteria in an effort to extract a dataset that leads to the quantification of a child; children are thus designated as 'ahead or behind' in terms of their development. Such practices lead to reductionism and the depiction of a child as a score or data to be input into a system and aggregated.

The oversimplification of a child's development and the propensity to 'place the child in a box' or against age bands leads to inaccurate reflection of children's development; particularly in the case of children with SEND the Development Matters(ibid) goals are described as broad and generic:

I think the Development Matters statements are so broad, particularly in terms of children with SEN, it's very hard to show progress in terms of Development Matters because, yes the age brackets are huge but also what's within them is so broad that it could take children several years to move from one age band to the next.

(Anna, Early Years Advisor)

Anna's claims are consistent with the Tickell review findings (DfE, 2011), which reported that some practitioners felt that the statements were wide and vague. Although this may make allowances for children's differential pace of development, it hinders practitioners from demonstrating the subtle but significant progress children with SEND are making:

There are lot of gaps. Sometimes you are trying to... you see a child who is starting to use a bike, and then you see a child who is using the pedals. There is no use of bikes, scooter or pedals there. So, you have to kind of classify this child under 'move in a variety of ways with co-ordination' and... there is no meeting in the middle…

(Edith, Early Years Professional)

Edith describes the significant growth one of her key children has demonstrated when he progressed from sitting on the bike to putting his feet on the pedals-she laments the fact that

the ‘Development Matters’ (ibid) statements are unable to capture and accurately depict the nuances and complexities of children’s progress and development in a way that rewards and validates the child’s efforts.

As well as neglecting to capture the breadth and depth of children’s development the Development Matters (Early Education, DfE, 2012) appears to favour normative development as expressed in previous vignettes:

> *I think we... we established quite early on with our children where there is no verbal communication there’s a real challenge to mark off lots of the specific areas of Development Matters because obviously they have to explain why or put meaning to things or be able to articulate those sorts of things.*
>
> *(James, SENDCO)*

James raises the very important question of children’s representation; children who are unable to express themselves or ascribe meaning, due to the lack of conventional spoken language or delay in communication are ‘penalised’ in a context that rewards normative modes of communication, which focus heavily on verbal exchanges. Eke *et al* (2009) advise that instead of ascertaining what children cannot achieve, we emphasise what children actually do.

It has been established by the educators in this study thus far that ‘The Development Matters’ (Early Education, Dfe,2012) guidelines revolve around conventional and simplified reflections of child development and fail to take into account the rich sociocultural context of interactions and non-linear trajectories of growth and progress. In an effort to compensate for the drawbacks discussed above, the practitioners resolve to utilise alternative assessment frameworks, which are provided by the local educational authority and are specifically designated for children with special needs and disabilities:

> *We got in touch with our portage inclusion worker and she pointed us in the direction of the Differentiated Early Years' Outcome that Bristol have published for development matters and so for a lot of those children we now use the Differentiated Early Years Outcomes to be able to track progress and monitor what they’re doing.. So therefore, being*

able to break it down into smaller outcomes and also being able to show progress and show that, actually, yes she can make good progress.

(James, SENDCO)

The entwining of the guidance's statements with age brackets and the vagueness of goals appears to diminish its capacity to celebrate achievement; instead, it serves as a monitoring tool reinforcing the 'schoolification' (Bradbury 2019) of early years observations and assessments. Bradbury(ibid) notes that recent government initiatives such as the Baseline assessment which will come into force in September 2020 and will aim to capture children's progress in the prime and specific areas of development shortly after commencing reception classes, has intensified the pressures placed upon early years settings. They are thus view as a pre-preparatory stage to the Key Stage 1 curriculum.

Early years settings are subsequently expected to put effective pedagogical strategies into place that adequately prepare young children for the academic requirements that will beset them by the time they reach compulsory school age (Bradbury, 2014). This has often been reported as detrimental to stimulating activities; it detracts from free- play as a meaningful endeavour and transforms it into a means of assessment (Palaiologou, 2017).

Reception class teachers are reported to be under similar, if not more increased pressures, and the early years educators in this study claim that children's transition documents and progress reports sent to schools sometimes have to be doctored to present a different picture:

We get pressure from schools not to have them at 40 to 60 months because that's what they need to do in reception, but, if the child's been in the setting for 4 years, they are likely hitting some 40 to 60 statements as far as the EYFS goes. So then, we get pressure from them not to mark them down as doing things so the teachers have something to do. So that's hard isn't it?

(Beatrice, Early Years Teacher)

As accountability appears to intensify as the child progresses into reception classes and compulsory schooling (Bradbury 2014), the educators in this study have come to acknowledge that marking a child as advanced in relation to their chronological age erects barriers that

affect subsequent teachers' performance. In addition, educators report that marking children as closely as possible to their age provides them with the 'breathing space' and opportunity to settle into school life and adjust to the increasing pressures and academic requirements they encounter:

> *You put the children in 30 to 50 months because, as an ex-TA Reception, I used to take the school forms, say from another nursery, and they used to have the children secure in 40 to 60 months, so that child then got put straight into the top group..And this child's learning all brand new routines, all new friends, new environment, as say in my parent meetings when I'm doing the school forms, they're as secure in the 30 to 50 because it gives them breathing space to learn their new environment, their new friends, their new teaching staff.*
>
> *(Elizabeth, Early Years Practitioner)*

It is evident from the narratives of the early years practitioners that accountability and performativity is not limited to the adults but has, through the 'standards agenda' saturated the life of very young children. Bradbury (2019) claims that the 'datafication' and 'schoolification' of children are the opposite signs of the same coin; they lead to the formation of children's data selves. The categorisation of children into age bands is upsetting for young children and their families, particularly affecting children with special needs who may not fit into the normative standards of development and are consistently labelled as 'being behind'. Practitioners in this study report being concerned about the impact such measurements have on children's self-esteem and aspirations.

The educators note that instead of concentrating on a child's strengths and achievements, the reports exacerbate parents' anxiety; they come to perceive a child's delay as a failure. The utilisation of the Development Matters guidelines serve to mainly highlight delay and serve as means of demonstrating a child's significant gaps, which in turn alert local authorities and SEND panels to the need for an assessment:

> *I think, in terms of evidencing that difference to where children could be at their chronological age to where they actually are has been good in order to get them that level of support they need, because you're saying we're highlighting the fact that we can see the progress isn't being made at as accelerated a level as we would like it to be. So when we're sending it to panels for additional funding or for their EHCP it's really explicit as a tool to*

show we're measuring their ability, we're measuring their progress and look, they need that help.

(Mary, SENDCO)

According to Mary, the guidelines serve a functional yet insidious purpose: to expose children's differences and deviation from the mean average; the children's measurements in relation to ability and progress falls short of the expected standards and may justify panel meetings and the dispensation of funding. In the views of the educators, the 'Development matters' (ibid) document becomes an effective 'surveillance' tool, which is there to monitor, record and aggregate children's performance. It provides comparisons that highlight deviance from normative standards and categorise children's variation from what is expected in accordance to age:

They look like they are underachieving when actually they are not underachieving; they are achieving what they should be for them.

(Beatrice, Early Years Teacher)

Beatrice is advocating a version of an assessment framework, which does not compare children against predetermined standards and norms- rather it is based on children's individual and personal development and sets out targets for each child based on what they enjoy and can achieve.

It is unsurprising that the educators in this study conclude that the Development Matters document has outlived its usefulness; its use may have been substantiated as a bible (Tickell Review,2011), particularly for inexperienced practitioners but it has been misused in its constitution as the textbook of young children's normative development. It is therefore proposed that the document in its current form is abolished or reformulated to omit the age band categorisation. The areas of learning could remain the same while acknowledging there is an overlap and children's knowledge cannot be compartmentalised into neat areas. It would then be left to the educators, child and parents to work together to devise a personal development plan that is relevant and referenced against the child's wishes and dispositions.

5.5 Sense of failure: Roles

Norwich (2009, 2014) asserts that dilemmas cause tensions as educators often resort to making a choice between two options that are not favourable; in trying to compromise the two unfavourable resolutions, the majority of educators articulate a unilateral or bilateral sense of failure towards the children with SEND and/or their peers:

> *Then if you read any... you read, obviously, and you research how much happens within the first five years, and in the first five years we are failing them, and then we are sending them to school and then what they were meant to do before... we haven't given it to them because none of us is really trained. I have the training but I am not an expert...*
>
> *(Samantha, SENDCO)*

Samantha notes the significance of the first formative years in a child's life and feels that the lack of appropriate training leads to the child being let down-she and her team fail in fulfilling their obligation toward them by providing them with the necessary experiences, skills and abilities to cope. Samantha feels that, although she has received some limited training, she is still ill equipped to provide effective and stimulating pedagogical provisions. She claims that she is not an expert. This quasi-professional status, which instates the early years practitioner as an expert in the child but a novice in special needs pedagogy, was encountered repeatedly in the study and is analysed further in the theme related to professional roles and identities.

The sense of failure is not solely predicated on the inefficiency of the training on offer; other educators struggle to reconcile the provision for the majority and minority of children and feel that they consequently end up failing one or both populations in their effort:

> *Sara: And then we're failing the other children because, yeah.*
>
> *Elizabeth: We are failing the other children because they then accept that you can't help them because you need to be hands-on with, like a one-to-one.*
>
> *(Sara, Early Years Practitioner and Elizabeth Early Years Teacher)*

The educators describe their frustration at the lack of additional funding and staffing which would enable them to provide individual support to the child with SEND while ensuring they continue to help and support the other children in their care. The child is seen to monopolise their attention, which results to the needs of the majority being neglected in favour of the minority. Black-Hawkins and Florian (2012, p.574) advocate against the deterministic belief that the 'presence of some will hold back the progress of others.' Although the concept could be seen as a reductionist fallacy, it nonetheless constitutes a practical pedagogical dilemma for the educators in this study. The educators felt unable to support the other children without the appropriate infrastructure that would free up their time.

Even though the infrastructure is a prerequisite in the operationalisation of inclusive practice (Anglim et al,2018) it constitutes only one part of a complex system and the educators promulgate a more radical overhaul of the system if inclusion is to be successful (Nilholm,2007; Slee, 2008):

> *We are failing in general in the system because obviously you have to prove that you're working, you have to prove that you have observed a child, you have to prove that you have things in place…*
>
> *(Edith, Early Years Professional)*

Edith acquiesces in the notion that it is not sufficient to provide an inclusive environment for educational or ethical purposes; it appears to be equally important to be in a position to demonstrate that you have succeeded in doing so-the pressures imposed by the standards agenda and the inspection frameworks conducted by Ofsted necessitate that settings present measurable and auditable evidence of their outcomes. (Bradbury 2014, 2019). Edith asserts that the system in place is currently failing the children and frustrates the educators, as it is not geared to cater for a diversity of needs.

This sense of failure is communicated clearly and constitutes the 'tip of the iceberg'; its roots are deeper and complex; they are embedded into attitudinal barriers that are oriented towards a traditional, medical model of disability and the mechanism that reify the special education episteme (Thomas and Loxley,2007). These attitudes materialise into practices in setting structures and cultures that lack the appropriate infrastructure to support diversity. They are further framed within a wider sociohistorical and educational matrix that views early

years practitioners as lacking in skills, knowledge and ability and are thus constituted as inadequate in respect of the complex task at hand-they lack the perceived professional status required to implement inclusion.

The denigration of the role of the early years educators by parents and other professionals (Bryant, 2018) appeared to prevent practitioners from approaching the former if they had concerns about their child-this appears more pertinent to practitioners working with very young children and babies as evident in the discussion between the early years educators below:

Elizabeth: I mean that sometimes you can see in some parents that they have the belief about the early years- nursery is just there to feed the child, change the nappy and get them to bed. So, for pre-school I think it's better because they see pre-school like their first day of school.

Edith: First educators.

Elizabeth: Yeah, to go to school, and sometimes they see us like we are other than that, I don't know what to say! Just general caregivers.

(Elizabeth Early Years Teacher and Edith, Early Years Professional)

Elizabeth highlights one of the most prominent discourses that have contributed to the de-professionalisation of the identity of early years educators over the years; in the past, it had been presumed that all one required to become an early years practitioner was a number of attributes that were mainly associated with a maternal instinct: caring, emotionality and nurturing. These were attributes that could be inherently possessed (particularly by mothers) and were sufficient for the performance of the role (Osgood, 2009, 2012). The advent of the Labour government with its ambitious childcare agenda expansion highlighted the need to upskill early years educators and a number of directives was targeted towards their professionalisation.

This was followed up by the Coalition government with the publication of the Nutbrown review (2012). In aiming for professionalisation, the successive governments further compounded this notion of inadequacy and inefficiency among early years practitioners. Although Elizabeth is a qualified early years teacher (EYT), she works with young babies and

feels that she is perceived as a 'generic caregiver'. She feels that the identity assigned to her prevents her from approaching parents if she had concerns about a child-as a maternal carer it would not be in her remit to highlight her concerns to the parents and feels that they would be more receptive and more likely to take into account the views of the early years educators deployed in the preschool.

Other practitioners note the lack of parity between early years educators and schoolteachers (Elwick *et a*l, 2018) and the tensions that the marketisation of nurseries and role of private nurseries play in the operationalisation of inclusion:

> *Schools have more authority. A school can do that, a school can be like, we can take your child during the day but they are struggling during the afternoon, whereas we, if they pay for a whole day yes we can talk about it, but at the end of the day we don't have the power of a school to say, this is what your child needs. I mean, again, the parents don't always have to listen but I think generally parents respect schools more than nurseries because they're trained teachers.*
>
> (*Philippa, Early Years Teacher)*

Although the importance of maintaining a caring approach and demonstrating emotions has been seen to enhance the quality of care provisions, it has equally detracted from the construction of early years careers as professional and is perceived by practitioners as detrimental to inclusive practices. Some feel that as carers, they do not hold the authority to broach certain subjects with parents; their main duties and responsibilities revolve around safeguarding (Mconochie, 2018) and protecting the children in their care. The role of the parent as a consumer of a paid service is perceived as a deterrent in the effort to approach and establish dialogues.

The denigration of roles could attribute to some of the educators feeling incompetent and expressing low self-efficacy and confidence in their abilities to teach children with SEND. The roles of practitioners and other key stakeholders in the inclusion process and their localised interpretation of policies in the enactment of inclusion is analysed in the next chapter and provides an insight into the tensions that are generated and the strategies various stakeholders adopt to navigate the inclusion terrain.

5.5.1 Sense of Failure: Self-efficacy and training

Anglim et al (2018) and Ekins et al (2016) note that self-efficacy affects practitioners' ability to implement and adapt pedagogical approaches to meet the needs of a diverse range of students. Although the early years practitioners in this study have articulated a sense of enhanced accountability, which results from their perceived failure to meet the needs of the children in their care, they have equally proffered some examples of outstanding teaching practice and inclusive pedagogy that merge children's requirements into a core curriculum.

Training has been consistently linked to the development of self-efficacy of educators in implementing inclusive practice (Anglim *et al*, 2018; Ekins *et al* 2016; Avramidis et al, 2000; Avramidis and Norwich 2002;Engstrand and Roll-Pettersson,2014) and in some cases, the introduction to the relevant SEND law and policies and directives appears to enhance educators' confidence.

Some of the educators in this study were qualified teachers and had the opportunity to attend the established postgraduate SENDCO award. When discussing the 'inclusive practice for all' that his setting has adopted, James accredits the training he received during his postgraduate study as influential in the formulation of a cohesive approach that takes into account the diversity of learners:

> *That comes from the Special Education Needs Co-Ordinator post-grad diploma that I did, and just that fundamental principle of 'good practice for all' which really supports children with additional needs, as the same as English is an additional language, you know, they are learning language, they need these things regardless of whether it's for developmental needs or just generally developmentally. So, that's where we try to come at it from as an inclusive approach which is a "let's just have best practice for all"...*
>
> *(James, SENDCO)*

Other participants in the study asserted that the SENDCO award is not restricted to advancing their knowledge and understanding but allows them to progress professionally in the field.

Sian concurs and asserts that the SENCO award is not restricted to advancing her knowledge and understanding but allows her to progress professionally in the field. She feels that her course has introduced her to a network of practitioners she could call upon and whose skills and expertise she could utilise:

> *If I am not sure about something, I have always felt that I know whom to contact. I feel like now with the national SENCO award that I'm even gaining more knowledge and understanding since I've been on the course and there's obviously so much to learn, especially in early years and primary... so, I'm really looking forward to just carrying on to.. develop professionally.*
>
> (Sian, SENDCO)

Wedell (2015a) asserts that SENDCO fora constitute effective support networks for their members and not only serve the purpose of knowledge exchange but offer their members the opportunity to establish strong personal and professional partnerships, which provide moral and psychological support to their members. Overall, formal and informal professional support networks were rated highly by the majority of educators in this study.

Ongoing professional development for SENDCOS is a prerequisite to the building of confidence; school staff training appears more robust and consistent in comparison with the training offered in the early years.

Due to the variance in qualifications observed in the early years sector (Osgood 2012), the training of qualified teachers came into contrast with the training that some of the Nursery Nurse qualified practitioners had received:

> *And then even the SENCO training, when I had it I think it was five days but then they cut it to... not even a day. A day? I mean, like, it's ridiculous! A day! You have to cover... special education needs is not just a 'one day'... it would need to be a longer training and more depth.. It is not a day training, it is not even a five-day training, it is much, much more than that.*
>
> *(Samantha, SENDCO)*

Although the requirement for training has been linked by theorists (Wilde and Avramidis, 2011) to a traditionalist approach, which views specific training on impairment as consistent

with an approach that focuses on prescribed medicalised interventions, the majority of educators in this study dismiss this type of training and focus on the child as an individual with unique needs:

> *Even if you're trained in the area, when it comes to the autistic spectrum, every child is so different, even if you care for a child who has got autism and they've got a statement for autism, there's no way that... they might have traits similar to this child, but they won't be the same. They all need to be cared for individually.*
>
> *(Edith, Early Years Professional)*

Instead of training focusing on the traits and interventions associated with different conditions, the majority of practitioners feel that they would benefit from practical training that focuses on knowledge of generic SEND, builds upon their existing teaching skills, and ensures that the competences acquired are translatable and transferable into inclusive pedagogy for all children:

> *I think for a lot of people there's definitely not enough knowledge and without the knowledge that's where people lack the confidence, because they just don't know what to do and they can't then translate the skills they might have used with one child, they can't see how those skills would transfer and how they might need to change them.*
>
> *(Anna, Advisory Teacher)*

The notion of transferable skills through training becomes a pertinent one in the quest for the development of sound pedagogical practices; it is not restricted to theoretical knowledge acquired in the academia but should encompass placements that allow educators to observe other teachers, who hold relevant expertise, and learn through experience. Studies are divided as to the best course of action in regards to pre-service teacher training: some theorists(Purdue et al,2009) are calling for the establishment of modules that prompt students to develop an analytical and critical approach of the sociocultural frameworks and ideology that breeds exclusion while others(Hemmings and Woodcock,2011) are advocating first hand experiences ,facilitated through placements, that encourage problem solving and allow students to observe how experienced teachers overcome barriers affectively.

The educators in this study embrace training that combines both approaches but gravitate towards the development of an inclusive repository of pedagogical strategies that can be adapted and implemented successfully across a range of situations and various populations; they adopt a common approach towards SEND knowledge while accepting that individuality of each child.

In 2018, the DfE published an Early Years SENDCO qualification specification that had been compiled in consultation with early years experts from Nasen (National Association for Special Needs) and other relevant organisations and stakeholders. The specification will be utilised to guide the development of a National Vocational Qualification at Level 3 for SENDCOS deployed in non-maintained and private settings. This is a welcome, albeit delayed, addition to the scarce training that has been on offer to SENDCOS deployed in the private sector. Although non-mandatory, it is hoped that the qualification will enhance early years educators' confidence and their self-efficacy.

Although the specificities of the award have not been finalised, it would be beneficial for the training to combine theoretical and practical elements that will prepare educators for the demands of the role and enable them to interpret SEND policies and translate them into meaningful and effective practice. Kearns (2005) researched the contribution of experiential learning in relation to the role of the school SENDCO and called for the development of innovative course descriptors that acknowledge functional learning in the workplace and evaluate it within its context. The new SENDCO award could be enriched through the incorporation of educators' analysis and reflection of inclusive practice in their settings. Such an approach would reward existing experience and the skills and abilities associated with the 'craft knowledge' of the profession (Black-Hawkins and Florian, 2012).

Black-Hawkins and Florian (2012) claim that although educators can be reflective of their teaching practices, they often have difficulty articulating and justifying their day-to-day decisions. The reasoning behind decisions could be utilised in an experiential reflective learning journal to promote awareness of the macro and micro variables that affect practices thus allowing educators to weave tacit pedagogical practice into theory. Such an approach would be compatible with' reflection in action' (Schon, 1991) methods of promoting learning and the transferable skills the educators have been seeking.

5.5.2 Working towards a resolution- a shared learning approach

Kearns (2005) calls for a collegiate approach to learning which moves away from a solitary focus upon the individual towards a more holistic approach that takes into consideration how educators interact with other stakeholders, share and impart knowledge and skills and negotiate their roles in relation to the contextual variables and specificities of their setting.

The majority of Early Years SENDCOS in this study promulgate a shared approach to the development of their SEND practice. This shared understanding materialises in practice in a plethora of ways:

> *I went to a fantastic network meeting the other day... the area SENCO Network Meeting … I think it's so important that we share as a team. We're bringing all that information together and not only supporting the children on the spectrum but supporting other children in the room who may need a little bit of support and attention awareness, as well.*
>
> *(Hayley, SENDCO)*

Hayley appears enthused by the training; she has acquired some ideas that she is looking to put into practice in collaboration with her colleagues who have attended a similar course. She feels that sharing the new knowledge with her team will help them provide an enabling environment that promotes listening and attention skills among all children; although the specific training was initially devised for children with social and communication difficulties, Hayley is looking to merge it into her core routines in an effort to offer good inclusive practice for all.

The expansion of training to include all staff and not the SENDCO exclusively is perceived to support staff who may feel apprehensive about working with children with special needs and are reluctant to discuss their lack of confidence. Sian claims that a visit from the sensory team during an in-service training day for all enabled her team to develop a shared knowledge of the child:

We have had the sensory support team recently come in to discuss a child's needs with us and share a bit of information about how we can support them and that was a whole team inset day so I think that sort of thing can just give practitioners a bit more confidence... I think that's been really beneficial just to give everybody a shared knowledge of a child and how to support them at the setting.

(Sian, SENDCO)

Although the training provided revolved around one child, Sian feels that it was not intended to single out the child but allowed the team to devise common strategies to support him. Other participants exhorted the effectiveness of simple strategies; they opined that the adoption of these approaches could build the confidence of their teams, which could lead to them persevering, and reaching the children, they may have found difficult to approach:

The educators' narratives point to a shared approach to SEND management; the role of the SENDCO is not seen as a solitary role confined to teaching specific groups of children but entails strong leadership elements that are based upon dispersed forms of governance and control. The duties of the SENDCO may be assigned to one person but they are cascaded and become a whole team's responsibility. Several SENDCOS found job sharing with another early years educator a fruitful approach. The practice was seen to alleviate the burden associated with the extensive paperwork and bureaucracy entangled in SEND:

I think that's helped to some extent because actually trying to have all the onus on one person to figurehead the SEN across, well and disability I guess, across a setting especially of this size, I think is an awful lot of pressure and I actually think it needs to be a shared approach. I think that works well when we can, again, bounce off each other and, you know, just check that everything's going as to plan and follow up things that need to be followed up.

(James, SENDCO)

James discusses the excessive pressure that can placed upon one person when dealing with the SEND provision of a big setting; sharing the role allays his concerns and allows him to ensure that plans are followed through and communication with parents and other stakeholders is sustained.

Whether sharing involves the dissemination of training, the holistic knowledge of a child's needs or the functional aspects of the SENDCO role (job-sharing) it appears to be a key concept in early years' educators perceptions of inclusion .Although the SENDCO role is conceptualised in the SEND Code as a post for an individual, it becomes evident that for the early years educators in this study it is not viewed as a solitary but a collective function.

There are various aspects of the educators' narratives that point towards a 'distributed' form of leadership (Heikka *et al*, 2011) in their settings. Even though there are some hierarchical elements attached to the role of the SENDCO, there is an emphasis on the product of their practice (their learning and pedagogy) which is created by collaborative processes. The model of distributed leadership is particularly pertinent to practices that promote integrated working among various stakeholders, as is the case with inclusion.

5.6 Concluding Comments

This chapter provided a detailed analysis of educators' views on the dilemmas of difference. Although serving as a descriptive tool (Thomas, 2008), the weaving of various theoretical approaches and the contextualisation of the dilemmas within everyday practice provide provocative accounts of inclusion and exclusion and explore the institutionalisation of certain practices.

The participants in this study provide eloquent narratives that unveil their entrenched beliefs about (dis)ability, the mechanisms that reproduce exclusion in the educational system and the complex pedagogical decisions they are called to make. Their questioning stance and reflexivity, framed within a culture of performativity, lead them to experience a sense of heightened accountability and guilt, which is communicated as failure to address the needs of the children in their care. Despite their feelings of failure and acknowledgement of the denigration of their roles, they proffer a resolution in the form of a shared approach to their roles that enable them to meet the challenges, share and disseminate knowledge with their teams and adopt a proactive stance towards their own professional amelioration

Chapter 6

6 Opening Comments

This chapter explores the educational partnerships that form between early years educators, parents and external professionals and the challenges and characteristics that define these. It examines the subtle power shifts that occur in the attitudes and roles of early years educators in response to the behaviour exhibited by the other stakeholders. In addition, it explores the exogenous and endogenous factors that hinder the materialisation of multiagency partnerships. The first subsection explores the partnerships between parents and educators while the second focuses upon interagency partnerships formed between educators and external professionals.

6.1 The Ideal partnership for inclusion- The parent 'on board'

The notion of the parent being 'on board' and engaging in the process of their child's inclusion is conceived as crucial in the process of inclusion, almost the 'sine qua non' or foundation stone upon which the whole process relies:

> *Inclusion in that respect particularly worked really well because we had a huge amount of parental involvement and that relationship with the family was there. Where sometimes in the past we might have come up against it is where the parents are struggling to either identify or recognise or maybe accept themselves that there is perhaps something else…*
>
> *(James, SENDCO)*

This notion of inclusion appears to infer a willingness to accept the practitioner's feedback and resume an active role that includes parents' voluntary and enthusiastic engagement. This engagement is not restricted to attending meetings but becomes an encompassing term that presumes that parents have an awareness of their child's developmental needs.

For me, that (partnership) is working very closely to the parents to provide that inclusion and really, until the parents are closely working with you and understanding the needs of their child that can be one of the barriers... is to get the parents on board.

(Hayley, SENDCO)

For the partnership to flourish both parents and practitioners are expected to be open, approachable and receptive to sharing information and allowing the support and involvement of the services available.

The construction of the 'good' parent role (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2010) predisposes that parents are aware of their child's behaviour, welcome strategies and could take a leading role, when required, by initiating visits to other professionals:

I think parents really welcome strategies and ideas. We've got a children's centre, so parents are really good, if they want some advice around behaviours that children are displaying they tend to go

(*Mary, SENDCO*)

Parents, as effective partners in inclusion are therefore conceived to be compliant with the suggestions put in place to support their child (Sukbunpant *et al*, 2013). This finding is consistent with research conducted by Todd (2007 p.81) who claims: 'Good parenting is only conferred when it is supporting the school in its educational decisions about a child'. Parents are thus expected to put these strategies into place to support their children at home and ensure consistency in approaches between home and early years setting.

Runswick-Cole and Hodge (2008) refer to a minority of parents, who respond to this 'requirement' by upskilling themselves or becoming experts in a relevant area to leverage their expertise against those of other child professionals.

The concept of the parent as an expert in their child or a 'key-informant', (Runswick-Cole and Hodge, ibid) who can educate the practitioners in respect of their child's condition, is proffered by several practitioners:

A partnership with parents is important for inclusion because if a child has got undiagnosed autism… the parent knows what you can do to help that child with routine, what they do

at home. So, liaising with them, really, before any other practitioner... that'll give us the bulk of the knowledge that we need to help that child and for us to be inclusive with them

(Edith, Early Years Professional)

The parents acting as the first port of call positions them in an advisory or 'informant' role (Hellawell,2018; Runswick-Cole and Hodge,2008) to the practitioners, which could be seen to establish a truly collaborative partnership, one that is based on the sharing of information and the establishment of effective communication channels. The SEED (2017, DfE) report findings reinforce the success of the formal and informal communication methods that early years' settings employ to liaise with parents and bring their voices into the consultation process. Runswick-Cole and Hodge (2008, p. 638) disagree and assert that the position of informant presupposes that 'the decision-making process lies elsewhere'.

While agreeableness is indisputably an inherent aspect of a harmonious relationship between parents and early years practitioners, the role of the parent, who is 'on board', also incorporates elements of a political nature: the tendency to 'fight their child's corner or advocate for the child to expedite the process of inclusion and secure a child's entitlement.

This role of the parent as their child's advocate is envisaged as a challenging one, due to the fact that the parent has to accept their child's 'problem', come to terms with it and simultaneously seek the support of a network of other professionals:

It might be a difficult role to take but you have to take it because there is a case of concern because your child has a problem, but, you have to take it anyway, so why don't you take the role in the sense of... get all the support, the help you need from other professionals, from the school or the setting that you are, from your family when you can get it.

(Edith, Early Years Professional)

The traits and characteristics that constitute the 'ideal' parental collaboration (engagement, agreement on targets, expertise, and openness) appear reasonable, even predictable and have been theorised as prerequisites for the establishment of successful professional partnerships and relationships (Percival, 2009). The notion of compliance appears more insidious and connotes the potential inequality borne out of the interaction. Despite the narratives' presentation of the parent as an equal partner whose feedback and knowledge is

valuable, it is clear that there is a 'predominant knowledge', that of the early years practitioners, and other professionals, which holds more value and is seen as more influential in the process of inclusion.

Borrowing from Habermas' concept of 'deliberation', Tveit (2013, p824) claims that in parent and teacher exchanges, dialogue 'assumes an argumentative form through the exchange of information and reasons. Although parents and early years practitioners are engaged in frequent formal and informal dialogues (DfE, SEED,2017), parents in this study were expected to maintain a submissive stance in their exchanges within the setting while reserving their antagonistic or fighting spirit for times, when they needed to fight for resources or funding to secure their child's rightful entitlement.

In constructing the 'ideal' parental partnership for inclusion, the participants in this study have also unwillingly constructed the optimal parent role that they have encountered, who appears to give rise to an unproblematic collaboration, where practitioners are given the 'green light' to proceed with the strategies they have put in place to support the child, without parental resistance or disagreement. This is consistent with a transplant model of partnership, which has been criticised as maintaining a deficit view of the parent. (Hellawell, 2017)

The early years is considered a sector where the establishment of close relationships and partnerships constitutes one of the overarching principles of the EYFS (DfE, 2017) and the establishment of relationships that are agreeable could be conceived as important in the avoidance of conflicts .This does however detract from the essential process of a dialogue which involves negotiations and re-negotiations until agreement is reached. It becomes evident from the narratives of the practitioners that there is a lack of agreement (Tveit, 2013) in the discussions associated with the inclusive process. As a result, the dialogue appears to be unilateral and hierarchical as the early years' practitioners retain control of the exchanges.

6.1.1 The problematic partnership for inclusion-the parent 'in denial'

The 'parent in denial' discourse (Gorman, 2004; Lalvani, 2014; Rogers, 2007) was considered to constitute one of the most significant barriers in the process of the identification of a child's needs and was prevalent in the majority of interviews and focus group discussions; it was

seen to delay or halt the opportunity to put strategies into place which effectively support their child and ensure they have their needs met in the setting. It was felt by some that, as the children are very young, the parents can be understandably hesitant about approaching practitioners with concerns as children are still developing and learning at their own pace, which can present in diverse and unique ways during the early years:

> *In the cases of parents, because we are in a setting that is a nursery, it is more difficult.... because the parents hope, hope that the child is going to catch up with the area or with the learning, or with the skill..There is a moment that they need to try to open their eyes and see that there is something that needs to be addressed, but as a nursery it is very difficult because the parents are always going to try to say, "Oh no, but he's so young, but he's little, there is no problem.*
>
> *(Edith, Early Years Professional)*

Edith highlights two highly contested discourses in the area of special education: that of normalcy, which essentially distinguishes the child from others, who are developing in accordance to expected frameworks, and that of an 'objective reality' or truth that the parents refuse to accept. This reality relates to their child's needs, which appear indisputable to the practitioners, yet escape the parents. Instead of embracing the possibility of a child behaving in different ways in relation to different adults or peers, practitioners embrace their 'own professional reality' or instinct. They feel that, in some cases parents may be aware that their child presents with a delay, but they choose to omit information.

Contrary to research conducted by Broomhead (2018, p. 436) which reported that 'the effectiveness of home-school partnerships appeared to be strongly dependent upon the approaches of educational practitioners', the early years practitioners in this study were equally reliant upon the parents communicating clearly and promptly, being open, and entrusting them with sensitive information about their child.

The fact that the parents have not been 'open' and 'sincere' with the practitioners leads to the latter experiencing a' sense of shock' when the child commences their attendance and they are not meeting the criteria associated with the setting's 'normative' or 'desirable' behaviours:

I suppose it is when you get those children coming in that you're not aware of... you haven't been told beforehand or the parents haven't opened up beforehand […]. That's where it is hard because it's suddenly a shock and you are expecting these children to come and sit and sing and they can't... and the parents haven't noted that.

(Hayley, SENDCO)

Dealing with a child who may not display typical behaviours presupposes a 'readiness', on behalf of the practitioners, and the implementation of strategies into place in advance (home visits), which in this case described above was not feasible and appeared to have become a source of anxiety for the practitioner. Dalkilic and Vadebonceur (2016) claim that a child's difference presents early years educators with challenges that results in the latter experiencing a sense of vulnerability due to their unfamiliarity with teaching and caring for children who are deemed to learn differently.

If a parent is not aware of the child's needs or potential delay in development, the early years' practitioners must approach them in an honest, yet gentle way, to set the process of identification in motion and source the necessary support for them:

Talking with the parents as well is often quite a difficult thing, it might be the first time, and some are often in denial and need a gentler approach. We just... we're always honest with them so if we've noticed there are some gaps we will say how important it is to get help for them

(*Patricia, SENDCO*)

Gorman (2004, p 34) advises that 'when confronted for the first time with the fact that their child has a disability many parents go through an emotional process like what happens when hearing news of serious illness or loss of the loved one'. This certainly appears to be the view that most early years practitioners endorse:

Sometimes that can be a grieving process for parents, of the child that they thought they were going to have, and they kind of foresee those long-term difficulties. So, for some parents, particularly in early years, a lot of that is about supporting the parents on that journey into understanding the importance of additional professionals or putting that extra intervention into place.

(*Anna, Early Years Advisor*)

Anna refers to the dashing of hopes or loss of the 'normal' child that the parents were expecting to have, and the prospects of a woeful future-this appears to be a common thread among the accounts of some parents of children who have been identified as disabled (Rogers, 2007).Equally, practitioners' accounts are governed by philanthropic feelings towards the parents' tragedy-thus raising a child with special needs is constructed as a personal misfortune (Kearney and Griffin, 2001).

Although the majority of practitioners appeared empathetic and acknowledged that they may need to wait, give parents time, approach them at later stage and 'ask why' or 'encourage and exhort', steps that have been identified by theorists (Gorman, 2004) as paying dividends, this 'waiting game' invariably delayed the process of the referral of the child to external professionals. This precious time lost was seen as detrimental to the child's best interests:

I think it's really important that they're(parents) on board and understand the benefit – the benefit to them and the benefit to the child, of any interventions that might be putting in place or any inclusive practice, and I think if part of that first discussion with parents is about inclusion, is actually about okay, here's what we understand to be inclusion, actually it's about providing something different which allows the child to access the same thing but in a different way, I think sometimes that would be easier.

(*Anna, Early Years Advisor*)

Anna's account highlights that early years practitioners are often the first people to approach parents with this sensitive information; she asserts that early years practitioners' clarity in communication and explanation of the setting's unique meaning of inclusion will enable parents to explore the benefit of the proposed intervention in the long term.

However, the practitioners also describe cases where, despite their repeated efforts to engage the parent, they remain disinterested which leads to a stalemate:

We can only advise. If the parent isn't willing to accept their child needs some extra support, then we can't do anything further, we are stuck...'

(Edith Early Years Professionals)

In the case where parents do not wish to engage in the process, some practitioners felt that there was nothing further they could do to support the child and the inclusion ecology observed in their classroom was disturbed as a result:

Then we don't get the support. We can't override the parent. We don't get the support

(*Lyra, Early Years Practitioner)*

The construct of the 'disengaged parent' is further affirmed in the SEED (Study of Early Education and Development report, Griggs and Bussard, DfE, 2017 p. 27) which reports: 'Some parents did not fully engage with setting activities (such as taking up opportunities for nursery visits). This lack of engagement was generally a result of parents not wanting, or feeling it necessary, to get involved in their child's early years education and care'.

The SEED report (ibid) appears to reach general conclusions unquestionably, without exploring the reasoning behind parental disinterest or more crucially, the societal and institutional hegemonic mechanisms at play, which may prevent or distance parents from early year settings or educational institutions that appear to undermine their input and alienate their child. Lalvani (2014, p.1223) aptly contextualises parental disengagement within a historical and sociocultural framework:

> Perspectives on the familial experience of disability are entrenched in a long history of ascribing blame for children's disabilities to their parents, dating back to early western civilizations

This was a view espoused by some of the early years' practitioners, who had extensive experience of working in multi-cultural settings, and demonstrated an awareness of the complex sociohistorical factors that may have resulted to parental hesitation when liaising with the nursery setting:

Sometimes I also have the feeling that parents are scared of telling us something that they notice so they might be concerned because you are looking at the child and you are comparing with other children... but they don't want to realise because they don't want to maybe feel that we are judging them and thinking that they did something right or did something.. I know that is not true, but it is what they might feel, you know

(Edith, Early Years Professional)

Edith and her colleagues bring the notion of parental self-blame (Broomhead, 2013) to the forefront of the discussion although the practitioners involved do not delve further the historicity of the concept at this stage. It is however interesting to note that they display a grasp of its historic evolution.

The discourse of normalcy (Lalvani, 2014), governed by a pathognomic view of the child, which presents them as defective or different from the other children, is dominant in the majority of discussions. The parents are expected to grieve for the loss of their normal child but equally have to accept the reality of their condition and assume their 'child advocate' role as soon as possible. Dalkilic and Vadenbonceur (2015) concur that acceptance is equated with advocacy and the parent consenting to a practitioner's label is a necessary precondition of inclusion.

The practitioners confronted with parental denial experience this as a withdrawal of trust and openness (or disinterest in some cases), which leads to the removal of relevant financial support or resources that they can acquire through multi-agency partnerships upon which they can rely to help the child.

Although the professional knowledge of the practitioner remains predominant in the exchange, the power shifts to the' parent in denial' who retains control over their child's future educational provisions. Parents 'in denial' go against the professional experts' advice and oppose the structural mechanisms that reify the special educational needs system: intervention and labelling. Their defiance on this occasion is not viewed as valuable, as that of the parents 'fighting' for support and resources, but interpreted as an inability to accept an objective reality.

In the case of parents, who were hesitant to involve external professionals in the fear that their child may be labelled, some practitioners reported using subtly manipulative techniques to enable the referral to external professionals while alleviating the concerns of the parent. The extract from the discussion between two early years educators below demonstrates such an example:

> *Georgina: You can't push anything because we don't know. I don't have any qualifications in diagnosing children, generally you have to go slightly down the speech and language*

(route)because that's one thing…they'll agree to that because they can see that speech and language would help, I think.

Philippa: Because they don't necessarily see it as that there's another problem beyond that

(Georgina, Early Years Professional and Phillipa, Early Years Teacher)

Philippa infers that the implication that a child may have certain 'hidden' conditions or disabilities is more traumatic to the parent (Rogers, 2007) than a relatively common speech and language delay; as a result an initial referral to a speech and language therapist may be regarded as a fairly inconspicuous process by the parent, who is then more likely to consent to the sharing of information. The notion of certain hidden conditions (such as autism) attracting stigma and ostracising parents in comparison to visible disabilities is documented in literature (Gill and Liamputtong, 2009) and appears to impact negatively on the opinions of other parents (Kniveton, 2004); early years practitioners in this study appear to acknowledge these tacit perceptions and operationalise alternative means of securing a referral while alleviating the concerns of the parents.

While the strategies adopted to secure referral may be questionable, in the views of educators they are necessary to establish the benefits associated with early intervention.

6.2 Support for multi-agency partnerships

The involvement of external professionals in the SEN support approach was welcomed by the majority of early years practitioners, who viewed it as synonymous with good inclusive practice (Barnes, 2008). Their expertise and suggestions were seen to enrich pedagogical practices and provision:

I think working with outside professionals has been really great for me actually and my experience of them supporting the children just by having somebody else to come in and look at the environment, because we see the environment every day and we think it's accessible for children and inclusive, but an outside professional might have other suggestions to make it more beneficial for the children.

(*Sian, SENDCO*)

Sian identifies the positive impact the visits from the sensory support team and physiotherapists had on her setting's environment and the enhancement of existing activities on offer. Patricia, who was deployed in an independent children's nursery at the time of this study, felt that the staff team benefited from the local educational authority's support officers' visits:

> *I know the staff have found it helpful having that extra person coming in and having an outside person coming in with new strategies and things that, you know, can work I think has been helpful.*

(*Patricia SENDCO*)

A minority of practitioners reported that liaising with external professionals had come to acquire negative connotations and viewed with suspicion:

> *I think we've been fortunate in our setting at home that, because we were fairly new as a team that came in, our council spent a lot of attention on us and made sure that we were comfortable with things. But it's meant that we've got quite good relationships with all those people that are external, where I think a lot of settings see them as the enemy or that they're coming to check on us, whereas for me, if I've got a query I will pick up the phone and just phone them. But I'm sure that's not the case in most places.*

(*Philippa, Early Years Teacher*)

Philippa highlights the belief that external professionals may be there to check upon early years practitioners, thus creating a feeling that the latter are being watched and monitored, and inferring their practice may not be up to standard. This notion is reminiscent of Foucault's concept of 'panopticism' (Blackford, 2004) as transplanted in an early years' context, where practices are monitored and practitioners are accountable for their actions. The local authority or external professionals conduct the surveillance to ensure practices fall in line with policy guidelines and government directives.

Ball (2003) and Dunne (2009) assert that the advent of neoliberal values has promoted a culture of individuality and competitiveness, which place educators in a position of

accountability; they are expected to perform to a high standard while evidencing their progress.

Despite practitioners' emphasis on multi-agency partnerships as means of addressing the holistic needs of the child effectively and providing appropriate support, the partnership when eventually established, is plagued by divergent conceptual and practical considerations. These lead to partnerships, which are frequently characterised by tension, conflict and are conceived as deeply flawed by the participants.

6.2.1 Multi-agency Partnerships: The professional 'expert':

The dominance of medical professionals in the partnerships observed between various professionals has been well documented in research (Thomas and Loxley, 2007). This is consistent with the specific concept and understanding of professionalism as it has evolved historically and socially (Osgood 2012). Specifically, in the field of special educational needs, the remnants of a system that relied heavily upon medical specialists for assessment, diagnosis and highly prescriptive treatment has persevered and has shaped the system for the last century (Thomas and Loxley, 2007).

It is thus unsurprising that medical practitioners' views hold more gravitas than that of education professionals. In reality, a diagnosis is still issued by a clinician and although various professionals are expected to feed into the process, it is ultimately down to that one person to provide the diagnosis that designates a child as falling under a specific medical category.

The early years' practitioners in this study corroborated the established authority of the medical professionals and made concerted efforts to involve practitioners from external agencies. They highlighted the value that parents place on the involvement of external professional and the significance of their attendance in one of their regular meetings -external professionals are somehow seen to enhance the substance of the meeting. Georgina feels that these professionals possess specific knowledge and expertise that practitioners do not have:

I think most of them are all very well trained and know what they're talking about, so I always think it's worth giving it a try, whatever they recommend. Then I don't think there's any harm in saying, when they normally come back in a few months of going,' I've tried this, I've tried it a few different ways, it just didn't work'.[….] *You sometimes need that external help because they've got so much experience in that area that perhaps your average practitioner doesn't have.*

(Georgina, Early Years Professional)

This lack of experience appears to be prevalent in the area of speech and language disorders, where early years practitioners are frequently reported to be ill prepared, due to a lack of adequate training during and after their studies. (Hall, 2005)

If you don't have the ability to get professional guidance on how to support a child with a speech and language delay... because, not many practices here, as I've said to you, I talk to about their confidence about speech and language therapy and that, I must admit, would be low down because we don't have the training on how to help support children necessarily with speech production issues therefore.. we know how to try and enhance their vocabulary, give them strategies, sing the songs, do the talking tunes, all this sorts of things and immerse them in languages and use all these techniques..

(James, SENDCO)

James feels that the staff in the nursery he is deployed have the generic skills and training to support children with the improvement of their vocabulary utilising a range of techniques and strategies-they are however less confident about supporting children with speech and language production issues. Both James and Georgina value the specialist expertise that external professionals may contribute, as well as their 'hands-on', empirical experience. The emphasis on the fact that external professionals are 'well-trained' almost signifies that the opposite applies to early years' practitioners.

The knowledge of the external professionals is thus valued and elevated to a higher order of professional wisdom (Thomas and Loxley, 2007), one that has the power to validate or dismiss the suggestions and practices of the early years' practitioner. The narratives of the practitioners' attest to a pressing need for validation of their practice. Having the seal of

approval by external, mainly medically trained professionals, provides them with reassurance that the support they provide is appropriate:

> *'It would be nice to have that professional support coming in because that team are amazing and they've got resources just to say, "Oh, actually I think you're stepping too far ahead but come back and do a smaller step". That's really useful'*
>
> *(Hayley, SENDCO)*

A study conducted by Hall (2005, p.19) which explored the inter-professional interactions between early years practitioners and speech and language therapists reported that the former were in 'overwhelming need of reassurance'. The findings of this study substantiate Hall's (ibid) findings. The reasons behind the practitioners' dependency could be attributed to a lack of training, a poor perception of one's own skills and ability or a lack of confidence; a combination of these elements were evident in the practitioners' accounts.

The narratives appear to construct two different types of professionals: medical and educational ones with the former occupying a position of privilege and power. The early years' practitioners in these cases assume the role of the novice or understudy (Altrichter, 2005) in a community of multi professional practice-their practices are professional within an educational context but of lesser value compared to clinical practitioners.

Despite the unprecedented developments (Vincent and Braun,2010) aimed at professionalising early years educators, the compounding negative discourses appear to have led to the development of a 'quasi-professional' identity which is in the process of becoming but does not materialise clearly and confidently and leads to educators feeling torn.

Edith attests to the concept of professionalism, as construed in the inclusive inter professional partnership, when discussing how to broach the subject of a child's needs with new parents:

> *Oh, dear, how do I tell her...?" I am not a professional in... I am not a doctor. I mean, I am a professional but... so, I cannot tell you this as a diagnostic opinion.*
>
> *(Edith, Early Years Professional)*

It becomes evident from the practitioners' accounts that there is a hierarchy of professionalism and medically trained practitioners occupy the positions at the top of this

order. Todd (p.119) debates the role of professional practices as creators of identity or 'image fixers.' These practices affect and 'other' the child but equally serve to 'institutionalise' the domination of certain roles. The domination of the roles of medical professionals in the partnerships described remove the child from the remit of the 'regular educator and place them into the jurisdiction of clinicians who can diagnose and support their needs more efficiently.

There are clear elements in the vignettes that follow in the next sub-sections that despite the dependency expressed by the practitioners at a semantic level, they approach partnerships critically and reflectively. They are capable of exercising agency when involvement is not forthcoming, and they aim to support the child and parents effectively. Whereas practitioners may appear dependent upon other professionals for the materialisation of inclusion, equally they display the capacity to critically reflect upon advice given, reject what they see as inappropriate counsel and vocalise their disapproval. They view themselves as the 'experts in the child' due to their closeness to the child and their unique understanding of the children and family's specific needs and circumstances. Despite the emergence of agentic responses, the educators' stance is characterised by a 'passive resistance' (Bradbury, 2014); they challenge top-down directives but ultimately acquiesce in the fact that the referral process has to subscribe to a particular order.

6.2.2 Multi-agency Partnerships: cultural and interpersonal barriers

Multi agency partnerships are plagued by structural, cultural and personal factors, which erect significant barriers (Payler and Georgeson, 2013) that hinder effective collaboration and result to a fragmented understanding of the child's needs and an ineffective process (Todd,2007). The practitioners in this study describe a range of organisational and cultural barriers that hinder their joint efforts to support children with special needs.

A common thread running through practitioners' accounts revolved around external professionals' episodic visits that are brief and generate more paperwork if a re-referral or additional visit is required:

They can only come for an episode... what they call an episode of care where they just come for a short amount of time then they go away then we have to re-refer the child which is quite tricky if we feel that that will really benefit the children and the staff here to get information from them.

(*Sian, SENDCO*)

The time constraints associated with external professionals' work has been reported extensively in research and is mainly related to the structural processes of the inter-professional partnership (McConkey, 2005); the implications for the child are far reaching and complex. The specific mechanisms that local authorities put into place to filter individual cases lead to significant delays, inadequate communication and overreliance on the judgement of practitioners, who may have only met the child once:

Speech and language have been so long to even get that nowadays... it's portage and inclusion. So unfortunately for them, they're picking up cases that, really, they don't need to be picking up just in order for us to be able to then access the one that we do need which, again, is a waste of their time but it's the only route that we have in! Yeah, it's a snapshot really... portion of time of the day, and you know, that overtime... which again, the whole industry is about overtime, but, whenever anyone comes in, Ofsted or these reports it's always a judgment isn't it on what they can see at that moment.

(James, SENDCO)

Limited contact with the child presupposes a reliance upon early years' practitioners' feedback- as practitioners are more likely to develop meaningful relationships and get to know the children well, their opinions should be given due consideration (Payler and Georgeson,2013). However, external professional agencies have different governing principles and specific systems for referral, which are characterised by thresholds based on their specific relative 'notions of need' -as a result of the disparate priorities, their engagement is not always forthcoming (Barnes, 2008; Salmon 2004).

James infers an incongruence between values; staff in the early years industry are willing to put in the overtime and effort to get to know the children well, whereas external agencies rely on observational 'snapshots' that are unable to capture a more holistic picture of the child's abilities and dispositions. The practitioners' narratives construe a professional identity,

which becomes distinct, and is characterised by emotionality (McGillivray, 2008); a sense of care, knowledge of the child's needs and enhanced accountability. These characteristics are perceived by practitioners to distinguish them from other professionals and construct an early year professional identity in relation to inclusion, which is separate and distinct (Vincent and Braun, 2010; Colley, 2006) in comparison to other child professionals. White and Featherstone (2005.p.210) concur that such narratives often serve to 'strengthen and confirm identities.'

The close relationship of the practitioners to the child and the understanding of what she enjoys prevail**s** over the implementation of specific strategies that may be construed as appropriate for children who fall under specific medical designations and address all such groups as homogeneous (Thomas and Loxley 2007). The educators' concerns are not limited to the strategies proffered but extend to address the assessments and subsequent reports produced by external professionals:

> *The ones that I've seen recently have been very accurate, because sometimes you sort of think well the child's in a strange place, they don't know that person, and will they see what you want them to see...*
>
> *(Patricia, SENDCO)*

Patricia refers to the inaccuracy of previous observations and assessments she had received which are held in artificial environments and extricate the child from its natural surroundings and comfort of familiar context -the child is expected to interact with an adult they do not know or perform set tasks in a 'strange' or foreign environment (Mcartney and Morton, 2013).

Ng et al (2015, p.2287) support this view and claim that medical professionals may 'produce incongruent reports that are beyond their scope'. In the same study, medical practitioners are reported to be engaging in a process described as 'spotlighting' during which they draw educators' attention to subtle symptoms that may be associated with hidden special needs in an effort to make these visible and provide the relevant support.

This research study indicates that the opposite applies; early years educators purport to possess the valuable knowledge of the child which is based on everyday interactions and

meaningful relationships -they often have to perform 'reverse spotlighting' by ensuring that medical professionals move away from episodic observations that provide a fragmented picture to a more holistic method of assessment.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of participants in this study promoted a 'sociocultural' approach to observations and exhorted the need for authentic assessments:

> *It' s good… like when a child is going to school. The school is coming to the house and they're seeing the child in his environment, so the paediatrician should be able to come for example to nursery or go home and see how the child is actually in real life*
>
> *(Elizabeth, Early years Teacher)*

The issues arising from external professionals' advice are not limited to matters pertaining to the accuracy of observations and assessments or the disagreement over the authenticity or the severity of a child's needs.

The reports produced by medical professionals are governed by a dominant language, which is characterised by 'medical jargon' and is reported to baffle the educators:

> *There's a lot of technical language in there that you need to unpick first and foremost, especially if it's medical because it's obviously that medical jargon, so it's like... right ok, so on the whole, which of these do we feel that we can do, and what do we already have? What do we might have already in place that we could just alter? When can we see this working? How can it work best?*
>
> *(James, SENDCO)*

In addition to the 'technical language' which serves to highlight the medical condition of a child, identify its associated symptoms and categorise their needs these reports could be seen to further reinforce the dominance of a medical model of special needs and disability. The advice given by external professionals was considered by early years' practitioners as unrealistic or impractical in an educational context. Often advice is based on therapeutic interventions that were designed within a medical paradigm and weave in relevant prescriptive interventions that ultimately favour or lead to individualised support or withdrawal of the child form the nursery class.

In their effort to implement educational practices emanating from the guidance given, early years educators felt that they invariably ended up to excluding the child and/ or his peers:

Lyra: it's good advice, but it's hard to implement, because, for instance, the setting support officer came in and did an activity and took two members of staff. We don't have two spare members of staff or a quiet room. It was a quiet room, the child was the only one in it and there were two staff in there to help him engage in the activity.

Edith: And then you need three people to do it because one is taking the photo, one is doing...

Beatrice: One is holding to support. Really...

Lyra: *Do we have three people in order to do that?*

(Lyra, Early years Practitioner, Edith, Early Years Professional and Beatrice Early Years teacher)

The early years practitioners in this discussion acknowledge that the advice given may be beneficial for the child but is not applicable in a pedagogical environment. Ng et al (2019, p.4) note that health professionals are increasingly called to perform 'social and humanistic roles and activities'. In doing so, they have to merge practices from two disciplines: health and education, which are underpinned by different theoretical models of special needs and disability. Health professionals often adopt a therapeutic interventionist perspective, which aims to treat the symptoms associated with special needs and disability. Early years' pedagogy, on the other hand, is considered to be more closely aligned to a social model of disability. Abbot et al (2005, p.158) claim that social practitioners in his study felt that a 'social model of disability was being threatened by medical and health issues'. The inappropriateness of the guidance given was not limited to reports by medical professionals but encompassed external, local authority child professionals.

The practitioners in this study were struggling to adopt interventions within the constraints provided by the child: adult ratios and the routines in place. Although routines may be associated with a more fixed or rigid daily programme that may be seen to repress inclusion, routines such as free play or group play were 'institutionalised' in some of the settings and considered conducive to good practice and children's development of 'agency' and emotional

well-being. Free play denoted time to children' selves where they could engage in meaningful play of their own choice. External professionals' advice was seen to threaten the children's rights to play and valuable time with their peers:

So we work with mainly the individual educational plans so we complete those and that often contains input from professionals that have given us targets, but sometimes we can end up with speech and language.. have given us targets and physio has given us targets and hearing support has given us targets so the child then ends up with 10 targets that they should be working towards which I feel is too much so it's just streamlining that and working with the parents to see what they feel is more important for the child. It's great having the input but sometimes if you've got four targets from each of the professionals it can be quite a lot to look at and monitor. [.....]It's too much for the child if they're trying to be included in the day to day nursery and everything that's happening here... to have ten targets to work on can be... taking them away. They are, you know, with their peer groups... are going off and choosing where they would like to play and they have to come away and do something different, it can feel maybe a little bit not very nice for them because they want to follow their peers'.

(Sian, SENDCO)

Sian and the other practitioners' vignettes explain how the targets set by external practitioners are incompatible with educational routines and practices that are child led and play-centred. The efforts to weave targets set by external agencies into the curricula often mean that the child has to be withdrawn from their group or community-this is perceived by practitioners as exclusive practice. Furthermore, there is an inference that each professional set different targets for the child, which indicates that goals are not shared as, would be expected in a partnership. (Stroggilos and Xanthacou, 2006)

Early years' practitioners acknowledge that during free play time, children may be operating within the constraints of a collective or social preschool order –equally they have the opportunity to turn activities into their advantage by negotiating space and time and gaining control (Markstrom, 2009).The imposed advice from external professionals is seen to disturb this bilaterally negotiated routine and place the child in an environment outside their natural, collective space. The child in this vignette above (in contrast to the majority of the educator'

narratives in this study) is not presented as passive-they are actively trying to become included by making choices-she is perceived to demonstrate agency.

6.2.3 Multi-agency Partnerships: structural barriers

Whereas in the excerpts above, the participants focus mainly on barriers imposed by differing ideologies, professional perspectives and working practices (Rose, 2011; O'Reilly et al,2013), there are frequent discussions of structural barriers and top-down directives that supress practitioners' agency.

Anna refers to a divergence in priorities due to busy caseloads which results in children not seen by the relevant external agencies:

> *I think that is often a big frustration from settings, that actually they feel the engagement from the professionals is not there and I understand that a lot of that is about the professional services. For example, I know that health visitors have been told that their priorities now are onto twos, although they still work with nought to five of course but that actually that's their priority in their role because they have such a big caseload that that's difficult then for settings who are only getting those children at two and are saying, okay well we need to talk to the health visitor.*
>
> *(Anna, Early Years Advisor)*

Anna highlights the fact that different agencies appear to have distinct agendas- their focus rests on specific areas-as a result, individual children, who do not meet the threshold or agency's criteria for referral may not be seen. Salmon (2004.p 158) distinguishes the functional difference between educational settings and healthcare agencies; the former are operating an allocating service where there is an equal distribution of resources to enable access to the curriculum whereas the latter intervene only when the needs arise (commissioning service). These needs have been described in previous sections as relative (Barnes, 2008) and may not warrant involvement depending on the agency.

Even in the cases, where children are eventually seen, the constant reorganisation of provisions (Sloper, 2004) and the introduction of specific methods of service delivery seem

to impact negatively on communication with other agencies, as Mary's account demonstrates:

> *And now it's just, oh done a drop-in, parents have got some strategies, discharged and I'm sat here like, 'so what does that mean for me?' I've got to now go and chase someone up to say, what did you tell the parent? You always have to either hover outside the door or, before they get the next person in say, oh could you just summarise what you suggested? I mean, it's often the strategies that they've taught us, if we've attended certain language courses, but it's not specific to that individual child's level.*
>
> (*Mary, SENDCO*)

Despite previous research findings (Payler and Georgeson,2013) indicating that practitioners deployed in children's centres have stronger partnerships with external professionals, as the purpose of children's centres has been historically associated with early intervention and supportive provision for families, Mary' s experiences demonstrate that there remain structural barriers in place that hinder communication.

Effective communication is considered essential in multi-agency partnerships, yet the strategies of opening effective communication channels remain a far reached target. Even in cases where agencies co-exist in the same location, it has been reported that communication and collaboration may remain poor (White and Featherstone, 2005).

Communication with other professionals in this study was often erratic and not conducted on a face-to-face basis; early years practitioners attribute this to financial restrictions:

> *I think they are very stretched as well so I think it's not always easy for them but I can ring them up or a phone call... and they've been really good with offering advice.*
>
> *(Patricia, SENDCO)*

Anna, an early years advisor, highlights the issue of the funding cuts and the conflict arising out of the government directives' emphasis on early interventions, which are not adequately supported by the relevant budgets:

> I *think funding in every service has been stripped back so much that settings are finding they are identifying children earlier, which is fantastic because it's what we want, but that*

actually they have nowhere for those children to go or professionals won't see them until they're in their pre-school year, the year before they go to school, even if practitioners are identifying things earlier, and then there's such a long waiting list for a lot of things that when they're referring, if they won't allow a referral to go in until the child is three, they're then not seen until they're halfway to the year before school and I think it makes it very hard for settings.

(Anna, Advisory teacher)

The National Union of Teachers in their 2018 conference noted the discrepancy between the increase in the number of EHCP requests since the introduction of the SEND code of Practice in 2014 and the government reduction of local authority funding (Whittaker, 2018). Kevin Courtney, Joint General Secretary of the National Education Union claimed: 'It is an absolute disgrace that the Government is starving local authorities of the resources needed for children with SEND'.

The recent Ofsted's annual review findings corroborate the findings of this study; Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's Chief Inspector states:

> 'We are still seeing too many local areas providing a sub-standard service when it comes to SEND provision. At the end of our second year of LA SEND inspections, we have inspected 68 local areas. Thirty of these have been required to provide a written statement of action'.
>
> (Ofsted, 2018, p.11)

Although funding cuts have been identified as a contributing factor in multiagency partnership breakdowns, they are seen as a matter of lesser importance in comparison to integral issues such as culture shifts in interagency communication (Commons, 2019) However, the financial restrains imposed upon local educational authorities cannot be dismissed and appear to have a direct negative impact on the establishment of effective partnerships. Truly collaborative partnerships are hailed as means of eliminating the 'blame-culture' (Abbott *et al,* 2005) often noted in interagency relations; unfortunately, this blame culture was evident in this study and dominated the practitioners' narratives.

It could be asserted that barriers are multiple and not solely ascribed to the format of service provision or funding cuts –they extend to the external agencies' mind-sets and ways of

working, which are considered rigid (McConkey, 2005; White and Featerstone,2005). Several participants in this study refer to external agencies' 'fixed way of doing things' in addition to the top-down financial restrictions. When asked about the benefits of early intervention and the process of the issuing of an EHC Plan, James purports:

'*Some of it did feel like you were jumping through so many hoops I think because of the whole different agenda here, the agenda is that the local authority don't really want to administer EHCPs because the funding. So, we had a real challenge in tying all the professionals together and getting the report, and event then when we did get all of those together, they threw it back and said that we hadn't actively demonstrated the impact of these interventions over time, although there was nothing in the Code of Practice which says that they can refuse on that ground'.*

(James, SENDCO)

The extensive bureaucracy associated with the paperwork is substantiated by other early years practitioners in this study. The educators in this study appear to perform a form of 'orienteering without a map' (Ng et al, 2015, p.2286) which focus on familiarising themselves with the bureaucratical requirements of the education system's policies and procedures. To become effective they have to collate a plethora of reports written in the appropriate language that demonstrates the 'palpable' impact of their interventions, clearly exhibits the collaboration between different professionals and ultimately presents a picture of a child who is failing repeatedly and is thus deserving of the allocation of resources and the issuing of the EHCP (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2010).

The process of the issue of an EHCP (which replaced the previous statement of special educational needs) was meant to be a cohesive and timely process-unfortunately the recent Ofsted's annual review notes that this has not been the case:

> The level of demand for local authorities to undertake EHC needs assessments has increased by over 50% since 2015. In 2017, 45,200 children and young people were assessed and a decision taken to whether they need an EHC plan. The number of requests for EHC plans that are either refused or delayed is also increasing. LAs can refuse to carry out an EHC needs assessment if they believe it has not met the required threshold of needs. In 2017, there were around 14,600 refusals to carry out an assessment.
>
> (Ofsted, 2018, p.53)

The new SEND (Dfe, DoH, 2015) code has widened the age bracket of provision covering children and young people from their preschool years to the age of 25. Although hailed as a positive move that endeavours to provide a seamless and cohesive approach and a consistency in care and educational provisions that extend beyond a child's school years, the government has failed to address the fiscal requirements of this directive (House of Commons, 2019) and put effective structures in place to support the expected increases in assessments, thus letting parents, children and practitioners down.

As in the case of James, some of the practitioners in this study had adapted to the requirements and specificities of the special educational needs processes and had devised effective ways of navigating themselves (Ng *et al*,2015) and, where appropriate, challenging decisions to access what they perceived as a child's rightful entitlement. In these cases the SENDCOs and early years educators demonstrated agency-albeit restricted by local authority processes and the legal and bureaucratic stipulations of the SEND Code- they had developed strategies (passive or antagonistic) that enabled them to navigate the special educational needs terrain and manipulate the outcomes for the perceived benefit of the child.

Quite often, the conscious choices and decisions made by the participants installed them in an advocacy position, which enabled them to act both as a surrogate parent for the child with special needs (Broomhead, 2013) and/or a social pedagogue supporting the parent and performing 'orienteering by proxy' (Ng *et a*l, 2015) - thus allowing parents who were not familiar with the system or perceived as lacking the cultural and educational capital to negotiate their child's rights and entitlement.

6.2.4 Multi-agency Partnerships: Conflicts and role expansion

External professionals exert significant power in the exchange and, although their feedback into the process provides the relevant medical information that assists local authority panels with critical evidence, their stance and approach towards parents, children and practitioners is criticised heavily and described as lacking in sensitivity or being overly confrontational. This tension or conflict appear to be more prevalent among parents who may lack the sociocultural capital or 'system knowledge' to advocate for their child (Ng *et al*, 2015):

Unfortunately, we then had an occupational therapist meeting which the mother did go to, and that professional really offended the mother because there was previous social service involvement with the family. The first thing she did, according to the mother, was go straight in heavy handed and made her feel very uncomfortable, and questioned and grilled. So, she didn't take him back for the second one. As a result then, we were never able to get an occupational therapist report around the strategies that would be best for him...

(James, SENDCO)

The fact that there was prior social services involvement in the case of this child may have instigated a direct approach from the professional which resulted to the mother adopting a defensive position in response to what she may have perceived as a 'blame culture discourse' (Todd, 2007). This inevitably led to a breakdown of the partnership and affected partnerships with other professionals.

Todd (2007, p.75) claims: 'Children who have a disability and whose families also represent other disadvantaged groups are suggested to have even more difficulties in their relationship with a range of services, including education'. This view was shared by other practitioners in this study. Hayley is deployed in a Children's centre in the inner city:

Well, I'm unravelling the story from mum. Mum is saying that the paediatrician isn't very helpful and she felt she was actually accusing her of hurting her child, so clearly there's a bit of miscommunication down there. So, it's more complex than just the child, it's a family issue.

(Hayley, SENDCO)

In the cases described by James and Hayley, the parents have been made to feel responsible for their child's delay and their parenting skills have been put under the microscope and construed as inadequate (Rogers, 2007). The 'deficit view of parenting' (Todd 2007) tends to invariably trace the root of the child's problem to parental behaviour and treat the parent with suspicion.

It becomes evident from the practitioners' testaments that partnerships, like inclusion are conditional (Todd, 2007) and tend to favour certain populations, classes or ethnicities over

others (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2010). Whereas certain parents may be viewed as more competent in representing their views and putting their child's case across eloquently (Ng et al,2015), others lack these 'instinctive' skills and are therefore seen as in need of remediation or advocacy themselves to enable them to fulfil their role.

Particularly in the case of parents who may be known to local social services or in receipt of government funding (and thus more likely belonging to a lower socioeconomic status), there appears to be an explicit acknowledgement, on behalf of the practitioners, that they may require additional support with their parenting skills:

> *We've got a child at a setting at the moment who had had two-year old funding elsewhere that came to us at three and the child's centre placed him with us and asked us to work with the family as well. His behaviour was off the wall and his vocabulary was interesting! In front of the other children and things but I actually think now, when I go into the room and I see him I don't actually think there is anything to diagnose there, I think it all was parenting, not all…*
>
> (Philippa, Early Years Teacher)

The assertion that the prevalence of certain behaviours or delay may be due to inappropriate parenting runs through several vignettes and reinforces the tacit parental blame discourse encountered in previous sections; more significantly, the optimal parental role and the dispositions encompassed within it could be equated with middle-class parenting. In contrast, 'working class' parenting is perceived as inadequate. Broomhead (2013, p.310) concurs that: 'Interventions in this area have therefore attempted to make parents (usually those experiencing social disadvantage) more responsible for their children's well-being and development'.

These narratives appear to be more prevalent among early years educators deployed in children's centres whose original purpose were to provide support for parents in disadvantaged areas of the country. Ball *et al* (2004) claim that 'the mix of private, subsidised and free places embeds and reproduces class divisions.' However, the expansion of the two year old free places and funding into private day nurseries has further served to exacerbate the distinctions between parents and perceived parenting (in)adequacy among both state and private -run settings as evident in the account of the early years educators in this study.

Where partnerships break down and parents are unable to advocate for their child, the early years' practitioners or SENDCOs take the role on, to enable the collaborative process to proceed:

> *We then also had to organise a specific transition meeting for mum. She did not attend the one for the school so we really had to say to the school, "Please, please, please come in, and we'll orchestrate it here." because we were having issues with mum dealing with anyone outside of nursery and actually going there. She's sort of always finding excuses on why she can't make it and why there's problems and, so, we did manage to get them in and meet with her to explain to her what would happen and how that transition would look but it was, yeah, a real challenge.*
>
> *(James, SENDCO)*

James and his team decided to assume a proactive approach to the child's transition to school. The fact that the child's mother appears unable to deal with external professionals could be symptomatic of the parents' perception of the treatment she received or the fact that they feel unable to undertake the burden of the advocacy role. The early years practitioners step in, when this occurs, and assume a 'substitute' family advocate role, in an effort to organise the necessary processes that may promote collaboration and pave the way for the incorporation of external professionals at a later stage. (Ng et al, 2015)

The participants in this study seem to acknowledge that the advocacy role does not necessarily come naturally but presupposes a knowledge of the practices that are embedded in the joint collaboration associated with special educational needs. These systems are embedded in specific institutional and cultural frameworks; parents may thus require some initiation into the educational 'community of practice' (Wenger, 2000) and adjustment before they are ready to accept the involvement of other professionals:

> *It's really, really useful, but the parents have to allow you to approach that team first and we've got... well we haven't gone there with that specific child yet because I wanted to give him a lot of time because of the language barrier and the cultural barrier. I don't know whether they've been given a home or whether they've had to find one. There's lot of things happening in the family for them especially with the younger child as well. With other*

children, you know, we've talked with the parents but they're not ready for that next stage of getting support in.

(*Hayley, SENDCO)*

Hayley demonstrates an awareness of the barriers the family has to overcome before they are in a position to focus on the partnership with external professionals-she acknowledges that the family need to have their primary physiological or essential needs met before they can focus their attention on their child's needs. At the same time, the language and cultural barriers are identified as a hindrance in the establishment of effective partnership, a finding that has been reported in other studies (Bodvin *et al*, 2018).

The role of the family advocate thus becomes crucial in the pursuit of inclusion. Good inclusive practice is thus not limited to the pedagogy in the early years classroom but incorporates the role of 'social pedagogue':

I've got some really lovely examples of where settings have gone above and beyond and done really different things for different families, which has helped them to feel included, to be able to change their provision, to change the way they do things that suits a parent's needs. One of the settings, they're in a very vulnerable area and they have regular meetings with parents but they've done things like gone to get the children to bring them in if the parents haven't been able to get them to the provision.. I think the family work can be even more important sometimes than what they're providing for the children.

(Anna-Early Years Advisor)

As social pedagogues, early year educators are assigned the role of the expert educator, whose task is not limited to delivering educational approaches that will enable the child to progress in relation to the curriculum but extends to include the support for parents. A social pedagogue's remit is not limited to providing the optimal inclusive classroom environment but involves putting the structures into place to enable the engagement of children and parents, and acts as a mediator between services for the purpose of promoting a child's best interests. (Kyriakou, 2009). This thread permeates practitioners' discussion, as they are preoccupied with the establishment of partnerships as means of providing a holistic framework of intervention and assessment for the children in their care. Kyriakou (2009

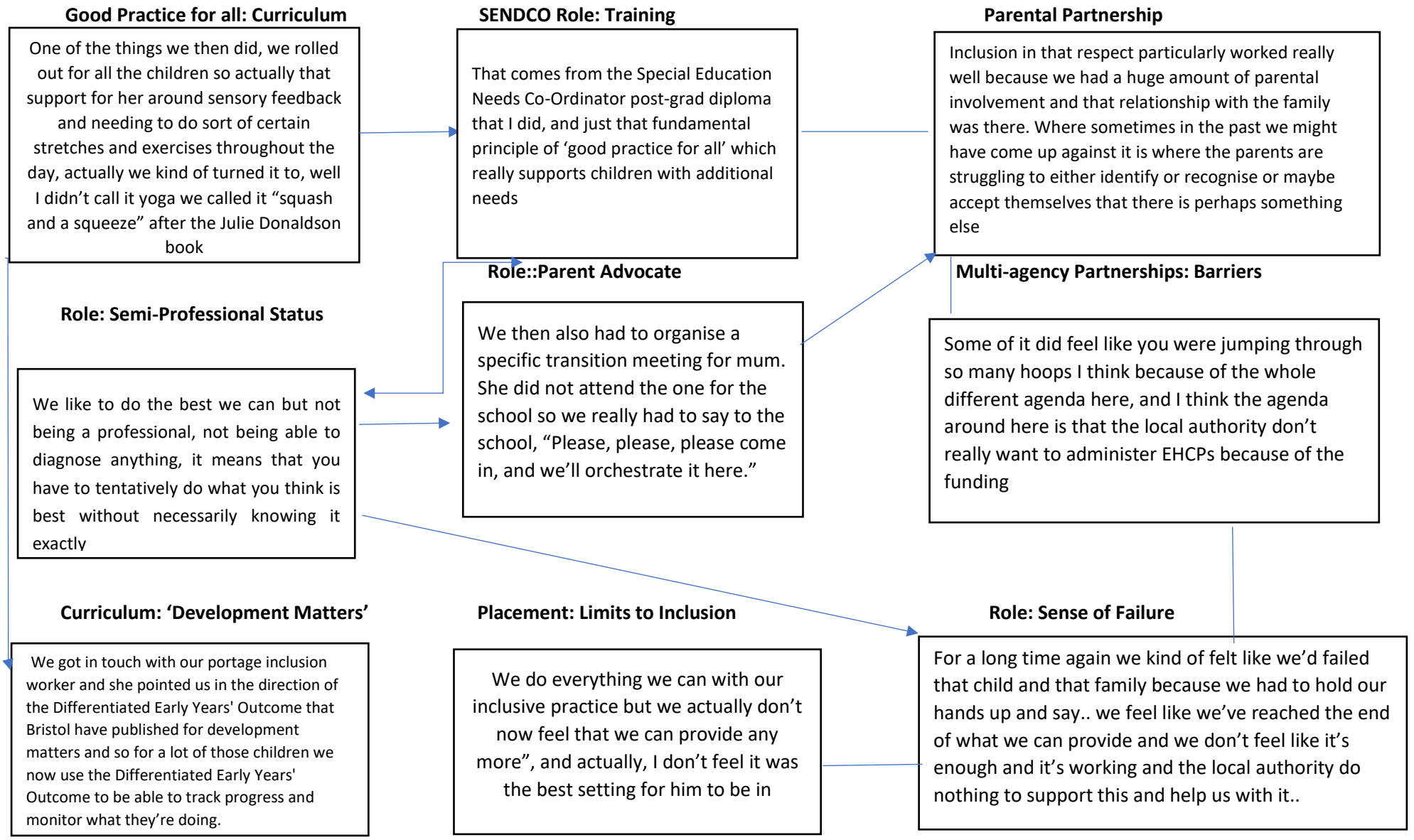
p.104) claims that 'social pedagogy within the context of schools is best thought of as involving five discernible but to some extent overlapping dimensions: care and welfare; inclusion; socialisation; academic support; and social education. This is consistent with the accounts encountered in this research, which are preoccupied with all aspects of a child's development and family's involvement.

Although early years practitioners in this study feel trapped in a curriculum and educational framework that focuses heavily on school readiness, they acknowledge that it is equally important to allow the child to develop the emotional and social skills that will help them flourish in life. Dannesboe *et al* (2018) assert that there appears to be an increasing tendency among early year educators to shift the focus from the academic achievement of children towards an emphasis on social development-this appears to be a concern that is shared by the early years educators in this study.

6.3 Thematic Maps

The theme maps that follow are based on four of the interviews and one of the focus group discussions. They illustrate a variation of the six main themes and sub-themes and include representative narratives that bring the themes to life. The boxes representing each theme or sub-theme are linked with solid lines, where appropriate, to demonstrate the interconnectivity between themes. Where a theme is explicating or 'accounts for' the emergence of another theme, solid lines with arrows (Thomas, 2017) are directed towards the relevant theme.

Theme Map 6.1-James



Theme Map 6.2-Anna

Good Practice for all: Curriculum

So that's sometimes where we see wonderful inclusive practice which is about basic provision, for example using visual aids and using Makaton and excellent communication, we see good inclusive practice in lots of our settings

Placement: Values

A sense of belonging I think is really important, along with the sense of identity. Children understanding actually their seeing themselves as an individual, seeing themselves as part of their family, as part of different social groups

Parental Partnership

I got some really lovely examples of where settings have gone above and beyond and done really different things for different families, which has helped them to feel included, to be able to change their provision, to change the way they do things that suits a parent's needs. One of the settings, they're in a very vulnerable area and they have regular meetings with parents but they've done things like gone to get the children to bring them in if the parents haven't been able to get them to the provision.

Educator's Role: Parent Advocate

It be quite difficult for parents to accept it if a child needs additional support. Sometimes that can be a grieving process for parents, of the child that they thought they were going to have, and they kind of foresee those long-term difficulties. So for some parents, particularly in early years, a lot of that is about supporting the parents on that journey into understanding the importance of additional professionals or putting that extra intervention into place

Educators' Roles: Training

I think, in areas of vulnerability ; there's so many vulnerabilities, I think the family work can be even more important sometimes than what they're providing for the children.

Multi-agency Partnerships and Support

I think a lot of it is about people's confidence and knowledge. I think there's not enough in the training in the Level 3s or even in the degrees, even in my teaching degree I can't think of anything that we did that was really focused on autism for example, or on Down's syndrome or on any of those special needs, anything in my three-year degree that actually helped me to understand that

Multi-agency Partnerships: Barriers

I think funding in every service has been stripped back so much that settings are finding they are identifying children earlier, which is fantastic because it's what we want, but that actually they have nowhere for those children to go or professionals won't see them until they're in their pre-school year, the year before they go to school

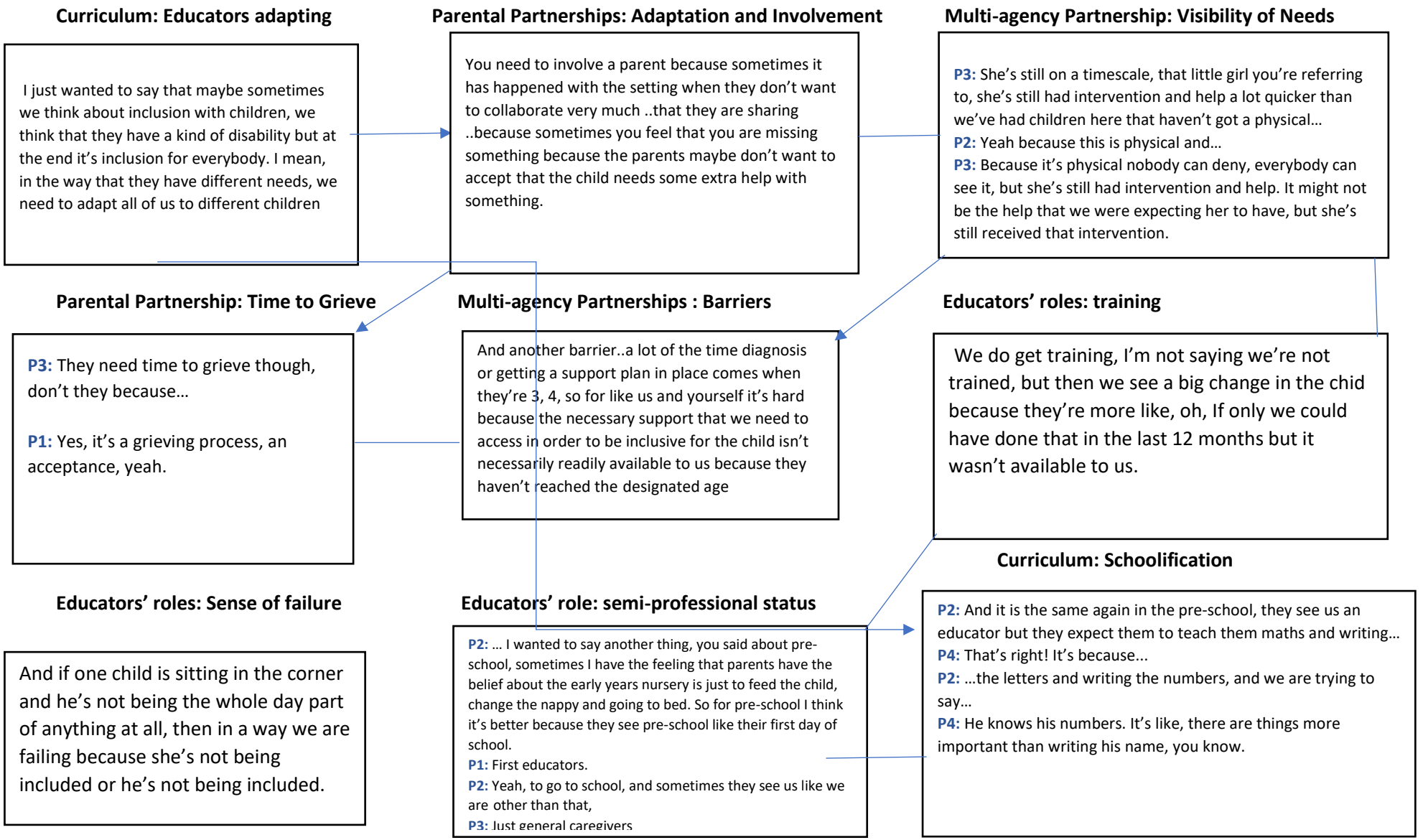
Roles: Semi-professional Status

I think the difficulty is there's a massive disparity there with the fact that more and more is expected of the settings and SENCOs in particular or managers, but actually they still don't have the value and the hierarchy that they should have in terms of the rest of the professionals who work within early years and education. I think that's a real difficult disparity, which is continuing to

Diagnosis : Relief and Justification

I know parents that have gone along the diagnosis route in order to make things easier and they do tend to be parents that understand the education system because actually, if a child has a diagnosis, then it's almost already an acknowledgment that for example lots of children struggle when they go to school and if their child has a diagnosis it almost gives the parent..,.it's about them not wanting the child to be labelled as the naughty child, the child that doesn't listen, the child that can't sit down

Theme Map 6.3-Focus Group 1



Theme Map 6.4-Mary

Curriculum: Additionality/Commonality

I would say we've been differentiating what we've already got for the children so a lot of the environment is free-flow play and then we would look at is it accessible for particular children that might need something additional or different, so then we would adapt it to meet their individual needs on a one-to-one thought basis

Multiagency Partnership: Barriers

I think the biggest difference I'm finding now is for speech and language, the way that they are doing drop-ins. In the past we've always had therapists come in and work with practitioners and parents together, so you've got that triad of the therapist is the expert teaching us and the parents to have a consistent approach. Whereas now they've just kind of withdrawn completely from one-to-one with us, they're doing it at drop-ins with the parents and But it's not inclusive of us any more and I feel like that's really lost for those children.

Curriculum: One-to-One Support

But the difficulty with that then is the other practitioners getting involved with that child because it can become quite exclusive so that person might have so much of their time just with one practitioner and, in terms of inclusion, they should be linking up with all professionals in all areas

Educators'roles: Training

I think communication is a lot of it. I hear a lot of people talking about the child passport or that little one-page profile but, , is that helping with all practitioners' confidence of how to be with a child? I recently did a course called Adapting More Than Words and I would say that developed my confidence hugely as a teacher but now as a SENCO.

Multi-agency Partnerships: Professional Experts

We've got a lot of the skills here to give commentaries to children, we're all very sensitive, but that expert knowledge of really tuning into that specific child and having something really smart to measure to move forward, it means that I've got to try and be in the mind of a speech therapist and I draw on what I know in training to do that for practitioners with parents all the time here.

Parental Partnerships: Parent on Board

I think parents really welcome strategies and ideas. We've got a children's centre so parents are really good, if they want some advice around behaviours that children are displaying they tend to go, and health visitors seem a little bit more on the scene now, whether it's because we're doing our two-year old checks in the centre…

Curriculum: Child-Centred and Flexible

Whereas, I think the early years really foster those relationships with families that meets the children's needs really well and linking with other professionals. Any time we just say, oh we'll have a team around the child meeting, just invite everyone in and things get done, actions happen and it just feels really like the best practice for a child.

Diagnosis: Ticket to Specialist Schools

The majority, I would say, have wanted the EHC because they feel like, if they want to choose a specialist provision it's like a ticket to that.

Specialist and Mainstream: Resource Bases

My ideal would be specialist classrooms within mainstream nurseries, just like I do believe in school really. I think if you had no children with special needs or hardly in mainstream provision the downside is that the children that are mainstream level of need aren't seeing that diversity that is a reality of our community, they're not learning that empathy, they're not learning about difference and diversity and valuing individuals, and how they can have those skills of supporting other children and equally, in a specialist nursery, would those children be having the role models of being in a mainstream smaller little version of society I guess, before they go out into the wider world?

Thematic Table 6.5-Sian

Placement: Values

I feel like it's respect and value all of the children here at the setting and ensuring that all of the children's needs are met and respecting that children are different and unique. I think making sure that the environment and everyone that works here is making sure that those children can access all types of provision and we're not making any barriers for them

Curriculum: Development Matters

I think sometimes that Development Matters isn't really that great for all children. We've tried to use some of the Bristol Differentiated Early Years.. I feel like that allows more variety of different things just like if you use Makaton or visual aids, ..and, you know, not every child is able to follow the Development Matters Early Years Outcome and that might reflect that they're not making any progress, but actually they are making lots of progress

Multi-agency Partnerships: Barriers

I do think that would be beneficial. I feel like there's still a bit of.. not all of the agencies are that joined up yet, but I think that there is, obviously, that's the hope and the vision that they will be joined up and everybody's working together but, I do feel like sometimes it's quite difficult with certain agencies that you try and contact and are unable to come and visit

Placement: One-to-One Support

We have looked at that one to one support quite a lot here and thinking about not just being attached to a child and more making sure that they can access the provision. So just being around to help the child if they do need it but not necessarily just with that adult the whole time because I think it supports the child to be really included more with the other adults and the other children if they're not having just a one to one with them the whole time

SENDCO Role: Training

I feel like now with the national SENCO award that I'm even gaining more knowledge and understanding since I've been on the course and there's obviously so much to learn, especially in early years and primary.. so, I'm really looking forward to just carrying on to.. develop professionally.

SENDCO Role : Lack of confidence

I think that sort of thing can just give practitioners a bit more confidence because some people might not be forthcoming with the fact that they are not very confident ..so by having an inset day where somebody can come in and talk to us about a child's needs.. I think that's been really beneficial just to give everybody a shared knowledge of a child

SENDCO Role: Shared responsibility

Sometimes I'll meet the professionals and sometimes my job share taking responsibility for the funding so the way we work here I think it works really well.. after being on this course and talking to other SENCOs, you know.

Parental Partnerships: Support

We liaise with parents here and we've had mostly positive experiences with the parents here to support their children

Parental Partnerships: Barriers

Also, if parents are not wanting to engage then it can be quite tricky to put things in place for the child without the parents' support

6.4 Concluding comments

This chapter has mapped the complex interactions between parents, educators and external professionals and their impact on the inclusion of children in their care. Parents' roles become critical in the operationalisation of inclusive practices, as their consent is a prerequisite for the referral to external professionals. Through the narratives of the educators, two distinct roles were construed: that of the 'parent in denial' and the 'parent on board'. Each role entailed certain traits and characteristics, which became critical in the establishment and maintenance of partnerships and instigated distinct responses and a responsive shift in the roles of educators.

Partnerships with external professionals were equally fraught, as they were hindered by a number of barriers related to structural, cultural and interpersonal factors. Despite the denigration of the roles of early years educators in policy and practice, they approached partnerships critically. They had adapted practices and demonstrated that they had developed strategies that allowed them to navigate the bureaucratic requirements and idiosyncratic expectations of multiagency partnerships. The study found clear elements of agency and role expansion with early years educators adopting the role of substitute family advocate or pedagogue in an effort to assist families that were unfamiliar with the system.

Chapter 7

7. Opening Comments:

This chapter provides a synopsis of the findings and the policy implications and recommendations that arise from this study. An additional conceptual framework is utilised to provide a supplementary analytic perspective to the dilemmas of difference and reflect upon the decisions made by the educators. The sense of failure experienced by the participants is framed within the current culture of accountability and performativity and analysed within the context of neoliberal regimes. The study explores the role of the SENDCO and highlights the importance of a shared approach to the management of special educational needs underpinned by relevant training that provides practical, transferable pedagogical skills. The formation of the roles of educators in response to their complex interactions with parents and other professionals are framed within the barriers presented by the system.

7.1 Theoricolage

The prevalence of a singular theory as means of explicating a phenomenon or event has been lamented by academics (Citton, 2012; Ford, 2016) on the basis of its narrowness and its tendency to analyse complex events and phenomena on the basis of one singular theory governing one discipline. While theory cannot be discarded entirely -as it is by virtue of its analysis and attention upon events that these come to form our objects of interest-it nonetheless should constitute the departure point of our enquiry rather than its destination.

Ford (2016) notes the scrutiny plaguing theory, which has resulted in its current fragility. He states that theory is 'at risk on two sides, both from the formal rigours of its academic institutionalisation, and from the increasingly austere conditions of higher education that threaten theory's de-institutionalisation, its expulsion from the academy'. As an antidote to the domination of the singular theory, which seeks to impose disciplinarity upon processes,

Citton (2012) proposes an indisciplinary means of theorising, which is based on the notion of 'bricolage'.

'Bricolage' is a concept traced back to Claude Levi-Strauss(Schwandt,1997;Citton,2011) which denotes a researcher's adaptability and capacity to utilise heterogeneous methods and tools to piece together a 'structured solution'(Schwandt,2007,p.11).When applied to theory, bricolage advocates the explication of a process through the adoption of multi-disciplinary theoretical lenses that are not applied horizontally but include vertical connections that take into account the practices that inform and shape our findings. This study has adopted an inductive approach to reasoning, which aims for the dialogic exchange between existing theories and the flexibility that being guided by the findings allows. My quest for phronetic reasoning (Thomas, 2010) has therefore led me to embrace the notion of 'theoricolage' and the theoretical polytheism that it offers.

This study therefore rests upon various theoretical drives and analytical lenses:

- The 'dilemmas of difference' formulated by Berlak and Berlak (1981) and Norwich (2008, 2009, 2014) explicate practitioners' responses to the challenges they face in implementing inclusion in their daily pedagogy and decision- making.
- The notion of the 'communities of practice' (Wenger,2000; Thomas,2013) brings to the fore the partnerships between practitioners, parents and other stakeholders and aims to illustrate how the intersection of the roles and the norms and values adopted by communities serve to erect barriers that distance and 'other' specific groups or populations.
- The morality and ethicality of the teachers' decisions (Colnerud, 2015) are examined against the ethics imposed by previous and extant legal frameworks, their ethics of care, critique and the profession (Shapiro and Stevkovich, 2005; Stevkovich and Bagley,2019) to unveil the complexity of the dilemmas. These are enacted in exchange with the expectations set upon educators by external parameters and result in internalised ethical and professional codes of practice.
- Finally, the ethics of care and the profession are linked to the 'policies of technology' (Ball, 2003) imposed by the state that target educators' managerialism and performativity under the idiosyncratic conditions governing the early years sector.

Their performativity is framed within neoliberalism, which aims to de-regulate and re-regulate their performance and place the failure of policies and interventions upon individuals.

Through the weaving of all these theoretical tools into the findings and analysis, I aim to piece together a 'tapestry' of inclusion in the early years, which is simultaneously multi-disciplinary and 'indiciplined' (Citton, 2012); it does not rest solely upon one explanation but acquiesces that the complexity of life and practice cannot be illustrated adequately through one lens or analytical tool.

This study calls for an approach that encompasses theories but does not distance them from practice .Theory and practice become 'inseparable' and merge to demonstrate the messiness of qualitative enquiry which is subjective and incomplete, yet nuanced and capable of capturing the complexity of pedagogy in practice.

7.2 Dilemmas of difference: Conceptual framework(s)

The findings related to educators' perceptions on the dilemmas of difference clearly demonstrate that, early years educators hold predominantly more positive views towards the inclusion of young children in nurseries (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002) compared to their schools counterparts. The tensions associated with the multiplicity of values underpinning inclusion are clearly evident in the accounts of the educators in this study. The analysis of the dilemmas of difference employs a conceptual framework borrowed by Shapiro and Stevkovich (2005) proposing that educational leaders can adopt an approach that takes into account several ethical dimensions when engaging with complex dilemmas that require practical resolutions (Lashley, 2007; Robson and Martin, 2019). The framework consists of four interdependent perspectives: justice, critique, care and the profession. The ethics of justice call upon educators to consider the legal framework of their decision making. The ethics of critique draw attention to the silenced and underrepresented voices of the people whose lives these decisions affect. The perspective on care emphasises the fluid nature of relationships between educators, children and other stakeholders and should be guided by uncontested moral values such as empathy and beneficence. Finally, the concept of

professionalism sets out the values and moral principles that define and are subsumed within a role.

Stefkovich and Bagley (2019) note, when faced with complex moral dilemmas, educators and educational leaders tend to resort to decisions that refer to a 'child's best interests'; the term according to the authors is highly situated and relative upon individual children. In putting the individual child at the heart of practice and assuring them that they will be treated with fairness and respect, it is deducted that all children will be treated in the same manner. In some cases this results in the needs of the individual being considered against the background of the needs of the other individuals who are guaranteed the same treatment: 'Thus, rights carry with them responsibilities, so much so that the rights of one individual should not bring harm to the group'(Stevkovich and Bagley,2019). The consideration of a child's best interests is complex and interdependent on rights as dictated by judicial systems, responsibilities and uncontested moral values such as respect and autonomy (Colnerud, 2015). When making decisions related to the placement of a child into a nursery, the identification of their needs, and the provision of appropriate educational and care provisions, these multifactorial dimensions have to be taken into account. Robson and Martin (2019) assert that learning taken from the observation of mechanisms that underpin decision making at micro level between educators, parents and community provides a useful insight into early childhood education leadership, which is conceptualised as everyday practice. This study has expanded this understanding from leadership to early childhood inclusive and exclusive practices. The vagueness of a child's best interest can be exploited and leads to decisions that are governed by a setting's financial efficacy and cost efficiency, lack of resourcing or the educators' perceived capacity in dealing with a wide diversity of children. All these factors were evident in the educators' narratives.

7.2.1 Dilemmas of difference: Placement

The participants in this study embraced a moderate view of inclusion which pledged support towards a 'continuum of provision' (Norwich, 2008), ranging from specialist to mainstream nurseries, although the majority felt that these schools should take the form of 'hybrid

settings' (Norwich, 2010). This entailed resource bases being located within mainstream nurseries with the aim of promoting socialisation and diversity. The educators felt that the benefits of these hybrid settings would be two- fold: they would allow children with special needs access to specialist resources while providing access to mainstream communities and fostering a sense of belonging. For the remainder of the children, their socialisation with children possessing a wide range of abilities would expose them to the diversity of various communities and induct them into society. In their majority, the participants in this study viewed the education of children not as 'a means to an end' (Norwich, 2014) with the end goal being their inclusion into society, but as a process of developing a sense of belonging into the nursery's community practices. Although the sense of belonging constituted an integral aspect of the notion of inclusion it was overshadowed by the predominance of welfare concerns and the establishment of normative behavioural standards that ultimately guided their resolutions.

Inclusion, in the minds of the early years educators, thus remained conditional and relative (Evans and Lunt, 2001; Clough and Nutbrown, 2004) upon a number of factors related to the child's perceived nature of needs and the settings' and educators' threshold of tolerance. This level appeared socially and individually constructed with educators having difficulties articulating established thresholds. Generally, children who required specialist medical support or had complex needs were deemed as the most likely candidates to attend specialist settings (Imray and Colley, 2017; Warnock, 2010; Lawson and Jones, 2018). Specialist settings and children's centres were exhorted by the majority of educators for their abundance of resources, staff expertise and capacity to provide a safe haven for a small proportion of children whose needs could not be met in mainstream (Blackburn,2016; Wilde and Avramidis 2011; Warnock 2010). This is unsurprising given a recent report by the government on maintained nursery schools (Paull and Popov, DfE, 2019) and their capacity to cater for diverse populations, particularly disadvantaged children and children with SEND. These schools were praised for the quality of educational provisions (proven by the higher Ofsted judgements in comparison to PVI settings) and their system quality (the calibre and qualifications of their staff) which is conducive to better outcomes for children. Historically, children's centres, state-run nursery classes and maintained nursery schools have been associated with the provision of specialist and additional services for children and families. More significantly,

these settings receive supplementary funding, compared to PVI settings, which is seen to enhance their ability to resource provision for children with special educational needs.

Framed within the conceptual framework provided by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), the educators align with the ethics of justice reasoning provided by the SEND code (DfE, DoH, 2015). This emphasises inclusion in mainstream settings on the proviso that, the education of the child is not deemed incompatible with their peers. These 'conditionality clauses' according to Liasidou (2008) serve as excuses for 'empowered' social actors to enforce segregation. This was not a view shared by the educators of this study. Although overall supportive of specialist nurseries, they did not relinquish their responsibilities unless they perceived that all efforts had been exhausted. The ethics of care demonstrated in the narratives are underpinned by a multiplicity of values often seen as contrasting (Norwich 2014). The value of belonging, although hailed as integral in the establishment of inclusive communities, was abandoned by educators in favour of the settings' capacity to safeguard and protect both the children with special needs and their peers. Child protection has saturated narratives and is, according to Dunne (2009,) an indication of government rhetoric infiltrating practices and becoming synonymous with exemplary versions of pedagogy. These directives are reinforced by the EYFS (DfE, 2017) and monitored by Ofsted; thus, they constitute fundamental elements of practitioners' 'surveillance' and validate or discredit their ability to provide a safe and secure environment. A culture of culpability and accountability is promoted through inspections. This culture promotes an inclusive rhetoric, yet reifies structures that serve to exclude populations of children whose educational needs are incompatible with the normative set standards, on account of their idiosyncrasies and child protection concerns.

Educators' skills in maintaining an orderly class were viewed as an inextricable aspect of a cohesive early years community. By setting certain normative behaviour expectations and standards that all participants are expected to abide by, the educators contradicted the goal of inclusion which focuses upon creating diverse communities that embrace all differences, including children's variance of abilities and different means of expressing feelings. Instead their views aligned with an archaic notion of integration which focuses upon the child fitting into a largely unchanged system of behavioural norms (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). By sanctioning compliant behaviour and aiming towards a harmonious environment that

rewarded specific attitudes and behaviours, they invariably 'othered' children with SEND, particularly the ones who were seen to be impulsive and aggressive (Warming, 2011). There appeared to be a tacit acknowledgement of the reciprocity of responsibility placed upon both educators as well as families and young children to behave in a certain manner (Stefkovich and Bagley, 2019). On the part of the educators the overarching responsibility focused on maintaining and clearly demonstrating these standards to parents and Ofsted. The educators acknowledged the burden of top-down accountability and constructed themselves as vulnerable due to the enhanced pressure placed upon them by educational and legislative directives to account for the safety and well- being of all children. At the same time, children with SEND were considered vulnerable as they were seen to pose a risk to themselves and other children (Dalkilic and Vadenbconceuer, 2016).

The ethics of the educators' profession revolved around their accountability and vulnerability which called upon them to be reflective and evaluative of child protection and safeguarding concerns (Ball, 2013). Equally, their admission of the inability to cater for some children was plagued by feelings of guilt (Farouk, 2013) and attestations that every other measure had been taken before the decision to exclude the child was made. These discussions were permeated by an ethics of critique and educators expressed guilt and appeared cognisant of the potential inequity or construed mistreatment of a child such a decision could effect. Educators, in their effort to meet standards associated with the protection of children sometimes sacrificed the education and care provisions of children with SEND, who are seen as more likely to constitute a hazard to themselves and others. The former children's behaviour was perceived to have a destabilising effect on a setting's ability to comply with behavioural norms and exhibit high standards of desirable behavioural compliance. Given that the majority of PVI settings operate under market conditions, the educators feel obliged to meet consumer demands and parents are viewed as customers who have a right to a safe, orderly and organised environment. Educators' inability to conform to these expectations falls short of both Ofsted and consumer standards and has repercussions on their settings and their professional reputation.

It becomes evident from these accounts that some early years educators are not prepared to teach children with special educational needs (Chadwell *et al,* 2020). Once again, the issue of policy implications surface with reference to the training provided to early years educators to

enable them to meet the responsibilities of teaching all children. By designating children's centres and maintained nursery classes as the predominant providers of children with SEND, these children are removed from the remit of educators deployed in the PVI sector.

7.2.2 Policy Implications and Recommendations

This study highlights the policy implications of the competitive market conditions associated with early childhood services and the diversity of funding provisions between state run and PVI settings. Financial funding provisions in the early years in relation to inclusion, particularly in PVI setting, are non-existent and although research frequently focuses upon educators' shortcomings in relation to beliefs and the attitudinal barriers they erect, there is an equal valid case to be argued in favour of putting the adequate infrastructure in place that could support inclusivity while addressing the entrenched and resistant views of educators. The current mixed market system of early years provision is highly problematic as the private, voluntary and independent sector is subjected to market dynamics (Lloyd, 2015) that create precarious financial conditions for both small family run nurseries and bigger childcare businesses. The current system of delivery of early childhood care and provisions as well as the financing provisions that are currently governing the system need to be reconsidered by future governments. Early education and care are currently perceived by the government as a purchasable commodity instead of a universal good. This commodity is accessible to parents – consumers, who possess the educational and financial capital to purchase -parents who lack the ability to buy their way into this market as well as children who have special needs are viewed as outcasts.

7.3 Dilemmas of difference: Diagnosis

The early years educators in this study grappled with the tension of identifying a child's special educational needs; they acknowledged that the designation may stigmatise the child. However, the increasing pressures put upon them, in the form of the government's adherence and promotion of early intervention as means of improving outcomes for the

children and their families (Allen, 2011; Guralnick, 2011; Mengoni and Oates, 2015), have installed them in a position of surveillance (Watson, 2018) which requires them to act early to secure the scarce support and funding that is associated with an EHCP. The progress check at the age of two reinforces the emphasis upon the early identification of a child's strengths and weaknesses and seeks to distinguish children who are not meeting the standards or deviate from the average from the very beginning of their lives (Runswick-Cole,2011). The concept of school readiness associated with early intervention (Allen 2011) has infiltrated the early years sector. Participants in this study viewed this as a failure of the school system to provide an adequate inclusive culture to support a diverse population of children. As a result, the onus was placed on early years settings to conduct the monitoring (Thomas and Loxley, 2007) required, through observations and premature assessments, and expose the child's needs to the school in an explicit manner (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2010). The participants felt that children's identification would provide the school teachers with the justification to make allowances and treat the children differently. Despite the diagnosis conceived as a facilitator to differentiation, the homogenising of populations of individual children on the basis of their difference or (dis)ability was problematised by the participants in this study who felt that children are individual and unique and should be treated accordingly. The 'one size fits all' approach (King-Sears, 2008) was dismissed in favour of a child-centred approach that focused on getting to know the child as an individual. An additional ethics of profession infiltrated the analysis of the children's diagnosis through this theme, which added upon the notion of accountability discussed in the previous sections and assigned the role of 'primary surveyor' (Watson, 2018) to educators.

Despite the dismissal of prescriptive strategies as capable of addressing the needs of certain populations (Thomas and Loxley, 2007), educators contradicted themselves by confirming that rooting behaviour to the pathology of the children would provide an excuse for children to behave differently without being judged harshly, and for teachers to put differentiated plans into place and to apply different rules or make exceptions for them.

Nevertheless, the stigma attached to a diagnosis and the young age of a child burdened the conscience of some participants, who felt that children required time to develop at their own pace, and a holistic observation approach was required, which should take into account their cultural capital and the impact of social factors on their behaviour before any formal

judgements were made. Other educators noted the transience of certain labels (Danforth and Rhodes, 1997) that appeared to have become more prominent in recent years due to a heightened awareness and a resurgence of applied behaviourist approaches to treat certain populations (Shyman, 2015). They noted that some of these labels are ephemeral. Essentially, labels and diagnoses were mainly advocated in the case of children, whose needs were deemed severe and complex. Children, whose needs were mild, had educators torn as they felt that, as their needs did not meet a diagnostic threshold, the children would not secure the funding and support associated with an Education and Health Care Plan (Kerrins, 2014) and they were doomed to become lost in the system. The notion of children 'slipping through the net' dominated narratives; these children were considered the victims of inappropriate demarcations between professional agencies (Barnes, 2007) and pointed to the failure of the SEND code to make appropriate provisions for children falling under the SEN support category (Commons, 2019). The educators' ethics of care in relation to diagnosis urged them to act in what they felt was the child's best interest by securing the necessary funding provisions whatever the cost to the child-in this case the benefits were counterbalanced by the acknowledgement of stigma and labelling.

What becomes evident from these accounts is the educators' concerns about accommodating a stimulating environment for a population of variant needs; they perceive that children with mild needs may become neglected due to the teachers' failure to ascertain the exact nature of needs and secure funding, while the 'acting out' children come under the remit of special education provision, due to the severity of their needs and attract funding to operationalise special support. Despite the mild protestations, the majority of educators appeared to adopt a 'pragmatic' stance that weighed the benefits against the drawbacks of the process: a significant majority felt that the only means of securing the scarce funding (Arishi et al, Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007; Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2010) dispensed to the early years setting was to obtain the SEND label and thus acquiesced. Furthermore, they noted that the stigma often preceded a diagnosis (Riddick, 2000) and that children with SEND were 'othered' on the basis of the differences in their behaviour by parents and other children. As a result, demeaning labels were already assigned to these children -the children and their parents were ostracised by the community or ignored.

A diagnosis was, according to some practitioners, conceived by some parents as a relief and opportunity to rid themselves of the self and societal blame that plagued them (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007; Broomhead, 2013). The diagnosis provided a medical justification that accounted for their child's behaviour on the basis of their pathology thus alleviating them from the implications that their parenting skills were insufficient and had directly resulted in their child's deviance. For other practitioners the issuing of an Education and Health Care plan provided parents enhanced parental rights (Norwich,2014) by offering the choice to select specialist provisions or a setting of choice for the child and placed a legal responsibility upon local authorities to regularly review a child's provision and put strategies into place to secure their ongoing support. It was viewed as the ticket or passport to high quality provision and interagency support (Warnock, 2010). Overall, the educators were not averse to a diagnosis or label although they proffered that if support and funding was readily available, the need for a diagnosis or an EHCP would become obsolete.

7.3.1 Policy Implications and Recommendations

Contrary to children's centres and nursery schools that benefit from the supplementary funding for SEND, funding provided to PVI is attached to individual children with special needs; it is calculated on the basis of their attendance and in most cases, it is allocated after the child reaches preschool age. As a result of the scarce resourcing, an EHCP has become necessity if the setting is to receive financial assistance to support the child. As the majority of educators in this study held substantial experience of the legalities associated with a diagnosis and the issuing of an EHC plan, they had developed an ethics of justice that focussed upon providing the child with their rightful entitlement. To achieve this, they knew they had to follow that route; essentially the identification of needs or a diagnosis in their mind has become synonymous with support. This irregularity and inconsistencies of funding practices from one local authority to the other (Curran *et al*,2017;Sales and Vincent,2018)) and the variance between resourcing assigned to compulsory schooling and early years settings, particularly in the PVI sector, presents a significant challenge to the education of young children with special educational needs. It unveils structural inequities at a macro, meso and micro policy level that needs to be addressed to enable early years settings to obtain funding

towards the resourcing, training and the accommodation of appropriate educational environments for all children including children with SEND.

Currently the funding flow for SEND in the PVI sector is governed by an 'input model' (Pijl,2014) where the allocation of funds is based on the assessment of needs of an individual child; it is attached to children and thus necessitates that they become diagnosed or fulfil other eligibility or local authority threshold criteria to secure it. Maintained nursery schools and children's centres receive 'throughput' funding, which is not necessarily based on the number of students but linked to the tasks and services the school is expected to offer to these populations (Pijl, 2014). Although both models are perceived to have disadvantages with the input model considered to be conducive to strategic manipulation by stakeholders while the throughput model prone to activating setting/school inertia, a combination of both models could alleviate some of the issues encountered in this study. Particularly in relation to PVI settings as the input model has become synonymous with the identification and funding, it has cultivated a tendency among parents and educators to actively seek a diagnosis or EHCP. Although utilising the throughput model could introduce further complexity in the PVI sector, it could equally detract from the culture of SEND overidentification. A throughput model could place a requirement upon PVI settings to accept and facilitate places for a specified percentage of children thus eliminating some of the inequalities reported in recent Parliamentary inquiries (Commons, 2019). The funding could be used in a variety of ways to support children-it could take the form of additional resources, training for all staff or supplementary staff to enhance ratios.

This model of provision could become subject to manipulation with the aim of producing a financial profit unless carefully monitored. It would however remove the need to seek an early diagnosis or EHCP for young children in a large number of cases. Moreover, it would allow educators in the PVI sector to teach a diverse population of children instead of encouraging the ghettoisation of children with SEND in children's centres and thus removing them from the remit of a large proportion of early years practitioners. If successive governments are to persevere with the current quasi market conditions permeating the early childhood care and education provisions, there needs to be a careful reconsideration of the funding mechanisms deployed to support inclusion with specific reference to the idiosyncrasies of the PVI sector.

7.4 Dilemmas of difference: Curriculum

The area of the curriculum appeared to be unique in that the ethics of justice in this section were limited compared to the dilemmas related to the identification and placement of a child, which appear to be heavily legislated upon or fall outside their professional remit. Despite the legal requirement to the EYFS adherence, the pedagogy and activities offered to children were governed by educators' ethics of care, critique and profession. Although the EYFS guidelines stipulate the prime and specific areas of the curriculum, educators felt that they had more control over the daily routine and educational provisions of the children in their care. The values that predominated in this theme were child-centred and focussed on offering provisions that were meaningful and considered children's individual needs. The early years curriculum was described as fluid and flexible by some practitioners, who acknowledged that they had relative freedom, compared to reception classes and schools, to exercise agency and provide activities that revolved around children's interests; at the same time they accepted that by the end of reception year the children were expected to achieve a set of predetermined targets (Bradbury, 2019). They proffered examples of good inclusive practice for all, which were based on a continuum of provision that considered the common needs of all children while simultaneously providing stimulating opportunities for individual children (Norwich and Lewis, 2004).

Strogilos *et al* (2016) have asserted that teachers in his study had difficulties distinguishing between differentiation as an individual and context-oriented approach and adopted an approach to differentiated pedagogy that aimed to eradicate individual difference or deviances. Although the views of the early years educators in this study, in relation to placements and diagnoses could be perceived as more closely aligned to the traditional medical model of disability at times, they appeared to break with tradition in regards to their teaching practice and pedagogy which embraced a social model of ability and was heavily context focussed. The teaching and activities they offered to the children were responding to their perceived levels of readiness, their particular interest and their learning styles thus embodying a holistic view of differentiation as a pedagogical rather than organisational approach (Tomlinson 2003).

According to Janney and Snell (2006, p.216) the appropriateness of pedagogical adaptations should be judged on two criteria: their capacity to facilitate social and instructional participation and in so doing using means that are only as 'special as necessary'. The participants in this study have articulated a range of curricular, instructional and alternative approaches (Strogilos *et al*, 2016) which appear to meet the needs of the children in their care effectively. In their majority they aimed to ensure that, the provisions on offer although addressed at specific children, remained common for all and they managed to achieve this through the 'emancipation of play for children' (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2010). This study emphasises the importance of free play and open-ended activities and resources in the provision of an equitable curricular provision that allowed children opportunities for expression and representation of their chosen channels of communications, experiences and cultural capital (Eke *et al*, 2009).Play was open to all and although resources were set up, the means by which children experimented and explored the material was open to them ;educators perceived the gains and goals achieved through these activities to be different depending on the child's individual needs and interests.

The educators exhorted the benefits of small group activities that allowed children to learn from peers (Janney and Snell 2006) and flexible routines that focused on children's choices and allowed them to develop independence and feel valued for their contribution. The institutionalisation of free flow routines and small groups throughout the day and the deployment of circuit activities offered the actualisation of an equitable curricular provision (Lalvani, 2015). The examples proffered by the educators in this study are consistent with a Universal Design for Learning paradigm(UDL) which is seen to overcome the 'one size fits all' approach in favour of a model that involves children in their own learning and assessment(King-Sears 2008).The participants accomplished the three clusters incorporated in the UDL by representing new experiences in an enticing manner, provoking the engagement of children through small group activities and by encouraging them to express themselves in different ways. In addition, they enabled another personal capacity in the child, that of developing ownership of the curriculum and 'personal agency' (Markstrom, 2010) through the institutionalisation of free play and the establishment of flexible routines and free-flow routines. The sense of ownership, evoked by certain activities and the familiarisation of routines, was considered critical in allowing the child to develop agency and

released them from the passivity of being the recipients of professional wisdom and transformed them into active and autonomous agents (Cefai *et al*, 2015). In addition, children's joint sharing of 'recurring class routines' are seen as an essential aspect of participating and developing a sense of belonging in a community (Erwin and Guintini, 2010). Although torn between common and personalised provision at times, the pedagogical 'craft' skill of the educators in this study (Black-Hawkins and Florian, 2012)**,** their tacit knowledge and understanding of what works in inclusive educational practice, was articulated clearly and demonstrated that, where the top-down, legal policy constraints are relaxed, educators are capable of demonstrating agency and providing good inclusive practices for all. The 'schoolification' (Bradbury, 2019) of early years dominated the discussions among early years practitioners –they reported doctoring transition forms given to reception classes and intentionally lowering children's performance in relation to the age bands of the Development Matters(Early Education, DfE, 2012) to give children the opportunity to settle into the reality of a new, highly demanding academic environment and provide their reception class counterparts with the opportunity to evidence their own teaching capacity through the achievement of measurably improved EYFSP profile results .

7.4.1 Policy Implications and Recommendations

The educators in this study called for the EYFS to shift from the prime and specific areas of learning towards a curriculum that places dispositions in its core (Carr, 2001) and enacts the values of belonging and participation in a way that does not favour certain populations or individuals. They refuted specialist pedagogies or distinct approaches that are perceived to correspond to specific subgroups of children (Thomas and Loxley, 2007) and called for the implementation of certain augmentative communication approaches (such as Makaton) as a common inclusive approach that benefits all children. The practitioners were critical of the 'Development Matters'(Early Education,Dfe,2012)non-statutory guidelines and asserted that the statements were broad and generic and thus failed to capture and accurately record the nuances and complexities of children's growth and progress. They reported that the classification of children into chronological age bands upset the parents and categorised the children as 'advanced' or' backwards' thus inadvertently labelling them before they were diagnosed or issued with an EHCP. The majority of educators felt that the document was

written with normative development in mind, and could not record the personalised progress children with SEND made. This forced them to resort to the utilisation of alternative documentation which was devised by local educational authorities and incorporated differentiated outcomes specifically for children who did not meet the linear trajectory of development reflected in the 'Development Matters'. The compartmentalisation of learning areas and the tendency to 'break down' skills, concepts and bodies of knowledge (Goddard, 2007) was considered simplistic and erroneous.

The unequivocal condemnation of the 'Development Matters' (Early Education, Dfe,2012) guidelines should act as an impetus to reconsider its usefulness in early years pedagogy; the educators in this study perceive it as a monitoring tool which mainly serves to expose difference and designate it as deviance. Although non-statutory, the guidance permeates all aspects of assessments and acts as a precursor to the ascertainment of children's school readiness. This study calls for the abolition of any prescriptive guidance that aims to compartmentalise children's learning in the early years. A document based on dispositions and attitudes would enable early years practitioners to record children's progress based on their specific interests and celebrate goals and achievements, even if these are small and not presenting in a linear fashion.

7.5 The role of the SENDCO and Educators in Inclusion: Sense of failure

The findings of this study indicate that early years educators experience a profound sense of failure in meeting the needs of the children in their care, particularly children with SEND. The feelings they internalise are exacerbated against the background of neoliberal policies that construct corresponding policy technologies: the market, managerialism, responsibilisation and performativity (Ball, 2013; Hellawell, 2018; Osgood, 2010). Early years educators are expected to 'perform' inclusion, while taking into account the requirements of all parents as consumers (Flewitt and Nind, 2007) and demonstrating the measurable impact of the strategies they have put into place to support the children in their care. Thus, subscribing to highly bureaucratic procedures that accompany the recording of evidence and information on children. The visibility enforced upon them by Ofsted and inspection regimes places both

children and educators in an untenable position where they are measured and judged against criteria that fall within normative standards and clearly set out desirable behaviours and measurable welfare outcomes. Within the climate, managers and heads, particularly in PVI settings where market conditions prevail and profit making is the objective, 'would be unlikely to 'invest' in work with children with special needs, where the margins for improved performance are limited'(Ball,2013 p.223) and the settings are set to lose financially through their presence.

The 'datafication' of children (Bradbury,2019) constructs children as measurable objects whose value and worth is judged on the basis of their ability to meet predetermined goals and criteria set by documents such as the 'Development Matters' (Early Education, Dfe, 2012)and place them in a failing trajectory before they even commence schooling. Furthermore, in PVI settings their worth is measured by their ability to contribute to the setting's profit making rather than extricate precious and scarce resources from the care of others.

Ball (2003, p.219) asserts that 'the act of teaching and the subjectivity of the teacher are both profoundly changed within the new management panopticism (of quality and excellence) and the new forms of entrepreneurial control (through marketing and competition)'. The early years educators' role and identities are shaped in interaction with the new expectations-as one of the early years educators in this study stated it was not enough to provide a high quality of inclusive care but you had to prove you were doing it. As the educators are struggling to reconcile the requirements of the curriculum attainment against the directives to include all children and meet the responsibilities set upon them, they internalise feelings of failure and demonstrate self-doubt and anxiety (Hellawell, 2018) in relation to their skills and expertise.

The reflexive practitioner, who is meant to evaluate their own performance and strives to continuously improve, subsequently places the blame for the failure of inclusion upon themselves. The participants in this study experience guilt; their emotions of self-blame are articulated as a sense of failure towards the child with special educational needs and/or their peers. They do not necessarily perceive themselves as causally responsible (Farouk, 2012) for the difficult decisions they have to make as they perceive some of these to be the dictated by a rigid 'top-down' method of performing inclusion and exclusion. Particularly in relation to

the placement and identification of children, they proclaim that they have to follow established institutionalised procedures, if they wish to obtain funding and resources. They perceive to have low control of the procedures and processes that guide the identification and placement of children. Although they do not feel they can deviate from these procedures, they nonetheless feel that they have fallen short of their own ethical code of caring and educating children, which calls upon them to include all children and be fair while tending to their individual needs. This ethical code calls upon them to not relinquish the care of these children to others, unless all other options have been exhausted. When, despite the measures they have put in place, they are deemed to have underperformed in relation to their capability to meet the needs of the child while satisfying the external requirements set upon them by parents and regulatory bodies, their feelings of guilt are exacerbated. The moral clash of values that underpin the 'fairness dilemmas' (Colnerud, 2015) becomes evident in their conviction they have failed the children.

Educators too are perceived to be in need of remediation (as is the case of children with special educational needs) due to their lower qualifications and defective teaching abilities. Rather than admitting that the system is failing educators, parents and children on the basis of its institutionalised shortfalls (Wedell, 2013) the failure of inclusion is based upon individual stakeholders. Slee's call (2008) for the deconstruction of the regular school and the construction of new structures of schooling becomes crucial and applicable to the early years sector. Trnka and Trundle (2014) analyse the concept of responsibilisation that is created by the self-governance regimes placed upon professionals by neoliberalist ideology and claim that although certain choices may be sacrificed, other forms of autonomy may emerge as a result. Despite the guilt and contradictions experienced by early years educators in this study in relation to the dilemmas of difference (Norwich, 2008, 2009, 2014), there are aspects of agency and elements of empowerment they exhibit, particularly in relation to their pedagogy and interagency and educational collaborations. Their agentic responses will be analysed in more detail in the next sections.

In contrast to the solitude and isolation of choices seen to be placed upon professionals through neoliberalist technologies, what appears to distinguish the responsibilities the participants in this study assume, is their interdependence to 'relations of care'. The decisions they make, however inclusive or exclusive, are justified on the basis of the welfare of the child

(Trnka and Trundle, 2014). Ball (2003) asserts that the teaching profession is consigned to working on the children rather than with the children, due to the requirement to produce auditable outputs. This appears to be the case with the early years educators in this study whose relations of care are not always governed by selfless interest and empathy but are at times characterised by a 'detached' emotionality which gives them the opportunity to make difficult decisions, extricate themselves from the intimacy and emotiveness that everyday relationships with the children engender, and make the difficult decision to exclude. This finding comes into contrast with previous research (Colley, 2006) which emphasises the importance of early years educators 'labouring with feeling'. Although meaningful relationships have been described as a prerequisite in the establishment of 'sustained shared thinking' (Sylva *et al,* 2004)- the epitome of quality early years practice-the overt display of emotions is tautological with a maternal discourse. Despite emphasising the importance of close relationships, the opportunity to have a degree of emotional detachment, particularly in relation to the parents of the children, allows educators to remain 'objective'. Their conduct serves to distance them from the maternal discourse, which is perceived to de-professionalise early years, and distinguishes them from higher order professionals.

It is evident that the internalisation of failure cannot be attributed solely to neoliberalist technologies; it also appears to be rooted in the denigration of the roles of early years educators to that that of the 'generic care giver' who is accountable to the parent-consumer and is not perceived to be appropriately qualified to approach parents with concerns. Osgood (2009,2010) has analysed the professionalism of early years educators' who are depicted as lacking in skills, knowledge, abilities and whose professionalism is tainted by gender discrimination and class inferiority. The early years educators are fully aware of these limitations and articulate the disparity between their roles and those of qualified school teachers, who are seen to occupy a higher rank in the knowledge and professionalism hierarchy. The status of the former is diminished; their pay, views and professionalism are viewed with suspicion by the state (Osgood, 2009) which has made concerted efforts to re-regulate early years through intensive curriculum enforcement and successive educational and legislative directives. Despite this, early years educators assume a collective persona grounded upon uncontested moral values and characteristics that enable them to advocate for parents of children with special needs, who are perceived as lacking in parenting skills and

knowledge, and for their children who are lacking in ability. Therein lies the paradox of the 'defective' or 'oppressed' representing the interests of other oppressed populations.

Trnka and Trundle (2014) assert that relations of care are not devoid of power struggles and differentials; on the contrary they constitute complex exchanges where power is negotiated. The SENDCOs and early years educators in this study become embroiled in power exchanges and partnerships with parents and external professionals which become 'uncomfortable and conflicted' (ibid) at times. Despite this, early years educators seem to demonstrate agentic responses that are not restricted to 'passive resistance' (Bradbury, 2014) but encompass a range of strategies they have come to master (Payler and Georgeson, 2013) that enable them to provide support to parents and children.

7.5.1 The role of the SENDCO and Educators in Inclusion: A shared approach and the requirements for training

The role of the SENDCO is often described in research as both strategic and managerial; the levels of bureaucracy associated with the collation of information, recording of evidence and formalised paperwork calls for the development of corresponding sophisticated skills. On the other hand, the partnerships with a range of professionals and parents as stakeholders and the onus on the establishment of interagency collaboration (Norwich and Eaton,2015) infers a strategic element which places the SENDCO in a relevant leadership structure to effect higher order decision making (Abbott,2006). Although both elements of the role capacity are evident in the educators' narratives, the early years SENDCOS involved in this study embrace a shared approach with regards to the leadership of inclusive practices. This enables them to liaise with their teams and develop cohesive team approaches that disseminate knowledge and training, ensures that parents receive continuity of care and enables them to relieve the burdens associated with their enhanced accountability and the paperwork requirements of the role.

The majority of early years participants highlight the significance of local SENDCO networks and the support mechanisms these informal fora offer in building their confidence (Wedell, 2015a) and allowing them to develop a knowledge of local support groups and structures they

could call upon to enable them to obtain additional information. Equally, they are deeply aware of the significance of formal training to develop transferable skills and knowledge they could implement in a range of cases. Some of the practitioners ascribe the development of sound pedagogical practices to the SENDCO award. The majority of participants view impairment specific training as simplistic and focus on the expansion of practical pedagogical strategies, such as differentiation and personalised learning, as means of building their confidence and enriching their teaching. In this respect they veer away from a model that focuses solely upon pathognomic views of children with special needs towards one that acknowledges the importance of good teaching as significant in the enactment of inclusion and the removal of some barriers. The role of the SENDCO, despite the participants' commitment to a shared approach implies highly skilled work which often occurs at the boundaries (Edwards et al,2010) of various zones of interagency work and cannot be restricted to pedagogical knowledge but requires an awareness of the multiple accountabilities(Hellawell,2018) and challenges these partnerships present.

7.4.2 Policy Implications and Recommendations

Given the disparity of training levels and qualifications observed in the early years sector(Osgood 2009), the need for experiential learning (Kearns,2005) is of great significance in the development of functional skills that acknowledge the complexity of the role of early years educators while simultaneously allowing individuals to work at differential levels that correspond to their qualification. Further, such work could focus on an analysis of real case studies to generate the development of problem-solving skills that the complex ethical dilemmas of inclusion pose. Moreover, training for teachers and early years educators should aim to enhance their knowledge and understanding of differentiation with an emphasis on the practical aspects of pedagogy rather than the heavy focus observed upon the theoretical dimensions of SEND pathology. Furthermore, this study indicates that the roles of early years educators and SENDCOs are expanding rapidly in response to policy formulation and the opportunity to work with a range of various professionals and obtain an insight into their roles would enable them to grasp the skills and abilities that working at the interface of service provision may entail. In addition, the role should not be envisaged as performed by a sole

person/ leader but could become the responsibility of a team thus detracting from the notion of one person as the gatekeeper of 'special knowledge and expertise'.

7.6 Educational Partnerships

7.6.1 The interplay between the multiple roles of practitioners and parents

The role and expected responsibilities of the parent in the inclusion process does not stand in isolation but is formed and re-shaped continuously in response to their complex interactions with professionals within a specific context, which is framed by multiple cultural and societal variables. Consequently, the role of all key stakeholders in inclusion (including parents) in this study are not static but characterised by a dynamic fluidity which led to the adoption of multiple roles on behalf of various individuals-some of which co-existed harmoniously while other times they became adversarial and antagonistic (Osgood 2012).

Despite the government's pledges to install the parents in a position of authority at all levels, research (Runswik-Cole and Hodge, 2008) indicates that the role of the parent is more precarious and less valued in relation to the policy depiction and prescription. Their findings are consistent with the role of the parent constructed by the participants in this study, who welcomed the notion of the parents 'being on board' particularly during the process of the identification and establishment of a collaborative partnership, while concurrently viewing the parents as vulnerable due to their emotional attachment to their child. This constructed 'vulnerability' is seen as a hindrance in the process of the SEND support and creates tensions at both the personal and interactional levels. In viewing the parent as a 'subjective participant' who is often in denial of the 'reality' of their child's needs, the participants demonstrated an adherence to a traditional or medicalised model of inclusion (Thomas and Loxley, 2007) which values the views of the 'objective experts' who possess the child development expertise to make objective and reliable judgements. Todd (2007) adds to this debate by highlighting the role societal norms perform in reproducing the role of less competent parents and pitting it against that of the paid professional thus devaluing the knowledge and disturbing the equilibrium of an equal partnership.

In the case of parents displaying this notion of denial or vulnerability, there was a responsive shift in the role of the early years' practitioners from that of equal partner to one of 'expert professional' or 'substitute family advocate', whose job is to guide the parents in their journey towards the recognition of their child's needs and eventual acceptance of an 'objective reality'. Early years practitioners' restrained emotional attachment, in contrast to parents' heavy and long-term emotional investment (Broomhead, 2018; Hellawell 2017), appeared to lead to the creation of an unequal partnership. This relied heavily on the practitioner to maintain and sustain through the adoption of an 'in loco parentis' stance (Broomhead, 2013) in order to enable external professionals' involvement with the child and the progression of the SEND identification process which was considered essential in the process of inclusion. Despite the constructed vulnerability of the parent in some cases, all participants expressed the view that practice cannot be truly inclusive without the prior consent and agreement of the parent.

The SEND Code (DfE,DoH, p.86) is unequivocal in its directive to include and involve parents in the SEND plans for their child. Although the form this information may take varies from one setting to the other and may depend on the practitioners' relationship with the parent and dictated by setting policies or head teachers' approaches to inclusion (Broomhead,2018), the establishment of a communication channel is an inescapable fact that inadvertently transfers power back to the parent. The parent thus becomes the driving force in the relationship and their perceived 'refusal to cooperate' is seen as a barrier in the adoption of inclusive practices. When this occurs, the practitioners often operationalise subtle techniques or coercion to navigate themselves in the special educational needs process (Ng et al ,2015) in a direction that they feel would be beneficial to the child. In some cases that may involve putting informal strategies into place while in others making referrals to an external professional who may be perceived as less threatening.

At the same time, practitioners acknowledged that parents required time to deal with what may be an overwhelmingly emotional and stressful period in their lives (Barnes, 2008) and were content to adopt a patient stance. The concept of time however was acknowledged as important in relation to early intervention and the opportunity to support the child to ensure their needs were identified before transition to school. White and Featherstone (2005) note that time can be ascribed a 'profoundly moral dimension' when it comes to parent and multi-

agency partnerships. In this case time assumed moral implications in relation to the child's overall well-being. However, despite time being crucial, several practitioners spoke of the need to let parents grieve, a concept identified by Runswick-Cole and Hodge (2008) and Hellawell (2017) as consistent with the 'personal tragedy' notion of impairment propagated by the medical model of disability. This notion although benevolent in its intent to provide parents with precious time to come to terms with their feelings and emotions, may unwittingly contribute to 'the dissatisfactions with provisions which explains parents' anger and disengagement' (Hellawell,2017, p 417).

The power asymmetry noted in the partnerships between parents and early years practitioners differed from one case to the other -they were dependent upon the parent and practitioners' background, cultural capital, race and ethnicity (Artiles et al,2010) and were framed by the setting's context and individual characteristics -nonetheless these were characterised by a dynamic interplay which was predominantly governed by strong emotions on both parts; these emotions could range from exasperation to disappointment or anger for both parents and early years practitioners(Hodge,2005) but were crouched in a strong moral sense of doing the 'right thing for the child' although the concept of what the 'right thing' was differed greatly between practitioners and parents. Parental competence was often associated with class and parents whose children were receiving government funding were seen as in need of guidance as they appeared less willing to engage-this was in response to professional experts' condescending approaches that appeared to ascribe blame to their skills. The findings of this study indicate that gender, cultural capital and social standing intersect and affect the way that stakeholders in inclusion enact their roles (House of Commons, 2019).

7.6.2 Policy Implications and Recommendations

The operationalisation of collaborative partnerships for inclusion between parents and early years educators appear highly problematic; the emphasis on early intervention exerts significant pressures upon early years educators to approach parents with concerns they may have at an early stage-yet the training offered to practitioners at college or university level, is

tokenistic and devoid of the essential knowledge and understanding that is required to build effective partnerships.

Overall training tends to be unilateral, focusing upon the educators' perspectives and ignoring the unique knowledge and insights that parents can bring into the process of inclusion. Parents' fora and professional networks frequently seem to co-exist in parallel rather than joining forces and working in tandem. Future training at all levels should include parents and other professionals' input to raise awareness of the struggles and challenges both parties are facing in the process of supporting children.

7.7 Interagency partnerships: barriers and the expansion of roles

A large proportion of the SEND Code is dedicated to inter-agency collaborations (Norwich and Eaton, 2015), yet the means by which these partnerships materialise in practice remain elusive and subject to intense policy formation at local authority or ground level. Particularly in the early years, there has been a dearth of research on the enactment of inclusive interprofessional partnerships (Payler and Georgeson, 2013). This research aims to fill the void and contribute to new information that can be utilised effectively to identify the barriers and enablers. Abbott *et al's* (2005) study into the multiagency provision for children with complex health needs found that educators were considered by other professionals the least accessible partner to work due to their commitments and structural frameworks-the findings of this study contradict their assertions and may help shed light on the aspects that hinder collaboration between external professionals and educators.

Todd (2007) and Salmon (2004) assert that a child's needs may be neglected as a consequence of fragmented interprofessional services. The collaboration with external agencies in this study appears to lead to a 'double fragmentation'. There appears to be a practical fragmentation of services and provision; the sporadic nature of the visits, divergence of agendas, and inaccuracy of observations on behalf of medical professionals are seen to provide compartmentalised insights into on a child's dispositions and abilities. This is further exacerbated by the conceptual fragmentation posed by the disparate targets set by external

agencies which break down the child into parts; each professional is focusing on their area of expertise -in doing so, it could be claimed that they fail to see the bigger picture and thus neglect the true needs of a child: to participate, feel valued and respected **(**Booth *et al*, 2006).

Structural barriers related to the commission of services, within a context of austerity and funding cuts ((Lloyd and Penn, 2014; House of Commons, 2019), plagued all sectors and led to significant breakdowns in communication which influenced the mode and provision of services and frustrated the practitioners. The priorities placed upon individual professionals by their agencies' differing agendas (Griffin, 2010) created and perpetuated a chasm in practices, which were seen to be implemented in parallel instead of materialising as joint provisions. Despite the pledges of the SEND code for speedy and timely EHC assessments, early years educators reported significant delays and excessive bureaucracy associated with the process (Hellawell, 2018; House of Commons, 2019).The well-recorded issue associated with the delay in the issuing of EHC plans remained despite the repeated calls for a strengthening of the process from the House of Commons (2006) and Lamb Inquiry (2009)

The exchanges between the early years' practitioners and external professionals in this study were governed by a lack of a shared language, working culture and practices. Despite the government calls made as early as 2003 by the Laming Inquiry, for the establishment of a common language, this appears to remain an elusive goal (Salmon, 2004).The language and practices of the agencies in this study, in comparison to those of the early years practitioners, are underpinned by different theoretical and practical understandings of special educational needs and disabilities and indicate the requirement for a 'culture shift'(McConkey,2004, p.204) or bridging of the gaps, if truly collaborative work is to occur. Participants noted the lack of communication between various professionals and the overreliance upon their own narrow area of expertise, which resulted to a multitude of disparate goals passed on to early years practitioners-they were thus tasked with translating the advice into pedagogically meaningful practices for the children in their care. There appears to be a requirement on behalf of other professionals for teachers and early years educators to possess the skills necessary to implement a range of therapeutic strategies (Hall, 2005; Glover et al, 2015) yet this is not reciprocated by clinical professionals, as they appear unaware of the complexity of converting these strategies into relevant, meaningful experiences for young children.

The participants in this study reported that the advice offered by external, mainly medical professionals, was not applicable in a pedagogical context as it appeared to have a therapeutic or remedial focus and involved working individually with the child with the aim of addressing their deficits. They were opposed to the prescriptive (Thomas and Loxley, 2007) and interventionist approaches that removed the child from the classroom and encouraged their isolation from the nursery community. Moreover, they problematised the inaccuracy of paediatricians' assessments that were conducted in therapeutic settings and failed to 'situate' the child within a familiar environment that would enable authentic observations based on interactions with peers and educators in a less threatening, naturalised play-based context (McCartney and Morton,2013).

The early years educators in this study proclaimed professional practices that revolved around a 'pedagogy of listening' (McCartney and Morton, 2013) and participation and outlined a range of methods they utilised to support an equitable curriculum for children. Their values were based on building long, sustained and meaningful partnerships with children and parents to the detriment of their personal time. They felt it was important to demonstrate professional self-sacrifice and go above and beyond their responsibilities to facilitate partnerships with parents. The narratives of the educators described 'atrocity stories' (White and Featherstone, 2005) which pieced together aspects of early years professional identities enacted during the operationalisation of inclusion which appeared to submit to a voluntary professional self-categorisation (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). This practice aimed to reinforce the strength of their identity, generate the ethical code consistent with this identity and in doing so, distinguish the early educator' ethics from the values and work ethics associated with other groups of professionals (Holland and Lave, 2009).

Despite the dismissal of the values and working practices associated with other professionals' work ethic, the findings demonstrate that clinical professionals still retained control of multiagency partnerships .They appeared to hold the highest hierarchical positions in the decision-making process of multi-agency partnerships; their contribution, although brief, had the biggest influence in the identification process. They are thus regarded and often referred to as 'professionals', in contrast to the role of the early years' practitioners, who may refer to themselves as professionals within specific contexts, but implicitly and inwardly designate themselves as non-professionals in relation to medical clinicians. A hierarchy of

professionalism and positivistic knowledge prevails and guides the process of a child's identification and assessments (Thomas and Loxley, 2007). The 'history- in- person'(Holland and Lave,2009) of early years educators unfolded within a local struggles level; their identities were affected by the maternal discourses permeating early years which were embraced by some educators tentatively, although they were seen to de-professionalise them and restrain their capacity to form an equal partner in parent and interprofessional partnerships.

Out of the local and institutional struggles (Holland and Lave, 2009) sprang the role of the social pedagogue, which displaced the emphasis from children's academic achievement and favoured a holistic approach to children's well-being. Although the role was attached to the process of inclusion in that it aimed to prepare children to ameliorate physically, emotionally and psychologically, it was not restricted to teaching but encompassed the pedagogy of the whole child. This extended to families who were in need of support, during what was perceived to be a stressful time in their lives and required an experienced mentor to guide them through a process they were unfamiliar with and required their participation and extensive engagements with various professionals. Participants in this study willingly undertook this role as they felt that it contributed to the child's and family's well-being.

7.7.1 Policy implications and Recommendations

The training required to simultaneously interpret and administer pedagogically sound health-based interventions requires significant and ongoing professional development, both at preservice and continuous professional development levels, which are conspicuously absent from the syllabus of teacher and nursery educators' courses. Equally, similar requirements should be included in the training programme aimed at health- based professionals to enable them to contextualise their strategies into tailored pedagogical advice that eschews the generalisations associated with sub-groups of children populations. For a truly collaborative partnership to materialise, joint professional fora and training would have to be established with the aim of developing 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 2000) that overcome cultural and interpersonal barriers (Payler and Georgeson, 2013).

This study highlights the necessity of co-ordinating services through the provision of lead practitioners who can guide the establishment of partnerships, oversee the co-ordination of provisions between the different professionals, alleviate the excessive bureaucratic aspects

and minimise the paperwork associated with the observation and assessment process. Although the role of a designated medical officer is prescribed in the SEND Code it does not always materialise (House of Commons, 2019) and when it does, it occurs in the late stages of the review cycle prior to the issuing of an EHCP. Until that time professionals mainly appear to work in parallel rather than engage in team work. The role of co-ordinator is crucial, should be detangled from that of designated medical officer, which infers pathology within the child, and should be available to parents, educators and professionals from an early stage.

The educators in this study have willingly demonstrated an interest in expanding upon their existing roles to deal with the multiple accountabilities encompassed in the role of the SENDCO and inclusive educator. The role of the social pedagogue is crucial in inclusive practices and relevant to the early years where the well-being of the children is viewed holistically and cannot be extricated from that of the family. The role of the pedagogue became increasingly pertinent since the introduction of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda, which requires educators to collaborate with a wide range of other professionals to support children perceived to be in need of integrated provision

This study advocates the tautology of the role of early years educator or SENDCO with that of the social pedagogue; the change of nomenclature may not effect a change in the working conditions of early years educators unless steps are taken at all levels to recognise the significance of their contribution to inclusion, offer appropriate training that incorporates the holistic nature of their role and strengthen partnerships on ground level.

7.7.2 Synopsis of Recommendations

The findings of this research have resulted in a number of recommendations, which have clear policy implications for the ECEC sector:

- There needs to be a move towards a different model of early care and education provision, which will minimise the fragmentation observed in the sector; this would require robust funding that would aim to minimise the disparities observed between the maintained and PVI sectors. Early childhood education and care should be

considered a universal provision rather than a service reserved for the parents who can afford it.

- The PVI sector could be better supported through the provision of a combination of throughput and input funding that would enable the reorganisation of services to cater for all children, including children with special educational needs and disability. The appropriate utilisation of funding could be monitored by the local authority or other organisations to ensure that nurseries, particularly in the PVI sector, offer placements to a diverse population of children and minimise exclusive practices.
- Independent Ombudsmen could be commissioned by the Department for Education and Department of Health with the aim of monitoring the adequacy of input and throughput funding provisions available to maintained and non-maintained settings and ascertaining their capacity to offer diversity of provision. Ofsted inspections in early years settings should emphasise the quality of special educational provision in direct relation to the pedagogy on offer for children with special educational needs and the training provided to early years educators to equip them with the relevant skills to meet the demands of their roles .In the same manner that Safeguarding training has become compulsory, training on SEND in the early years should form part of mandatory requirements of early years pedagogy. In addition, special attention should be given to the admission and retention of children with special educational needs and their families in non-maintained settings.
- The curriculum governing the early years should shift its focus; the compartmentalisation of learning into distinct areas in combination with the increased emphasis on safeguarding ostracises children with special educational needs. The preoccupation with school readiness should be replaced by attention to the child as a whole; their personal, social and emotional development should be put at the heart of provision. The non-statutory guidelines accompanying the curriculum should be replaced by documents that place dispositions in their core; children's progress should be recorded in relation to their own starting points and not become reliant upon a mean average; chronological milestones should be abolished in favour of a child-centred planning and assessment model that allows early years educators to record the nuances and complexity associated with children's development.

- A more child-centred document will allow educators to devise the child's own specific goals, which may fall under the broader areas of development but are unique to each child and not predetermined. Instead, they are written and produced by children's keypersons with the aims of capturing non-linear developmental paths. Goals for all children, including children with special educational needs could form part of their own 'personalised' educational plan, which is set in partnerships with parents, the child and other stakeholders. Changes towards a personalised version of observations and assessment would have a domino effect on reception classes making the need for baseline assessments and profiles redundant and transforming reception classes into a continuation of the foundation stage. Currently the reception year constitutes a precursor to primary schooling with all the negative academic implications this institutionalisation of formal practice has come to acquire for children and teachers.
- Training for all early years educators at undergraduate and postgraduate level should encompass placements in a range of early years settings that would enable them to teach diverse populations. Emphasis could be given on the development of transferable pedagogical skills and strategies such as augmentative communication approaches that would enable the delivery of good inclusive practice for all. Differentiation and personalised learning provisions should constitute part of core modules delivered at college and university level to build educators' confidence. This study does not assert that a distinct pedagogical approach works for specific populations of children. Instead it supports a shift from the 'one size fits all' method to creative approaches that are based on educators' 'practical wisdom' or phronesis.
- Parental feedback and experience should be galvanised to enable educators and other professional agencies to gain an insight into the challenges parents experience and minimise the power differentials observed in partnerships for inclusion. This could take the form of joint parent and practitioner networks and incorporate training delivered by parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities to professionals. It is only through gauging at how parents feel and establishing the support they wish to have that we can tailor make our provision to meet their needs.

- The SENDCO role is plagued by complex bureaucracy and the requirement to work at the interface of sectors; these appear to be governed by distinct agendas, divergent values and a cultural chasm which is exacerbated within the current climate of financial austerity. The participants' call for a shared approach advocates all educators to develop their ability to offer inclusive practice as a team. This is a particularly pertinent approach to leadership in the early years, which operates distinctly and cannot be associated with the leadership models governing other sectors. Figure heading the SEND provision should not be assigned to one person. Responsibilities could be shared to enable all educators to develop confidence in their skills and abilities to teach all children.
- The role of the early years SENDCO in the SEND code should be reviewed to include the implications arising from the increasing responsibilities set upon them by the focus on early intervention and the demands of working at the interface of various disciplines. As in the case of school SENDCOs the role should be acknowledged as a senior or leadership role and concomitant training should be made available and eventually compulsory for all staff who are assigned the role in the early years.
- There needs to be a reorganisation of services to enable a culture shift. Collaborative multi-professional working must offer a holistic approach, which addresses children's needs and requirements effectively without 'breaking the child in parts.' Opportunities for training at undergraduate and postgraduate levels should incorporate working at the interface of fields, sharing practice through fora, and working towards the development of a shared language (which remains devoid of medicalised terms). A shared approach could serve to demystify the special educational needs sector which is still perceived as distinct and isolated from mainstream education. Regular meetings between all stakeholders would enable them to jointly 'translate' advice into meaningful practice, find 'common ground', and develop a pedagogically oriented language and approach.
- Centralised 'physical' or virtual banks of resources should be created which combine resources, readings, and equipment from various disciplines, such as Speech and Language therapy and Occupational Therapy with the aim of enabling educators to utilise ideas and suggestions and transform these into meaningful pedagogical

activities. These same activities/resources should be offered to all parents on a free of charge basis. The sharing should go some way towards breaking down the barriers between various professionals and their specialised/distinct fields of expertise.

- Joint training and seminars could be held for professionals of different disciplines with the aim of merging therapeutic intervention techniques into pedagogical activities that are relevant and meaningful for young children. The sessions should have a practical focus and involve professionals from different disciplines devising a repertoire of activities that have a child-centred focus and could be held within clinical settings or early years settings seamlessly. The practitioners in this study have called for naturalistic assessments that take place in early years settings under familiar circumstances in an effort to ensure children's development and behaviour is contextualised and observations do not extricate the child from her natural environment.
- The findings of this study demonstrate the requirement for the coordination of services 'around the child'. The role of coordinator should bring together all professionals, support parents and eschew 'therapeutic' interventions in favour of relevant educational activities that can be incorporated into daily routines -these should not necessitate the removal of a child from their familiar environment and their peers. Children's participation in nursery communities of practice appears to rely heavily on their opportunities to develop ownership of their daily routines and make choices. The educators in this study have demonstrated that this is possible in early years and good inclusive practice for all materialises organically, where institutional constraints are relaxed.
- The educators in this study have proferred a range of good inclusive practices that merge additional strategies into the core curriculum to create a fairer and equitable early year provision. Early years settings appear to benefit from daily routines that incorporate free-flow time and small group activities; settings could promote circuits of small-group activities to encourage children to take part in activities of their choice thus empowering them and allowing them to develop agency. Activities that utilise open-ended resources offer the same provision for all, which is differentiated by outcome, thus giving children the opportunity to participate in joint group sessions that promote their sense of belonging and engender community spirit. Furthermore,

they cultivate creativity and accommodate opportunities for creative, child-initiated play.

- Educators should involve children in the planning of the curriculum on offer, through ascertaining children's interests and planning stimulating activities that address these specific interests. Visual aids and other 'support' materials should be adapted so that they are meaningful and relevant to the child; such practices could help children develop a sense of ownership and control of their nursery life thus alleviating stress and anxiety.
- Although the deployment of one-to-one support assistants is not perceived negatively by the majority of early years educators, a shared approach to SEND provision allows all staff to familiarise themselves with the needs of all children and prevents the culture of dependability that exclusive relationship breed. Equally, educators advocate the introduction of small group activities, such as targeted language or 'shared attention' sessions that may take place in a quieter area of the classroom or another room to enable children to focus upon the activities on offer, in an environment, which is not disruptive.
- The role of early years educators in inclusion are not restricted to 'working with or on the children'; it encompasses a holistic approach that takes into account the children's and family's needs and builds support networks around the child. Educators in inclusion assume the role of social pedagogue; their roles are complex and multifarious and should command the appropriate training, pay, and work conditions that are commensurate with their contribution.

7.8 Limitations of this study and directions for future research

This study sought to present the views and experiences of a small group of early years educators on matters pertaining to the key tensions associated with the location, identification and pedagogy governing the inclusion of young children with special educational needs. In addition, it examined the contribution of parents and other

professionals in the establishment of partnerships and analysed the barriers that are erected in their efforts to orchestrate a holistic network of support for children. Both areas remain theoretically and empirically underrepresented in research; this study endeavours to offer valuable insights into an unmapped terrain with the aspiration of furthering the quest for social justice in the early years.

As the sample is very small, this study is not making claims to the generalisability of its findings but encourages early years educators and other professionals to reflect upon the key tensions and barriers and utilise the recommendations for the purpose of enhancing existing inclusive practice and pedagogy.

As this research was limited to the perceptions of early years educators, it provides a unilateral perspective into the process of inclusion and the enactment of multi-agency partnerships. Future research could widen its scope to include the parents of children with special educational needs and other professionals involved in partnerships to bring a multiplicity of voices to the fore and enrich our understanding of the enactment and maintenance of partnerships for inclusion.

I am also aware that, although this research was spurred by an intention to improve the lives of young children with special educational needs and disabilities and discussed the implications affected upon them by structural, cultural and attitudinal barriers, it did not include their voices. Young children with special educational needs should be heard, their needs should be valued, and their contribution respected. I am hopeful that my study contributed to raising awareness of a group of children who seem to be consistently 'othered' or neglected in policy and practice despite governmental rhetoric pointing to the contrary.

7.9 Conclusion

The recommendations arising from this study cannot be effected unless a major restructure of the ECEC sector takes place-the market conditions that drive the early years, the current curriculum's contribution to the schoolification of young children, a pre-existing system of practices that encourages the classification of children and the embedding of early years

educators' role into maternalistic practices and discourses has led to practices that can be perceived as exclusive.

Despite the barriers erected, early years educators strive to free their pedagogy of some of the constraints imposed upon them and demonstrate their agency in covert or overt manners depending on their perception of the 'severity of constraints'. It could be claimed that some of these barriers are attitudinal and can be ascribed to the educators' values towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs. This may be true, inasmuch as educators can create their own limits to inclusion in interaction with complex structures, and sometimes choose to exclude certain children on the basis of these limits. Educators appear to acknowledge this and ascribe blame to themselves; their culpability though is that of a whole

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