Realising Young Children's Rights: Researching Conversations With Rights Respecting Early Childhood Leaders

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Abstract

Children's rights to express their views in matters that affect them, and have those views given due weight, are enshrined in Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC ratified by the UK in 1991. In addition to education being directed towards the fullest realisation of children's potential, a further aim of education is the development of respect for human rights (Article 29). UNCRC signatory states 'undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike' (Article 42). Between 1996-2017 the Department for Education published five iterations of a curriculum for children younger than statutory school age. Since 2006, compliance of settings with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) has been mandatory. National and international reports record low levels of well-being and increasing levels of mental distress amongst children in the UK. Since publication of UNCRC a range of research practices which respect young children's agency have been developed. These divergent trajectories rest on competing discourses: children as agents and children as performers.

This professional study intertwined understanding the rights respecting praxes of two early years leaders with the case for realising young children's rights. A catalyst for the research conversations was the author's experience of rights disrespecting behaviours whilst a pupil, teacher and lecturer. Alongside the substantive foci the study responds to an entreaty from Goodson (1981) to integrate 'the biographical with the situational' when researching teachers' lives.

Set within an interpretative conceptual framework the development of a respectful, ethically sensitive methodology to re-present rights respecting educators' narratives was imperative. A bespoke inductive methodology combined strands of life history, narrative enquiry, thick description and reflexivity sheathed in appreciative enquiry. A metaphor of ancient Egyptian rope-making denotes the combination of these strands and reflects the distinct, complementary roles of participant and researcher in joint meaning production. Following a practise interview the methodological tool used

to record two reflective narratives was refined to research conversation. Thick ethical description was employed to fashion and re-present the research conversations in ways which respected each participant's unique contribution.

Analysis was undertaken using the lenses of critical events and key people identified by participants as having contributed to the development of their rights respecting values. Initial analysis focused on the distinctive experiences of the participants. Further analysis identified values held in common by both participants. The research conversations confirmed the value of reflections on educational narratives and their significance in the development of professional praxes focused on realising young children's rights.

Five principles held in common by the participants were identified. These were respect for children's rights as a non-negotiable principle, valuing children's participation, co-creating a culture which respects children, relational learning and enabling rights respecting practices within a required curricula framework. They are presented as a basis for professional reflection by trainee and qualified early years educators. Recommendations for training early years educators are indicated. Dissemination opportunities and possibilities for future research are presented.

Dedication

for Silas

Acknowledgments

Grateful thanks, and appreciation, are due to:

Dr. Jane Andrews, Dr. Richard Eke, the epitome of respectful educators

Jamie and Margaret

Colleagues in the Department of Education, UWE

I learned all this, indeed, without being urged by any pressure of punishment, for my own heart urged me to bring forth its own fashioning, which I could not do except by learning words: not from those who taught me but those who talked to me into whose ears I could pour forth whatever I could fashion.

St Augustine *Confessions* Book 1 chapter 14

I am going to tell you a story. Once upon a time there was a good fairy called Narrative. Narrative spent her time rushing around the kingdom, clarifying thoughts and saving ideas in distress. Everybody loved Narrative and would call on her whenever their understanding needed a bit of help. But on the far side of the Kingdom there was a dark, scary place where all the children had to go to school for 190 days a year. While all took Narrative with them, none knew for sure whether her powers could be used and effective learning still take place.

Daniels, (1996)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Committing Professionalism

> Education is an extremely important societal activity that can materialise children's rights and bring them to life. (Harcourt and Hagglund, 2013, p.287)

> Taking children seriously as people leads to shifts in thinking. First, children move from being objects of adult work, to being competent, contributing social actors. (Mayall, 2000, p.248)

According to *The child care transition,* a 'great change' has occurred in the way children are raised:

> Today's rising generation in the countries of the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD) is the first in which a majority are spending a large part of their early childhoods not in their own homes with their own families but in some form of child care. […] Approximately 80 percent of the rich world's three-to-six year olds are now in some form of early childhood education and care. (Adamson, 2008, p.3)

Despite being 'rights bearing citizens', children in the UK are conspicuously failing to flourish. According to a Green Paper (2017) from the Department for Education (DfE) and Department for Health (DoH) *Transforming children and young people's mental health provision* nearly 8% of 5-10 year olds have a diagnosable mental health disorder. Young Minds' 2015-16 annual report showed a doubling of diagnosable mental health problems in children between the 1980s and mid 2000s. It recorded:

> 1 in 10 children 5-16 years, or 3 in every classroom, having a 'diagnosable mental health problem'. (Young Minds, 2016, p.6)

Evidence from Bradshaw (2016); Place2Be (2016); (NUT 2015); and Adamson (2013) indicate low levels of well-being amongst young children, and echoes data in the Green Paper. In England children younger than statutory school age, 0-5 years old, are taught a mandatory curriculum, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Noting 88% of countries begin schooling children at ages 6-7 years (Riggall and Sharp, 2008) invites an

enquiry into the contribution curricula demands may play in producing low levels of well-being. While children in England have had the right to participate in all decisions that affect them since UK ratification of UNCRC 1991, the contemporaneous emergence of curricula for young, and very young, children since 1996 is seen to be in tension with elements of the Convention, in particular Articles 12, 28, 42 and General Comments 1, 7, 12, 14. These divergent policy arcs rest on competing discourses. One arc emphasises young children's capability, agency and self-determination (Lundy, 2018, 2012, 2007; Clark, 2017, 2010; Freeman, 2014, 2007; Lansdown 2010, 2001; Bath, 2009; Alderson, 2008; MacNaughton, 2007). Juxtaposed with these acknowledgements of children's agency is a performance discourse consisting of assessed learning outcomes. Qvortrup argues that the work children do in school:

> […] is the part of children' s work which is constituent to modern society. (2001, p.93)

Qvortrup's analysis, centred on an investment model of childhood, leads to the radical proposal of paying children wages for school work. It is not an idea endorsed by this study. A rather more modest, though equally radical, suggestion of respecting young children's rights in early years settings is what is proposed here. Diverse sources stretching back to the beginning of the 20th century attest to the significance of respecting children's agency for the development of positive learning dispositions (Katz, 2015; Alexander et al, 2012; Rinaldi, 2006; Laevers, 2005; Sylva et al, 2003; Bruner, 1990; Holt, 1964; Dewey, 1902). Article 42 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) requires signatory states to promulgate the Convention. No current, or previous, iteration of the National Curriculum (Department for Education 1989, 1995, 2015) or EYFS (DfE 2007, 2012, 2014, 2017) makes reference to the UNCRC or its precepts. Despite this lacuna some leaders of early years settings hold the pre-eminence of listening to, and respecting, young children to be sacrosanct. This study investigates early childhood leaders committed to acknowledging, and developing, young children's rights in their educational environments. In research conversations focused on their educational biographies committed educators reflected on the development of their rights respecting praxes.

1.1 Introducing the study

> The idea that children have rights of their own, rights which transcend the family setting is an idea apparently simple, in reality complex. (Flekkoy, 1990, p.1)

> And it is yet more difficult to include children into society rather than excluding them. (Mayall, 2000, p.248)

These statements, written a decade apart, by Flekkoy, the first Ombudsman for Children in Norway, and Mayall, a supporter of children's right to self-expression and participation in socio-political life, articulate the complexity of meaningfully realising children's rights. A further twenty years after Mayall's reflection, the gap between the Convention's intentions for children's social participation and their realisation continues:

> […] children's rights and needs continue to be largely absent from the decision-making process. (Children's Rights Alliance for England, 2017, p.4)

Since training to be an educator of children aged 3-7, I have held the following to be self-evident: the manner and processes by which a culture educates its youngest people contribute significantly to shaping its present and future. Young children's learning in early years settings is predicated on the quality of relationships. Learning relationships, between learners and educators, whether informal or formal, with infants or children, are characterised by dynamic, intersubjective exchanges (Trevarthen, 2011, 2009, Sylva and Blatchford, 2003). If learning interactions between children and teachers are built on rights respecting values, rooted in joint attention and shared understanding—for Rogoff (2003) 'mutuality'—there are positive implications for children's well-being as well as communities in which they live and learn, as Berthelsen et al (2009) indicate:

> […] investment in young children is recognised as important for the development of moral values for a cohesive society. (p.164)

In England, prescribed outcomes for children aged 0-5, and those who teach them, rest on a cultural mistrust of young children's capacity to direct their own learning and contribute to reproducing unhelpful relations between adults and children (Mayall, 2000, Katz, 2015). Close curricula specification for young children's learning is in sharp

contrast to the international context of children's rights as asserted in the UNCRC (1989).

Significant moments from the author's educational narrative introduce, and illustrate, my sustained interest in young children's rights. They illustrate my subjective motivation for examining the narratives of rights respecting early years leaders. The value of examining links between their educational past and present praxis was identified by Goodson. It is central to this study.

> We have to reconnect our studies of schooling with investigations of personal biography and historical background. We are arguing for the reintegration of situational with biographical and historical analysis. (Goodson, 1981, p.69)

> Now is the time that everyone with an interest in children must be clear about who they are and their own identity, so that they can work with others to pursue common goals. (Nutbrown, 1996, p.108)

Goodson's entreaty applies equally to the study's author as to its participants. Accordingly this chapter brackets a contextualisation of my professional values with five formative personal narratives from my educational biographical which have motivated this study.

The foundation of this study is an examination of two policy arcs. One narrates a story of increased attention to, and concern with, the promotion of young children's rights (Freeman, 2018; Lundy, 2011; CRC, 2006; UNCRC, 1989). Respect for young children's experiences and ideas is evidenced in research literature, research projects, media coverage and some school settings (Colliver, 2017; Barley and Bath, 2014; MacDonald, 2013). Juxtaposed with these developments is a policy arc inscribing increased specification of outcomes for young children in England before they reach statutory school age.

> With the EYFS we have an education system in this country that begins from birth. (Nutbrown, 2012, p.59)

> The perceived need to monitor children's development has led to unprecedented surveillance of children both at school and at home: the scholarisation of childhood is well advanced. (Mayall, 2000, p.247)

Within this policy context the study considers the curricula experiences of young learners through an examination of formative biographical experiences of rights

respecting early years leaders. Accordingly the study has two planes. The substantive plane concerns itself with ways in which early years leaders draw on narratives of their educational biographies to account for, and maintain, a commitment to rights respecting practices with young learners. The second plane is an exploration of the two policy arcs regarding children's participation and the curricularisation of young children's pre-school experience. These two planes coalesce around professional decisions. Within the context of national policy frameworks the educators featured in this study are unusual in prioritising children's rights when framing educational provision and organisation in their settings. In order to explicate both planes it is necessary to first set out the development of international and national frameworks for children's rights in which early childhood policy and practice inhere before researching the significance of biographical events in the formation of professional values.

1.2 Introducing the author

According to Holliday (2016), a significant factor in any social study is what the researcher brings to the situation. His ideas reflect those of Leavy:

> […] in qualitative research we are not outside of our projects but located and shifting within them. (Leavy, 2014, p.1)

Deciding to pursue a Professional Doctorate had implications for the focus, conduct and dissemination of research undertaken. At its centre this study has:

> […] a sense that research should make a practical difference. (Clandinin and Connelly, 1999, p.189)

The practical difference aspired to is to contribute to increased understanding, and shared knowledge, of early years settings with leaders,committed to actively respecting young children's rights. In order to do this, the study has two foci: the under-explored relationship between young children's rights and the early years curriculum in England, and understanding the educational biographies which shaped rights respecting early years leaders. The study has grown out of my educational biography. It builds on experiences I had as a pupil, a probationary teacher and an early years teacher/ headteacher and early childhood lecturer. In each of these educational contexts, which straddle publication of the UNCRC, I have had an interest in, and concern with, how

young children are treated in educational environments, in particular whether they have their rights accorded or denied.

I began work as an educator in Tottenham, north London, in 1981, teaching children aged 6. My qualifications for this role were an undergraduate degree in philosophy followed by a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). I held it as an article of faith that my degree would be of most value if put to practical use teaching young children in a thoughtful manner. Between 1981 and 1997 I taught children aged 3-7 in London and West Yorkshire. Since 1997 I have taught students aged 18-60 in a post-1992 university in the west of England. Following a Masters degree from the Open University, the opportunity to study for a professional doctorate with others, including colleagues from other professions, was compelling and apposite. The professionally focused, peer learning environment supported a deep engagement with both pedagogy and professionalism. This helped crystallise a long-held interest in children's rights in early years settings. Centring the study on settings affords an opportunity for dissemination to professionals which, in terms of impact, is important.

My interest in the importance of teaching young children about their rights, within a rights respecting ethos, reaches back to my earliest experiences of being a pupil, some 25 years before the publication of the UNCRC. It continued, and was strengthened, by 17 years as an infant teacher, Deputy and Headteacher, and most recently, by 20 years as an Early Childhood lecturer.

The case, to be developed in this study, for affirming the centrality of respecting young children's rights in their educational settings, falls into three overlapping categories: the moral, the relational and the pragmatic. The moral case rests on an acknowledgement of children as beings, as well as becomings (Qvortrup, 2009), entitled, as the Convention states, to express their opinion and be consulted in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously. The relational case growing out of the moral case is that non-rights respecting, uni-directional, or vertical, relations between adults and children (MacNaughton 2007; Mayall 2002) in educational contexts diminish the learning of both. Such relations may contribute to the development of unhelpful patterns of resistance and resentment between children and adults. In

contrast, young children shown the respect of being consulted and who enjoy sensitive, responsive relationships with adults have the opportunity to practise and develop agency and confidence (Oswell, 2013). The pragmatic case draws on the work of Sylva et al (2010); MacNaughton (2007) and Holt (1964). It overlaps with the relational case by acknowledging that education is unquestionably a matter that 'affects' children. It is necessarily shaped by and contributes to shaping cultural values (Rogoff, 2003). Building a rights respecting ethic into early years learning environments has the potential to contribute positive, respectful, democratic values to current and future lives.

1.3 Beginning with 'I' – Illustrative biographical narratives

The five short biographical narratives below correspond with Kelchtermans' (2005) definition of key or critical events in the lives of teachers. They are provided as scene setting, or illuminative instances, for the study. In combination they are intended to achieve three intertwined purposes: to illustrate commonplace rights disrespecting attitudes in educational settings for young children; to illustrate my professional values and commitments; and to signal the adoption of a narrative approach to gathering, analysing and re-presenting data.

The study is concerned with opportunities for, and instances of, the facilitation of young children's rights in early years settings. In the disparate but arguably representative narratives below, spanning over 50 years and different locations, each narrative illustrates a casual, confident assertion of an adult's will over a child's self-articulated need or right. Denial of young children's agency, either directly or indirectly, stretches to include basic human functions, specifically food consumption. The examples illustrate experiences inside and outside classrooms. It is important to indicate that in each instance it was not only the spotlighted child, but each member of the school community, who may have learned from the imposition of adult will over young children's expressed preference. As reflected by Rosenthal and Gatt:

> […] during most hours of the day every child in the group is both an observer of social and emotional events, as well as a participant in them (2010, p.377).

My interest in young children's rights was kindled by subjective experiences as a pupil and sustained by professional experiences. The narratives were selected as indicative of instances which have shaped and continue to shape my thinking and praxis. Their presentation emphasises the powerful contribution of subjective experiences to the development and maintenance of professional values and identity. According to McNiff (2012) and Weiner (1994) identity fuels professional praxis. This is explored in Chapter 3. Ritchhart describes the relationship of educators' professional values to their practice as:

> [t]he 'red thread' of beliefs, passions, values and goals that tie together and unite a teacher's practice over time and contexts. (Ritchhart, 2002, p.181)

In order to meaningfully study the educational narratives and motivations of leaders of early years settings it was important to start by attempting to declare my own. It was important to develop a thesis which has integrity in both process and form. Designing and carrying out an enquiry into the educational narratives and personal motivations of professionals with a commitment to respecting young children's rights requires a high degree of respect for those sharing their biographical narratives. As important as the conduct is the rendition. In consequence finding a 'faithful' way of re-presenting personal accounts became a priority.

1.3.1 Narrative 1: An infant school, outside Southampton, Hampshire

The year is 1963. The scene is a school dining hall at the end of lunchtime. The ambient sound is of cutlery and crockery, roughly sorted and stacked, scraping of cutlery against plates, and chairs against a wooden floor. This Victorian-built infant school had recently adopted a modern approach to seating children for school dinners. No trestle tables here; instead there are octagonal tables, with family (mixed age) grouping, intended to reflect a domestic, rather than institutional, environment. These end of lunchtime noises echoing off the high ceiling, and the fixed climbing apparatus lining the walls, become more prominent as the hall empties of children headed outside to the playground. On

each of about four of the 30 or so tables, sits a solitary child. Periodically a shrill, impatient voice enjoins either one or all of these children to "eat up", "clear that plate". One child, a 5 year old, sits pushing cold custard round her plate; the other remaining children, having finished their food, leave the hall. Now, she is the only child in the hall. "Come along you've got to finish that, you can't go out to play until it's all gone." The child tries to eat a small amount of custard from the tip of the spoon and gags. "Now you're just being silly, eat it up, you should be outside by now. It's time I had my dinner, never mind waiting round for you." For this child the scene is repeated whenever custard is on the menu for two years.

1.3.2 Narrative 2: The infant department of a primary school, Tottenham, London

The year is 1981. The scene is a busy infant classroom. The sounds are a loud bang as a door between two classrooms is flung open, suddenly hitting the wall behind it, and a raised voice from a senior class teacher, aggressively addressing a newly qualified reception class teacher. "You have him. There's no place for individuals in my class." An above average sized 5 year old boy, of Afro-Caribbean heritage, is hurled across the linoleum floor. He spins involuntarily on his bottom to a standstill. The door slams shut. The child, the newly qualified teacher and reception children look at each other. For a moment the room is silent. Then the hurled boy bursts into tears.

1.3.3 Narrative 3: An infant school in a West Yorkshire market town

The year is 1991. The scene is a reception classroom. The sound is of children busily playing and working in their classroom. The following Monday will be August Bank Holiday when, by local convention, the school is open. Two adults, the Headteacher and Deputy Head, are talking together in the classroom. The Deputy Head, recently appointed on the basis of her record of inclusive practice, is the reception class teacher. The adults are discussing a 5 year old boy with special educational needs including mobility difficulties. "Of course," says the Headteacher, "he won't be able to come in on Monday." "Oh, why not?" asks the Deputy Head, who is new to the area. "Because

our ancillary staff are entitled to Bank Holiday leave and there won't be any 'cover' for him," the Headteacher replies.

1.3.4 Narrative 4: A university education department in the west of England

The years are 1997-2017. The setting is a Department of Education in a post-1992 university. The sound is of respectful discussion amongst undergraduate students, with an average age of 20, either training to teach children aged 3-7 or studying Early Childhood. These discussions took place over a period of 20 years in a variety of seminar rooms. The tutor asks each cohort how many of them knew, while they were children, of their entitlement to the 43 Articles of the UNCRC. In this period, covering 20 years, with up to six seminar groups per year—a total of approximately 1500 students—only six students have indicated they knew of the UNCRC before encountering it in their university learning. All six were either 16 or 17 years old when they learned about UNCRC. Four had studied it as part of History or Sociology at 'A' level, and two in organised clubs such as Girl Guides.

1.3.5 Narrative 5: University seminars on UNCRC dissemination

The years are 2010-2017. The setting is a post-1992 university Department of Education. The sound is that of a single voice, a lecturer, introducing the history and implementation of the UNCRC to second year cohorts of both Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Early Childhood undergraduate degree programmes. Contextualising it with reference to local settings, the tutor indicates nursery and infant schools in the region awarded the UN Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA). Invited to consider the question of how they would make young children aware of their rights there was, in all six successive year groups, universal hostility and protest amongst students at the very suggestion. These, to me, surprisingly aggressive responses are perhaps best summarised by the following statements, recorded, in long-hand, from students in different year cohorts:

> "It's O.K to treat them properly but you couldn't tell them they had rights."
>
> "They would get away with anything."
>
> "There would be a riot."
>
> "What would the parents say?"

1.3.6 Recontextualising the narratives

Lundy has asserted that a commitment to inviting children's perspectives is:

> […] not an option which is the gift of adults, but a legal imperative which is the right of the child. (Lundy, 2007, p.931)

In the context of children's rights in England prior to and since the UK ratified the UNCRC in 1991, each of these narratives, whilst not claiming to be representative, is not, perhaps, exceptional either. They are strongly suggestive of a construction of children as threat (Wyness, 2015; Hendrick, 2003) rather than rights bearing citizens. While Narratives 1, 2, and 3 may be regrettable unlike Narratives 4 and 5, they predate publication of the UNCRC. Collectively these educational narratives illustrate the author's motivation for enquiring into settings committed to respecting young children's agency, specifically into biographical events and experiences of setting leaders which contributed to developing rights respecting values. In the fourth and fifth narratives the learners are early years trainees. It is the reach into the future of the values articulated by these trainees which interests, and concerns, the author. The informal enquiry outlined in Narrative 4 confirms the difficulty of finding adults who knew of their entitlements whilst a child. It illustrates a failure by the UK government to adhere to Article 42, to make the Convention known to children and adults. Arguably this makes the evidence in the second university-based narrative, Narrative 5, unsurprising, demonstrating as it does high levels of resistance amongst trainee educators to the idea of children learning of their rights. This indicates an enduring impact of the failure to communicate the UNCRC especially, as the convention asserts in Article 29:

> […] a goal of Education is to respect others' human rights, and their own.

It also confirms what was drawn to the attention of the UK government by the Committee over 10 years ago:

> The Committee stated that the lack of a children's rights approach in the UK was exemplified by the fact that 75% of children have not heard of the CRC. The Committee criticised the absence of the CRC in teacher training and in the school curricula. (Harvey, 2002, p.2)

The selection of three school-based and two university-based narratives is intended to form a foundational context for the thesis and help illuminate the biography of the author, in order to begin to establish positionality. They are amongst the stories I live by as a professional and echoed by Hutchinson in recalling a moment from her educational biography.

> My memory of these few moments in a fifth-grade classroom has continually resonated within my thinking. (Hutchinson, 2015, p.5)

1.4 Defining respect

> Respect is a critical variable in education. (Miller and Pedro, 2006, p.293)

This section establishes definitions of key terms: respect, rights respecting, and children and young children. Following consideration of some philosophical definitions of respect the focus sharpens onto definitions of respect related to children, specifically for young children. Consideration is then given to uses of the phrase 'rights respecting'.

Noddings (2012a) refers to respect for (an)other as an expression of an ethic of care which she considers to be fundamental in pedagogic relationships. Her prioritisation of the affective and relational domains corresponds with Darwall's definition (2015) for whom 'human affections' are at the centre of human morality. Darwall distinguishes appraisal respect from recognition respect. Recognition respect is due to another regardless of their characteristics or achievements, rather it is accorded by virtue of their dignity or authority. It is recognition respect with which this study is concerned. Covell and Howe (2001) argue for a curriculum which prioritises Rights, Respect and Responsibility through which:

> The child comes to see the self as a worthy person, not because of particular characteristics or achievements, but simply because of existence. (Covell & Howe, 2001 p.41)

Children's unqualified entitlement to respect is mirrored in the work of those concerned with children's rights beyond, as well as within, educational contexts:

> To accord rights is to respect dignity: To deny rights is to cast doubt on dignity and integrity. (Freeman, 2007, p.7)

Freeman's assertion identifies an important companion concept for respect: dignity. Meyer defines human dignity as:

> […] an intrinsic moral worth, a basic moral status, or both, which is had equally by all persons. (Meyer, 2015)

Johansson, who argues all education should be based on the UNCRC, emphasises an additional related concept, integrity. In her discussion of the marginalisation of children's integrity, she asserts children's unqualified entitlement:

> The right to integrity concerns being human and equally valued, irrespective of age, maturity or competence. (Johansson, 2005, p.11)

Katz includes dignity in her definition focused on early years pedagogy:

> A respectful relationship between the teacher and the learner is marked also by treating learners with dignity, listening closely and attentively to what the learners say. (Katz, 2011, p.80)

A coalescence of views regarding the interdependence of respect and dignity is significant for a focus on rights respecting pedagogic relationships. Freeman's identification of dignity, and Johansson's of integrity, as characteristics of respectful relationships align closely with the tenets of this study. The author's feelings of indignity and lack of autonomy whilst a pupil correspond with Freeman's description of rights denied. The concept of dignity features is threaded through the Articles of the UNCRC and its General Comments (considered in chapter 2). It features from the outset in the preamble to the Convention:

> […] in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. (UNCRC, p.1)

Freeman articulates the opportunity provided by rights when he asserts:

> As agents rights bearers can participate. They can make their own lives rather than having their lives made for them. And participation is a fundamental human right. It enables us to demand rights. (Freeman, 2007, p.8)

A further marker of respect for children is the emphasis placed on their active involvement in educational environments. In her report on children's voices and their experiences of primary school, in the context of the UNCRC, Article 12, Robinson (2014) notes:

> […] while teachers have a responsibility towards making decisions that are in children's best interests, they also have a responsibility to respect children's rights and to listen to, and acknowledge, their opinions and perspectives. (Robinson, 2014, p.18)

In their Practice Standards in Children's Participation, Save the Children declare:

> Human rights are inalienable. In other words, they are inherent in each human being. Accordingly, they must be respected in all learning environments. (Save the Children, 2010, p.35)

Christie argues that respect lies at the heart of working with infants and toddlers:

> Respect involves intentional caring in which the teacher displaces her own ideas and motivations to truly understand the needs and wishes of the child. (Christie, 2018, p.15)

In summary, in early years settings respect, and its allied concepts of dignity and integrity, comprises a shared disposition amongst educators that children are beings, as well as becomings, entitled to be listened to, consulted and taken seriously. A corresponding responsibility, or duty, for educators is to support and extend children's agency. In so doing respect becomes part of an ethical educational practice.

1.4.1 Defining rights respecting

According to Struthers the phrase 'rights respecting' is used to describe educational settings where:

> […] human rights values such as justice and equality are infused throughout, including within decision making processes and disciplinary procedures. (Struthers, 2015, p.58)

In her commentary on the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UNDHRET, 2011), Struthers (2015) notes a lack of attention towards

ensuring children are respected in schools. She laments a move towards didactic education, arguing such curricula direction conflicts with the potential of education to empower and transform children's lives, and calls for a reversal in what she describes as a 'banking model' of teaching and learning. She echoes the position of UNDHRET when she asserts the importance of learning environments which respect the rights of both educators and learners, and the significance of human rights training for professionals. Struther's position is complemented by the work of Smith (2011) who identifies a requisite disposition for rights respecting educators:

> If children's voice is being sought they have to be positioned as participating subjects, knowers and social actors. (Smith, 2011, p.12)

In order to be positioned as participants children have first to be listened to respectfully. Fielding and Moss (2011) endorse this perspective with their emphasis on the centrality of attentive listening.

> Listening […] is one of the foundations of the educational project. (Fielding & Moss, 2011, p.5)

Attentive listening is predicated on an acknowledgment that young children are neither objects or subjects, but entitled to courtesy and consultation in line with that accorded to adults (Struthers, 2015). In this way a commitment to attentive listening in the structures, processes and practices of settings is in alignment with a rights respecting ethos.

The phrase 'rights respecting' is used by Unicef-UK for their school based Children's Rights audit toolkit, Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA).The audit has four dimensions; wellbeing, participation, relationships and self-esteem. This is illustrated on the RRSA website by a pupil's definition of a rights respecting school:

> A Rights Respecting School is a place where we can all feel confident with ourselves and it encourages us to use our voice.

In its own words the RRSA website states:

> A Unicef UK Rights Respecting School is a community where children's rights are learned, taught, practised, respected, protected and promoted.

The award itself comprises three strands which mirror the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UNDHRET, 2011):

- Teaching and learning about rights;
- Teaching and learning through rights – ethos and relationships;
- Teaching and learning for rights – participation, empowerment and action.

While all are relevant to this study it is the second, teaching and learning through rights, with which this study is most concerned.

> A rights-based approach consists in a set of values and standards and a comprehensive and inclusive manner that apply to all children and their best interest, and the development of their capacities. It emphasises well-being and not only well-becoming. (Herczog, 2012, p.542)

In August 2018 352 English nursery and infant settings were registered for the RRSA award (Unicef, 7/8/18). As a percentage of the number of nursery and primary schools in England, 3022 and 16798 respectively, this is 1.7%. Whilst the study does not claim children in 98.3% of early years settings are having their rights disrespected it is a strikingly low take-up and indicative of low levels of awareness and commitment to teaching about and through the UNCRC.

Drawing on sources cited above, the following is offered as a definition of rights respecting practice for the purposes of this study. Early years professionals acknowledge children's rights, as set out by UNCRC. They pay particular attention to children's rights to participate, express an opinion and be heard in all aspects of their learning. Setting practices are directed towards the active promotion and development of these rights through meaningful dialogue with children.

> […] wherever children spend their daily life, the setting at large is responsible for ensuring that the child is met with respect as a human being with rights, and given opportunities to learn about rights and to practice them. (Harcourt and Hägglund, 2013, p.286)

1.4.2 Definitions of children and young children

> For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. (UNCRC, Article 1, p.4)

Defined so broadly 'children' presents difficulty when reviewing literature relevant to a study focused on young children. As indicated by Lansdown, 2011, Clark et al, 2003 and UNCRC General Comment 7, 2005, the experiences of young children are often hazed

within those of slightly older, or considerably older, children. There is a great deal of difference in respecting the rights of a 6 month old, a 6 year old, and a 16 year old but under the umbrella of 'children' they are undifferentiated. For the purposes of this study the definition of young children used in General Comment 7 is adopted.

> In its consideration of rights in early childhood, the Committee wishes to include all young children: at birth and throughout infancy; during the preschool years; as well as during the transition to school. Accordingly, the Committee proposes as an appropriate working definition of early childhood the period below the age of 8 years. (CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1 p.1)

1.5 Structure of the study

Chapter 1 sets out the background and purpose of the study. The author is introduced followed by a justification for opening with autobiographical narratives. Five short narratives from the author's educational biography are presented and recontextualised. Definitions of key terms respect, rights respecting and early years are provided before the research questions which guided the study are indicated. Chapter 2 contextualises and provides detail of international and national policy pertaining to young children's rights in educational settings. Chapter 3, the Literature Review, opens with an overview of the literature search strategy before reviewing literature on curriculum, young children's participation and the development of early years professionals' identities.

The Conceptual and Methodological Framework, Chapter 4, establishes the ontological and epistemological premises used to frame knowledge claims for the study. The methodological section outlines a rationale for combining critical instance analysis with appreciative enquiry method and its implications for the conduct of professionally oriented research. Chapter 5 re-presents research conversations with rights respecting early years educators with an emphasis on the distinctiveness of their responses. These are considered in light of the literature reviewed. In the Discussion, Chapter 6, shared aspects of the participants' responses are considered and again linked with the literature reviewed. Chapter 7 the study's conclusion reprises the research questions and considers its epistemic limitations. Implications arising from the study, including ideas for its dissemination and possibilities for future study, are presented.

1.5.1 Research questions

The study's research questions, prompted by reflecting on the selected biographical narratives, are set within an interpretivist paradigm. The study does not seek to prove/disprove nascent theory. Rather the following five questions acted as foci and guiding lights throughout the study.

1. Does my abiding interest in young children's rights, as represented through biographical narratives, resonate with rights respecting early years leaders?
2. What stories do early years leaders share in accounting for their enduring commitment to rights respecting praxes?
3. What, according to the participants, does rights respecting practice look like in their setting?
4. What would be the most appropriate, respectful way of enquiring into the relationship between the personal educational biographies and current praxes of these particular early years leaders?
5. What could be learned that would strengthen early years training in order that educators are facilitated to respect young children's rights?

Arising from these questions four elicitation prompts were developed intended to enable early years leaders to reflect on the relationship between their commitment to respecting young children's rights and their educational biographies.

i) Drawing on your educational biography how would you describe the development of your professional values relating to young children's rights in their learning?

ii) Can you describe ways in which this setting has implemented/is implementing a rights respecting learning environment?

iii) In your experience how well does a rights respecting ethos align with the current early years curriculum?

iv) What do you draw on to sustain your commitment to teaching and learning rights respecting values?

The study seeks to showcase pedagogic choices made on behalf of young children by rights respecting early years leaders and reflect on the implications which their formative educational experiences have for training respectful early years educators.

Chapter 2

Policy Contexts

Young Children's Rights: International and National Imperatives

> Education is an extremely important societal activity that can materialise children's rights and bring them to life, as children spend a large part of their everyday life in prior-to-school and school settings. (Harcourt and Hagglund, 2013, p.287)

This chapter sets out the policy environment relevant to the study. It presents policy frameworks salient to the realisation of children's rights, applicable in English early years settings and establishes intersecting layers of international and national imperatives. These imperatives form a lattice of requirements and aspirations, lain under and over young children's education. Early Years Leadership, with or without knowledge of the UNCRC and European Human Rights Convention (ECHR), is always enacted in their purview. In order to consider relevant policy, the chapter is divided into five sections. The first provides a short overview of the development of children's rights. It is followed by a recontextualisation of the UNCRC. The second identifies articles of the UNCRC which have a particular bearing on the study. The third section reviews five key 'General Comments' from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (hereafter CRC), while the fourth elucidates the Committee's Concluding Observations on UK and Northern Ireland Periodic Reports since 2008. The fifth section provides an overview of current curricula policy and proposals for teaching and assessing young children in English early years settings.

2.1 Birthing children's rights 1889-1989: A long labour

Thirty years after publication of the CRC it is timely to consider how far its ambitions are realised in the educational experiences of some of the youngest children, living and learning in one of the world's 'rich countries' (Unicef, 2007). Before establishing the current context for children's rights in general, and in early years specifically, it is useful

to provide a summary account of the development of children's rights in national and international contexts.

The emergence of children's rights began at the end of the 19th century with the identification of children as a group who, vulnerable to deprivation and cruel treatment, were entitled to legislative protection from exploitation. The first UK legislation to offer children protection against cruel treatment became law in 1889. The development of children's rights in the 20th century consisted of international initiatives as well as national legislation. Swedish reformer Ellen Key published *Barnets århundrade* (*The Century of the Child)* (1900) which proposed that the world's children should be the central work of society in the 20th century. In 1924 Eglantyne Jebb (Kerber-Ganse, 2015), an English social reformer, proposed the League of Nations adopt a Children's Charter ratified by the International Save the Children Union. In 1959 the adoption of a second Declaration of the Rights of the Child expanded the five articles of 1924, which were focused on child welfare, to ten principles. The additions included the right to free education which was explicitly linked to the opportunity for play and recreation which should be directed to the same purposes as education (Principle 7). No reference is made to consulting with children in educational settings or any other aspect of their lives. The United Nations Year of the Child (1979) launched a decade-long drafting of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Convention was ratified by the United Nations Security Council in 1989 and became international law in 1990. The United Kingdom became a signatory in 1991. Signatories are subject to regular auditing visits by the Committee for the UNCRC who publish their findings and recommendations.

2.2 Relevant UNCRC articles

Eight Articles are judged to be of particular relevance for a consideration of young children's rights in educational settings. In reviewing implementation of the CRC it is important to acknowledge the legislative status of the Convention. An account of recent developments relating to direction by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for the UK to pass it into law is contained in a subsection of this chapter, covering the fifth

periodic review. While the totality of rights set out in the convention has relevance for all young children, in relation to this study Articles 2, 3, 12, 13, 28, 29 and 42 have most significance. Salient sections of each Article are set out below.

Article 2: States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

Article 3: In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Article 12: States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law

Article 13: The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

Article 28: States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;

Article 29: States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to: (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the

child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

Article 42: States Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.

2.2.1 The importance of Article 12

It is useful, for the purposes of the study, to review the scope and significance of Article 12. Freeman, who argues it is the linchpin of the Convention, observes it is significant,

> […] not only for what it says, but because it recognises the child as a full human being with integrity and personality and the ability to participate freely in society. (1996, p.37)

Daly, Ruxton and Schuurman concur and in their evaluation of Article 12 note:

> Article 12 of the UNCRC, the right of children to be heard, is arguably the most ground-breaking provision in that instrument. It is, at least in part, due to this provision that there is acceptance by many states, organisations and others that legal standards and policies concerning children should be informed by their views. (2015, p.5)

They conclude:

> Article 12 therefore highlights the role of the child as an active participant in the promotion, protection and monitoring of his or her rights. (2016, p.21)

The articulation of Article 12 has contributed to modifying discourses of childhood away from being objects of need towards rights bearing, social actors. In the arena of education Lundy has noted:

> Article 12 was embraced unambiguously by the UK Government, which is therefore legally obliged to give effect to it in full. In spite of this, there is a recognised gap between the UK's international commitments and what happens in practice in relation to educational decision making. (Lundy, 2007, p.928)

2.3 CRC General Comments

Periodically the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (hereafter CRC) issues General Comments. General Comments are intended to deepen understanding of key issues. General Comments address criticism of the Convention and clarify and amplify specific articles. Some focus on a topical theme in children's rights. Since 2001, seventeen General Comments have been issued. Five General Comments have particular bearing on this study:

- General Comment No. 1 (2001) The Aims of Education
- General Comment No. 7 (2005) Implementation of Children's Rights in Early Years
- General Comment No. 12 (2009) The Right of the Child to be Heard
- General Comment No. 14 (2013) The Right Of The Child To Have His Or Her Best Interests Taken As A Primary Consideration
- General Comment No. 17 (2013) The Right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts

The following section contains a substantial amount of direct quoting from General Comments 1, 7, 12, 14 and 17. This is justified in two ways: it evidences that explicit inclusion of young children's rights, in both curriculum content and pedagogy, is an expectation of CRC. In addition it reveals a discontinuity between current policy in English early years settings and adherence to the Convention.

2.3.1 General Comment 1

It is significant that Article 29, The Aims of Education, was the first Article selected by the Committee for a General Comment (2001). It is described as:

> […] the foundation stone for the various programmes of human rights education called for by the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, and promoted by international agencies. (CRC/GC/2001/1, para.15)

Most importantly paragraph 3 establishes not only children's right to education but also its content:

> An education with its contents firmly rooted in the values of article 29 (1) is for every child an indispensable tool for her or his efforts to achieve in the course of her or his life a balanced, human rights-friendly response to the challenges that accompany a period of fundamental change. (CRC/GC/2001/1, p. 2)

The Committee declares Article 29 to be of far-reaching importance for realising the core value of the Convention:

> the human dignity innate in every child and his or her equal and inalienable rights. (CRC/GC/2001/1, p. 1)

In addition the Committee clarifies that Article 12:

> insists upon the need for education to be child-centred, child-friendly and empowering, and it highlights the need for educational processes to be based upon the very principles it enunciates. (CRC/GC/2001/1, p. 2)

2.3.2 General Comment 7

The impetus for a General Comment focused on Early Childhood, Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood (2005) was an overview of the Committees' findings across several countries, which noted that:

> Respect for the young child's agency - as a participant in family, community and society - is frequently overlooked, or rejected as inappropriate on the grounds of age and immaturity. (CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1 p. 6)

This was amplified in a publication by Unicef providing the context of General Comment 7 and summaries of papers submitted to the Day of General Discussion (2004).

> Dialogues surrounding the needs of and provisions for very young children have almost never been grounded on a full respect for young children as rights-holders, that is, as human beings who have individual feelings, their own perspectives and their own distinct interests, including the right to development and participation as stipulated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This observation is the main reason for the Committee's decision to focus attention on children's rights in early childhood. (Doek, Krappmann and Leep, 2006, pp.31-32)

While the primary audience for General Comments is signatory governments in the case of General Comment 7 they are directed, in particular;

> […] to parents and all other persons who live with children, care for children, or work professionally with children because these individuals ought to be reminded of the rights of children from time to time. (Doek, Krappmann and Leep, 2006, p.31)

Of the seven objectives the following three are considered to be of particular relevance:

> (a) To strengthen understanding of the human rights of all young children and to draw States parties attention to their obligations towards young children.
>
> (c) To encourage recognition of young children as social actors from the beginning of life, with particular interests, capacities and vulnerabilities, and of requirements for protection, guidance and support in the exercise of their rights.
>
> (g) To contribute to the realization of rights for all young children through formulation and promotion of comprehensive policies, laws, programmes, practices, professional training and research specifically focused on rights in early childhood. (CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1, pp. 1/2)

In paragraph 3 the Committee emphasise that:

> […] young children are holders of all the rights enshrined in the Convention. They are entitled to special protection measures and, in accordance with their evolving capacities, the progressive exercise of their rights. (CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1, p. 2)

Paragraph 4 requires that:

> States parties should review their obligations towards children younger than eight. (CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1, p. 2)

General Comment 7 acknowledged an increased understanding of young children through research since ratification of the Convention (1991) and the implications for social policy.

> The Committee notes the growing body of theory and research which confirms that young children are best understood as social actors whose survival, well-being and development are dependent on and built around close relationships. These relationships are normally with a small number of key people, most often parents, members of the extended family and peers, as well as caregivers and other early childhood professionals. (CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1 p. 4)

Doek et al (2006) emphasise the benefits of providing early opportunities for children to express their agency:

> The investment in early childhood pays dividends through the young members of society who have thereby been able to realize their rich, natural capacities and enjoy the satisfactions of self-reliance and social responsibility. (Doek et al, 2006, p.34)

Analysis of General Comment 7 by MacNaughton et al (2007) identified contrasting pedagogic dispositions amongst professionals committed to realising young children's rights. They categorised the roles which well-intentioned educators play in relation to children and their rights into three categories—the translator, intermediary, or advocate—before arguing that each one of these incarnations reinforces existing authoritarian relationships. They propose that in order to realise radical change and build rights respecting pedagogic relationships, early years professionals ask themselves a radical question:

> How can we use our expertise in child development to collaborate with young children to build new social structures in which everyone's voice is heard? (MacNaughton et al, 2007, p.167)

The response of Vaghri et al (2011) to General Comment 7 was to focus on the legislative imperative, urgency and critical importance of ensuring young children are accorded their full entitlements:

> Governments are under international legal obligation to respect, to protect, and to fulfill early childhood rights without delay as the early childhood period spanning from prenatal to age eight is a specific period when changes in the emotional, intellectual, social, and physical development of young children lay the foundations of human development and subsequently the social and economic development of societies. This is especially true as early child development is one of the strong determinants of the health and productivity of any society. (Vaghri et al, 2011, p.186)

In order to help facilitate this, Vaghri et al designed a monitoring tool intended to provide a universal safeguarding system to guarantee worldwide realization of young children's rights. The rationale for the monitoring tool is that it provides a bridge between the theoretical ideas of General Comment 7 and the practical work needed for it to be realised. In combination the proposals of MacNaughton et al (2007) with Vaghri et al (2011) support an invigorated environment for implementing young children's rights. Herczog (2012) noted how despite the publication of General Comment 7 monitoring and implementation of young children's rights 'remained a challenge'. She asks:

> What policies are in place to ensure that early childhood education provisions are suitably child-centred, child-friendly, rights-based and aligned with GC7 principles and aims of education? (Herczog, 2012, p.552)

There is little evidence to suggest that children in English early years settings are benefiting from either knowledge of human rights or capacity to support their realization.

2.3.3 General Comment 12

In General Comment 12, The Right Of The Child To Be Heard (2009) the Committee acknowledge a fundamental tension within children's rights (a) and reassert the primacy of listening to children (b).

> (a) Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) is a unique provision in a human rights treaty; it addresses the legal and social status of children, who, on the one hand lack the full autonomy of adults but, on the other, are subjects of rights. (CRC/C/GC/12, p.5)
>
> (b) The right of all children to be heard and taken seriously constitutes one of the fundamental values of the Convention. (CRC/C/GC/12, p.5)

It notes, favourably, the emergence of participation practices; although the word 'participation' does not appear in the text of Article 12, it again cites, with approval, that as a concept, participation relies on 'mutual respect' (CRC/C/GC/12, p.5).

The Committee emphasises the centrality of respecting children's right to be heard in educational environments:

> Respect for the right of the child to be heard within education is fundamental to the realization of the right to education. (CRC/C/GC/12, p.24)

It goes on to note 'with concern':

> […] continuing authoritarianism, discrimination, disrespect and violence which characterize the reality of many schools and classrooms. Such environments are not conducive to the expression of children's views and the due weight to be given these views. (CRC/C/GC/12, p.24)

The identification of authoritarianism and disrespect in this statement endorse the focus of the study which suggests an outcomes-led curriculum both exemplifies and precipitates these characteristics towards children. The Comment makes specific reference to early years education:

> In all educational environments, including educational programmes in the early years, the active role of children in a participatory learning environment should be promoted. Teaching and learning must take into account life conditions and prospects of the children. For this reason, education authorities have to include children's and their parents' views in the planning of curricula and school programmes. (CRC/C/GC/12, p.24)

As with General Comment 1, General Comment 12 indicates and promotes the importance of children's active participation and the social and relational experiences which underpin rights respecting pedagogies and practices.

> Human rights education can shape the motivations and behaviours of children only when human rights are practised in the institutions in which the child learns, plays and lives together with other children and adults. (CRC/C/GC/12 p.21)

The Committee emphasise children's awareness of discontinuities between rhetoric and reality regarding observation of their rights in practice.

> In particular, the child's right to be heard is under critical scrutiny by children in these institutions, where children can observe, whether in fact due weight is given to their views as declared in the Convention. (CRC/C/GC/12, p.24)
>
> Children's participation is indispensable for the creation of a social climate in the classroom, which stimulates cooperation and mutual support needed for child-centred interactive learning. (CRC/C/GC/12, p.24)
>
> The Committee endorses, the introduction of child-friendly school programmes in many countries, which seek to provide interactive, caring, protective and participatory environments that prepare children and adolescents for active roles in society and responsible citizenship within their communities. (CRC/C/GC/12, p.25)

It concludes by declaring the necessity of:

> […] dismantling the legal, political, economic, social and cultural barriers that currently impede children's opportunity to be heard and their access to

> participation in all matters affecting them,' and calls for, 'a commitment to resources and training. (CRC/C/GC/12, p.35)

Lundy (2007) suggests practices regarding children's participation can be predicated on an interpretation of children's rights which do not 'match-up to Article 12'. The UK's legal obligations in relation to the Convention are stressed and the importance of its holistic, rather than piecemeal implementation is highlighted. Article 12 is depicted as being complemented by Articles 2, 3, 13 and 5. Lundy proposes a model, comprising four features, space, voice, audience and influence, for assessing UK educational decision making. Each of these elements were to feature in the research conversations.

2.3.4 General Comment 14

The first paragraph of Article 3 of the Convention, The right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration, mandates such consideration:

> In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. (CRC, Art.3, para.1)

General Comment 14 synthesises the 'best interests of the child' as 'a right, a principle and a rule of procedure' and notes that in order to promote education, or better quality education, for more children:

> [s]tates parties need to have well-trained teachers and other professionals working in different education-related settings, as well as a child-friendly environment and appropriate teaching and learning methods, taking into consideration that education is not only an investment in the future, but also an opportunity for joyful activities, respect, participation and fulfilment of ambitions. Responding to this requirement and enhancing children's responsibilities to overcome the limitations of their vulnerability of any kind, will be in their best interests. (CRC/C/GC/14, p.17)

Although written in relation to educational developments in Australia the words of Cumming and Mawdesley (2013) exactly reflect the position taken by this study:

> If the 'best interests of the child' are to be the primary concern in all matters relating to children, it is logical to expect that these are a major consideration in education laws and policies in Australia. (Cumming and Mawdesley, 2013, p.293).

Particularly noteworthy in General Comment 14 is the inclusion of the Committee's use of the word 'joyful' alongside an endorsement of enhancing children's responsibilities as a way of overcoming limitations and vulnerabilities. Trevarthen (2013) considers joyful to be the normal human affect. It can be questioned how far the regular assessment of young children against seven defined areas of learning in the EYFS is consistent with, 'joyful activities, respect, participation and fulfilment of ambitions'.

2.3.5 General Comment 17

General Comment 17 (2013) addressed the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (UNCRC Article 31). Davey and Lundy (2011) note Article 31 was one of the most innovative aspects of the Convention. Realisation of Article 31 is acknowledged as a fundamental for children's well being but General Comment 17 notes that:

> For many children in both rich and poor countries, child labour, domestic work or increasing educational demands serve to reduce the time available for the enjoyment of these rights. (CRC/C/GC/17, p. 3)

Noting human rights to be 'universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated' (United Nations, 2003, para.5), Davey and Lundy identify the particular significance of Article 31 in the arenas of health and education. Focusing on education for the purposes of this study, Article 31 emphasises that school environments which provide a major role in realising Article 31 include: physical environments for play, sports, games and drama; active promotion of equal opportunities to play for boys and girls; safe playgrounds and equipment, accessible for all children; adequate time during the school day for play and rest; a curriculum which includes cultural and artistic activities; and a

pedagogy which offers active, playful and participatory activities and learning. In their commentary Davey and Lundy note:

> Thus, the right to play is dependent on the right to education and the right to education is dependent on the right to play. (Davey and Lundy, 2011, p.4)

A further relevant feature of General Comment 17 is its emphasis on the importance of training in the rights of children for professionals working with or for children.

> All professionals working with or for children, or whose work impacts on children (Government officials, educators, health professionals, social workers, early years and care workers, planners and architects, etc.), should receive systematic and ongoing training on the human rights of children, including the rights embodied in article 31. Such training should include guidance on how to create and sustain environments in which the rights under article 31 can be most effectively realized by all children. (CRC/C/GC/17 p.22)

2.3.6 Summary of General Comments

General Comments 1, 7, 12, 14, and 17 affirm a view of young children as capable, social beings entitled to be respected, consulted with and listened to. General Comment 7 emphasises young children's participation rights while acknowledging a limited understanding of young children's entitlements in signatory states. General Comment 1 noted that human dignity is served, and developed, through the provision of education. General Comments 12, 14, and 17 cite the role of adults for realising children's rights and press for training in children's rights for those working with children. An overarching elucidation of the inadequate engagement by the UK, and other states parties, in respecting young children is perhaps best expressed by an assertion in the Guide to General Comment 7:

> A distinction must be drawn between the needs-based approach and the rights-based approach in the development of public policies and in the planning generated by civil society organizations. (Liwski, 2006, p.8)

2.4 CRC Concluding observations on UK and NI Periodic Reports

This section presents the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on UK and NI periodic reports which have relevance for the study. These observations include the status of the CRC, children's participation in education and knowledge of children's rights since 2008. Article 44 of the Convention establishes the expectations and conduct of a reporting cycle. Signatories are required to submit reports on progress towards implementing the articles of the Convention. The first report is required to be submitted 'within two years of ratification', with subsequent reports submitted at five yearly intervals. Guidance for the submission indicates the report should declare difficulties and be, 'problem orientated and self critical'. It emphasises that the Committee is interested in concrete implementation measures which would make a reality of the principles and provisions of the Convention. Before analysing the Committee's Concluding Observations on the most recent report (UK Government, Fifth Periodic Report, 2014) it is useful to contextualise it with relevant Concluding Observations from previous reports. Two recommendations from the Concluding Observations (2002) on Periodic Report 2, submitted 1999, are cited in support of the study's assertion that the educational policy context in England diverges from its international children's rights obligations. Nearly twenty years later neither a rights based approach to policy or legislation which reflects Article 12 have been have expedited:

> [T]he Committee remains concerned at the lack of a rights-based approach to policy development and at the fact that the Convention has not been recognized as the appropriate framework for the development of strategies at all levels of government throughout the State party. (CRC/C/15/Add.188, p.4)
>
> 2.4.1 that legislation throughout the State party reflects article 12 and respects children's rights to express their views and have them given due weight in all matters concerning their education, including school discipline. (CRC/C/15/Add.188 p.1)

2.4.1 Third and fourth Periodic Reports

The third and fourth Periodic Reports which were considered together at the 49th session of the Committee in September 2008. The committee continued to be critical of the landscape for children's rights in the UK, citing lack of participation and consultation opportunities both inside and outside school. It regretted the CRC had not been made legally binding and urged all four nations to pursue this, noting that, while Scotland had adopted a rights-based approach to education, this was not the case in the other three countries. The Committee's recommendations most relevant to this study were in paragraph 21 under the heading Dissemination, training and awareness-raising. In addressing adherence to Article 42 two recommendations were made, firstly to make the Convention known to adults and children and secondly to ensure adequate training for professionals working with children.

> The Committee recommends that the State party further strengthen its efforts, to ensure that all of the provisions of the Convention are widely known and understood by adults and children alike, inter alia by including the Convention in statutory national curriculum and ensure that its principles and values are integrated into the structures and practice of all schools.
>
> It also recommends the reinforcement of adequate and systematic training of all professional groups working for and with children, in particular law enforcement officials, immigration officials, media, teachers, health personnel, social workers and personnel of childcare institutions. (CRC/C/GBR/CO/4 p.5)

Six years later reporting on further evidence the Committee noted that:

> […] participation of children in all aspects of schooling is inadequate. (CRC/C/GBR/CO/4, p.15)

and made the following recommendation:

> 33 a) (To) Promote, facilitate and implement, in legislation as well as in practice, within the family, schools, and the community as well as in institutions and in

> administrative and judicial proceedings, the principle of respect for the views of the child (CRC/C/GBR/CO/4, p.8)

A source of support for the inclusion of teaching about the Convention in the curriculum was the Report of the UK Children's Commissioners on the fifth periodic report (2015). The report included the following recommendation:

> The State Party and devolved governments should intensify their efforts to ensure that all schools include the Convention in their curriculum (including where applicable through its inclusion in statutory curriculums, and ensure that its principles and values are integrated into the structures and practices of all schools. (UK Children's Commissioners, 2015, p.41)

There is little evidence to suggest that a systematic approach has been undertaken to raise awareness, knowledge and understanding of the CRC amongst professionals working with children.

2.4.2 Fifth Periodic Report

Although the Committee acknowledged efforts to promote and protect the rights of the child since 2008 critical comments were included in the sections on, 'Child Rights Impact', 'The Best Interests of the Child' and 'Respect for the views of the Child' each of which have a direct bearing on children's day to day lives. In reference to 'Child Rights Impact Assessment'. The Committee called for action to:

> Strengthen coordination and evaluation of the implementation of the Convention at the national level. (CRC/C/GBR/CO/5, p.3)

Under 'The Best Interests of the Child' the Committee:

> […] regrets that the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration is still not reflected in all legislative and policy matters and judicial decisions affecting children. (CRC/C/GBR/CO/5, p.5)

In relation to 'Respect for the views of the child', it noted concern that:

> Children's views are not systematically heard in policy making issues that affect them. (CRC/C/GBR/CO/5, p. 6)

For this study it is the recommendation in, 'Education, leisure and cultural activities' which provides the clearest articulation, to date, of the importance attached to educating children about rights. This most significant recommendation is also the shortest:

> Make children's rights education mandatory. (CRC/C/GBR/CO/5, p. 19)

Were this to become part of educational curricula policy in the UK/England, with its attendant implications for both professional training and child-adult relations, not only would the UK be fulfilling its obligations under the Convention but, potentially, laying the foundations for further social benefits.

2.4.3 Summary of concluding observations

These concluding observations and recommendations made by the CRC indicate a frail environment for the promotion of young children's rights. Responses to Periodic Reports 2 and 3 are critical of children's levels of participation. Without plans to incorporate the Convention into national legislation and no national strategy for implementing children's rights ensuring young children's full participation in educational settings will be hard to realise. If the recommendations to make children's rights education and training professionals in children's rights mandatory are acted upon the prospect of greater participation might improve. Collectively the concluding observations and recommendations provide firm endorsement for the focus of the study.

2.5 Re-contextualising the CRC

> […] the existence of a worldwide accord on the need for and content of children's rights and education is an achievement in and of itself, irrespective of patchy, unsatisfactory or reluctant implementation. (Lundy et al, 2017, p.376).

The CRC is the product of 20th century, Euro-centric, English speaking values (Mitchell, 2005; Lundy et al, 2017; Quennerstedt et al, 2018). Although it can be argued that the framing of a global statement of children's rights was a modernist project Mitchell asserts it straddles 'the modern/postmodern divide'. Whilst its inception and articulation is modernist contrasting interpretations by signatory states indicate an essential capacity for diverse approaches to implementation. Mitchell's overarching concern with the promulgation of the CRC by signatory states (Article 42) is recontextualised by Lundy, Orr and Shier (2017), Struthers (2015), and Bae (2010) who argue for paying greater attention to the relevance of the CRC in children's lives including their education. Thirty years after publication despite critique of its shortcomings and limitations the CRC remains a conduit for monitoring and reporting children's rights as well as a site for theorising childhood. Quennerstedt et al (2018), while not uncritical of the CRC, acknowledge it as:

> […] a dominant and compelling instrument for advancing human rights for children. (Quennerstedt et al, 2018, p.39)

Mitchell notes its provision of:

> at least a minimum standard for cultural, historical and political expressions within ratifying nations (Mitchell, 2005, p.326)

A key concern underpinning this study is the contrast in trajectories between the delineation and development of young children's rights outwith education and early years curricula policy in England. Accordingly the CRC is used throughout as a framework of children's entitlements and government accountability. Critique of the CRC, as enshrining the cultural norms of wealthy, Western, English speaking nations and the complexity of enforcement, is acknowledged (Lundy et al, 2017; Orr, 2014; I'Anson, 2013; Harcourt and Hägglund, 2013; Arce, 2012). Critique notwithstanding the

periodic reporting requirements of the CRC oblige the UK to account for its progress towards realising children's rights as specified in the Convention. Lundy (2012) acknowledges substantive and procedural imperfections of the CRC for realising children's rights in education but asserts that nevertheless:

> international human rights law should make a difference to the way in which states choose to provide schooling to children living within their territories. (2012, p.395)

Lundy, Orr, and Shier strongly endorse the role the Convention can play in realising children's rights and in so doing provide affirmation for its central place in this study:

> the CRC provides a consistent and clear destination, the point at which all children are able to develop to their fullest potential through education that is respectful of their rights. (2017, p.376)

This chapter now moves away from the international policy environment concerning children's entitlements to consider the national context for young children's rights in education.

2.6 National policy context for young children's rights in early years settings

This section outlines the history of specified learning outcomes, or learning goals, for children in England younger than statutory school age, since 1996. It ends by reviewing current DfE policy regarding listening to and involving children and young people and and three interconnected curricula initiatives directed at young children early years settings in England.

2.6.1 A curriculum for young children

> The assumption that an early school starting age is beneficial for children's later attainment is not well supported in the research and there are concerns about the appropriateness of provision for four-year-olds in schools. (Riggall & Sharp, 2008, p.19)

Attention to specifying learning outcomes for young children, in England and Wales, came several years after the introduction of a National Curriculum (1989). Desirable

Outcomes for Children on entering Compulsory Education (DOfCL, 1996) segmented young children's learning into six areas aligned with National Curriculum subject areas. Following an expansion of childcare provision from 1997 (Penn, 2007) the QCA and DfEE published an enlarged set of descriptors, including the specification of early learning goals for each area of learning, in Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (2000). When the Early Years Foundation Stage expanded to include children from birth to 5 years, and became statutory, assessment of learning outcomes was formalised and centrally reported (Foundation Stage Profile, 2008). Thus since 1996, and more so since 2000, young children's educational experience has been subject to:

> […] a highly regulated system, exercising strict and centralised control over children and adults alike. (Moss, 2015, p.231)

Moss notes that educators themselves have, since 2013, been subject to performance related pay. Intertwining child and professional assessment, it is suggested, may not be in harmony with acting in children's best interests when children are assessed using predetermined outcomes.

2.6.2 Listening to and involving children and young people

Statutory guidance issued by DfE (2014) Listening to and involving children and young people, states:

> The government believes that children and young people should have opportunities to express their opinion in matters that affect their lives. (p.2)

The guidance refers local authorities and schools to the Education Act 2002 as the relevant legislative framework. It cites CRC Articles 2, 3, 6 and 12. Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article 12, asserting children's rights to express their views, are quoted verbatim. Acknowledging that the CRC has not been incorporated into national law this two page statutory guidance nevertheless states:

> Schools are strongly encouraged to pay due regard to the Convention. (p.1)

The guidance refers explicitly to facilitating 'pupil voice' as an aspect of effective leadership.

> A feature of effective leadership is engaging pupils as active participants in their education and in making a positive contribution to their school and local community (p.2)

It identifies social, political and educational gains arising from listening to and involving young people specifically:

> participation in a democratic society and benefits for pupils' achievement, attainment, confidence, motivation and self respect. (p.2)

This, arguably encouraging, directive is overshadowed, for young children and their educators, by three policy developments emanating from DfE, England. They are: Bold Beginnings (Ofsted, 2017), Reception Baseline Assessment (Standards and Testing Agency, 2018) and proposed revisions to The Early Years Foundation Stage and Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP, 2018).

2.6.3 Bold Beginnings

'Bold Beginnings' (2017) a report by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) on 'The Reception curriculum in a sample of good and outstanding primary schools' published on Dfe website (2017) endorsed the practice of reception classes which focused teaching and learning on reading, writing and mathematics. Bold Beginnings attracted strong criticism from the Early Years sector. Early Education noted:

> […] an underlying agenda of downward pressure from KS1 to narrow the early years curriculum. (2018, p.1)

while the Centre for Research in Early Childhood stated:

> […] this paper ignores and contradicts other recent Ofsted papers which highlight the benefits of a play-based pedagogy and a broad curriculum in the EYFS. (2018, p.2)

Although not itself a policy directive reference to Bold Beginnings is used to contextualise two proposals which are set to become policy: the pilot Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and Reception Baseline Assessment. What is common to all three is a curricula emphasis on reading, writing and mathematics.

2.6.4 Reception Baseline Assessment

Scheduled to begin in English reception classes from September 2020, the Department for Education (DfE) emphasises cross institutional accountability when it asserts, Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) is:

> […] essential for building a fairer progress measure for primary schools. (DfE, 2018. p.1)

'A baseline without basis: The validity and utility of the proposed reception baseline assessment in England' (2018) is the title of a report commissioned by the British Educational Research Association. Noting its sole purpose as accountability the report disputes the validity of a national methodology for assessing 4 year olds on grounds of ethics, feasibility and reliability. Commenting on the proposals, the authors state unequivocally:

> […] they will not work in the best interests of children and their parents (BERA, 2018, p.1).

This phrasing is particularly telling since it uses the language of Article 3, UNCRC, which enjoins all adults to work in the best interests of the child/children. In their response, 'Bald Beginnings', The Association for Professional Development in Early Years (Tactyc) commented:

> These recommendations are based on limited evidence derived from a questionable methodology without recourse to well-researched, established international evidence about young children's learning and early years pedagogy. (Tactyc, 2017, p.1)

2.6.5 Proposed curricula revisions

In addition to assessment on entry into Reception classes four and five year olds in England will have their progress towards the early learning goals (ELGs) at the end of their Reception year. The draft early learning goals, currently being piloted, have been vehemently critiqued by Early Education. In their 'Commentary on the draft revised Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework, including the Early Learning Goals and Areas of Learning', Early Education (2018) claim that the scope of the proposed modifications has no professional mandate from early years specialists and exceeds those of the Learning Goals:

> Effectively it is a rewrite of the EYFS curriculum by the back door, as the Areas of Learning section has been re-written, and the Characteristics of Effective Learning have been made non-statutory (Early Education, p.2)

For the purposes of this study it is the impact of the revised Speaking Early Learning Goal, which directly connect with young children's opportunities to enjoy their right to express themselves (Article 12), which is of particular concern:

> Current ELG Speaking: children express themselves effectively, showing awareness of listeners' needs. They use past, present and future forms accurately when talking about events that have happened or are to happen in the future. They develop their own narratives and explanations by connecting ideas or events.
>
> Proposed ELG Speaking: Children at the expected level of development will: - Participate in small group, class and 1-to1 discussions, offering their own ideas, using new vocabulary; offer explanations for why things might happen, making use of new vocabulary from stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems when appropriate; Express their ideas using full sentences, with modelling and support from their teacher.

Having 'awareness of listeners' needs' and 'developing their own narratives' are critical for respectful engagement of children towards others and respectful engagement of

educators towards children. Their omission conflicts with the requirement of Article 42 to promulgate knowledge of the Convention. Early Education noted:

> Key aspects of the original ELG have been lost. There is nothing here about expressing themselves effectively and actively communicating with others taking listeners' needs into account; nor clarity around the importance of using language for thinking in narratives and connecting ideas. (p.14)

Proposals which promote a restriction of the early years curriculum and formally assess children as they are inducted into Reception classes, as well as when they leave, are in tension with research evidence cited by professional bodies, a policy directive which encourages 'engaging pupils as active participants in their education' and The Aims of Education specified in CRC.

> 'The development of the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.' (Article 12 (a))

Each of these curricula intentions for young children in England inscribe an extension to an early years curriculum arc which privileges the assessment of prescribed outcomes over learner-led participation. Considered together they lend further weight to the implications of this study for those concerned by didactic pedagogy in the early years and its social consequences.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Literature reviewed for exploring the relationship between realising young children's rights in early years settings and the professional identities of rights respecting early years leaders had three foci: curriculum and early years curricula in particular, young children's curricula agency, and the well-springs of professional identities. An outline of the search strategy is provided followed by a brief account of the sociology of childhood as it relates to this study. In order to contextualise young children's educational experiences, theoretical perspectives on early years curricula are considered. Following this learner-led relational curricula approaches for young children are reviewed, after which definitions of children's agency and illustrative examples of pedagogic respect for children's agency are provided. The final section considers literature focused on the development of teachers' professional identities, in particular factors which contribute to the development of professional values. The chapter closes with a summary of the support and endorsement, provided by the literature, for this study.

3.1 Search strategy

Relevant literature was identified using Scopus and Education Research Complete (ERIC), UWE online library and Google Scholar. There were two starting points for searching: children's rights in early years education, and the development of rights respecting identities in early years educators. Articles written in English published between 2000 and 2018 were evaluated.

To review literature covering young children's rights in educational settings, an initial search of the databases was undertaken using the terms children's rights and education. This returned a large number of papers focused on inclusion, children's health, language teaching and school governance, none of which were directly relevant to this study. Refining the search term by adding early to education and children's rights also yielded a considerable literature (238 articles). Themes of inclusion, social justice,

participation and policy planning were well represented. It was notable how few included pedagogy. In line with the definition of young children provided in Chapter 1 only literature which addressed rights and participation of children under 8 years of age in educational settings was reviewed.

The next refinement added rights respecting with young children and early years education. Of the four articles returned only one, on researching with children, was tangentially related. Adapting the search terms to specify UNCRC and young children yielded articles focused on monitoring, with limited reference to children's curricula participation, and none which included the age bracket 0-8 years. The inclusion of rights respecting, thus rights respecting, young children and education, yielded a total of 20 articles. Amongst these articles only one focused on young children's active participation in early years curricula. Five searches of Education Research Complete using (1) rights respecting early years, (2) rights respecting, early years and education, (3) rights respecting, pedagogy, (4) rights respecting young children and education, (5) curriculum, rights respecting and early years resulted in respectively 1, 0, 3, 2 and 0 articles. Searching UNCRC with early years was, again, more fruitful yielding nine relevant articles. The low numbers of relevant results indicated an endorsement of the author's perception of conflicting trajectories regarding young children's participation outside of education and those of early years curricula policy in England. Using Scopus and ERIC to search for literature on the development of professional identities of rights respecting early years educators began with the search terms early years educators identities. This yielded 103 results covering diverse topics from medicine to forest school as well as reflections on professional trajectories, including altered identities. At 97/103, an article contrasting interpretations of professionalism by Finnish and English early childhood educators had relevance. To refine the search rights respecting was added to early years educators identities. This yielded 0 articles. By refining the search terms to rights respecting educators the number increased to 27. Database searches were augmented with searches using UWELibrary. Additional relevant sources were identified in response to contributions from the study's participants.

3.2 Reconceptualising childhoods

The development of a sociology of childhood in the 20th century together with ratification of the UNCRC contributed to a reconceptualisation of childhood (Alanen, 2018; Wyness, 2015; Moss et al, 2007; Qvortrup, 2004; Alanen and Mayall, 2001; Freeman, 1992; Postman, 1983; Aries, 1963). Whilst acknowledging that children's experiences continued to be structured by adults, in the service of what adults require from childhood, Alanen and Mayall noted a modification to discourses of childhood towards the end of the 20th century:

> The idea that adult views are sufficient for defining children's needs has given way to the understanding that children's own wishes and expressed needs are relevant to the construction and implementation of social policies and practices. (2001, p.248)

This passage articulates the tension between discourses of child rights and educational developments in early years. While they noted an increase in children's involvement in public discourse, simultaneous developments in early years curricula saw an increased specification of children's learning. Arguably it is in the arena of education, specifically through curricula, that adult constructs of childhood are most vividly articulated (Hedges et al, 2011; Sellers, 2010; Nutbrown et al, 2008). The organisation of educational provision including school starting age, assessment requirements, and grouping of children, in combination with curriculum design, are key cultural tools for shaping children's experiences and imaginations. (Moss, 2014; MacNaughton, 2003). Mayall's description of the scholarisation of childhood is significant here because it predates a mandatory Early Years curriculum in England (The Childcare Act, 2006). For young children in England scholarisation subsequently extended to include children from birth EYFS (2012) with an explicit focus on school readiness (Tickell, 2011; Nutbrown, 2012). Following publication of the UNCRC, but before General Comment 7 (2005), and in light of changing discourses of childhood, a powerful question emerged. First asked by Langsted (1994), *Do we consider children to be experts in their own lives?* disrupted discourses of child need and concomitant adult power. In their response to Langsted, Clark and Statham (2005) focused on young children's perspectives citing lack

of attention to young children's voices, widespread beliefs amongst adults that children do not know their own minds, and, contingent on these points, a lack of skills amongst adults in listening to young children. Applying a modified version of the question to early years curricula can reveal not only implicit constructions of childhood but space(s) available, and unavailable, for children's active participation in their educational experiences: *Do we respect young children as capable learners?* Accordingly literature on early years curricula is evaluated through the lens of respect for children's agency.

3.2.1 Critiquing and reconceptualising curriculum

Curriculum content and objectives reflect, and produce, social constructions of childhood (Moss, 2012; Smith, 2007; MacNaughton, 2003, 1997). In consequence curriculum is a site of contestation or 'struggle' (Soler and Miller, 2003). This section considers complementary critiques of curriculum: one generic, one early years specific. The first combines Jackson's (1968) identification of the hidden curriculum and Eisner's null curriculum in order to highlight the often unplanned, unintended learning which arises outside specified curricula objectives. The second critique questions the validity of using the tenets of developmental psychology to organise and assess early years curricula. In its place a model of curriculum based on children's interests or working theories is proposed.

Identification of the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968) promoted consideration of the totality of children's experiences in educational settings. Jackson's work indicated that children's learning arises not only from explicitly encoded objectives but also from the social relations, values, pedagogic and behavioural expectations manifest within educational settings. Unintended, or hidden, lessons learned by the author from the introductory narratives included the transcendent power of adults, threats posed to that power by children's non-conforming behaviour and the ramifications of those threats. For the purposes of this study's enquiry into realising young children's rights, it is instructive to combine the concept of the hidden curriculum, a site of adult power, with Eisner's (1985) definition of the null curriculum. Eisner defined the null curriculum against the explicit curriculum or intentional curriculum which covered all planned

teaching and activity. The identification of the null curriculum drew attention to a shadow side of curriculum: that which is not included. For Eisner the null curriculum comprised two elements: intellectual processes that schools emphasise and neglect, and content or subject areas that are present and absent. This aligns with Mayall's evaluation of adult structures for children serving adult needs (2001). As with the hidden curriculum the null curriculum is a site in which adult power pertains.

> In identifying the null curriculum there are two major dimensions that can be considered. One is the intellectual processes that schools emphasise and neglect. The other is the content or subject areas that are present and absent in schools. (Eisner, 1985, p.98)

Eisner also noted the role played by habit in determining curricula content. The close alignment between the EYFS areas of learning and subject areas in the National Curriculum (Soler and Miller, 2003), underscored by an increased emphasis on school readiness (Tickell, 2011), can be considered illustrative of habituated practice. Neglect of both information about the UNCRC and respect for children's participation in the EYFS is considered a significant curricula absence for young children in England. This is an important perspective when considering what is present and absent in the EYFS (2017). Were an acknowledgement of children's right to be consulted in all matters that concern them alongside a right to be informed about their entitlements included in the curriculum, framing young children's experiences in settings could be substantially altered in favour of their active participation.

Eisner's identification of what is included and excluded is echoed in the analysis of power and knowledge applied by those reconceptualising early childhood curricula (Farquhar, 2012; Sellers, 2010; Cannella and Bloch, 2006; Johansson, 2005; Soto and Swadener, 2002; Dahlberg et al, 1999; Kessler and Swadener, 1992). Reconceptualists developed the sociological framing which locates the design and practice of Early Childhood curricula as political and value laden. Cannella and Bloch (2006) note the role played by the state in producing:

> children as societal objects and subjects of educational and care practices (2006, p.7).

A central component in their critique of the dominance of American and European perspectives in the field of Early Childhood is their questioning of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) drawn from developmental psychology. What is considered to be a misconception of children's learning, as a linear progression, is identified by Wood and Hedges (2016) as underpinning the assessment of the EYFS learning goals. Measuring children's achievement against externally generated assessment criteria produces a deficit model of young children's learning reminiscent of Holt's (1964) analysis. Soler and Miller (2003) and Hedges and Cooper (2016) critique instrumental early years curricula focused on preparation for subsequent stages of education through centrally controlled outcomes. They identify the dangers of an outcome specified curriculum leading to atomised, homogenised learning experiences for children and didactic pedagogy. Although the EYFS (2017) contains five references to responding to children's interests in they are framed within a developmental model of learning and constrained by assessment demands.

> EYFS seeks to provide a secure foundation through learning and development opportunities which are planned around the needs and interests of each individual child and are assessed and reviewed regularly (EYFS, 2017, p.5).
>
> Practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care (EYFS, 2017, p.7).

In contrast learner-led curricula challenge pre-determined centrally conceived curricula. Instances of learner-led approaches include: following children's abiding interests (Athey, 1991), learning stories (Carr, 2011), children's working theories (Sellers, 2010), and child-led pedagogies (Kinos et al, 2016). Athey promoted the identification of children's schematic learning as a way for educators to learn from children's meaning making how best to extend their learning. In so doing, a top-down model of curriculum is overturned. Similarly learning stories (Carr, 2005) which draw on Bruner's self making narratives (2001) support a learner-led, child respecting model of learning. Smith (2007) indicates ways in which learning stories promote children's agency by offering

opportunities for children to initiate and develop a sense of ownership in their learning. She considers them to be good examples of children's participation rights. For Sellers (2010) curriculum is driven by children as opposed to visited upon them:

> I pay attention to their doing (of) curriculum – how they process through/with curriculum or how they go about 'curriculum-ing' (p.574)

Seller's respectful starting point is that:

> young children's understandings are equitably expert to those of adult worlds. (p.557)

Like Athey (1991) and Carr (2005), Sellers (2010) promotes responsive, dialogic pedagogy unrestricted by assessed prescribed outcomes:

> Children thrive within the complexity of their spontaneous play(ing) where linear processes are not necessary to the fruitful play(ing) of generative learning~living experiences. (Sellers, 2010, p.574)

Wood and Hedges (2016) emphasise the importance of developing learning environments which support children to develop their own working theories:

> Curriculum should be seen as incorporating dynamic working practices, specifically what children choose to do and talk about with each other, and what practitioners enact with children to support their learning and development in a variety of ways through play-based provision, through reciprocal relationships, as well as through intentional and responsive teaching. (Wood and Hedges, 2016, p.401)

Prioritising children's meaning making over adult structures represents an affirmative view of young children as active participants in building their own understandings. Invoking children's working theories as an approach to young children's curriculum complements rights respecting pedagogical practices. It conceptualises young children as competent, confident learners who, when given opportunities to articulate their understandings, support educators to extend their learning. A final pertinent example of alternative conceptualising of early years curriculum is the radical alternative to developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) provided by democratically appropriate

practice DeAP (Kinos et al, 2016). Their critique of contemporary early years curricula in England, Sweden, Estonia and USA, is articulated as:

> too often shaped by externally imposed, often national and standardized, targets and performance measures and by context-specific pedagogical traditions. (Kinos et al, 2016, p.346)

Their analysis overlaps with the work of Athey (1991), Carr (2011), and Sellers (2010) when they assert:

> A child's sense of self and her individual and idiosyncratic motivations are related to and arise from her life experiences, including her shared school experiences in a particular school culture that has deep historical roots. (Kinos et al, 2016, p.348)

As in this study, the authors identify a tension between realising human rights and democratic imperatives which each country is subject to and the framing of early years curricula. Their analysis of the EYFS aligns with Hedges and Cooper (2014) by citing a formal curriculum based on sequential, universal developmental stages. In support of a case for respecting young children's active participation they note:

> […] a pressing need exists to define child-initiated pedagogies, so that practitioners and settings can move toward democratically appropriate practices. (Kinos et al, 2016, p.346)

3.2.2 Synthesising perspectives on curriculum

Opportunities for young children's participation in educational settings afforded by curricula design reflect constructions of childhood including conceptualisations of children's capabilities. The discussion above has contextualised the concept of curriculum and outlined some theoretical perspectives which endorse a learner-led approach to working with young children. A learner-led pedagogic environment is considered to correspond closely with rights respecting, participatory, educational practices:

> Interests-based curriculum and pedagogy are highly participative and interpretive. (Hedges et al, 2011, p.185)

Although the current iteration of the EYFS (2017) specifies following young children's interests, neither consultation or participation are referred to explicitly. There is no

reference to UNCRC. In addition to the requirements of the UNCRC (Articles 12 and 13), the work of Smith (2015), Sellers (2010), Hedges reaffirm moral, relational and pragmatic arguments in favour of respecting and consulting with children in their learning environment(s).

3.3 Young children's agency

Before defining and illustrating instances of young children participating in their educational environments, it is useful to identify a prerequisite for participation: agency. Ahearn's definition is helpful:

> Agency refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act. (2001, p.112)

This captures the interplay of macro and micro processes involved in young children's learning experiences whether in educational contexts or not. Ahearne's definition has relevance when applied to the first three of the introductory narratives. It offers an explanation of instances of thwarting of children's agency as, in part, a function of the positioning of adults in sites of learning. Ahearn's definition complements Oswell's. In *The Agency of Children*, he characterises progress during the 20th century in the following terms:

> […] the capacity for children to determine their and others' lives has emerged and grown and refers to the democratisation of our relations with children. (2013, p.4)

Archard's assessment of the achievement of the UNCRC is more modest:

> Children are acknowledged as having agency and as having a voice that must be listened to. This is no mean achievement. (2015, p.58)

Oswell credits education with increasing opportunity for children to exercise agency. Schools, he claimed that following the Plowden report education in England and Wales adopted a child centred pedagogy which reconstructed the role of the teacher and enable children to learn at their own pace. This analysis reflects an—arguably idealised—interpretation of the Plowden era (1967–1989). During this period there was an emphasis on active learning, which drew on the ideas of Dewey (1913), and Piagetian thinking was also emphasised. According to Oswell, the emphasis was:

[…] on learning rather than teaching. (2013, p.122)

Evidence of increasing democratisation between adults and children, including young children, exists in, for example, research with children (MacDonald, 2013; Punch, 2002), some policy and charity consultations (DFE, RR071, 2008), and, increasingly, media coverage of children's experiences. Evidence of this occurring inside early education is limited.

3.3.1 Theoretical perspectives on young children's curricula participation

In this section the work of Matusov and Laevers (2005) is highlighted as having significance for the study. Matusov devised iterative agentic curricula. Laevers' interest is in learner dispositions. Matusov, a post Vygotskian, developed a learner led, relational pedagogy he has variously named EFA (Education for Agency), Dialogic Education for Authorial Agency (DEFAA) and, most recently, (2014) Democratic Dialogic Education For and From Authorial Agency (DDEFFAA). Matusov (2014) identified some biographical influences on his reconceptualisation of curriculum. Recalling his studies in a Moscow high school, Matusov recounts how he developed pedagogic practices based on Socratic dialogue for teaching 'math'. He credits his reading of Vygotsky and Bahktin, in combination with his own pedagogical 'disasters' for understanding the importance of learner agency in a dialogic, rather than didactic, environment. In the course of the interview he reveals that he found responding to set assignments, rather than following his own learning direction, very tiring. Not only does his personal account affirm evidence provided, from Plato to Trevarthen, regarding the centrality of learners' interest in their learning, it is an exemplar depiction of professional values arising through personal educational biography.

Laevers' focus on Experiential Learning analyses young children's learning through the lenses of well-being and involvement. Laevers is concerned with 'deep level learning' (2013, 2018). His research is echoed in an EPPE report (2004). Van Oers' description of children, 'deeply experiencing', a role whether in their play or in participating in the life and development of the setting they attend, is reminiscent of Eisner (1994). Van Oers (2007) draws explicitly on Vygotskian thinking when he

reminds readers that learning should begin with children's actions. He points to studies he has undertaken which suggest such an approach respects, values and extends the thinking of young learners (van Oers & Poland, 2007, van Oers & Duijkers, 2012). The significance of the pedagogic role is promoted countering a spectre of chaos and misrule sometimes attributed to learner-led practices:

> […] teacher (or expert) is necessary in order to guide the process toward one of the culturally accepted versions of the role and the types of speech that can be associated with it. (van Oers & Duijkers, 2012, p.525)

Matusov (2014) critiques van Oers, Duijkers (2012) describing their approach as closed participatory socialisation because of its emphasis on guidance towards culturally accepted learning. Matusov, whose approach privileges learners' and teachers' 'authorial agency' defines education as:

> […] a learner's leisurely pursuit of critical examination of the self, life and the world in critical dialogue […] Students are led into investigating and testing their ideas and desires, assuming new responsibilities and developing new questions and concerns. (Matusov, 2014, p.162)

It is difficult to reconcile Oswell's description of participation (3.3 above) with curricula and inspection frameworks which emphasise 'standards', 'school readiness' and 'requirements' (EYFS, 2014). Both frameworks require educators to focus on what are described as prime and specific areas of learning and school readiness including early identification of children who do not achieve school readiness (Early Years Inspection Framework, p.1).

In his deconstruction of schools as social sites Oswell notes the individualisation that characterises the construction of relationships between adults and children. He draws an analogy between a teacher and a priest, caring for each member of the class individually. He asserts that this individualisation has contributed to the emergence of children's agency but also notes the sociocultural mediation of this:

> […] the school individualises children but only inasmuch as that individualisation is coordinated within a disciplined grid of time (Oswell, 2013, p.121)

In summary it can be argued that young children's opportunities to exercise agency in educational environments in England, are circumscribed in the current curricula context.

It has already been indicated that the UK falls short of its Article 42 responsibilities by not including knowledge of children's rights in the National Curriculum including EYFS. Woodhead and Lansdown (in Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010) respectively comment on the gap between the rhetoric of ratifying the Convention and evidence of their practical implementation.

> If we are to develop fully the potential for children and young people to participate in society we may need to move beyond 'listening to children' and 'giving children a say' to the meaning of participation in everyday life. (Woodhead, 2010, p.xxi)

Both acknowledge that this applies to the very youngest children. Woodhead comments on the simultaneous attractiveness, and blandness, of the word 'participation'. Lansdown agrees with a need for 'clarity of definition':

> There should be no lower age limit on the right to participate, and it should not be limited to the expression of views in adult language' (Lansdown, 2010, p.12)

Current, and previous, iterations of the EYFS (2012, 2014, 2017) recognise play as children's mode of learning. This provides opportunities for fostering, and promoting, children's agency.

> Each area of learning and development must be implemented through planned, purposeful play and through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activity. (EYFS, 2017, p.9)

It describes characteristics of learning in agentic terms: playing and exploring, active learning, creating and thinking critically (p.9). Children's choices are promoted but there are no references to participation. Brooker's (2011) analysis of practices claiming to follow children's interests notes how these practices can be tokenistic, and/or trivial. She identities the adoption of an attitude of benevolence, 'let them have their way', over respectful listening, and contends tokenistic listening may reinforce the power and status differences between the listener and the listened-to:

> It means that they must be prepared to revise their own views, and review their own practice, in the light of what children say. Fundamentally, it means believing that children are entitled to the same respect for their views as are adults. (Brooker, 2011, p.140)

Pascal and Bertram's analysis of young children's participation outlines its significance in all aspects of children's lives and therefore in the work of educators. The current iteration of the EYFS constructs children as unique becomings (Eke, Butcher & Lee, 2009) whose progress towards school readiness is tracked, measured, recorded and published. Pascal and Bertram's list of eight conceptual and pedagogic actions required of rights respecting educators of young children includes two with particular relevance to this study:

> The courage required to redistribute the power so that children have a sense of their strength and rights.
>
> The need for professional action with a strong praxeological intent (theory, action, documentation, reflection, ethics). (Pascal & Bertram, 2009, p.261)

Pascal and Bertram's work emphasises the importance of respecting young children as people; people with rights and opinions entitled to be acknowledged, and responded to, as adults would be responded to:

> However, for us, this perspective has validity only if we see children as active citizens in the here and now, already participating in a democratic life in which they have full rights and responsibilities which they are practicing continually in their daily interactions with the world. (Pascal and Bertram, 2009, p.254)

General Comment 1 (2001) emphasises continuity of respect for children's rights inside as well as outside educational settings:

> Children do not lose their human rights by virtue of passing through the school gates. Thus, for example, education must be provided in a way that respects the inherent dignity of the child and enables the child to express their views freely in accordance with Article 12 (1) and to participate in school life […] The participation of children in school life, the creation of school communities and student councils, peer education and peer counselling, and the involvement of children in school disciplinary proceedings should be promoted as part of the process of learning and experiencing the realization of rights. (CRC/GC/2001/1 p.3)

In their contribution to reconceptualising early childhood research and young children's agency, Pascal and Bertram assert:

> If all our children are to enjoy the rights enshrined in the UNCRC then research and practice in England needs to fundamentally reshape its paradigm to become more inclusive and participatory. (Pascal and Bertram, 2009, p.253)
>
> The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is now part of our thinking and discourse but it is far from being realised in our actions. It is the responsibility of all of us engaged in working with or researching with young children to strive to ensure that children's right to active participation maintains a high profile in practice as well as in theory. (Pascal and Bertram, 2009, p.261)

The assertion that the UNCRC is part of our thinking may not extend as widely as Pascal and Bertram might hope. The opportunistic sample of more than 1,000 young adults illustrated in Narrative 4 conveys a worrying picture of ignorance regarding the Convention by trainee educators and in turn by many of their educators. Eighteen years after UK ratification of the CRC, Pascal and Bertram (2009) indicated a need for changes in:

> […] values and attitudes to realise this commitment for all children in all early childhood settings In many settings these hard fought for rights of children are not yet evident in practice. (Pascal and Bertram, 2009 p.253)

Nearly a decade later, evidence of respect for children's rights in early childhood settings in England remains limited.

3.3.2 Participation afforded by curricula design

> To be of high quality, ECE settings must be structured to support warm, nurturant, challenging, and responsive interactions between children and well qualified staff, and for children's views and feelings to be respected. (Smith, 2016, p.501)

> The attainment of these (UNCRC) goals involves respecting and valuing children as active participants in the educational process. If fully implemented, the right of children to express views and have them taken seriously, throughout the school environment, would represent one of the most profound transformations in moving towards a culture of respect for children's rights, for their dignity and citizenship, and for their capacities to contribute significantly towards their own well-being. (Lansdown, Jimerson, Shahroozi, 2014, p.5)

This section contrasts opportunities for participation afforded by Te Whariki, New Zealand's bicultural early childhood curriculum, and HighScope in Ypsilanti, North America, to demonstrate possibilities for accommodating children's participation into pedagogic practices if written into curricula documentation.

Te Whariki, translated from te reo Maori as 'a woven mat for all to stand on' was first published in the same year as Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Schooling 1996. It was 20 years (2017) before it was deemed necessary to make revisions which, as with the EYFS, involved a reduction in assessment demands. Listening to children is central to its values position and a key marker of respectful pedagogy:

> Te Whariki recognises and incorporates children's voices, and recognises the uniqueness of children, and their rights. Children are seen as active learners who choose, plan and challenge, rather than as passive recipients of the teaching of skills. (Smith, 2015, p.85)

> Te Whariki builds a climate of reciprocity, listening to children, and observing how their curiosity, feelings and interests are engaged by their learning environments, encouraging them to contribute to their own learning. Including children's and parents' voices in the formative assessments that accompany Te Whariki (within learning stories), the curriculum constructs children as social actors, and orients them towards self-regulating their own learning, and striving towards increased competence (learning goals) rather than towards favourable judgements and the avoidance of failure (performance goals). (Smith, 2015, p.87)

Research into the HighScope early childhood programmes in North America (Schweinhart et al., 2005) found that participatory settings in which children's

self-initiated play using the plan, do, and review approach were associated with more positive long-term outcomes than nursery settings in which teachers focused on narrower, academic, knowledge. Once again research echoes findings from the EPPE study (2004). Indeed, respect for participation rights within education is fundamental to the realisation of the right to education. At this point it is useful to reconnect with General Comment 7:

> To achieve the right of participation requires adults to adopt a child-centred attitude, listening to young children and respecting their dignity and their individual points of view. It also requires adults to show patience and creativity by adapting their expectations to a young child's interests, levels of understanding and preferred ways of communicating. (CRC/C/GC7/Rev.1, p7)

The critical involvement of respectful adults is emphasised by Percy-Smith and Thomas (2010) and Smith (2015):

> The attainment of these goals involves respecting and valuing children as active players in the educational process. (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010, p.5)

> Pointing towards participation rights in educational settings suggests that children should be viewed and treated as citizens in early childhood settings, and this means respecting their dignity and giving them a chance to make choices, take responsibility and care for others. It also has implications for designing an early childhood curriculum that will strengthen dispositions towards resilience and reciprocity. (Smith, 2015, p.80)

Smith is a pioneer of respect for young children whose book *Enhancing Children's Rights* crystallises a rationale for young children's rights as well as offering a metric for evaluating early years curricula. Put another way, a curriculum for young children which does not prioritise building resilience and reciprocity is failing to fulfil both moral and pragmatic responsibilities.

> Business as usual is not enough to make the vision of the Convention a reality for all children. The world needs new ideas and approaches, and the Convention must become a guiding document for every human being in every nation. (UNICEF, A World of Difference: 25 CRC achievements, 2014, p.1)

This assertion develops points made by Lansdown (2011) in her report for UNICEF, Every Child's Right To Be Heard, she declares:

> Supporting a child's right to be heard in the early years is integral to nurturing citizenship over the long term. In this way, the values of democracy are embedded in the child's approach to life – a far more effective grounding for democracy than a sudden transfer of power at the age of 18. (Lansdown, 2011, p.9)

3.4 Respect for young children's educational participation

This section provides evidence, from different cultural and educational contexts, of young children co-constructing learning. Afforded opportunities to direct, contribute to, participate in, and reflect on educational provision, young children and their educators demonstrate both the possibilities and actualities of respectful learning. Johanssan's (2005) account of respectful relations between teachers and young children in Swedish preschools corresponds closely with recognition respect as set out in Chapter 1. Johannssan asserts the root of pedagogic praxis to be teacher beliefs about children. She identifies developmentalism as responsible for considering children as undeveloped or 'primitive' and suggests this as a source for the enactment of non-respectful attitudes and behaviours towards children in early years settings. A vivid exemplar of child respecting practices is provided by George's account of respecting very young children's decision making about food toileting. She asks:

> What does respecting the autonomy of children aged one and two years – who are dependent on adults for assistance with eating and excretion - look like on the ground? (George, 2009, p.10)

She describes the concrete actions arising from professional reflection and consideration for pre-verbal children by educators in different settings, referring to this as:

> […] systematic efforts to create respectful environments from birth onwards. (George, 2009, p.10)

Two projects, Living democracy in day nurseries in Germany, and Young children and the Human Dignity Initiative, in Israel, are cited as further examples of adults rethinking power and relations with young children in order to foster mutually respectful relations. Quoting an educator from the German project, George cites the following example: when a pre-verbal child signals they have had enough to eat, through body language or sound making, the signal is taken as intentional communication and respected by educators.

Taguchi (2008) reports on a longitudinal study of children and teachers in an early childhood setting. She is endeavouring to understand what lies behind teachers' decision making. Her research challenges taken for granted ideas connected to power and relationships in Swedish early childhood education. She presents an example of a teacher incorporating one young child's repeated request to sit with another child into the class topic on spatial awareness rather than scolding the child for being a nuisance. This alternative pedagogic choice was made following professional development, led by Taguchi, in which educators were invited to deconstruct their pedagogic. In the context of Norwegian early childhood settings Bae makes explicit reference to UNCRC when considering young children's participation rights:

> […] children have a right to experience that their expressions and points of view are taken seriously and have an impact in their everyday life, even though their intentions cannot always be followed up in action. (Bae, 2010, p.209)

In Enhancing Children's Rights, Smith (2015) crystallises a rationale for young children's rights as well as offering a metric for curriculum evaluation:

> […] a curriculum for young children which does not prioritise building resilience and reciprocity is failing to fulfil a moral responsibility. (Smith, 2015, p.85)

3.4.1 Instances of adults' disrespectful attitudes

It is possible—likely, even—that any attempt to collect data for the study which illustrated disrespectful relational engagement by educators towards young children would not have been very difficult. Happily it was not within the study's parameters either empirically or ethically. It is however possible, and important, to report on what others have observed. George (2009) notes how disrespect towards young children can appear routine, as suggested by the author reflecting on the introductory narratives. Berthelsen (2005) offers an incisive explanation for the low priority children's rights has in early years settings:

> The rights of participation for children in child care programs have not received strong attention. This is because the primary purpose of such programs is not to serve the needs of children. (Berthelsen, 2005, p.49)

She suggests that the institutional nature of early childhood education and care can militate against respecting young children's rights:

> […] unless adults appreciate that children are agents of their own learning. (Berthelsen, 2005, p.50)

Vuorisalo and Alanen (2015) describe the behaviour and interactions of adults and children at a shared institutional breakfast. Adult enactment of power in this scenario is about noise levels. What is of interest to the author in this scenario is the inconsistent, almost capricious, nature of the 'preschool teachers' behaviour. As well as breaking her own rule of silence while eating by responding to a conversational opening from a girl, she singles out a boy to chastise when all the children had been 'noisy'. A serious mismatch between a teacher's expectations of herself and the children in her care recalls the examples of casual disrespect illustrated by the opening narratives.

Very young children are capable of contributing their views on the educational environment in which they are learning. Research with Italian children aged 3 to 5 in an early years setting found their perceptions to be profound (Daly, Ruxton and Schuurman, 2015). The children acknowledge the authority of their teachers, and their responsibility to behave well. However they do not think they should be shouted at:

> When the teacher shouts at me I feel sad and also I will start to cry. (Daly, Ruxton and Schuurman, 2015, p.33)

When invited, the children say that the right kind of teacher would be firm when necessary, but would also offer kind words. The words below are spoken by a child talking about a picture she has drawn illustrating a nice teacher:

> This is the teacher and me. We are holding hands and sometimes we embrace. The teacher says 'thank you' to me. This is what I would like the teacher to do. (Daly, Ruxton and Schuurman, 2015, p.33)

The research team stated that sharing the views of children with their teachers enabled teachers to better understand the perspectives of children, the misunderstandings that can arise when trying to guide children's behaviour, and better ways to establish positive environments for their growth. Regarding children's participation, in line with Article

12, the team summarise points made by children themselves. Of the eleven points the following four have a particular bearing on this study:

> The awareness of both children and adults about children's rights, including their right to participate, should be improved.
>
> Professionals working directly with children should be trained to listen to children and support their participation rights.
>
> Honesty, trust, and good relationships are key to improving relations and communication between children and adults, and to facilitation of children's participation.
>
> Children should be made aware of how their opinions have impacted on decision making processes. (Daly, Ruxton and Schuurman, 2015, p.21)

3.4.2 Realising rights respecting early years educators' values

> Children need well educated educators who engage in professional and sensitive reflection, who think about their work and who respond to new ideas and new experiences drawn from reflection on their practice and relevant research. (Nutbrown, 2011, p.177)

> The foundations of teachers' views of children as persons - subjects with the same value as adults - are to a large extent based on a combination of personal, cultural and educational perspectives on children and childhood and how they as teachers should act towards children. (Johansson, 2005, p.12)

> Professional identity results from interaction between the personal experiences of teachers and the social, cultural and institutional environment in which they function on a daily basis. (Court et al, 2009, p.208)

That issues of identity are fundamental to human wellbeing including mutual understanding is well documented (Schwartz et al, 2011). The personal identities of early years educators connect and intertwine with the developing identities of young children. The personal, and educational, biographies of educators are a resource drawn upon heavily in pedagogic exchanges. For some, though not all, educators this process is conscious. Educators with self awareness of their value positions, including the wellspring of those values, may have a greater capacity to withstand the vicissitudes of

changing curricula imperatives (Laevers, 2005). This study is interested in promoting greater reflexivity on the part of—particularly trainee—educators.

> […] teachers' beliefs, values, frames of reference and obsessions involve a complex relationship between us as individuals, communities and the cultures of which we are a part. (Weiner, 1994, p.10)

> The person of the teacher is an essential element in what constitutes professional teaching and therefore needs careful conceptualisation. (Kelchtermans, 2009, p.79)

There is a substantial literature covering teacher identity. Court at al (2009) note:

> Professional identity results from interaction between the personal experiences of teachers and the social, cultural and institutional environment in which they function on a daily basis. (Court et al, 2009, p.208)

A strand within narrative accounts of teachers' experiences focuses on ways professional educators account for the values they enact in their work, their praxis. Court et al, whose work examines the biographical narratives of pre-school teachers, note that narrative research with educators in this phase of education is under-represented. Their study revealed:

> An ongoing connection was revealed between key events and people in the preschool teachers' narratives, their perceptions of the teacher's role and their professional selves. (Court et al, 2009, p.207)

Weiner developed a pathway for women educators to declare their personhood within their work:

> […] teachers' beliefs, values, frames of reference and obsessions involve a complex relationship between us as individuals, communities and the cultures of which we are a part. (Weiner, 1994, p.10)

More recently Lunn Brownlee (2016), Collinson (2012) and Maggioni and Parkinson (2008) have reflected on the continuous nature of values development amongst reflective practitioners. Collinson (2012) suggests there is a 'paucity' of literature which examines the sources of teachers' values. She identifies two complementary reasons for examining this aspect of educator identity development. First, that an educator's values and sense of identity shape educators' decision making and actions, praxis. Secondly, that self awareness, regarding personal values, is associated with good and expert teachers. Collinson's research was undertaken with American secondary teachers but has

relevance for this study. Of fourteen categories which emerged from interviews with 81 'exemplary' teachers, the most significant were firstly family, and secondly a category she referred to as life's routine, which included experiences as a pupil with teachers and peers, and activity which she called experimental or accidental use, intensive professional development, colleagues and personal reflection. This second point is supported and developed by the work of Lunn Brownlee (2016), and Maggioni and Parkinson (2008). In Collinson's research participants and author acknowledge that experiences which form values can be either positive or negative.

> […] many also appeared to understand that development and integration of values and attitudes is a lifelong process that defines their being. The results of this study suggest that although the teachers fundamental values were, for the most part, forged in childhood and adolescence, refinement of values and attitudes occurred continually throughout adulthood. (Collinson, 2012, p.341)

Collinson concludes by identifying what could be called a values circle through which teachers inspire, or disrupt, future generations of children and their educators.

> Teachers serve as one of the most forceful recruitment tools for the profession positively or negatively. (Collinson, 2012, p.342)

3.5 Summary

Literature reviewed has provided support for this study's position regarding early childhood education as a political, ethical and moral endeavour. Accounts of young children's experiences of respectful pedagogic encounters illustrated opportunities and sensitivities which instrumental pedagogic practices overlook. Evidence of contrasting curricula experiences which prioritise learner led learning and model rights respecting pedagogic practices was presented. The literature reviewed underscores assertions that respect for young children's participation rights in early years settings is fundamental to a full realisation of the right to education.

Chapter 4

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

Ways of Knowing

Research is neither neutral nor innocent practice. (Sikes, 2006, p.105)

This chapter frames the study conceptually and methodologically. It has four sections. The first identifies the study's ontological and epistemological positioning. The second details the construction of a bespoke methodology which includes the use of ancient Egyptian rope making as a metaphor. The third provides an account of ethical considerations and processes. The final section is an account of a practise interview. It is included in the methodological chapter because reflection on the experience led to modifying the principle methodological tool from 'interview' to 'research conversation'.

The chapter opens with a consideration of philosophical and theoretical concepts which help ground overarching epistemological questions: what does knowledge consist of and how, or by what means, can we come to understand more? These form the foundation for the study's claims to validity. Berger's Ways of Seeing (1972), which reflected contextualised meaning making, also contributed to the study's conceptual framing and informs some of the subheadings in this and subsequent chapters.

4.1 Ontological and epistemological positioning

The study is set within a post positivist, interpretivist, or meaning-making, paradigm (Moss, 2007; Farquhar, 2012). Postmodern critiques of positivism reject as naïve the notion of the objective or disinterested researcher (Holliday, 2016). This study is constructed from subjective authorial and participant accounts of critical, values forming events in their educational lives. Interpretivism rests on constructivist and social constructivist epistemologies: human centred theories of knowledge. Adopting an interpretivist lens through which to view the biographies, principles and praxes of rights respecting early years leaders provided scope for flexible, iterative data gathering which shaped the study's research processes. Debate regarding the significance of a synergy

between subject and process intensified following publication of Kuhn's seminal text, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). This study sought an appropriacy of methodological approach which accommodated non-singular, contextualised, truth claims (Holliday, 2016; Temple and Stanley, 2008). More than a decade after Kuhn's seminal text, Geertz noted:

> A few zealots still persist in the key to the universe view. (Geertz, 1973, p.3)

In contrast to hypothesis driven research activity, Holliday (2016) claims qualitative research, invites the unexpected. Modernist claims of a singular, external, knowable reality are reframed in interpretivism with understandings of multiple perspectives and dynamic personal, social and political contexts. Interpretivism confronts positivist notions of researcher neutrality by mandating acknowledgment and promotion of researcher positionality. Pillow (2003) and Sikes (2006) are amongst those who acknowledge and endorse the role of subjective experience in social and educational research.

4.1.1 Knowledges and understandings

Each preceding chapter has made reference to the significance of practical wisdom and reflexivity (Pillow, 2003). In this conceptual framework it is timely to label this identification as phronesis. The classical taxonomy of knowledge into episteme, phronesis and sophia are all relevant to this study. Knowledges relevant to this study which intersect with these ancient categories are: professional, technical as in interviewing, and phronetic.

> Wisdom is also about excellence that is appropriate to a particular time and place, and that will help secure a sustainable future through the application of knowledge. Wisdom is therefore more than knowledge and facticity. (Rooney et al, 2015, p.396)

Pluralising the word' 'knowledge' simultaneously acknowledges the existence of diverse experiences and understandings, and provides a multi-faceted platform for appeals to validity. The 'truth claims' I intend to make concern the manner and conduct of the enquiry and 'situated knowledge' that is the highly specific, dynamic, dialogic, meaning making context presented. This contests a world view in which knowledge is considered

to be singular. In western culture divine accounts were, from the Enlightenment onwards, challenged by rationalism and epistemological appeals to objectivity. Haraway (1988) points out how these appeals echo theism in what she calls the God trick, in which a divine presence is credited with seeing from everywhere and nowhere. This study rejects invocation to an all-knowing being as a useful ontology for examining professional values and actions. An enduring legacy of theistic accounts of knowledge has been the construction and articulation of knowledge as singular. Epistemological challenges and reformulations by postmodernists and feminists have enabled an instructive splintering of this hitherto monolithic concept.

> Knowledge is a constellation of phenomena comprising ideas, assumptions, beliefs, intuitions, memories, cognitions and so on that are taken in society to have justifiable and useful 'truth' values, and that are emergent properties of relations. In this sense, knowledge is taken to have reliable understandings that are (re)constructed in social relations and through communication. (Rooney et al, 2009, p.3)

In turn, a reconceptualised epistemology has contributed to an increased focus on interpersonal sites of meaning production. In turning from macro, grand narratives towards micro or solo narratives, feminist thinking in particular has combined a focus on studying unheard voices with sustained challenges to positivist assumptions at three levels: ontology, epistemology and methodology. Vendramin asserts that feminist epistemology developed the concept of situated knowledges. Commenting on the contribution of feminist epistemology to education and educational research she makes the case for declaring researcher positionality:

> This partiality (seeing situatedly) is of central importance […] Partiality can therefore be understood as the recognition of the essentially "situated" nature of knowledge and our epistemic limitations, which leads a subject to take a critical stance and reflect upon how particular situations can influence her views. (Vendramin, 2012, p.90)

Lest the impression be formed that post-modern assertion of subjectivity as a primary means of knowledge production in social science is uncontested, it is useful to cite some opposition. Davidson questions the reliability of what is sometimes called 'first person authority' when he asks:

> […] why we should see any better when we inspect our own minds than when we inspect the minds of others. (Davidson, 2001, p.5)

Nevertheless this study has been mindful of Holliday's exhortation (2016) to inform readers about decisions and choices made during the course of the study and identify some social dimensions of the research foci and processes of field work.

4.1.2 Practices and praxes

> Praxis is the relationship between thought and action, or reasoning that is informed by action and reflexively changed. (Weiner, 1994, p.1)

Educational practices are social products and available for scrutiny and, as Pring (2001) laments, consequently appropriation. As part of his critique, Pring notes that reflective practices, which have since Dewey been a hallmark of teacher education, are no longer encouraged. Praxes outlined in this study are the self-conscious, rights respecting, pedagogical enactments of two early years leaders. The willingness and determination of both participants to uphold values driven, rights respecting pedagogies in the face of an outcomes driven curriculum suggests that for some educators, educational praxes are less open than curriculum to policy alteration. MacNaughton (1997) argued that traditional understandings of child development construct teachers' gaze upon children along patriarchal lines and that reconstructing the teachers' gaze is central to feminist early childhood pedagogical praxis. In this she shares a perspective with Brooker (2002). MacNaughton explores the praxis of an early childhood teacher who endeavours to reconstruct her gaze via feminist readings of the child, to explore the possibilities and challenges of working for feminist reconstructions in the early childhood curriculum. Prior to MacNaughton's work, Nias (1989) was interested in the meshing, or otherwise, of personal values and professional actions. She defined praxis as embodied action. Freire, also in relation to education, described praxis as:

> […] reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. (Freire, 1970, p. 36)

For the purposes of this study, professional choices and embodied actions, whether made by the participants themselves or members of their teams, are considered to be instances of praxis.

4.1.3 Synthesising ways of seeing

The previous subsections have presented the knowledge terrain in which this study sits. Current epistemological ideas about meaning making and situated knowledges have been presented as justification for the focus of the study. In order to close this section and amplify the ideas already presented this synthesis ends by juxtaposing the work of Pring with Berger. In *Ways of Seeing*, Berger asserted that perception is not a neutral, value free experience or activity:

> The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe. (Berger, 1972, p.7)

Berger's contention is echoed by Pring:

> How we see the world depends upon the concepts through which experience is organised, identified as significant descriptions applied and evaluations made. (Pring, 2005,p.25)

This succinct summation covers both cultural and individual identity development (Rogoff, 2003). Having set out the what of knowing above, the next sections present a consideration of the how, or ways of knowing, relevant to the study. As a way of 'showing my working' (Holliday, 2016) methodological deliberations regarding selection of participants, interviewing style and research locus are outlined.

> We cannot study lived experience directly, because language, speech and systems of discourse mediate and define the very experience we attempt to describe. We study the representations of experience, not experience itself. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p.51)

Participants in this study will be re-presenting their experience for joint analysis and interpretation. What is being sought is not single truth but rather layers of experience and understanding perceived through the subjectivities of participants and author.

4.2 Identifying respectful methodological tools

> Every qualitative research design will be different. (Holliday, 2016, p.7)

Reflecting on and enacting the most appropriate way of gathering and representing values forming narratives from the educational biographies of rights respecting early years leaders was in itself an act of ethical care towards the study's participants. It was

important that each aspect of the research process, from recruitment onwards, demonstrated ethical sensitivity. In combination with interviews it was considered that drawing on features of life history and narrative enquiry would be both useful and apposite. In order to defend the use of life history and narrative enquiry for investigating the development and expression professional identities, it is first necessary to consider identity construction and enactment.

4.2.1 Considering identities

> Identity is given meaning by the narrative understanding of knowledge and context. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999, p.4)

According to Clandinin and Connelly, identity is represented by the stories we live by. For this study 'lived by stories' are shared by both the author and the participants. Each stage of this chapter, detailing the process of building a conceptual framework, includes self declaration. Declaring researcher subjectivity and positioning inverts the notion of researcher's as neutral, or invisible, as reified in a positivist paradigm. From the epistemological stance of this study declaring positionality supports procedural integrity. The study's processes and content rest on an acknowledgement of the significance of subjective experiences in the construction of personal identity and professional values. Throughout the study sources are cited which endorse the criticality of subjective experience for perception, interpretation and action (Berger, 1972; Pring, 2004; MacNaughton, 2004; McCormack, 2004, 2017).

Social encounters are relational processes and necessary preconditions for the emergence of identities and subjectivities. As with the pluralisation of knowledge so too with identity. Before postmodernism and feminism forged a pathway between singular and plural understandings came existentialism and symbolic interactionism. An apparently paradoxical view of personal identity is articulated by Thomas:

> Identity is constructed through an exchange between self and other. Identity is acknowledged as a social, contextual and uncertain construction process. (Thomas, 2012, p.93)

In contrast with a view of identity as pre-ordained, or fixed, symbolic interactionists contended identity is formed, and develops, with, and through, others and consequently

is dynamic and mutable. This assertion of identity, as contingent on context, pre-figured postmodern accounts enumerating multiple meanings attaching to single events and in feminist epistemology particularly, the complexity of inhabiting multiple roles. A, related, dimension of symbolic interactionism of relevance to this study is the role ascribed to interpretation in human communication. An individual's unique subjective experiences of the world result in differing interpretations and values being ascribed to shared experiences or joint meaning making. Ricoeur developed the ideas of the symbolic interactionists in claiming:

> […] identity is an ever changing formation of the self at various narrative intersections. We know ourselves through our collective memories through the stories we tell about ourselves and through complex linguistic designations. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character. (Ricoeur, 1992, pp.147-148)

Contingent on assertions of the critical role of personal perception in understanding is the importance of declaring, or situating, the perspective, or lens, through which specific events, and interactions are understood. Dewey's accounts of the inter-related, dynamic, non-linear nature of identities, and their development, draw from socio-cultural theory, and post-structuralism. Within sociocultural theory Rogoff (2003), uses the term mutuality to describe human learning exchanges. Trevarthen (2011) sets human understanding in the context of inter-subjective exchanges beginning at birth. (MacNaughton, 2004). These reference points contextualise a key proposition of this study, that identity is dynamically constructed and neither singular nor fixed.

This assertion applies to both researcher and researched. It underpins the inter-subjective dynamic of mutual engagement between researchers and participants. According to Mazzei (2013) researchers are both constituted and constituting in the process of intra-action in ways that produce different knowledge. In this epistemological environment declaring researcher subjectivity research not only can be justified, but arguably should be since it is the conduit through which data is perceived, filtered and edited with the intention of claiming new, or altered, understandings. In this study the salience of utilising my subjective experience as both an entry point and a resource

(Holliday, 2016) is further strengthened by a focus on the development of professional identity(ies). In seeking to understand the motivation of early childhood leaders it is relevant to acknowledge the features and analysis of my own educational biography including ways I understand and utilise my professional values. It is through the lens of these experiences that the shared narratives of the participants will be understood and represented. Beginning the study with my own narratives provides the reader with an essential orientation for the study as a whole. With this perspective on identity formation and enactment including narrative enquiry and life history as relevant adjuncts to the process of understanding the interviews became important.

4.2.2 Combining life history and narrative enquiry

The development of life-history as a method of social enquiry grew out of symbolic interactionism which validated self-storying, reflection and self-interpretation as sites of knowledge (Charmaz, et al 2018). In turn this endorsement of subjective experience contributed to the development of narrative enquiry in social research. Plummer (2001) described life history as a humanistic method and considered his work to be:

> […] a longing for social science to take more seriously its humanistic foundations and to foster styles of thinking that encourage the creative, interpretive story-telling of lives. (Plummer, 2001, p.1)

Studying the lived experiences of educators using features of life history in conjunction with narrative enquiry has featured in the work of Goodson (2013), Bathmaker (2010) and Clandinin (2007). Webster and Mertova's (2007) identification of the significance of critical events in the narratives of those whose lives they study is echoed in the work of Bathmaker. Bathmaker enjoins those undertaking narrative enquiry to consider their approach to devising questions:

> In a narrative enquiry, questions should be structured in such a way that they encourage reflection and recall of the critical event. (Bathmaker, 2010, p.9)

Court et al identify ways in which participants themselves can benefit from narrative enquiry:

> […] the reconstruction of participants' life cycles through telling of their narratives provides them with a retrospective look at their life stages, decision-making processes and underlying motives. (Court et al, 2009, p.209)

The opportunity that narrative enquiry provides for educators to reflect upon their praxis is emphasised:

> Teachers' stories can illuminate the knowledge that arises from action and express teachers' practical understandings, revealing the personal practical meaning teachers ascribe to and derive from their work. (Court et al, 2009, p.207)

This articulation of a humanistic perspective aligns with the sense-making, interpretavist paradigm of the study. Webster and Mertova (2007) and Court et al (2010) cite the use of narrative enquiry as the research method for their work on critical event analysis and teachers' personal-professional identities. Both lend support to the choice of narrative enquiry as the most suitable for this study:

> The idea of narrative enquiry is that stories are collected as a means of understanding experience as lived and told, through both research and literature. (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007, p.459)

Although it has been argued that narrative studies have become a new orthodoxy (Crang, 2002; Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007) Hendry notes:

> […] it could be argued that narrative research is the first and oldest form of enquiry. (Hendry, 2009, p.72)

Said (1978), Stanley (1991), Weiner (1994), and Rosen (1986) are amongst educational scholars whose explorations of links between their research interests and life histories contributed to the development of narrative enquiry. Rosen's account of his own schooling and upbringing locates his argument about the importance of narrative within his own life experience. He explicitly distanced his analysis from more 'objective' and 'scientific' forms of enquiry. Said also confirms the personal in the professional:

> No-one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life. From the fact of his [sic] involvement (conscious or unconscious with a class, set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of society. (Said, 1978, p.10)

More recently, Riessman's article 'Twists and Turns: narrating my career' hints at the consciously non-linear, re-presentational choice she makes, describing it as 'crafting a

crooked-line'. She attributes the development of her political perspective to formative educational experiences which the process of writing helped reprise and organise:

> […] by writing this piece I have discovered some of the teachers and ideas that clearly shaped the kind of work I do today. (Riessman, 2015, p.10)

The original, methodological, intention had been to combine a life history, narrative enquiry approach with interviewing. This made sense of the narrative extracts which open the study and the epistemological value position set out above. A commitment to narrative enquiry is retained but intentions were modified following a practise interview. This section begins by discussing narrative enquiry and interviews as methodological tools and concepts. It then summarises and reflects on the practise interview and ends with a defence of using 'research conversations' as a descriptor rather than interviews. The work of Harwood et al locates narrative meaning making specifically in the context of early years educators:

> The ways in which early childhood educators conceptualize and narrate their role is an important focus of enquiry since the meanings educators attach to themselves may be an essential aspect of contesting and situating professionalism within a meaning-making paradigm. (Harwood et al, 2013, p.4)

In *The Life Story Interview*, Atkinson states:

> Telling the stories of our lives is so basic to our nature that we are largely unaware of its importance. We think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through stories. (Atkinson, 1998, p.1)

There are four reasons why understanding narrative enquiry is significant for this study. The elicitation questions devised for this study were intended to prompt stories/ narratives. Storytelling is key to this study's understanding of ways experience(s) are processed and articulated. It is consonant with the framing of the study and the intentions for re-presenting data. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) indicate the proximity of narrative enquiry to interviewing while Clandinin (2007) argues:

> […] narrative enquiry is a way of studying people's experiences, nothing more and nothing less. (p.38)

Atkinson (2007) identifies storying as having different functions: locating its authors in time and place, affirming and clarifying relationships and, significantly for this study,

that stories can 'guide us through the life course'. In a critique of the ubiquity of interviewing, Atkinson argues that narratives are social products and as such researchers need to become critical of them and their production, by analysing them in terms of the forms and functions that they perform.

Turning now to the temporal context of interviewing, Silverman claimed the end of the 20th century could be described as an "interview society" (Silverman, 2013). In her account of the history of the interview, Platt(2012) notes:

> The "interview" has existed, and changed over time, both as a practice and as a methodological term in current use. However, the practice has not always been theorized or distinguished from other modes of acquiring information. (Platt, 2012, p.9)

In examining the dynamics between interviewers and participants and promoting the active aspect of interviewing Gubrium and Holstein assert:

> The active interview eschews the image of the vessel waiting to be tapped in favour of the notion that the subject's interpretive capabilities must be activated, stimulated and cultivated. (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.10)

These quotes suggest that since the work of the symbolic interactionists in Chicago in the 1930s, there has been a period of strong interest, perhaps preoccupation, with knowing the motivations and explanations provided by an 'other' through this particular mode of eliciting subjective experience(s).

All interviews are reality-constructing, meaning-making occasions, whether recognized as such or not. Interviews are interactional, narrative procedures for knowledge production which characterise participants as narrators and suggest that the aspect of their experience which participants choose to draw on will partly be determined by the role, or roles, they take within an interview. Here we arrive back at key concepts of identity and identities. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) cite an example of a woman who is a daughter and spouse. They point out that her answers are likely to be different according to which role, or perspective, she is thinking from when responding to particular questions. In this study the participants are positioned by me and position themselves within their professional identities as I in turn position myself as an educational professional researcher undertaking doctoral research.

Kvale (2007) represents the knowledge production arising from research interviews visually by placing a capital V in the word, InterViews. In so doing he emphasises the dual dimensions of dialogue and perspective involved. Angotti also emphasises the dynamic nature of interviews as sites of knowledge production:

> Such presentations manifest themselves in research settings, as subjects do not simply produce data to be harvested, but actively engage with researchers in creating, and sometimes in redefining, the research experience itself. (Angotti & Kaler, 2013, p.952)

Herzog (2005) highlights the intersubjective processes involved in interviews. She describes a 'collision' of alternate realities which need to be negotiated and interpreted if meanings are to be shared. She also notes the significance of context:

> The interview forms part of the concrete aspects of reality construction rooted in the social, structural, historical, cultural and circumstantial contexts in which the interview takes place. (Herzog, 2005, p.26)

The endeavour of this study, to jointly reconstrue, and reflect on, narratives of values using interviews rests on three propositions: that the site of intersubjective exchange represented by interviews is an appropriate, valuable and important site for knowledge production (Clandinin, 2007; Mazzei 2013); that aspects of the interview salient to this project can be 'faithfully' re-presented (Kvale, 2007; Goodson, 2013); and that participation in an interview alters each person involved (Mazzei, 2013; Kuntz and Presnall, 2012; Herzog, 2005; McCormack, 2000).

4.2.3 Purposive sampling and appreciative enquiry

In order to undertake empirical work I needed to request professional time of early years leaders committed to respecting young children's rights. It is a significant dimension of this study that the number of potential participants was small. Furthermore, since I had explicitly rejected positivist precepts I chose to use purposive sampling (Teddlie and Yu, 2007, Robinson, 2014) in which early years leaders known to have a commitment to respecting young children's rights were actively sought and contacted directly as described by Robinson:

> […] certain categories of individuals may have a unique, different or important perspectives on the phenomenon in question and their presence in the sample should be ensured. (Robinson, 2014, p.32)

The rights respecting early years leaders with whom research conversations were undertaken had important perspectives I was keen to understand. I chose to restrict my enquiry to early years settings in a local authority where I was known through visits to settings. This familiarity offered the opportunity of providing in depth or 'thick' description (Geertz, 1973) and opportunities for dissemination of the study once completed. Commitment to an interpretative paradigm and respect for committed early years contexts meant that adopting a purposive sampling with appreciative enquiry (Cooperrider and Srivasta 1987) aligned with my values and ambitions.

Before learning of Appreciative enquiry (AI) I was conscious that a methodology which involved judging against a typology, for example by evaluating school or classroom practices against stated values, would be misaligned with my epistemological positioning and not conducive to realising the study's aims to share success in realising young children's rights within existing curricula constraints. Appreciative enquiry (AI) is a 'collaborative', 'participatory,' approach originally focused on organisational change. It developed, heuristically, when Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) were tasked to investigate 'what's wrong with the human side of this organisation?' 'Overwhelmed' by the strengths emerging from the data, they requested to reframe the question as 'what's right with the human side of the organisation?' While organisational change is not directly consonant with this study nevertheless it has useful properties which can be applied to the study. Cooperrider sees it simply as a way of understanding the world. In addition AI emphasises language, dialogue and story, with a particular focus on the power of enquiry in the social construction of reality.

> Appreciative enquiry focuses on the positive and is grounded in participants' actual experiences. (Coghlan, Preskill & Catsambas, 2003, p.6)

At this point I reflected on the experience of having been researched several times in different locations by professional educational researchers whilst a classroom teacher. I recall my dismay at the lack of contextual knowledge, or, as it seemed to me, interest,

the researchers had in setting features, or professional or personal values staff held. The preceding discussion is intended to provide an instance of researcher visibility.

4.2.4 Thick description

Thick description, first elucidated by Ryle (1971) and adopted, most notably, by Geertz (1973), in the field of symbolic anthropology, offers qualitative researchers an appealing and meaningful alternative to objectivity. By insisting on sufficient information to allow those outside a specific culture to make sense of what is presented, thick description answers positivist demands for rigour by identifying a different metric: detail. It is not without its critics even within the paradigm. Jorgensen (2009) comments that thick description has:

> […] been imported somewhat uncritically into educational research. (Jorgensen, 2009, p. 69)

She goes on to point out that:

> For Ryle, thick description is a means of interpreting or explicating thoughts rather than actions, and thereby of understanding things philosophically […] thick description attempts to get beyond superficial description to see the richness of thought and purpose that might lie behind an action. (Jorgensen, 2009, p.70)

Hammersley is more critical, expressing frustration that Geertz did not provide methodological guidance for doing thick description. Hammersley also bemoans a lack of clarity:

> And it seems likely that our judgement of any candidate thick description would vary depending upon whether we were primarily concerned with how well it represented the situation being described or how illuminating it was in general terms. (Hammersley, 2008, p.12)

He uses this criticism to challenge the value of thick description:

> My point is that the concept of thick description does not provide an adequate specification of the goal of social enquiry or an effective rationale for how it should be pursued. (Hammersley, 2008, p.17)

In this study thick description is plaited into its conceptual methodological rope to augment and complement its other components, used to provide a detailed contextualisation of participants' professional setting and their responses.

By contextualising and narrativising two rights respecting early years leaders, the author sought to provide sufficient detail to enable readers to interpret participants' responses to the elicitation questions. This would help shed light on how each participant accounts for the development and maintenance of their rights respecting values and harmonises with the use of narrative enquiry as a strand in the methodological rope.

4.2.5 Methodological reflexivity

> The researcher is understood to be a player in the social world, with her own background, assumptions and ways of behaving that will affect the way the research is conducted, especially in terms of the intricacies of social exchange within the research context. (Cunliffe, 2003, p.984)

Reflexivity, the self conscious, detailed articulation of the author's perspective and values as well as procedural decisions and adjustments and environmental factors, is relevant to this study for three reasons. Working within an interpretavist paradigm, acknowledgement of the researcher's subjectivity as a significant component of the work is important (Pring, 2004; Holliday 2016). Secondly, conducting a practise interview resulted in adaptations to the original methodological approaches which it is important to describe, and finally a personal commitment to the demands of methodological transparency. According to Alexander (2012) reflexivity is an act of political self-awareness. Campbell's definition elaborates:

> Reflexivity asks questions about who is representing whom while acknowledging that the researcher is also always "caught in representation" (Campbell, 2004, p.163)

Kondrat's argument that reflexivity is both a conceptual and methodological approach echoes the author's:

> We understood reflexivity as both a conceptual and methodological approach. By a reflexive approach, we meant a process of ongoing critical self-reflection with the goal of enhancing self-awareness and minimizing potential social harm. (Kondrat, 1999, p.453)

Pillow, arguing as a friend of reflexivity, usefully indicates its over use, lack of rigour and limitations (2003). She later articulates its value when she states:

> Attending to the "how's" and "why's" of methodological reflexivity opens connections to think about what and who we are theorizing with and for what purposes. If we consider what reflexivity does, then reflexivity may be described as a methodology to "navigate tensions" and "arrive at a new place of mutual understanding within […] differences." (Pillow, 2011, p.424)

In epistemological terms some would argue that it is only increased knowledge of self that can be usefully claimed, others the opposite. Drawing on the paradox introduced by symbolic interactionism and developed by existentialism, that it is through others that the self/selves are constructed, it follows that knowing, or attempting to know others is as important in developing self knowledge as reflections on altered self/selves. It is for this reason, and because I am seeking the experiences of others, that this study embraces reflexivity. Hill and Holyoak's articulation of the role reflexivity can play in supporting enriched understandings encapsulates the author's perspective that reflexivity can help to:

> navigate tensions […] and arrive at a new place of mutual understanding within our differences. (Hill & Holyoak, 2011, p.187)

This study sets out to elicit and present the development and enactment of the rights respecting values of early years leaders. I judged the most effective way to gather narrative accounts of educational values was through face to face, individual interviews of up to an hour each. Deciding to interview rights respecting early years leaders appeared to be a straight forward, purposeful and manageable endeavour (McCoy, 2012; Koro-Ljungberg & Mazzei, 2013; Mazzei, 2013). Drawing on my professional knowledge, network of local contacts and interest in rights respecting early years settings I would identify, contact and 'gather', or ' harvest', respondents' stories, analyse them for common themes and, thoughtfully, re-present them. During my career—as infant teacher, Deputy Headteacher, Headteacher and University Tutor—I had experience of interviewing formally, for jobs in school and at university, and students for teacher training places, and informally, children, colleagues and students. I considered myself 'good at interviewing'. In formal contexts it was important to me to put candidates at their ease in order that they present the best of themselves. In informal contexts I consciously pursued active listening. In addition I had used interviews, as part of a life

history methodology, in my Masters dissertation. Complexity was to be expected at the analysis stage but had not been anticipated earlier in the process. Using interviews as a research instrument to gather data from rights respecting early years leaders initially seemed straightforward and unproblematic. I had yet to realise that it was this unexamined conviction, that interviewing was a 'neutral conduit' or 'pipeline' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) that posed a problem. Adopting an un-problematised view of interviewing is, arguably, redolent of positivism. In such a view the interviewer is positioned as an objective information, or data, gatherer capable of presenting data accurately without bias or interpretation. It could be said in this paradigm an interviewee is characterised, rather vulgarly, as a slot machine which, with the insertion of a coin, i.e. a question, yields a data nugget. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) emphasise that seeking knowledge using interviews necessarily impacts on the nature of the knowledge shared. They are at pains to frame the practice of interviews as 'active', resting on social constructivism and concerned as much with the how of 'meaning production' as the what. Reading and reflecting on the process of interviewing, I began to appreciate some of the degrees of complexity, and sensitivity, involved in the interview processes as well as the analysis. It gradually became clear that interviewing fellow professionals was going to be considerably more nuanced than asking focused questions. Considerations of identifying participants, ethical responsibilities, roles and relationships, location, timing and register began to come into focus. As Kvale (2007) indicates, in order to respect the process it needs to be practised. Accordingly I began to think about both the 'how' and the 'who' of a practise interview. Requesting time and effort from busy professionals towards an endeavour principally for my benefit, no matter what post-completion intentions I may have, makes me uncomfortable. The responsibility of identifying and inviting someone for a pilot interview felt particularly weighty. In being primarily focused on the process rather than the content it seemed even more of a personal favour than those from whom my findings would be drawn. Much discussion is devoted to the relative merits of structured, unstructured or semi structured interviews which Holliday describes as 'pale categories'. These seemed both unclear and unhelpful distinctions, in particular that made between unstructured and semi-structured.

Purposefully avoiding being hemmed in by rigid protocols was an important consideration for the conduct of the study. This was perhaps the first step in a move away from interview towards research conversation(s).

4.2.6 A methodological metaphor

The verb 'to frame' is commonly used to describe defining the scope of a research study. For me, this evokes a rigid, inflexible structure which does not accurately reflect either the epistemological approach or methodological strategy of the study. Accordingly a metaphor of rope-making, specifically ancient Egyptian rope, is invoked here to represent combining complementary research methods in order to construct a respectful, bespoke approach for understanding respectful educators. In his description of traditional Egyptian rope making, unchanged since ancient times, Teeter (1987) describes its dynamic nature. Rope making is a two person activity in which both participants have different, complementary roles. Combining separate strands strengthens each. Together they form a solid, but flexible, artefact. The description of asymmetric, equally significant roles in the production of rope acts as a useful metaphor for the co-construction of knowledge by researcher and participants. The combining of different methodological tools is mirrored in the plaiting of strands to increase strength. Overall it is the capacity of rope to flex, and incorporate changes or adaptations contingent upon altered circumstances and/or participant responses, which makes it a valuable metaphor. Plaiting together strands of life history, narrative enquiry and research conversations with reflexivity, sheathed in appreciative enquiry, created a strong, flexible framing with capacity to accommodate dynamic changes in thinking.

4.3 Ethical practices

> The human interaction in qualitative enquiry affects interviewees and informants, and the knowledge produced through qualitative research affects our understanding of the human condition. (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005, p.157)

Alongside identifying and combining respectful methodological tools a respectful enquiry into the values forming experiences of rights respecting educators required transparency of ethical practices. This section elucidates the values underpinning the

conduct of the study and details the manner of their application. It begins by indicating the adoption of thick ethical description (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005) as an appropriate framing for a study using thick description (Geertz, 1973) as a means of establishing validity. Specification of ethical practices is completed with reference to the Ethical Guidelines used (BERA, 2018) and a summary of the study's application for ethical approval.

4.3.1 Thick ethical description

> The skilled qualitative researcher understands the peculiar features of the interview context, and how this context generates specific ethical issues to be addressed. (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005, p.177)

In their critique of assertions that qualitative interviewing is necessarily ethical Brinkmann and Kvale delineate thick ethical description. In order to achieve thick ethical description they propose three features: 'contextualize', 'narrativise' and 'focus on the particular example'. Each of these features is consonant with the epistemological positioning of this study and its re-presentational intentions. Detailed reflections on the practise interview (4.4) establish a considered analysis and re-presentation of the interviewee's unique circumstances and content. This is augmented by narativising the study as a whole. In this way Brinkmann and Kvale's (2005) criticism of decontextualised interviews is addressed. Direction to 'focus on the particular example' underscores the author's intention to evaluate what Brinkmann and Kvale call microethics, the ethical considerations unique to each interview experience.

Thick ethical description is complemented by ethical reflexivity. For Gewirtz and Cribb (2006) ethical reflexivity involves transparency about the values lying behind the research and the basis on which decisions and judgements are made. It involves acknowledging tensions or conflict between researcher and participant values as well as understanding the dilemmas of participants and taking responsibility for the political and ethical implications of research. Their position is echoed in the work of Bishop and Shepherd (2011) whose work directly addresses narrative enquiry:

> Our aim is to demonstrate that acknowledging the role of narrative reconstruction in reflexivity creates more ethical research. (Bishop and Shepherd, 2011, p.1283)

The provision of a narrative reconstruction of the conduct of the study is intended to convey relevant value-laden features and a reflexive assessment, of both the research process, and the data focused on accuracy, validity and responsibility to participants (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006; Bishop and Shepherd, 2011). For this study it is argued that the inclusion of substantial detail helps provide a well-realised account. Thick ethical description is plaited into the methodological rope and used in the re-presentation of the research conversations (chapter 5) to provide contextualisation of the participants, and their engagement with conversational prompts.

4.3.2 Manifesting an ethic of care in research processes

> It seems to me to be unethical to offer a version of someone's life without making clear the nature of the gaze that is being brought to bear upon it. (Sikes, 2010, p.13)

This chapter has set out the nature of the gaze brought to bear on the research participants in the study. The gaze of the author has been identified as necessarily partial, constrained by subjective decision making, deliberately self-conscious and invested. Arising from biographical starting points, respect has been the fundamental focus of the study and enquiry process. (Pillow, 2003; Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006; Bishop and Shepherd, 2011; Holliday, 2016). This authorial gaze is underpinned by theoretical positions which acknowledge the inter-dependent, mutable nature of identity (Farquhar 2012; Thomas, 2012). This section sets out a rationale for the ethical conduct of the study. In doing so it draws on ethical reflexivity (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006; Sikes, 2006; Bishop and Shepherd, 2011; Murray and Holmes, 2013) and 'everyday ethics' (Banks et al, 2013).

It is useful to restate the intentions of the study since all ethical decision-making followed from this. Rooney et al (2009) proposes that the purpose of contemporary social research should be to improve life. From the outset it was an ambition of the study to share, with early years educators, accounts of settings which enact rights respecting practices in the context of an outcomes-led curriculum. In so doing the aim

was to extend the number of young children experiencing rights respecting practices and thereby improve their lives and learning. It was intended that the study contribute to:

> […] political and social change through research. (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006, p.141)

In this way the study aimed to 'maximise benefit and minimise harm', in accordance with the ethical principles endorsed by BERA (2018, p.4). It was important that the study's focus on respecting children's rights was reflected in the manner in which the research was conducted from conceptualisation to completion. This holistic understanding of research processes, including the dynamic nature of ethical conduct, is reflected in current BERA guidelines:

> [E]thical decision-making becomes an actively deliberative, ongoing and iterative process of assessing and reassessing the situation and issues as they arise. (BERA, 2018, p.2)

Conversing with rights respecting early years leaders in order to understand what lay behind their publicly declared rights respecting values with a view to sharing aspects of their educational biographies and value-based praxes was:

> […] saturated with moral and ethical issues (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p.83)

Moral and ethical issues regarding personal values and educational biographies involved participants themselves but also, through its focus on educational practices and children's rights, potentially staff, children and parents as well. This required eliminating any instances where identification of setting or participants was traceable. Whilst acknowledging the importance of ethical sensitivity at all stages, from the initial research idea onwards, moral and ethical considerations were particularly prominent in matters of recruitment, characterisation of participants, the organisation and conduct of the interviews, as well as interpretation and re-presentation of their data (Bishop and Shepherd, 2011; Banks et al, 2013; BERA, 2018).

4.3.3 Applying ethical reflexivity

In order to hear, record and re-present, with integrity, the educational biographies of early years educators committed to realising young children's rights, participants' rights

needed to be fully respected. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), Bishop and Shepherd (2011), and Banks et al (2013) provide a theoretical context for this study's ethical approach to social research in general, and interviewing in particular. This section describes the application of these theoretical perspectives with the research participants involved in this study.

In addition to respecting participants' foundational ethical rights of anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent and the right to withdraw (4.4) ethical and moral considerations were required concerning the author's personal conduct. Requesting time from busy, successful early years leaders in order to reflect on aspects of their educational history and current praxis was an intensely personal request. It felt important that participants were able to trust me with accounts of personal and professional experiences. The onus lay on the author to act in a way that would generate trust. Accordingly, it was imperative to adopt a respectful, ethically sensitive research process. For this study, ethical sensitivity involved developing, and maintaining, relationships before, during and after the interviews. This echoes the definitions of respect in Chapter 1, in particular the emphasis placed on the importance of listening by Noddings (2012a) and Fielding and Moss (2011). In addition to the participant information sheet (Appendix A) I sought to be transparent about the study's scope and purpose by answering participants' questions directly, or promptly where they were electronic. A key to showing respect for participants lies in being responsive to their personal choices and preferences. When organising times to meet I was led by participants' preferences for times and locations. Concerning personal conduct, Banks et al note its 'dynamic, complex and value-based nature' (2013, p.263). This description reflects the features of research undertaken for this study. As set out in Chapter 1, the study is strongly value-based. In concerning itself with the development of professionals' praxes it is inevitably complex and by being centred on interviews it was dynamic. Banks et al (2013) use the term 'everyday ethics' to describe the nuanced negotiation of interpersonal behaviours, negotiations and compromises which for them include the micro adjustments and negotiations involved in managing relationships. In this respect their description borders ethical reflexivity. Developing a trusting

relationship was different with each participant relying on inter-plays of subjectivities. Responsive, relational conduct was an important aspect of my ethic of care towards participants. It is partly illustrated in the different ways participants were recruited, two using purposive sampling and and one through opportunism.

> Purposive sampling techniques are primarily used in qualitative studies may be defined as selecting units (e.g., individuals, groups of individuals, institutions) based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study's questions. (Teddlie and Yu, 2007, p.77)

Ursula and Elaine were both known to me, though not to each other, from previous work into respecting young children's rights. In both instances the relationship was characterised by warmth and mutual respect based on shared professional values. James was introduced by a colleague recognising our shared interest in children's rights. This was a relationship which began and was developed during the study. With Elaine and Ursula I was building on existing relationships which required professional respect and sensitivity. The relationship with James had to be created and involved detailed sharing of my educational biography and values details of which had been shared during time spent with with Elaine and Ursula prior to the study's commencement. In each meeting, or contact, with participants I sought to emphasise the rights to which they were entitled.

> By allowing time and experience to work their way into the enquiry through telling and listening to stories and the creation of situations of trust, stories are told that enable narratives to reflect the experience and understanding of learning. These approaches need to be gentle because of what is at stake. (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p.88)

Again the significance of trust is cited, this time in conjunction with the word 'gentle', as well as an acknowledgement of 'what is at stake'. Sharing personal narratives which have shaped professional identities has the potential to make participants vulnerable. It was the author's responsibility to mitigate this as far as possible. My ethical decision making regarding composition of the participant information sheet and consent form comprised a balance of sharing information about myself and ensuring participants were clear about the purpose, intended use and right to withdraw.

4.3.4 Ethical guidelines

In all aspects of the research, this study has been informed by the ethical guidelines of the British Education Research Association (BERA). The overarching ethical ambition for the study is that it conforms to the following aspiration:

> […] all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for: the person; knowledge; democratic values; the quality of educational research; and academic freedom. (BERA, 2018, p.5)

For the purposes of this study an ethic of respect echoes Noddings' (2012b) ethic of care with which the study is concerned in both substance and process. Additionally, an ethic of care provides a sound underpinning for ethical reflexivity. It places responsibility for continual, iterative reflection and consideration of the processes and impact of the study on the researcher.

Using the values the study sought to enact; responsibility, respect, integrity, trust and trustworthiness, a word analysis was made of the BERA Guidelines (2018) It revealed the following frequencies of key words:

- 39 responsibility
- 13 respect
- 9 integrity
- 7 trust
- 2 trustworthiness

These totals reveal the relative weight of researcher responsibility with which the document is primarily concerned. In addition to responsibility and respect the identification of integrity, trust and trustworthiness emphasises the significance of personal conduct which the author considered essential in claiming an ethic of care towards the study's participants.

4.3.5 Summary of application for ethical approval

Whilst acknowledging an enduring debate amongst research ethicists regarding the unequal attention paid to researchers' personal conduct in comparison with the development of rules and procedures, it is nevertheless useful to detail the formal ethical processes adopted in this study (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015; Banks, 2006). Accordingly

the cornerstones of ethical regulation addressed in an application for ethical approval submitted to the Faculty Research Ethics Committee are briefly summarised here. The participation information and consent form are included in the Appendix.

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) declare that informed consent involves informing participants of the overall purpose and intentions of any study they are invited to take part in. They also assert the importance of striking a balance between too little and too much information. These were factors taken into consideration when composing the participant information and consent forms (Appendices B and C). The overarching intention of the study—to make a positive difference—was shared from the outset with participants, each of whom strongly endorsed the value of disseminating instances of rights respecting practices. It was important that from the outset participants were fully aware of the study's scope and purpose. In addition to preliminary conversations the participant information form specified that the interviews would contribute to a doctoral study. The origin and trajectory of my enduring interest in young children's rights and the CRC was briefly outlined. I indicated that the invitation to participate in the study was made to them in their capacity as early years leaders with an explicit commitment to respecting children's rights. Specifically leaders were invited to participate in a professional, ethically sensitive research conversation. I explicitly stated:

> For a study about respectful educators it is particularly important that my research practices reflect the highest standards of ethical practice. (Appendix A)

And included my professional ambition for the study's findings:

> I would like the completed thesis to provide a basis for sharing, with professional audiences, the significance for children of early rights respecting, or disrespecting, experiences as well as early childhood settings which are successfully pursuing rights respecting practices. (Appendix A)

Confidentiality was established by the omission of identifying institutional features. Ursula, Elaine and James' anonymity was ensured by using pseudonyms. In a study closely focused on personal and professional identities it was important to give sensitive consideration to the process of selection of pseudonyms. Offering participants an opportunity to choose their pseudonym felt respectful. Including participants in

important decisions regarding presentation of their data was intended to offset positioning participants as subjects. In the case of James, the offer was greeted with enthusiasm and a slightly abashed response, 'Well, if you don't think it's silly James Bond was always a hero of mine.' I replied that this sounded like a good choice. Because I was unsuccessful in making contact with Ursula and Elaine I initially thought of using the same first letter and number of syllables as their own names. It was pointed out that given the study's small geographical area and the description of settings as being in partnership with the university this might not guarantee anonymity. Instead a random process of opening a novel and using the first gender appropriate name was adopted. James reviewed the transcript and analysis following which I made the amendments he had identified. The same offer was made to Elaine without successful contact being achieved. It would have enhanced the study to have had their involvement and thereby close a circle of sense making. But having taken some time to elucidate the scope and purpose of the study with Elaine, publication of details of the practice transcript are defended as nevertheless having ethical integrity. Elaine had consented to material from the interview being shared as part of the dissemination, so on these grounds I proceeded.

> Researchers should recognise the right of all participants to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time. (BERA, 2018, p.18)

Despite this guidance some researchers specify a date after which participants may not withdraw. This approach would have been inconsistent with the values of this study. From the point of view of establishing trust, I judged it to be important not to place a limit on withdrawal for this study (Appendix A). I was aware that this decision constituted a risk to the study if participants chose to withdraw. I also felt it intensified, in a positive way, an enactment of thick ethical description and ethical reflexivity. Whilst behaving in a trustworthy manner and acting with integrity could not guarantee non-withdrawal, it nevertheless felt to be the right approach. The rights respecting early years leaders whose work I was interested in exploring were successful professionals working in promoted positions with high levels of status within and outside their settings. Their professional responsibilities and status were greater than those of the

author. Despite this, the issue of power asymmetry did feature in the research conversations. Brinkmann and Kvale indicate that research interviews are necessarily asymmetrical involving 'one way' and 'instrumental dialogue' (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). They also point to asymmetry in data interpretation even when participant verification is sought. Even though I intended to minimise the power asymmetry of an interview, in part by recasting it as a research conversation, it is relevant to acknowledge that this was not a jointly devised study. Initial analysis and interpretation would be carried out by the author and then juxtaposed with author narratives. These features confirmed an asymmetry of power between the author and participants.

Given the epistemological, methodological and ethical considerations considerations set out above, it was important to undertake a practise interview. The next section details that process of using a life history, narrative enquiry approach to undertaking a practise interview.

4.4 Undertaking a practise interview

Amongst my professional contacts was a small research group comprised of enthusiastic, expert nursery practitioners with whom a colleague and I had undertaken some research into the neglected area of the baby room, over a period of three years. Within this group one member was a nursery manager. As part of our induction my colleague and I had shared our professional biographies, including each of our trajectories towards working in early years, before inviting our colleagues to do the same. One prospective member of the group was unable to attend the introductory session. I undertook to correspond with her in order to provide an individual induction. Given the choice of email, a phone-call or a face to face meeting, Ursula chose to meet in person. We met in my office in the early evening after Ursula had finished work. It was, from my point of view, a convivial, enlightening meeting which not only revealed how her role as an informal childminder in her family while she was growing up led to her interest in, and commitment to, working in early years, but sowed the seeds of a very positive working relationship between us and for the project we were co-ordinating.

While considering the dilemma "who shall I make this important request of", memories of this encounter came into my mind. I was confident that Ursula would not only be a good person to work with on the task of refining the instrument but that if it was either something she was uncomfortable with, or unable to do, she would have the confidence to say. I emailed to ask if there was a good time to speak on the phone. She replied very promptly and included possible times. I made my request explaining that asking her on the phone felt more personal than in an email. I explained I was studying for a doctoral degree and needed to try out the way I intended to gather information, which I intended to be with a one-to-one face to face interview. At one point I said, 'Really I'm asking you how you would feel about being a guinea pig?" I tried, a little crudely, to balance any perceived inequality by saying, "I know, I thought it was just asking questions but it turns out there are lots more things to consider." Ursula laughed and said she was keen to help. She used the phrase 'flattered to be asked'. I thanked her, and said emailing would probably be the best way to find a mutually convenient date. In the ensuing email exchange I invited Ursula to let me know her preference for our meeting. I indicated I was happy to travel to meet her. She said her preference was to meet in my office. Because our earlier induction interview had been positive, I felt comfortable with Ursula's choice. It was arranged for 6 p.m. on a Friday evening in November. Ursula arrived at 6.30 p.m. having been delayed by heavy traffic. The account below is what happened in the hour we spent together.

4.4.1 Re-presentation of a practise interview

Except of course it isn't. Below is a compressed, crafted account which, for all its detail, omits as much, or more, as it includes. It is not a mimetic representation but rather approximations presented using my subjective values and perception of what signifies for the purposes of this study. Were Ursula to author the account it would be very different. Were an observer to write it, it would be different again.

When Ursula arrived I thanked her for her time, offered her refreshment, which she declined, and invited her to sit in the Lloyd Loom style chair in my office. I was sitting on an office chair facing Ursula, away from the desk, and intentionally with

nothing between us. I restated that I had been advised to trial my interview technique. I had decided not to use a recording device (this was a mistake) and asked if it was acceptable to make notes. This was agreed and I indicated that I had found the notes from when we had first met and would add notes of our conversation to the end of them. The notes themselves gave me an 'entry' point (Dibley, 2011) because I remembered Ursula telling me that as the eldest child, part of her role in the family had been to help with caring for younger siblings and cousins. I told her that I wanted to hear some more stories, or memories, which she felt offered an insight into how she had become an early years manager.

An hour later, with almost no further prompting from me, I had heard an account of current anxiety about the care being experienced by her nephews and nieces from her younger sister, about Ursula walking down an alley between her house and her aunty's house with cereal and milk, to have breakfast before school when her mum was working. I heard Ursula describe her very happy childhood which she had recently reframed (MacNaughton, 2004), deciding that for much of it her mother was probably depressed, which in turn had impacted disproportionately on her youngest sister, and which may even account for her present difficulties. In addition there was a detailed and 'heartfelt' account of a pressing professional dilemma regarding competence with a member of staff who had been at the nursery for six years, under Ursula's management, from the time they were a trainee. This member of staff had described to Ursula her own experience of abusive parenting. During these accounts in which Ursula herself used narrative processes (McCormack, 2000), specifically reflection, to 'augment' the story, I felt awkward, grateful, respectful, humbled, inspired and moved. At the same time, facing Ursula, I read the signals provided to me by her level of animation, speed of speech, fluency, facial expression, body language and emotional tenor as indications that she was happy in this semi-confessional mode. At one point Ursula connected stories of her sister and the nursery worker to the poor treatment of young children and disrupted her own narrative. She looked directly at me, holding eye contact and asked:

> "Helen, do you ever think that some people who haven't had a good upbringing can ever really get it?"

Taking Ursula to be wondering aloud whether a disposition towards positive, respectful learning relationships with young children was in turn dependent on professionals having experienced this in their own childhood brought, unbidden, tears to my eyes. It is a question which has troubled me professionally and personally.

It was after work at the end of the week. It being November the sky had been dark for two hours. Ursula was embarrassed because she had been delayed. I was conscious that a judgement would need to be made about ensuring there was enough time to acknowledge Ursula's feelings, and relax sufficiently to be able to move comfortably into the interview. At the same time mindful of Oakley's article 'Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms' (2013), I needed to consider how much of my feeling state and my day/week I should declare; how to judge, and signal, for the best mutual benefit, the right time to move into a different register (Mazzei, 2004) and indicate the start of the business part of our meeting also flooded my thinking at a level of intensity, and anxiety, I hadn't expected. Kuntz and Presnall, who promote a refinement from interview to intraview note:

> […] in qualitative methods both the body and material environment are often dismissed. (Kuntz and Presnall, 2012, p.734)

At the very moment I changed my sitting position, in what I intended to be a friendly way, to give my attention to Ursula, I knew at a visceral level that meeting in the office was the 'wrong place'. Something in my movement, a casual micro movement of the office chair, signalled to me, 'you (Helen) are very comfortable here'. The location, an academic office of which I had had sole occupancy for 12 years, is filled with my choices: books, materials, images and artefacts. Unlike any other space I inhabit there are no compromises or concessions to the needs or choices of others. It made me wonder how much 'breathing' space there would be for Ursula. What unspoken constraints might this book-laden, culturally high status, visually busy location impose on the interview? In addition, Rowe notes how, unlike educators working in schools and settings:

> […] the researcher's office can and often does promote an easy transition from frontstage to backstage—from competent performance of self as consultant, to competent performance of self as, perhaps, an interviewee for research on university practice. (Rowe, 2016, p.185)

4.4.2 Afterwords

When we had finished the interview Ursula thanked me warmly and repeatedly, for the opportunity to, in her words, 'offload in a private space', to 'think it through, see it more objectively, share it with someone outside the nursery', and, 'I think I needed that.' These statements were references to the dilemmas regarding her sister and the nursery worker, in particular the work problem, which she described as 'a real stress' and said she now felt clearer about tackling. These appreciative and affirmative statements were unexpected. Despite a cerebral understanding of reciprocity, it had not occurred to me that what I had characterised as disruptive for Ursula could be construed as a positive, helpful and welcome experience. Ursula's words were reminiscent of Oakley's 'Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms' (2013) and Court et al (2010), who note the opportunity life history style narrative enquiry provides participants to reflect, process, analyse and understand aspects of their own educational biographies.

In light of the epistemological concepts set out at the beginning of the chapter the most pressing question was 'how to describe or present the practise interview'. Or rather, which bit, whose story or by what veracity? Even an exhaustive narrative account covering email exchanges, meeting arrangements, the manner in which we greeted each other, a verbatim transcript of our conversation and description of post-conversation separation rituals would not re-present the encounter mimetically. There is then a need for selection, omission and compression. For this chapter I have chosen to focus on two elements, or threads: interview site and silence(s).

4.4.3 A time and a place: reflections on locations for interviews

Of the various aspects of research interviews, relatively little attention has been paid to where the interview takes place and who selects the interview location (Herzog, 2005). During our slightly awkward initial meeting, in an otherwise empty collection of offices—colleagues having departed for the weekend—while Ursula apologised

profusely for arriving later than planned, I was aware of multiple, competing questions. It was important to me to value the experience of the practise interview and I spent time reflecting on what had happened, how it had happened, what I had learned, and what might usefully be applied in the first of the interviews arranged for the following week. I was pleased that a focus on holding silences had been affirmed by Ursula herself. In the post 'interview' conversation it was the mutuality of our personal experiences as well as an intense focus on two women, her sister and a vulnerable worker, that produced further layers of understanding for both Ursula and myself. I began to consider different kinds of silences: hostile, cold, indifferent, distracted, patient or warm and became retrospectively aware of how much, almost physical, effort I had made in aiming to hold a warm silence intended to showed no judgement. This had been attempted using open body language, my head held slightly on one side and indirect eye contact. It seemed that direct eye contact might be experienced as challenging or impatient. The extended almost problem solving conversation we had had reminded me of Oakley's (1981) contribution to feminist epistemology, which she asserts that culturally reinforced habits of mutuality ingrained in women are themselves a challenge to the positivist stance of a neutral interviewer and there is 'no intimacy without reciprocity'. Rather than being resolved it seemed that the importance of making good judgements, in ways that could be defended, about when to speak and when to be silent as an interviewer had been affirmed.

4.4.4 Dialogue and silence

A significant conundrum for me was how to resolve the tension between attentive listening, allowing Ursula to develop and expand her thinking without interruption, and contributing my own experiences to the interview. If I understood the encounter to be an active site of mutual meaning-making there could be value in sharing experiences as indicated by Mazzei.

> It is important, then, not to fall into the trap of supplanting the silence with one's own voice, fears, desires, or omissions but rather to "make space" for the returns, the interruptions, the resistances, the denials, the subtle eliding of text present in the unspoken. (Mazzei, 2007, p.49)

Before Ursula arrived I considered what to attend to in the practise interview. In doing so I was conscious of feedback on an Ed.D. assignment. It had been pointed out that in a report of an interview with a Headteacher regarding her professional values, the reader had learned a great deal about me but a lot less about my 'subject'. Using authorial values position as the lens through which I would be formulating questions, hearing responses and interpreting meaning had dominated the account. In order to avoid a sense of interviewer intrusion I resolved to leave any pauses, gaps or silences unfilled. After approximately an hour I pushed the notebook away from the edge of the desk, put the pen down, moved my chair a little way from the table and began to express my thanks for the time given. Although I had not used a recording device, at the point where others describe what occurs 'after the recorder is switched off' (Mazzei, 2013) the tenor of the exchange altered perceptibly. Each of us relaxed by sitting more loosely in our chairs and smiling more. As a mark of respect, and transparency of purpose, I chose to explain the purpose behind our conversation more fully. I said it was to improve my skills at interviewing and in particular I wanted to get better at holding silences. In other words, although I had been open about the overall purpose of the interview in our preliminary conversations, I had not articulated the detail of what I intended to focus on. Dibley (2011) had made similar judgements when interviewing women with similar life contexts to her own. Ursula immediately responded to my explanation with:

> "But I've always thought you were really good at that [keeping silent]."

This referred to our initial, also hour long, research conversation and approximately six further meetings in 30 months of about three hours with other early years professionals discussing theory and practice. I thanked her and said that I wanted to get better.

> […] listening to silences in discourse-based research can be both purposeful and meaningful. (Mazzei, 2003, p.367)

I said I had noticed two instances during our conversation when there had been long silences; by not breaking into them not only had she resumed her response but those

post pause contributions had seemed particularly relevant and personal. She again responded with an affirmation, 'Oh yes me too', and referred to examples in her work as a manager. Ursula explained she felt guilty about times when 'I know I've jumped in too soon and I know we're not meant to.' This comment was in reference to some training on coaching Ursula had had. Ursula provided an example of where, in her own practice, pausing had had a very positive effect on a colleague's self-reflection.

> Perhaps because silence in communicative settings is often taken simply for inaction, […] the important position of silence […] has been largely overlooked. (Mazzei, 2007, p.15)

This opened up different dimensions of the field of interviewing pilot, reflections, conversations. The experience of the practise interview uncovered a number of elements, or threads, which contribute to an interview 'event' or encounter (McCoy, 2012), each of which needs to be defended, considered, and analysed. Particular threads which emerged were the significance of location and the holding of silences during an interview. Having divested myself of a simplistic conceptualisation of interviews and interviewing I approached the practise interview; more sensitised to the role of interviewer, aware of interviewing as a genre for meaning production and confirmed in a conviction that there was not a fixed store of experience and memories that would be harvested by me for careful re-presentation.

4.4.5 Refining the instrument: changing the verb

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Kvale (2007) stress the importance of learning the craft of interviewing. One practise interview does not fulfil an apprenticeship. It did however increase my understanding. The idea of interviews as straightforward had become overlain with unanticipated complexity. The verb 'gather' applied to learning from interviews (evidence perhaps of residual positivism) was re-conceptualised as a process of co-construction more closely reflective of the anticipated process and experience. As Herzog indicates:

> The interview not only structured the individual subjectivity of interviewer and participant but also broadened and deepened the concept of knowledge and its sources, and incorporated the subjects' experiential truths as part of a gendered, ethnonational social reality. (Herzog, 2005, p.25)

Having gathered the data, the question of its analysis arose. Although coding as an analytical technique is often used in qualitative research, to the author it suggests incipient positivism and consequently was not congruent with the epistemological position of this study. MacNaughton (2004), Jackson and Mazzei (2009) and Wiklund-Gustin (2010) argue that the practice of formal coding reflects positivist practices. An alternative method is immersion in transcripts of recordings, together with a notebook, in order to note themes and repeating the process until saturation (multiple occurences) of themes is reached. This reflects the way I approached analysing the research conversations. Mazzei (2010) points out that coding can blur individual experience or, in Holliday's words, 'reduce or package' unique encounters. This is a critical point for the study which does not seek to either aggregate or merge the experiences of unique professionals. Rather it aims to identify and present both differences and similarities in motivations, enactments, and maintenance, of rights respecting praxes. The intention is to:

> […] create images of the people in the research which promote an understanding of their humanity and do not reduce or package them. (Holliday, 2016, p. 171)

In this study the use of authorial narratives provides illustrative background with stories from rights respecting early years leaders in the foreground.

4.4.6 Research conversations

Denzin (2001) asserted that we live in the age of interviews. Recent literature suggests we may be moving into an age of research conversations (Rowe, 2016). Disciplines citing the use of conversations for data gathering include human geography, advertising, management and educational research. Having undertaken a practice interview, reflected on its limitations and become sensitised to the interrogatory aspect of research interviews, I was keen to reframe these 'encounters' between professionals interested in

children's rights. Accordingly I reconceptualised the interviews as research conversations.

4.5 Synthesis: ways of understanding more

Postmodern and feminist challenges to positivist epistemology have included a promotion of subjectivity. This study has a focus on the subjectivities of researcher and participant and an interplay between them. Subjectivity forms, and is formed by, our experiences and in turn shapes not only what we see but how we interpret, integrate, understand and utilise what we see. The study as a whole rests on an acknowledgement of the significance of subjective experiences in the construction of personal identity and professional values. Throughout, sources are cited which support the criticality of subjective experience for perception, interpretation and action.

This chapter has outlined its epistemological orientation and some of the methodological considerations for gathering meaningful data. Reflexive detail concerning the iterative process of building an appropriate conceptual framework has been included to exemplify transparency of process. The question of what enquiry strategy would be most appropriate to support a developed understanding of ways in which biographical narratives contribute to the development of strongly held values is partly answered by the opening narratives. Having presented these foundational narratives, it was essential to develop sensitive, ethical ways of eliciting educational narratives from participants.

Rather than selecting methodological tools from the epistemological shelf, I felt it important to tailor a bespoke methodology. Researching within an interpretivist paradigm which acknowledges subjectivity and positionality and the significance of context and multiple perspectives makes defining and delimiting the parameters and intentions of the study essential. Claims made from data arising from this study will be re-presented in accordance with the epistemological framing set out above. Thus validity will be claimed through procedural veracity and the specifics of interview data from participants rather than an appeal to generalisability. Brinkmann and Kvale assert that

validity 'permeates the entire research process'. They use the concept of 'quality of craftsmanship' to defend the validity of interview data. Indeed they argue:

> [quality of craftsmanship] becomes pivotal with a postmodern dismissal of an objective reality against which knowledge is measured. (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p.283)

Chapter 5

Re-Presenting Research Conversations

Ways of Listening

> In fact, the form of representation we choose to use is constitutive of the understanding we acquire; the medium is part of the message.
> (Eisner, 1994, p.52)

Conventionally the substance of this chapter would be called ‘findings’. Within the framework developed for this study, ‘findings’ is neither conceptually appropriate nor useful. ‘Findings’ is redolent of a positivist epistemology resting on ideas of pre-existing meanings to be discovered. This study rests on an understanding that meanings are co-constructed in contextualised inter-subjective exchanges. The processes of planning, undertaking, reflecting on and analysing the research conversations were, to borrow from Kvale (2007), analogous to travelling, rather than mining, the description he applies to positivist research. Accordingly, decisions regarding the re-presentation of these two research conversations are as significant as their content. Both conversations are prefaced with brief professional cameos of the participants. Details of arrangements and meetings which took place ahead of each research conversation are presented. In combination these features contribute to a thick ethical description (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Reflective of the study’s authorial narratives the analytical lens applied to the educational biographies is the identification of critical events augmented by participants’ acknowledgement of people who shaped their rights respecting values (Webster and Mertova, 2007; Court et al, 2010). Analysis of the selected narratives is provided beneath each transcript extract. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the author’s learning arising from the research conversations.

5.1 Re-presentation and fabrication

The intention behind hyphenating ‘re-presentation’ is to make explicit an understanding of the active role played by the author in the processes and formation of the artefact(s). Using the word ‘artefact’ extends Holliday’s (2016) use of the word ‘fabrication’. In this study the artefacts are narrative accounts of two research conversations. Unlike

‘findings’, ‘data’, the plural of *a thing given* (datum), is both conceptually, and semantically, appropriate to this study. The author acknowledges that responding to a request to participate in a research study, even within a declared appreciative enquiry, constitutes an act of considerable professional generosity. No matter how detailed, faithful, or participant endorsed, the re-presentation of these conversations involves decision making by the author concerning selection, organisation and interpretation of shared narratives. Priorities and emphases, whether of words, actions, gestures, or locations, by commission or omission reflect subjective choices made by the author. These decisions are contingent on the author’s subjective judgement in relation to the study and within the framing outlined. At the same time an underacknowledged aspect of the research endeavour is the impact and changes wrought in the researcher. In this study, changes in the author are established through a transparent narrative account of the process as well as the content of the conversations. The contrasting responses of the participants to the elicitation prompts confirmed the value of developing a bespoke methodological approach able to flex and accommodate participants’ unique engagements.

> Often a collection of personal stories of experience is not easily summarised or condensed into data tables, as survey results can be. Rather, responding to the need for a context for readers, a sense of the entire enquiry is useful. (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p.87)

In order to re-present the research conversations in ways which would respect the participants’ unique responses and convey meanings ascribed by the participants to their educational trajectories, two questions needed answering: the *what* and the *how*. Regarding the *what,* the study as a whole sets out to narrate ‘a sense of the entire enquiry’, from inception to reflection. In answering the *how,* analysis of the selected extracts, drawing on literature reviewed in Chapter 3, is presented following each transcript extract. These are summarised for each participant. Subjective presentational decisions made by the author are reflexively acknowledged. They draw on the work of Holliday (2016), Dibley (2011) and Mann (2010). Holliday defines the process of re-presenting research conversations as fabrication, not in the sense of invention but rather in the sense of making and, of course, of sense-making. Dibley emphasises the complexity involved in the analysis and presentation of narrative data, while Mann

asserts that analysis is necessarily selective with an intention to draw out some important contributions and dilemmas. In the case of this study, the contributions which are drawn out are the development and enactment of rights respecting values. Mann's perspective endorses Riessmann's (1993) position that a committed researcher who acknowledges their values position can make a positive virtue out of what positivists would refer to as bias.

The analytical lens applied to the conversation extracts presented below combines Court et al's (2009) use of content analysis with Webster and Mertova's critical events analysis (2007). A meta-analysis concludes the presentation of each conversation. The conversations are presented in the order in which they took place and include reflexive accounts of the processes and conduct of each.

5.1.1 'Storying stories' of rights respecting early years leaders

> Analysing narrative data in a manner that respects the raw data, fits with the methodology, preserves its veracity and demonstrates the credibility of the process is a challenge for the qualitative researcher. (Dibley, 2011, p.19)

Responding to Dibley's challenge, it was decided to present extracts from the research conversations utilising McCormack's (2004) method of 'storying stories' to frame their analysis. McCormack asserts narrative analysis is:

> […] where researchers gather descriptions of actions and events as 'data' that are then used to generate stories. (McCormack, 2004, p.220)

She describes three stages of storying: initial recounts by participants, their re-presentation by the researcher and finally, readings by readers. These stages closely reflect the author's ambitions for presenting the research conversations, their presentation and analysis. This approach to presenting narrative data is augmented by Webster and Mertova's (2007) suggestion of using 'a narrative sketch' to contextualise participants for readers. Both presentational formats align with the study's methodological intention to use thick description, specifically thick ethical description, to position and justify knowledge claims made by the study. Accordingly the research conversations analysed in this chapter are contextualised using narrative sketches

comprising professional biographical details of participants and thick ethical descriptions of how, where and when the research conversations were undertaken. McCormack's (2004) acknowledgement of the role played by readers' subjective experience is particularly salient. A significant consideration in the fabrication of the artefacts was that the content of the conversations should be rendered in ways which enabled readers to make independent interpretations. In this way the study acknowledges the significance of subjectivities, other than those of either the participants or author, in meanings to be made from the research conversations.

5.1.2 Applying critical event analysis to participant narratives

> Merely listening, recording and fostering participant stories, while ignoring the researcher's stories, is both impossible and unsatisfying. (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p.88)

Within 'storying stories' McCormack (2004) identifies the significance of 'moments' in narrative analysis. Her definition of important moments is where the storyteller has been shaped by the events described. This definition aligns closely with the authorial narratives and is extended by critical event analysis (Webster and Mertova, 2007) and key events (Court et al, 2009). The research prompts that shaped the conversations, and which drew on the author's formative experiences, are themselves examples of important moments and critical, or key events. As such, they form the narrative grounding of the study and correspond with Webster and Mertova's definition of critical events as having:

> [a] profound effect on whoever experiences such an event. (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p.77)

Using critical events as a way of selecting and analysing transcript extracts from the research conversations is further justified by noting the practice of Webster and Mertova to select an event because of its

> […] unique, illustrative and confirmatory nature. (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p.79)

This mirrors precisely the intention of the study's research conversations. The author was interested to learn whether inviting responses to elicitation prompts focused on the

development of professional values would evoke narrative illustrative of the how and the what of professional praxes. In so doing the proffered narratives, which were necessarily unique, illuminated the development of the values position being described. According to Webster and Mertova (2007) critical events occur in a community, are unplanned, exist in a particular context, impact on the people involved and are intensely personal. Each of these features is present in the narratives shared with the author by the study's participants. The narratives occurred spontaneously in specific contexts within school communities, either when the participants were a pupil or a professional and, by virtue of their identification and articulation, have had an intensely personal impact on Elaine and James. Of particular significance for this study is the definition of critical events having:

> […] impacted on the performance of the story-teller in a professional or work-related mode. (2007, p.74)

Webster and Mertova's identification of critical events is echoed in the work of Court et al (2009) who refer to 'key events' in shaping pre-school teachers' 'personal-professional history, values and beliefs'. They note that while there is considerable literature on teachers' narratives, only a relatively small proportion addresses early years teachers. Their research looked at factors which prefigure pre-school teaching as a choice of profession and indicated:

> The strongest theme to emerge from the narratives was the ongoing influence in the preschools teachers work of key people and events from their past. (Court et al 2009, p.210)

Identification of key people adds another layer to the conversation analysis of relevance to the responses of this study's participants. While the focus of their research into pre-school teachers' biographical narratives closely borders that of this study, their description of the analytic processes available to researchers using interviews is equally important and relevant. Both research conversations included identification of people who had made a significant contribution to each participant's professional identity and praxis. The identification of critical or key events and key persons were the lenses used to analyse the conversation transcripts. Together these perspectives supported the study's intentions to understand the formation of rights respecting praxes.

5.1.3 Seeking participant verification

What Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) refer to as 'member validation' and Creswell and Miller (2000) call 'member checking' describes a way of verifying data. As part of a respectful methodological approach I sought to share the transcripts and their re-presentation with both participants. As might be anticipated when researching with professional educators who may change jobs, move locations, take parental leave and/or gain promotion, this was only possible with one of the participants, James. In Elaine's case I wrote to her at the school address enclosing a hard copy of the transcript only to discover some weeks later, from the website, that she was on maternity leave. Some time after her return from leave I called her personal assistant and was told Elaine had been promoted within the Federation and was very busy. In a telephone conversation with James he confirmed he was happy to receive the text electronically. We had two further phone conversations, one unsuccessfully trying to arrange a time we were both free to meet face to face, the second to have a follow-up conversation regarding the amendments James had made and returned.

5.2 Conversation 1: A rights respecting Headteacher

This section provides a brief narrative sketch of the first study participant to undertake a research conversation with the author following the practise interview. The study's commitment to thick ethical description requires contextualising the participants. In doing so a balance had to be struck between providing sufficient information to support readers' independent interpretation and unintentionally revealing identifying details. Consequently, in contrast with the detailed narrative provided of the conduct of the conversation, the professional summaries are brief. During our introductory conversations I had asked Elaine how she would most like her professional role to be presented. She was happy for me to describe our professional relationship, which is included in the orientation section. In addition, Elaine suggested I use biographical material published on the school website along with relevant detail selected from the most recent Ofsted report (undated to protect confidentiality). An initial consideration was whether the summaries would be written in the first or third person. Having had

this suggestion from Elaine it became clear that the profile would be expressed in the third person.

> In the last decade, Elaine has taken on leadership roles in a range of contexts. Inclusion and Special Educational Needs are areas of expertise, as is managing change in various settings. Elaine has experience in EYFS and KS1, and has taught children, pupils and students from 3-19.
>
> The Headteacher demonstrates a relentless drive and ambition to ensure that all pupils receive a high quality education. This has led to ongoing and sustained improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

5.2.1 Orientation and antecedents

Since first contacting Elaine as Headteacher of an infant school, with a level 1 Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA), Elaine had moved schools, and become principal of a federated academy on the perimeter of the city. In a letter sent to Elaine requesting a second interview on rights respecting practice, I indicated an interest in a tour of the school. While it was the case that seeing a tour of the school interested me, I was consciously offering the opportunity, the prompt even, to meet in the setting. This suggestion was a direct consequence of my reflections on the practise interview. Having offered a choice of venue to the interviewee and accepted her response, the dominance of my context laden office had become apparent, and arguably intrusive. I wanted contextual details for the research conversations to reflect the professional context of the person with whom I was conversing.

We arranged to meet at the school. I cycled in the rain to the school. As I approached the entrance I was conscious that despite Elaine's warm and enthusiastic response to the study and my request for her time and our previous positive meeting, I felt nervous. I couldn't find anywhere to lock my bike. The school secretary, indicated on her name badge as part of the Welcome Team, observed me searching and said I could leave it in the lobby. I signed in and was introduced to the school dog, also identified as a Welcome Team member. The secretary and school dog took me to meet Elaine, who was talking to a member of staff in one of the school halls. Elaine smiled, acknowledged both the secretary and dog, and greeted me in a way that made it clear I was expected. She said she wouldn't be long and suggested I take the opportunity to

visit the area designed for reception children. The large, open plan area was flooded with light. There was a quiet buzz of activity, no raised voices, and 36 differently engaged young children; some in small groups, some working alone, others sitting with adults, some indoors and some outdoors. I spoke with two members of staff, commenting, favourably, on the space and facilities. They agreed it was a special place to work. I was approached by three children, simultaneously asking, 'What's your name?' 'What are you doing?' 'Who are you?' Each requested engagement with their reading book, topic book or a magnifier for examining a beetle. Having indicated I'd love to see what they wanted to show me but could only see one at a time and inviting them to decide what order would be best, I enjoyed sharing their enthusiasms.

Elaine collected me after 20 minutes and showed me the school, commenting positively on the building design. I had thought we were heading towards the Principal's office; instead we sat down in a small hall where a plate of cakes sat on one of the dining tables. Elaine offered me a cake and told me the kitchen had made them when they knew she was expecting a visitor after lunch. Having admired the facility I asked if she was happy to begin 'our conversation'. She smiled in agreement and I switched on the dictaphone. I did a test which did not work and tried a second time with success. Elaine had begun to speak, which accounts for the first words on the transcript of our conversation being 'So teacher'. This is the point she had reached in her first story when the recording began. After half an hour the elicitation questions which I had included in an email follow up to my letter had been answered. I remembered to switch off the dictaphone. We thanked each other politely and walked together to the entrance. Elaine extended an invitation to visit whenever I could find the time. Cycling back to the university campus I was beset with doubts: was it too short? what have I done wrong?

Later on the same day, I listened to the recording and noted: 'there is so much that's positive here/Elaine has so much insight/so much of this conversation is relevant to the study'. I sent the audio file for transcription. I found the return of the transcript two weeks later energising. Hard copy made the conversational evidence solid, more fully realised, and permanent. I read the script several times. Doing so triggered images of the time I had spent at the school. After reading it through three times I decided to

listen to the recording again, which added a further layer of meaning. The energy, enthusiasm and commitment of Elaine were embodied in the cadences and tones of her speech. It felt like being plugged into an energy stream. I found it impossible to listen without making notes and had a document page open into which I typed phrases, ideas and feelings which struck me. I wondered whether this, which to me felt like a period of play, that is without a predetermined end, is what Green et al refer to as the:

> […] time-consuming process of immersion. Repeated reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts and contextual data and listening to recordings of the interviews is the first step in analysis. (Green et al, 2007, p.547)

5.2.2 Analysis

'It's their learning space'

'It's their learning space' was a phrase spontaneously articulated by Elaine towards the end of our research conversation about her conviction that the school and grounds belonged to the children. Based on previous professional conversations with Elaine, and following a tour of the school, the phrase exemplified her rights respecting values. As the conversation reveals, Elaine's positioning of children as leaders of learning permeates all aspects of her praxis. Accordingly, using Elaine's own words was considered the most appropriate encapsulation of her values.

The conversation with Elaine ranged over the entire trajectory of her educational biography from reception class pupil to Headteacher. Of the eleven stories recounted during the conversation, two were from Elaine's experience as a pupil, a further two came from her experiences as a newly qualified teacher (NQT) and the remainder from time spent leading schools. These narratives identified key or critical events and people which had contributed to the development of Elaine's professional identity as suggested by the work of Webster and Mertova (2007) and Court et al (2009).

In deciding how to re-present these accounts it would have been possible to summarise the narratives and include key sentences or to select and isolate passages which directly focused on rights or values. The more I read through the transcript, the more important it became not to apply these decisions unnecessarily. Each short narrative is clearly contextualised by Elaine, and to contract or summarise would involve

unnecessary distortion and, through a set of editing decisions, involve more of my perspective than was warranted, as Holliday's question regarding whose voice we are writing in reminded me. In addition to the identification of key events and people, the rationale for selection and re-presentation was to provide a chronological coverage of each of the three phases of education referred to: pupil-hood, early career and leadership phase. Further, they are distinct from each other and evidence different types of contribution to the development of Elaine's rights respecting values. In each case, Elaine's words are reproduced verbatim and followed by an initial analysis.

5.2.2.1 Narratives from pupil-hood

> Narrative 1:
>
> This is me as a child. I'm probably four or five. And Mrs [name redacted] she's called – I'm sure she won't mind me using her name. She's still in, you know, contact with my family and very lovely she was. But a child was feeling unwell; she wanted to go to the toilet; they were on their way to go to the bathroom to be sick, and she helped them along their way and caught it in her hand. And I did think, gosh, that is real dedication. And I suppose what stands out for me with that is it's a real sense of those relationships – that love, that nurture, that care. And, actually, that's what I was shown at primary school.

> Narrative 2:
>
> I was reminded of this story by my mum fairly recently, being in probably year 5 or year 6 and the headmaster, who was also the teacher at the time, sharing some information with us. History. Something about a pilot flying over. And he described the story. He said someone – he flew over, and apparently, I don't remember the details but I put up my hand and I said, 'or it could have been she'. And he said, 'yes, you're quite right – it could have been she'. So, a bit of thinking there that it was important to have a voice, I suppose.

Narratives 1 and 2 are 'unique, illustrative and confirmatory' critical incidents which Elaine used to indicate ways in which she feels her educational biography has contributed to shaping a respectful praxis (Mertova and Webster, 2007; Court et al 2009). Proffering an account of witnessing a teacher catching a child's vomit constitutes a critical event which had exerted a 'profound effect' on Elaine regarding the

significance of a nurturing disposition in teachers. This theme of nurturing children's learning was evidenced throughout the conversation. Elaine alluded to opportunities for children to contribute their ideas to class and school activity, respectful ways of engaging with children's behaviour and building a culture of respect. Elaine also quickly brought to mind a memory of having her point of view acknowledged and respected when she spoke up and corrected a teacher. In reflecting on her learning in these narratives Elaine emphasised social learning above curricular content (Noddings, 2012a; Dunn, 1988). In the first account, it may or may not be the case that Elaine had the word 'gosh' in her head aged 4 but its use in the retelling powerfully conveys a lasting sense of surprise and admiration. In the second narrative, details of the headteacher's exposition are forgotten, other than 'history' and 'a pilot flying over'. What has stayed with Elaine is the importance of being listened to respectfully. Both these narratives fulfil the criterion of having:

> […] impacted on the performance of the story-teller in a professional or work-related mode (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p.74)

5.2.2.2 Narratives from early career experience

> Narrative 3:
>
> I learnt in my NQT year that, you know, never underestimate the value of children's contributions. It's very unusual for it not to have some connection to the question you've asked. It would be easy to think when you ask what 7 times 3 is and they've said 'fish' that they've really not understood but, you know, something along the line in the way you asked the question or the way you will have put them to that answer, they're, you know, not just deliberately making up nonsense. So, to remember that, actually, the contributions that children make, however wacky they might seem at the time, being really important, was something I probably learned quite early on in teaching, I think.

> Narrative 4:
>
> I think sometimes you have a behaviour strategy that is that the children need to leave the learning space and go to a different room. And my first, let's say when I was an NQT, I know that there was a behaviour strategy, but there was a recognition in that school that, actually, if a child came to you for some time out, some thinking time, I think probably different staff approached that in different ways, initially. One might have been a stern face and a cross-cross and more shouting; and some might have been actually having a bit of a

> conversation about it, a bit of a dialogue about it. And I am much more learning towards the second example, but I think it took us a little bit of time as a staff to recognise that, actually, if a child's been sent out of one room because of, you know, poor behaviour or not the right choices, is it then helpful when they're in flight or fight mode, is it helpful to have that extra discipline or would it be better to have a more restorative, more rights-respecting type approach? And I think we came to that because, you know, there were moments where it didn't feel like it was a very rights-respecting approach – so where children were being told off in one room and then told off in another. So we rethought that, basically.

Although narratives 3 and 4 do not correspond precisely with either Webster and Mertova's critical events or Court et al's key events, they nevertheless synthesise Elaine's fundamental pedagogic values. Elaine points to her first year of teaching as the time in her teaching career when she learned to value children's contributions. Her analysis noted that it was often a failure on the part of an educator to understand the connection children were making rather than a commonly expressed perception that the misunderstanding lay with the child/children. Her experience of some inconsistencies and confusing messages amongst teaching staff of behaviour management also dates from her time as a newly qualified teacher (NQT).

What is revealed in these two narratives is an empathy Elaine has for young children's experiences of being in a school environment. Speaking in a very relaxed register and using 'wacky' and 'nonsense', she readily recalled a time when 'fish' was offered as an answer to a multiplication question. This conveys sensitive perception regarding a not infrequent site of confusion between children and adults and reveals a highly reflective educator. In the second account focused on strategies for managing behaviour, her description of children being subject to 'more shouting', and being 'in flight or fight mode', conveys compassion and a privileging of children's perspectives and experiences over institutional precepts.

5.2.2.3 Narratives from leadership

> Narrative 5:
>
> I know when we first introduced rights respecting at [name of school redacted] we were very clear that we wanted it to fit within our already strong element of pupil voice. We were redeveloping the playground. They wanted a stage; we

> didn't have one so they asked the caretaker, "Could we build a stage?" and we got a stage for our creative arts outside during lunchtime.
>
> So that for me was a real strong example of the children wanted something in particular, they were able to articulate it, we had a discussion about it, we did a plan for it. It was about enriching the curriculum during lunchtimes. But a very tangible example for them to see that their voice was being heard. You know? They said that this is what would make the difference to make lunchtime learning more like classroom learning, I suppose, and they articulated that, we made a case for that, we got one built and they got to see the benefits of that. And I think that's really important.
>
> You've got to follow through, I think. That's key. If you're interested in listening to children's voices, it has to be genuine pupil voice at every level.
>
> I also think that it's easy for us to think about listening to pupils when they're older, maybe. You know? Or five and six. Well, we'll make them the school council because they're the older children. And I think that's a missed opportunity and as the head of an infant school previously we didn't have any year five-six, so we made the decision that, actually, right from reception, as soon as they were settled, reception and year 1 and year 2 would all form part of the school council.
>
> Taking it home, making the message really clear in terms of, you know, children. We decided at [name of school redacted] to grow rights respecting from the child up rather than the other way around, having visited some settings where they were looking at the UNCRC. Some early year settings, nursery and childcare settings, actually, where it felt to me like there was just a portfolio of evidence and I couldn't see any impact in terms of children. We did it the opposite way around, really. We did a little bit of staff development so they had a sense of what it was and what it was about, but we grew it from the children up. Now, that means you're dealing with a group of, you know, fairly well educated children going home and talking about rights and responsibilities [throughout] the context for their families.

Narrative 5 is closely focused on the study's core theme of realising young children's rights. It is an exemplar of an educator using narrative to convey their praxis and reflects the style of the author's opening narratives. Elaine's narrative account describes a consultation with children which is then acted on, or 'followed through', by the creation of an outside stage, so that children experienced a tangible example of their ideas being valued and acted on. Also vividly expressed in this narrative is Elaine's commitment to

incorporating rights respecting practices with the youngest children. Arguably reflecting her experiences as a pupil (narratives 1 and 2) Elaine articulates, and rejects, the practice of waiting until children are older before inviting them to be part of semi-formal structures such as a school council. This narrative links closely with narratives 6 and 7, the final extracts analysed from our conversation.

Narrative 6:

So, I would say that we would hold true to that ethos and the values and the rights respecting and children having a voice and a whole raft of other things around relationships and time and space and use of the outdoors and, you know, we have sort of. I heard someone talk this morning and they were talking about two pillars for a school around quality of learning in the curriculum and also the quality of the relationships, and that's not dissimilar to here. We've got sort of ten things but they broadly link to those two areas.

It has to be a recognition that in order to support children to acquire everything they need to in terms of learning in the greatest sense of the word, they need to have an understanding of their own rights and responsibilities, and that of their colleagues, their peers, the adults around them, and really grow that sense of a rights-respecting school or, you know, a strong sense of children's rights, and also adult rights and the community rights and all those aspects right from the start.

Narrative 7:

So I think definitely here, it would have been easy for us when, you know, it was the beginning of the year, brand-new school, no toilet roll, no bins, brand-new children, all the resources in a pile, 50 kids, lots of families, all new staff, it would have been easy for us to think, 'Do you know what? We'll deal with rights respecting at a later stage.' But there was never an inkling of that. That was never on the table as an option and neither did anybody want it to be. We all knew that it was absolutely intrinsic and key to what we needed to achieve and, you know, we've got a real range here in terms of children and needs and behaviour and, you know, we have some children who have required lots of additional support with the choices in their behaviour, and that takes up time and capacity, but it's all the more important to stand true to those ideas and aspects of what is it then about being a rights-respecting school or whatever that means?

Narratives 6 and 7 were responses to the prompt 'I was interested in how you approached your commitment to children's rights in their learning within the current curricula climate'.

Both narratives emphasise an enactment of rights respecting praxes centred on listening to children, respecting their contributions and acting on them in ways which are tangible. The unique, illustrative features shown in Narrative 6 encapsulate Elaine's conviction that far from being either an add on or marginal respect for children needs to be fundamental in their learning experiences in order for them to fully realise educational opportunities. Narrative 7 is consistent with the values expressed in Narrative 5 regarding not waiting until children are in years 5 and 6 to become school council members. Despite the intense demands involved in opening a school, the possibility of deferring the introduction of rights respecting fundamental value was 'never on the table as an option and neither did anybody want it to be'.

> We all knew that it was absolutely intrinsic and key to what we needed to achieve.

5.2.2.4 Key people

Court et al (2009) report the identification by pre-school teachers in their study of people who had made a significant impact on their lives and contributed to the development of their values. In each of the narratives Elaine made reference to the significance of key people, in a variety of roles, in the development of her praxis. Those cited in the pupil phase are her parents, reception class teacher and Headteacher; each is credited with being influential in developing her thinking about dedication, choices and listening to children's voices. In the leadership phase of Elaine's narrative she made reference to a values driven peer Headteacher, a caretaker, an academic responsible for a review of the primary curriculum review and a national education trainer. Credit is also given to groups of people, specifically the work of the schools learning council, governors and the school staff team. The learning council joined governors on a school walk during which a year 1 child, when asked what he had noticed, said he noticed 'everyone was working at their own level'. This echoed Elaine's pleasure when children use the language of the school. These appreciative, respectful references to other people

in diverse roles, within a relatively short conversation, suggested a generous, inclusive persona more concerned to give credit than be credited. References to key people also illustrated and confirmed the development of Elaine's rights respecting praxis.

5.2.2.5 'In-conversation' reflexivity

This section reflects on a decision made about using one of 'my stories' during the conversation with Elaine. Nearly 7 minutes into the conversation, Elaine had recounted five stories of how as a pupil she had been respected, shown nurturing, learned to assume children are making meaningful sense and introduced Unicef RRSA into an existing ethos of respect for children. Each of these accounts was positively framed. I decided to allude to my own narratives in order to illustrate how negative experiences can also contribute to strongly held values positions. Elaine was aware I was also conversing with other local early years leaders for the study. I made a decision to neutralise, arguably to conceal, the 'my' of these narratives stories by generalising and using the phrase 'some people'. In this way I intended to make use of my biographical experiences. I judged this to be an ethically defensible choice since I was concerned that declaring these as my own experiences would be intrusive and could risk the conversation focusing on my biography, rather than where I felt it belonged, with a rights respecting early years leader.

> H: Some people's anecdotes that they've shared around what constructed their set of values as rights respecting were less positive, for example being made to eat their custard in the school dinner hall as it emptied and held behind.
>
> E: Yes, yes.
>
> H: You can't go out to play until—
>
> E: Yes, yes.
>
> H: —or as a qualified teacher, a child being cast aside into another room. And there's an accompanying phrase, 'there's no room for individuals in my class'.

This was a spontaneous judgement. Other researchers might have made different choices. Under different circumstances I might have made a different choice. I decided what felt appropriate in that moment. By reflecting on some of the pitfalls of school

strategies for managing behaviour Elaine introduces an additional key person (her father) into her narrative. It can be argued that by yielding this rich information, the decision was a sound one.

5.3 Identifying refinements prior to Conversations 2

In moving from the re-presentation of Conversation 1 to Conversation 2, Rowe's insight has relevance:

> The strength and usefulness of these approaches lies in the possibilities opened up through dialogue with phronêtic accounts, or more precisely, through re-authoring conversations with educators themselves. (Rowe, 2016, 11:183)

Following Conversation 1, four key learning points were identified, which I intended to use to inform the fashioning of Conversation 2. The interview with Ursula and conversation with Elaine both affirmed the importance of developing a thoughtful, responsive research relationship. In order to eliminate, or at least minimise, ambiguity, responsibility for outlining the study's parameters lay with me, as author. This was achieved by sharing, and talking through the ethical consent form. Not only was respectful conduct professionally appropriate, it contributed to the construction of a communicative environment in which both participants were comfortable and willing to share rich, detailed accounts of a personal, values-forming nature. A second learning point was the importance of maintaining a quiet voice, both figuratively and actually. My narratives herald the study. Conversation 2 is about James, not me. I was keen to replicate a low percentage of researcher talk as in the conversation with Elaine. Because James and I had only recently been introduced, I was concerned that by being less familiar with the study and its aims I might be tempted to fill in the gaps and talk too much. Having talked with Ursula and Elaine, I understood the value of including as much contextual detail as possible along with the elicitation questions. Finally, in an endeavour to facilitate a comfortable and informative conversation, it felt important to avoid an interrogative approach.

In order to manifest an ethic of care in re-presenting the second research conversation it was important to demonstrate a responsiveness to participants. The

study's metaphorical rope has sufficient flexibility to accommodate contrasting styles of response to the elicitation prompts. James' overarching narrative is difficult to segment into distinct vignettes. Rather than imposing an analysis appropriate to Conversation 1 on Conversation 2 it was decided to celebrate its distinctiveness while maintaining a similar presentational format. With the exception of two brief passages of reflexivity near the beginning and at the close of the conversation James' account is expositional. It does not fall neatly into illustrative narratives. In re-presenting this conversation, the author chose to use verbatim extracts. Reading and rereading the transcript indicated the most respectful and valuable decision would be for the author to minimise her intervention. The decision to include substantial extracts of the conversation transcript allows James to contextualise his own narrative and provides readers with extended passages in his own words. For Conversation 2 because it was articulated as an overarching chronology the extracts are presented in the order in which they were spoken.

5.4 Conversation 2: A rights respecting nursery principal

Although the conversation with the nursery principal followed the same chronology as with Elaine, from pupil-hood to early career experience and then leadership, it contrasted with Elaine's distinctive narratives. The rights respecting principal offered an overarching narrative account of his educational biography. Involvement in the study of the principal (James as he elected to rename himself) was more opportunistic than the purposeful identification of Elaine. It arose as a result of an introduction by a colleague who knew of my research interest and had visited James rights respecting nursery setting and thought it would be valuable for us to know of each others' interest in young children's rights. To provide some professional orientation the James opted to send a short, first hand description of his own:

> I am an incredibly driven educationalist with high ambitions for myself and high aspirations for the children/people I work with. I currently manage an 8 a.m.–6 p.m. 94 place day nursery with over 160 children on roll.

In addition James, as the nursery principal chose to be named, was willing for me to select and cite extracts from the setting's most recent Ofsted report (undated to protect confidentiality).

> The passionate and knowledgeable manager supports staff superbly to maintain very high standards in their teaching. They receive extremely responsive training, support and guidance to develop their professional skills. For example, staff use their extensive training to support children's communication and language skills very effectively throughout the nursery (Ofsted, August, 2017).

5.4.1 Orientation and antecedents

Before proceeding to a thicker orientation of the second research conversation it is useful to identify two meta points: first that in flexing closely around the unique identities of each participant, this study demonstrates a high standard of methodological and analytical respect. Secondly this reflexively person-shaped approach echoes a bottom-up, respectful pedagogy which is responsive and attuned to the participants identities. The nursery principal identified as of relevance to this study by a colleague contributes to an Early Childhood and Initial Teacher Education programmes as a visiting lecturer in the department where the author works. A colleague volunteered to arrange an introduction the next time James had a lecture timetabled. I outlined my interest to James indicating that I had been told about the rights respecting practices at the early years settings he managed. James readily accepted an invitation to talk in my room. James enthusiastically articulated a values driven, child and child rights respecting, educational philosophy. These highly considered values included consulting children, working with colleagues, communicating with parents, and the layout of rooms and organisation of resources. As I listened it quickly became clear that, with James's agreement, including a research conversation about the development and enactment of his rights respecting praxis would be an invaluable contribution to the study. After approximately 10 minutes of passionate exposition I asked whether he would be interested in recording a conversation with me responding to some questions about

what had shaped his convictions. He agreed with alacrity and I responded by asking if I could visit the nursery before our research conversation. We arranged for me to phone staff in the nursery office to book a time. A little over a month later I visited the nursery. James welcomed me and introduced me to members of staff in the office. He then took me on a tour of each room and showed me the outside play area. In each room, children approached him and were greeted warmly by name. James' rationale for the layout of furniture and resources, which aligns with Jarman's pedagogic principles, see below, was to prioritise children's choices and decision making, as well as providing an uncluttered environment to enable free movement for children and adults. Ready access to resources and materials was prioritised, as was visual harmony and cohesion. The nursery had a colour theme of pale blue/turquoise. This ran through all the rooms to indicate continuity and maximise calm. Soft furnishings, utensils, and laundry baskets fitted with cushions which children used for sitting and playing in, were all pale blue. The feeling of a calm, uncluttered environment, not dominated by tables, and with lots of room to move around reminded me of visits to Danish nurseries, which are characterised by high levels of respect for children's participation.

The nursery James leads employs a particular pedagogic approach focused on conversation friendly spaces developed by Jarman (2008). The approach prioritises children's perspective and the centrality of communication for children's learning and confidence. Jarman explicitly challenges traditional ways of organising early years environments. James' commentary as we toured the nursery included details of his educational career, introductions to children and staff, explanations of the layout and organisation of resources as well as the story of the nursery's development since it opened. A topical theme was the imminent implementation of free places for two year olds. James, in common with many providers, was frustrated by what he considered to be poor central planning and its unforeseen consequences.

We arranged for me to visit a second time and record a research conversation a month later. I emailed a copy of the same elicitation prompts I had shared with Elaine. Already, using the question seemed too abrupt and interrogative. I indicated that if there was time to consider them before we met that would be good but in any event I would

be happy to provide the prompts at the time. I arrived 10 minutes early and was shown to the soft leatherette sofas arranged at right angles to each other in the lobby, and offered a drink. The coffee table had copies of publications relevant for parents including a publication by 4Children/Dfe titled *What to expect, when? Guidance to your child's learning and development in the early years foundation stage* which provided information on the Early Years Foundation Stage. From the sofas, the focal point was a large tank of tropical fish. On top of the tank was a display of framed photos and children's drawings from appreciative parents and children who had left the nursery and started school. On the wall to the right of the fishtank was a clearly laid out noticeboard which featured a child friendly version of the UNCRC on an A3 size poster. The sofas had turquoise coloured cushions and I recalled James indicating on my previous visit that colour consistency throughout the nursery was consciously intended to create a calm, coherent environment.

After speaking to staff members working in the nursery office, James joined me and sat on the sofa at a right angle to the one I was on. I was reminded of the interview with Elaine, who had also chosen to talk in a public space, not an office. Specifying the expected time commitment (an hour), purpose (disseminating successful rights respecting practices) and possibilities of publication had been discussed in previous communications. I chose to restate them, in summary, and left time for James to seek clarification. This was an aspect of my commitment to an ethic of care towards the study's participants (Noddings, 2012b). Once James had indicated his understanding and consent, I began to record our conversation, using my phone. The noise of the three doors to the nursery office upstairs opening and closing as staff members moved around the building and the arrival of a young girl with her mum formed a suitably grounding background to the recording.

As in Conversation 1, substantial unedited sections of the conversation are presented to facilitate an unannotated text for readers. Commentary and analysis is provided beneath the transcript extract. Full transcripts of both conversations are provided in the Appendix.

5.4.2 Analysis

A very caring and conscientious young man.

The title given to the research conversation with James is taken from a reception class report James quoted (extract vii below). As with the subtitling of the conversation with Elaine, it encapsulates the person revealed in James' responses to the elicitation prompts. It was important that the titling was generated from within the conversation and, whilst identified by the author, was not an author imposed summation which narrowed readers' independent interpretations. James' educational biography focused on the well-spring and development of his personal-professional values. He identified people and events which had contributed to his pedagogical praxis (Goodson, 2013; Court et al, 2009; Webster and Mertova, 2007; Clandinin et al, 1999). A significant theme was consistency between values learned whilst a pupil and values espoused as a professional. Sitting in the entrance to the setting James leads, surrounded by visual manifestations of his professional values, listening to his narrative, observing his interactions with children and adults, it seemed to me the description of James as a five year old accurately reflected his professional persona (Kelchtermans, 2009).

I listened to the recording in the evening of the day it was recorded, meaning I heard it twice: once directly from James and once on a smartphone. I found I needed a long period of time, nearly two weeks, before I was ready to return to it. My reflection on this was that I needed time to accommodate a significant amount of differently presented data. Having returned to it I listened three times, each time noting the content but also James' cadences and narrative style.

5.4.2.1 Extracts from pupil-hood

> i) I guess my earliest memories of education go back to early primary school, a couple of vague memories of pre-school but, ironically, I think it was actually the traumatic attachment issues around actually letting go of the parent and actually then having to separate that I remember. So that was interesting because that's the only couple of things that I distinctly remember, one or two very vague memories, at least I think I remember them, of those attachments and having to break that attachment from main carer.

This short narrative recalls a key event or critical incident (Court et al, 2009; Webster and Mertova, 2007) in James' initial experience of education. James described his memory of 'traumatic attachment' as ironic but didn't elaborate on this, a decision I chose to respect coming as it did at the outset of the conversation. Nevertheless this was a fundamental recollection because it connected intensely to James' choice of professional role. I was interested to understand the way James had used the word 'ironically' and sought to clarify this. I emailed James indicating that I would like to talk about an aspect of our conversation. He replied suggesting a time to call the nursery office. We spoke at the agreed time, two weeks after our research conversation. James said what he had been trying to convey was that, despite all professional attempts to make transitions smooth, separation from primary carers is still experienced as traumatic for some children. James' perspective indicated an acknowledgement of children's agency. Whilst educators endeavour to minimise distress in order to enable children to make smooth transitions into a setting, children's responses to the experience will be their own and as such need to be anticipated, acknowledged and allowed before responsive support is offered. Following this clarification it was evident that this met Court et al's (2009) criterion for having impacted on the enactment of his professional role. James' insight, borne of his own difficult experience of transition, struck me as powerful for a leader of an early years setting. This is an aspect, though not a comfortable one, of respect for young children. It is analogous to the practice described by George (2009) who described respecting babies' intentions when they use gestures and body language to decline food presented to them. Referring to the next phase of his education, primary school, James stated:

> ii) my primary school […] very fond memories of that, that was a slightly different education perhaps than other people had because it was a prep school that was run by nuns.
>
> iii) I look back now, at the time I didn't realise, but I do now, that I was afforded lots of different opportunities to develop as the whole child, I would say. I had opportunities for a kind of an enriched curriculum that enabled me to explore my artistic, creative, musical, dramatic educational side as well. I think a lot of what we were taught via the church teaching. I wouldn't consider myself

religious any more but I do value certain teachings that religion can offer, the moral side of things, there was a morality that I think was instilled as well by being brought up by nuns. There was also a discipline side to that, there was very much a sense of right and wrong, you know, what was and wasn't acceptable. I became the Head Boy of that school. So in year six there were additional responsibilities which I then had around being an ambassador for the school. So if we were out and about or if there were certain key events, the Head Girl and the Head Boy tended to have a bigger part to play as a representation of the school in its wider sense. That was really enjoyable, so again, I remember we did so many different things.

iv) it was always geared I think for success, that was always something that was instilled in us was that achieving the best you possibly can, albeit your own best. There wasn't necessarily a 'this is what best looks like.' But it was essentially anything is possible as long as you do your very best and try your hardest then nobody can say otherwise.

v) There was a genuine passion to provide an education for these children that gave them the same sort of education I had, albeit in the state sector. So actually for those parents who may not have been in a position to afford to buy into that smaller class size. I was determined to still give those children that same opportunity without necessarily having it to be based on income.

In twice citing the influence of nuns it was apparent that they were 'key persons' in James' primary schooling (Court et al, 2009). James attributed his current moral values to the influence of the nuns he was taught by and who instilled in him a moral code. Declaring himself to be no longer religious it is noteworthy that James had embraced an alternative encoding of moral behaviour (UNCRC) to frame his praxis working with children, parents and staff. He expressed appreciation for the enrichment opportunities and encouragement he enjoyed, and identified pleasure in the experience of shouldering 'additional responsibilities', citing 'representation of the school in its wider sense'. James reflected on his 'different type of education'. Twice during the conversation (extracts ii and v) James asserted a commitment to providing a different type of education for children whose economic circumstances might otherwise preclude them from the range of opportunities he experienced. Connecting his professional present with his educational past (Goodson, 1981; Collinson, 2012) in extract iv, James described a liberal model of achievement in his primary school, 'achieving the best you possibly can albeit your own best.' This demonstrated an understanding of children which

corresponds closely with a rights respecting ethos. It is indicative of a discourse of children as beings as well as becomings (Johansson, 2005) and aligns with a pedagogic values based on children's interests (Sellers, 2010) rather than predetermined outcomes. The sentiment manifests respect for children's agency by acknowledging a capacity for choice making (Oswell, 2013; MacNaughton, 2007; Lansdown, 2005). In summary these extracts convey the importance James attaches to an enriched curriculum, children's agency and the opportunity in education to instil moral values. Enduring connections between James' experience as a pupil and his current professional values are articulated in extracts vi, vii, viii below.

vi) I sang in full blue coat uniform in Bristol cathedral in the Christmas carol concert to a full packed audience, attended things like charter day service at the cathedral and all of those traditions, so I was able to really actively involve myself in the tradition of the school and I was very proud of its heritage and its history, and that was instilled in us a lot actually. The motto was, 'Whilst we have time, let us do good.' I make time to do some charity work as well now because I passionately believe in that motto that was instilled in us.

vii) I was giving prospective tours to parents, to prospective teachers, because they were just about to open the junior school. So they asked me to show prospective heads around the school as part of the tour. I was a peer supporter so I was supporting younger students if they needed to just have a buddy that was older to talk through anything. That was a kind of selective group of upper 6th students who were peer supporters. So all the way along I think I have realised when I looked back to my reception report which said 'he is a very caring and conscientious young man' actually that hasn't gone. It is actually still there and I just think I have been sort of shaped by other opportunities that have enabled me to really kind of develop that and understand myself.

viii) Part of me wanted to kind of engage in a sport that I thought I would never be able to engage with at any other time in my life. Rowing was one of those kind of traditional university sports. I did want the traditional university experience of red brick institution which also had traditional sport. It has been one of the biggest selling factors with any of my job interviews. I was able to talk through my role in the boat club and what skills it demonstrated that I had that I could bring into teaching. The feedback I've had was that there are very few people that have ever have the ability to talk through what they could offer. When I was applying for a job as an NQT I remember one distinct time. I was whittled down from 160 down to six. I was one of those six interviewed, and although I was unsuccessful I did say, 'Well, will you just give me some indication of, what was it on my application that made me stand out amongst 160 others?' Again they explained it was because of the enriched sort of

opportunities that I'd had and I'd demonstrated what I'd taken from those and what I could offer.

The three extracts above (vi, vii, viii) convey a consistent interest in responsibility in different contexts and all phases of James' educational experience. James is at pains to articulate how a breadth of experience had enabled him to continue to be 'a caring and conscientious young man'. Of particular note, for a consideration of the impact of an educational biography on professional praxis, is the explicit connection James made between his current actions and senior school motto, 'While we have time, let us do good.' This reference to a moral framework which James attributes to the religious context of his early years schooling occurred throughout the conversation. Although these extracts do not identify specific people they do emphasise the significance of relationships and responsibility in James' educational biography. James illustrated reflexivity regarding his life in education through reference to having been accorded responsibility as a pupil and working in a rowing team while at university. These examples connect with what Court et al (2009) refer to as 'perceptions of the teacher's role'.

5.4.2.2 Extracts from early career experience

ix) Yes. So I knew that I was going to go into teaching from the get go. Trying to articulate why and how I knew that was very difficult, but all I can ever remember was, even from a young age I would want to mark books. I would sit, even with my own books. I would tick through them and role play, you know. It might have been that was just because I'd maybe had what I consider to be a very lovely, you know, very lovely early experience of teachers and teaching and all those sorts of things. I don't know, but essentially that was something I was determined to do and on the back of that, I mean from the age of I guess how old was I, the nursery that we are in now opened in 1996 and so being involved in that educational establishment again was something that I had grown up with all throughout my childhood, so I had left school in '99, yes primary school started, secondary, even at junior school I had been privy sort of and part of, you know, an ethos creating an educational establishment and that drive and that vision on why.

x) that is when you have to tap in to early years, you have to tap into that idea of child initiated play based learning which is scaffolded and supported to the outcome but which isn't a 'you are the recipient of knowledge and I am here to

> transmit that to you but let's construct it together so that I am constructing in a way that is making sense to you'. I was completely restructuring how I did lessons and basically it was that idea, that notion of carouselling, so actually I had child initiated activities and adult led activities.

James illustrates his assertion that he always knew he was going to be a teacher by referring to the school focused play he involved himself in as a child (ix). This description corresponds with Athey's (1991) abiding interests and a sense of agency inherent in freely chosen play (Sellers, 2010). In light of this recollection it is noteworthy that he has retained an interest in, and commitment to, 'child-initiated, play based learning' throughout his professional life teaching a range of age phases. His reflections in extract ix articulate his pedagogic values centred on a dialogic, relational pedagogy in which learners' understanding is the principal objective (Laevers, 2005). James identifies his approach as 'child-initiated, play based learning', which aligns with Sellers (2010) and evidences a respectful pedagogy which corresponds with Noddings' ethic of care (2012b) cited in Chapter 1.

5.4.2.3 Extracts from leadership

> xi) when I came here [the nursery] it was a learning curve and it took a while to get into the early years, the rules and regimes, around the EYFS. I call it a regime because it is obviously government-led. You've got your curriculum, yes, but the legislation of you cans and you can'ts and your musts and all of those sorts of things and you know, you can't put a foot wrong. If you make a mistake it could actually be fundamental to your business and you can end up hugely suffering. You know 'requires improvement' for a school is not going to lose children necessarily but 'requires improvement' in a nursery could be the death of it potentially. So again I had to very quickly learn a lot about early years and essentially you know there is a time of change and a new manager comes in. You've got staff, you've got, you know, parents that are used to a sort of style. I had my own views of leadership and management and how they needed to be conducted and it's enabled me to really, nine years later, no seven years later I think I have really finally established where my principle beliefs lie. Before that I thought I knew but I don't think until you've experienced essentially birth to eleven, which is what I have, in its broadest sense. I think I have the capacity for change and leadership and the ability to drive a vision forward of how I want education to look under my leadership. It has made me question what I do value most and how I think that value is best shaped in terms of practice and provision. So that then leads me to that idea of the rights of the child and the value of the child. I think if I hadn't have had those teachers that believed in me

> and they gave me those opportunities and valued a well rounded education I would not be sat here trying to instil younger children and getting parental awareness of the whole child to really value that actually there is so much that we can do to support these children to be the best that they can be. Because we do not know if any one of these children in our care could be the next person who finds a cure for something or who goes out and does some charitable peace work that enables there to be greater levels of peace or becomes a politician and supports that or becomes an activist and enables greater rights for people.

In extract xi, James explicitly connected his educational biography with a rights respecting praxis (Smith, 2015, 2016; Johansson, 2005). In particular he attributed his experience of educators committed to believing in him as cornerstones of his praxis. He accounted for his professional values and pedagogical practices with reference to opportunities he experienced in his education and restated a commitment to offering respect and breadth of opportunity to children at the nursery he leads (Collinson, 2012; Kelchtermans, 2009). The vision he conveyed was strongly underpinned by a moral imperative to provide the best learning environment and opportunities for young children. James aligns rich provision for 'the whole child' with a moral duty to educate with the ambition of facilitating children's fulfilment. He also reflected on the development of his leadership skills. He was conscious of the benefits of being able to contextualise early years education from having worked with all age groups from 0-11. James' understanding of young children's agency is expressed in an unrestricted view of children's capabilities. His commitment to the importance of child-led learning is confirmed by the importance he attaches to communicating this with parents.

> xii) we don't put any sort of limiting belief on what these children can achieve and when I say achieve I don't just mean education. I literally mean in the wider sense, morally, socially, academically, you know. I think because each one of these children has a unique set of abilities and talents that make them who they are our job is to tune into those and try and enhance those for them, as well as give them opportunities perhaps to uncover other talents and abilities that they may not get the opportunity to do at home, outside in the wider world just because their parents themselves may not have had those opportunities or may not be aware of sorts of things. So educating the parents around how we support children, why we do certain things. I have a big display over in the corridor just over there about messy play and getting parents to understand the value of mess. So if your child comes home with some mess, understand what they have learnt as a result of getting a bit muddy or getting a little bit of paint

on them or getting a little bit of food down them and there is a value to that. So it's getting that ethos out to those parents straightaway, why we do it, why we value messy play, why we value sensory play, why we have communication spaces in nursery, how we support children to enhance their language and development through a book focus we have every half a term. So you know yes we are possibly trying to play the game of narrowing the gap for underperforming, although I hate that term myself, underperforming children. We are doing it in a way that actually doesn't single any children out of groups but it creates an ethos across the whole nursery. We are a language and communication rich setting because fundamentally if we can hit that prime area of learning and support then we can support children's understanding and so we can support their moral understanding, their social understanding. We can support their academic understanding, we can support their physical development through it because we can still enhance storytelling in the broadest sense of gross motor movements, storytelling, music and movement linked to stories. You know we can do all of those things but what we can't do is try and teach those specific things when their primary needs are not being well met because fundamentally if a child isn't happy, say secure, well attached, well adjusted, confident in our setting they are not going to be ready. And we talk about school readiness but we still need to talk about nursery readiness because there is such a big emphasis on school readiness. They sometimes forget so much of that comes down to supporting the child's emotional well being.

xiii) We have to track the progress and monitor the progress and there are still tensions there around my beliefs around having to track six month old babies every half a term and monitor and put them into a percentage of who are achieving and who are not achieving. That said I would sit and I would argue the toss with the Ofsted Inspector face to face if they came in. And this is why I do it only at this time of year because I absolutely refuse to fall foul of the system. It's not valuing the child and the individual and it's just looking at the children as a percentage. Will your practice clearly be assessed on their actual development levels or shall we not assess them and go on their attachments, they are happy with us and the security here.

xiv) I am such an advocate for early years principles and had I ever had my own headship it would have been to create a school which did not lose those early years principles. They would be actively spread across everything. I would have insisted. I would have done my best to make sure that my team understood and valued and came on board with that vision of children's intuitive learning. There are still challenges when you've got targets to meet with you know, SATS, that's absolutely true but there is a way that we can do it where we don't become a victim of the SATS testing regime. Thankfully here we don't have that.

xv) how confident they are here, their articulation, you know the way that they can sit and have conversations with you. So there is a tension here around our values, around what we believe and what the legislation of the EYFS and then

> the Regulation of what Ofsted actually insist we have to show. I guess it's the same with any educational setting isn't it?

In extract xiv, James restated his conviction that early years principles are fundamental for learners of all ages. His critique of intensive assessment demands, including a school readiness focus, is predicated on questioning their value and appropriacy. James considers this approach to early years education antithetical to the learner centred values he upholds because it ignores vital aspects of learning such as children's happiness, emotional well-being, security, confidence and participation.The example James provides in extract xii regarding messy play encapsulates his understanding of the importance of communicating respect for children's engagements with materials. He believes that in order for children to be able to enjoy and benefit fully from messy play clear messages about its value need to be communicated with parents and carers. His display for parents is a manifestation of his respect for children. In this way he provides a bridge between children, children's rights to participate and express themselves, and parents and carers. James' respect for children's agency permeates all aspects of his praxis (Bae, 2010; MacNaughton, 2009). James justifies compliance on the following grounds: 'I absolutely refuse to fall foul of the system'.

> xv) and some of that comes down again to that child knowing they are right to some extent and parents knowing 'actually this is what we value of the child' and that there are some rights so yes we don't, a lot of them mask their own behaviour but it's actually recognising the rights of the child are these. So they have a right to be heard and if I hadn't had those teachers that believed in me and gave me those opportunities and valued a well rounded education, I would not be sat here trying to instil opportunities for younger children.
>
> xvi) we never use [it here], that term 'terrible twos' but there is a very uniqueness around a two year old and I think a lot of that is a lack of empathy but they do learn it but they just need support and understanding empathy and that their actions have consequences on others and we need to do that in a way that is sensitive and appropriate for the age of the child as well. So we have been doing a lot of work recently about the child's voice and the child's rights and then seeing that their rights and that their voices being heard and one of the ways in which we have done that, trying to incorporate it into maths, so there is still an educational focus as well as the British values is that we have been doing a lot of physical representation of voting for the children so during their group times, for example recently we have been doing, we have a large white board and along

the bottom we have sort of three different things, categories so for example recently we did their favourite call book so far or story that they have learnt and during that group time each child had the opportunity to tell the group which was their favourite story and why and then go and stick their post it note above the book in a, you know in a kind of bar chart order.

xvii) so that then and also we encourage them if they are able to have a go at writing their name on these post it notes so again they are given the opportunity. We are talking here school readiness, you know but trying to support that right in a way that is purposeful and meaningful and if they couldn't they could have help, that was fine and we would post it note and we would stick it up and they were able to count how many children like to go to lots of three beds, how many children preferred, going to market and how many children preferred the three little pigs and as a result of that every child could see this is me, this is my vote visually, here it is. It's been counted, it's been verified, that's my name, oh look most of us think this but actually teaching it's ok that others will also think something different to us but we will still like the same thing. We still like stories, we've really enjoyed them but some people like this one a bit more than this one and that one and that is absolutely fine and for me that's been a breakthrough moment as well in the staff going wow actually giving these children opportunities to express their opinions on something but visually go up and give that vote to say this is me, I am voting for this one so we have turned it on the super heroes. We've done it on colours, we've done in on you name it, kind of anything and everything, the kind of activities that they like doing. It's a way for us to also find out what do they really like doing in a way that they are able to kind of vote on and snack, we've done all favourite fruit.

[…] have their voice heard and be recognised and be counted physically in a way, literally be counted, you know and that's part of something we've started in our pre school room. Having the family board, so we have things like our digital photo frames so children are there, they are represented

[…] they are doing it in a way they are engaged with in a multi sensory way and it's the same knowing obviously those earlier principles […]

[…] we do very much believe in those rights of the child and hence why we have you know the rights of the child on our display for parents to make it clear to them as they can come in, although we don't necessarily shove that in the parents' faces and we are not splashing the rights of the child everywhere because there is fundamentally a lot of literature out there and you've got the European rights of the child sits alongside British values which sits inside your safeguarding and your practice around behaviour and everything you do to support the privacy of the child. It becomes too much, too much of a view of things so essentially it has to be embedded into what you do and to make parents aware of it and make practitioners aware that this is why we are doing it because actually it's drawing upon several different areas

xviii) […] you know, do you have a naughty step or a naughty chair or whatever and I'm like, well first of all we will never use that word here. That is such a bad word in the nursery, no child is naughty and I then go into the opportunity to say, you know children have a right to be heard and to have their voice heard, to be respected. If they are behaving in a way that we might not consider to be particularly appropriate then we need to unpick that. We need to go get down to their level, make them feel valued, make sure that they understand that we are listening to them and then explain to them why their behaviour was not necessarily acceptable in that moment and the consequences of that because the other child may have been heard or is upset or actually it's something maybe broken, you know whatever it might be and then you just see the light bulb moment go with, the parents go oh ok so I say to them we don't, this is not a sanction or a fear of punishment the children behave should we say

[…] they behave because they value and respect each other. They value and respect why routine is in place, they understand the consequences of if they don't do this and they have the chance to be a decision maker. They have, in that moment in time there is a decision to make

xix) They learn that ability to assess for themselves their behaviour and manage their own behaviour but that's fundamentally some of the ways I think it's easiest to get the parents to understand the rights of the child and not trying to have it the other way round that we are here to control them and we are here to direct them and dictate their day for them. Actually no, it's a very different way we are in charge in this setting, where the rights of the child is paramount but we also do adult led support as we monitor, we assess and we will support their learning but that comes out of what we have observed as being their interest or we observe this being where they are developing and it is that whole assessment observation and planning cycle comes from the child at the heart, it's got to.

These extracts not only include James' declaration that the setting is one where 'the rights of the child are paramount', they also restate, in extract xii, how the use of language, including communicating with parents about language use in the nursery, is an important aspect of realising children's rights in this setting. Explicitly banning the use of 'terrible twos' and 'naughty' as descriptors of children's behaviour conveyed values based on understanding children's meaning making rather than labelling or condemning it (Lansdown, 2005). This manifests a respect for children's feelings and engagements in the setting (Sellers, 2010). It includes a commitment to supporting children's self management. Together the extracts illustrated several features of his respectful praxis: empathy, support for children developing independent, caring attitudes, working with

parents and an introduction to democracy (MacNaughton et al, 2007). The conclusion of this re-presentation of Conversation 2 consists of James' answer to a final, unscripted, prompt:

> James, just to finish I just wondered if there is a recent story, either on your walk around today, or something that made you think 'yes', when either a child was speaking to another child or to an adult, which illustrates…

> Yes, I do. It was last Thursday. It was breakfast and I noticed specifically because it was a child's last day. She was the youngest child when I started here. She was six months old when she started here and she is moving away to the other side of town so I made the effort to actually do breakfast that day so I could sit with her and just share a moment I would treasure. One child who has Downs Syndrome then joined the group for her breakfast and they were supporting her story telling.
>
> *At this point James explains to the children that it is time to finish breakfast and clear away.*
>
> […] the child with Downs Syndrome is still mix, mix, mixing and I said oh guys we going need to support [redacted] to eat her breakfast now as she is not going to do it. Another child looked across to the second girl and she looked at the child and she signed to her with her tongue and said, 'you need to eat your breakfast now' and the child with Downs Syndrome then carried on with eating her breakfast. In it was pure joy just watching another child help support another child because we had given them the tools to communicate. And seeing the child with Downs Syndrome know that her friends are trying to work with her because she doesn't have much language at all and would struggle with interactions without their help. And that moment stuck with me because it was natural for the other child just to do it. It wasn't oh don't forget we have to sign this, it was, she just did it in the moment because she knew that, that child needed slightly different support to help her and understand and I just sat there and I think this is what it is all about. This is what supporting early education is all about because in that moment. We had one child understand that in order to help support another child she needed to adapt her own way of communicating and it was completely spontaneous. In just that one moment I was so proud of what we do because of exactly what it was. It was just a joy to see and yes for me that really sticks out. We are actually understanding that we have created a culture of inclusion implicitly here, no matter what level of support is needed

In selecting this cameo of children's relationships and support for each other, James depicted an instance which conveyed to him how far the settings' values had been internalised and confidently enacted by the children themselves. Through spontaneously signing to a child in need of extra support, the children show they have been

empowered by rights respecting values and are able to utilise them in peer communications (Taguchi, 2008).

5.4.2.4 Key people

Analysis of the conversation with James indicated his identification of people who had contributed to shaping his rights respecting values was not as prominent a feature as for Elaine. Key people identified in the pupil phase of his biography are his parents and the nuns, including his reception class teacher who reported on his conscientious and caring disposition. In his time as a secondary school pupil, university student early career and as a nursery principal it is generic organisational relationships with senior management, staff and parents, in addition to learning relationships with children, which James points to as supporting his respectful praxis.

In this chapter it is the distinctiveness between two rights respecting leaders which has been prioritised. In the Discussion chapter which follows, consideration is given to analysing common experiences.

Chapter 6

Discussion

Reflections on knowledge and learning

> Young children's experiences of growth and development are powerfully shaped by cultural beliefs about their needs and proper treatment, and about their active role in family and community. (CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1)

This discussion combines reflections on the study's epistemic positioning with an examination of principles held in common by two rights respecting early years leaders. It opens with an identification of Early Childhood, as a field of enquiry, and outlines this study's response to Mannion's enquiry regarding the nature and purpose of Early Childhood researchers' endeavours.

> I am left with an annoying question, what, exactly, is it that childhood researchers are supposed to do in their empirical studies? (Mannion, 2007, p.405)

Following this, aspects of the study which are vulnerable to critique are evaluated, and in each case, recast as a strength. A fourth section examines ways in which the research conversations endorse the moral, relational and pragmatic cases for respecting young children's rights in early years settings. The chapter closes with a synthesis of the author's learning arising from undertaking this study.

6.1 Early childhood: An infant field

Early Childhood Studies, the field in which this study sits, grew from more established fields of study. Listed chronologically, philosophy, psychology and sociology are its principal forebears; MacNaughton (2007) adds anthropology to the field's antecedents. Epistemologically it is, itself, an infant. The study of Early Childhood, in UK universities, has yet to reach its half century. Consequently Mannion's question is particularly apposite.

In addition to epistemological, economic and social hurdles confronted by other fields of social enquiry, researching with children faces a further challenge. With very few exceptions childhood researchers are adults. This has ethical, epistemological and practical implications. A conceptual shift, an epistemological turn, prompted in part by the UNCRC, has moved towards researching with children (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012b; Pascal and Bertram, 2009; Dockett, 2007). Within this inclusive reframing there has been a range of purposeful attempts at reducing the distance between children and adult researchers: prioritising listening to children, developing meaningful ethical approaches, involving children in designing and evaluating research and developing child friendly methodologies. However, contingent on an asymmetry of brain development, at its most acute with young children, this largely unbridgeable space will endure. What is important is how the more powerful communicative partners, in this study early years educators, in Lundy's words 'duty bearers', respond to this imbalance, personally and professionally. The narratives with which this study begins attest to a particular mode of response to an experiential disjuncture between adults and children: oppressive, disrespectful, practical, linguistic and physical behaviours, by adults towards children when children do not behave, or respond, in ways deemed to be acceptable by adults. Sociological analysis might ascribe routine instances of coercion, restriction and hostility to a cultural construction of children as 'threats'. In his survey of trends in child wellbeing in the last century, Hendrick (2007) characterises contemporary political and social actions towards children as:

> […] a fear of, and a disdain for, young people - almost a 'child hatred.' (p.748)

This study suggests an acknowledgment of the communicative and experiential distance between adults and children and intensifies a moral imperative for rights respecting policies and practices. In answer to Mannion's question at the head of the chapter, this study re-connects the educational biographies of rights respecting early childhood leaders with their praxes in the context of a mandatory curriculum. It does so in order to assert and affirm that:

> Children's autonomy and freedom to pursue their own development is a prerequisite for the realisation of other key rights including freedom of expression and freedom of association. (Gillet-Swann & Sargeant, 2018, p.120)

This introduction to the discussion closes with a restatement of the study's delineation. Realising young children's rights: researching conversations with rights respecting early years leader is not an enquiry into the beliefs and practices of two early years leaders who happen to share an esoteric interest. A commitment to respectful engagement with young children shared by both professionals, far from being esoteric, aligns with frameworks to which the UK is signatory (UNCRC/EHCRC). Arguably more noteworthy than principles held in common for implementing rights respecting practices, is the routine manner in which educational policy and practice in England discounts mandated imperatives.

6.2 Revisiting themes from the literature

> To raise educational questions from a rights perspective, however, children's rights researchers also need educational theorising ideas that simultaneously reconceive curriculum and receive young children's understandings into the curricular conversation. (Sellers, 2010, p.560)

The work of Sellers (2010), Hedges and Cooper (2016), and Cannella and Bloch (2006) reviewed in Chapter 3 outlined a reconceptualisation of curriculum which challenges the use of developmental psychology as the basis for developing an early years curriculum. In a reconceptualised curriculum, children's interests or 'real questions' (Hedges and Cooper, 2016) are prioritised over top-down curricula. A re-focusing of curriculum away from adult interests towards child interests is predicated on a respect for young children which acknowledges them as capable learners as well as both beings and becomings (Smith, 2016). While constrained by a mandatory early years curriculum (EYFS, 2017) both early years leaders in the study placed respect for children's participation as competent learners at the centre of their work (Sellers, 2010; Johansson, 2005). Specific instances are presented in extracts below. A second strand of the literature reviewed provided illustrations of rights respecting practices with young children in early years settings. Drawn from different theoretical, philosophical and locational contexts they

demonstrated ways of enacting young children's curricula participation. Accordingly this discussion, identifying common themes from the research conversations with Elaine and James, references the work of Lansdown (2011), Smith (2015), Johansson (2005), Bae (2009), Lundy (2011, 2012), and Nutbrown (1996, 2018). Lansdown (2011) like Lundy (2007) emphasises the critical role played by adults in facilitating young children's rights:

> […] too often, children's capacities are underestimated because of an adult failure to create an environment in which children can articulate their views appropriately. (Lansdown, 2011, p.5)

In their narratives both Elaine and James cite the need to support children's social and emotional learning as part of their motivation for enacting rights respecting pedagogic practices. For Elaine this is revealed in her account of supporting children finding it difficult to make positive behavioural choices. For James it is evident in the care he takes regarding inclusion. A related focus, shared by both participants, is the importance of developing a culture of respect which is visible to children. Both participants highlight instances where children show they have internalised the setting's child respecting values. For Elaine it is when children take on the language of the setting, a language of learning. For James it is when children act inclusively towards a peer in need of support. Bae (2009) and Lundy (2007) in particular are concerned with participation rights. Elaine recalls children's proposal for an outdoor stage which was acted on by the setting. James cites a small scale example of democracy in action and the care he takes in communicating the settings values about children's participation to parents. Along with aspirational values intended to support children's social and cognitive learning, both participants advance pragmatic arguments for realising young children's rights. Elaine indicates that child led learning improves children's achievement while James illustrates a commitment to managing inspection demands without losing sight of the settings' values.

6.3 Unique pathways, shared values

Analysis of the research conversations in chapter 5 focused on the unique educational pathways of two early years educators with rights respecting values. The decision to

emphasise their distinctiveness was an intentional aspect of a respectful ethic of care. This study identified participants' individual professional praxes and resisted analytical processes which might dilute or blur special characteristics. It also contrasted their modes of response to questions about their commitment to realising young children's rights. Having considered and re-presented participants' individual stories, it is valuable to re-examine their narratives for themes held in common. Some of the pedagogical ideas and practices about children's rights held by both leaders are strikingly similar. In chapter 1 (1.4.1) the following definition of rights respecting practice was provided:

> Early years professionals acknowledge children's rights, as set out by UNCRC. They pay particular attention to children's rights to participate, express an opinion and be heard in all aspects of their learning. Setting practices are directed towards the active promotion and development of these rights through meaningful dialogue with children.

Following immersion in the data (Green et al, 2007) analysis of the conversation transcripts was undertaken in light of the definition above and literature reviewed in chapter 3. Five rights respecting principles held in common by Elaine and James were identified: respect for children's rights as a non-negotiable principle, valuing children's participation, developing a culture which respects children, relational learning and enabling rights respecting practices within a required curricula framework. Each is elaborated below. Together they underscore the possibilities for realising young children's rights in early years settings.

6.3.1 Respect for children's rights: a non-negotiable principle

In her critique of top down relations between adults and young children in settings Bae (2009) highlights how far realising children's rights challenges dominant discourses of children as becomings, inexpert and unskilled. Nutbrown (2018), Bae (2009) and Johansson (2005) indicate that pedagogic relations rely on individual teachers' beliefs and values:

> The foundation of teachers' views as persons - subjects with the same value as adults - are to a large extent based on a combination of personal, cultural and educational perspectives on children and childhood and how they as teachers should act towards children. (Johansson, 2005, p.121)

Both of the study's participants draw on discourses of childhood which conceptualise children as capable learners, experts in their own lives and entitled to express their ideas about all matters which concern them. In the research conversations Elaine and James provided examples of when they had had experience of being respected in their time as pupils (Collinson, 2012). Both participants indicated the centrality of respect for children's rights and pupil voice in their settings. Neither was willing to compromise on their commitment to respecting children's rights (Freeman, 2007; Lundy, 2007). Elaine offered a vivid depiction of the practical and professional intensity of opening a new school, noting that delaying the introduction of teaching four reception age children about rights and responsibilities was:

> […] never on the table as an option and neither did anyone want it to be. We all knew that it was absolutely intrinsic and key to what we needed to achieve.

Elaine also indicated that the school had been listening to children prior to enrolling on the RRSA programme, indicating a pre-existing values base in the setting:

> I know when we first introduced rights respecting we were very clear that we wanted it to fit within our already strong element of pupil voice.

By way of contrast Elaine provided an illustration of what might be called an audit approach to rights respecting values when describing her experience of visiting a school awarded level 1 RRSA. She commented that she couldn't see any impact of the award on children's experience.

The non-negotiable nature of this principle was articulated by James in his assertion that children's rights are paramount in the setting. This was manifest in a display of a child friendly version of the UNCRC in the nursery entrance stated and realised rights through communication with practitioners and parents.

> It has to be embedded into what you do and to make parents aware of it and make practitioners aware that this is why we are doing it.

In addition James' commitment to rights respecting values was articulated in relation to children through relationships, curricula activity and a commitment to breadth of opportunity.

6.3.2 Valuing children's participation

Bass and Good (2004) point out that the word 'education' has two 'quite different' Latin roots:

> [...] educare, which means to train or to mould, and educere, meaning to lead out. Thus, there is an etymological basis for many of the vociferous debates about education today. (p.161)

These etymologies exemplify the recent development of early years curricula (educare) and the understanding of learning embodied by two rights respecting early years leaders (educere). Both participants provide illustrative examples of 'educere'. Elaine refers to learning, in her first year of teaching, 'to never underestimate the value of children's answers'. She continues by indicating that it's really unusual for children's answers not to have some connection to the question. This not only echoes her story of being a pupil, when she suggested the pilot could have been a woman, but prefigures her ideas on managing children's behaviour which she stated had been rethought in order to reflect a restorative justice rights respecting approach.

James illustrates his commitment to valuing children's participation by explicitly citing young children's interests (Sellers, 2010):

> [...] follow the child's lead, follow what they have brought, so you are being very reflective which is all what early years practice is about isn't it?

Complementing a pedagogy of children leading learning James identified benefits of children learning skills to help them self-manage when he noted:

> […] children learn that ability to assess for themselves their behaviour and manage their own behaviour. I think it's easiest to get the parents to understand the rights of the child and not trying to have it the other way round that we are here to control them and we are here to direct them and dictate their day for them.

This approach is built on a respect for children as capable learners (Nutbrown, 1996, 2018). Once again James combines respect for children's learning with developing an understanding in parents and carers.

6.3.3 Co-creating a culture of respect for children

Adopting values which place children's interests at the centre of a curriculum and setting necessarily involves developing a setting wide culture (Johansson, 2005; Bae, 2009; Smith, 2006). Although they place different emphases in their accounts, both Elaine and James pointed to the significance of creating a culture of respect in their settings. Elaine suggested that children themselves using the language of learning indicated they had absorbed the school's respectful values:

> We're thinking really carefully in this school community about the language, and when children start to take on the language of learning that's really key for me.

Elaine amplified this by referring to the school's intention to build a culture of respect:

> We're growing a community here and we need our children to have a sense of that. We're not talking about rules; we're talking about rights, responsibilities and respect, and that's what it's about for us.

James nominates his approach to inclusion as illustrative of a commitment to developing a culture of respect (Nutbrown and Clough, 2013):

> I was adamant that any child with additional needs that comes into our setting, we embed what we do and we transform our practice around the child. I am not a fan of withdrawing for intervention at all. I think it just singles children out. I think it makes it very clear that there is difference and difference is only there because we allow it to be there and it shouldn't be.

For James, communicating effectively with carers was key to his demonstration of success with rights respecting practices (Quennerstedt et al, 2018):

> […] it's very encouraging for the parents, if your child comes home and starts roaring they are not being aggressive, they are reliving their play and they are exploring so understand the difference between aggression and them just being a dinosaur exploring and they've taken on a role and that's fantastic and that's creative and wonderful.

> [...] getting parental awareness of the whole child to really value actually there is so much that we can do to support these children to be the best that they can be

Additionally he makes explicit a connection between his commitment, 'passion' as he words it, and his personal history:

> […] and that partly comes back to having a disabled father from a very young age so generally I am passionate that disabilities should not be a barrier for anybody to access something that should always be very straightforward.

6.3.4 Relational learning

The most striking similarity between the two participants was the identification of a narrative which epitomised rights respecting values in their setting. In each case they selected a moment when a child responded thoughtfully to a peer. For Elaine the context was a teaching observation conducted with a fellow Headteacher. She commented that she was pleased that her fellow observer noted the quality of relationships between the children and their teacher:

> […] but I made a point of recognising that it wasn't just between the adult and the children; it was very much between the children and the other children. So, one child wanted something. The adult hadn't spotted they wanted something, so one of the other children recognised they wanted it, got up, got the thing they were missing and needed and took it back to them. That was a nice little example.

Responding to an invitation to provide a cameo which exemplified the settings' respectful values, James identified success in realising the settings commitments with a cameo of children working together and supporting each other socially to include a child with additional needs in finishing her breakfast:

> […] she signed with her tongue, saying 'you need to eat your breakfast now' and the child with Downs Syndrome then carried on eating her breakfast and in that moment of pure joy just watching a child help support another child because we had given her the tools to communicate that really sticks out. We are actually understanding that we have created a culture of respect implicitly.

Consistent adoption and enactment of child led learning places respectful relational conduct with children as pre-eminent (Smith, 2015). Viewed through this lens the quality of learning is predicated on the quality of learning relationships (Noddings, 2012a). It is a perspective endorsed by Elaine and explicitly linked to her own experience of being a pupil. Describing the fundamentals of rights respecting practices Elaine states:

> It's a real sense of those relationships, that love, that nurture, that care. And actually that's what I was shown at primary school.

This statement brings the study full circle with a participant affirming the future impact of the way children are treated in schools (Collinson, 2012).

6.3.5 Enabling rights respecting practices within a required curricula framework

Both participants were experienced in accommodating changing curricula, assessment and inspection requirements within child respecting practices. They articulated pragmatic responses in outlining ways to combine their values driven praxes with curricula and assessment framings which were not respectful of children's rights (Sellers, 2010; Johansson, 2005). James acknowledged the demands and risks attached to inspection regulation. His approach was to provide the required evidence of regular assessment but to do this in a way which was respectful of young children.

> […] there are still challenges when you've got targets to meet you know, that's absolutely true, but there is a way that we can do it where we don't become a victim of the testing regime.

Elaine indicated that she combined a principled approach to young children's rights with a belief in its pragmatic value. Her belief in the efficacy of treating young children with respect was so strong she confidently asserted that manifesting rights respecting

practice, by listening to and responding to 'pupil voice', results in increased levels of assessed achievement:

> Your early years outcomes will be improved if you take, you know, grasp this and take it on, or your Foundation Stage, Key Stage one or two, three, four, whatever results. And I know there are some primaries and secondaries working really well to sort a rights-respecting ethos, and they're really seeing fantastic outcomes for children and young people families in their communities, so there are some really good examples out there of great practice where it can make a real difference.

6.4 Reflections on epistemic features of the study

Five epistemic features of the study are considered in this section. They are: sample size, replication and generalisability, reflexivity and thickness. Although these are features most closely associated with positivism, an epistemological paradigm explicitly rejected by this study, they are nevertheless reviewed here to demonstrate how limitations in one paradigm can be recast as strengths in another. Eisner (1991) has indicated how positivism continues to exert a tenacious hold on the evaluation and critique of social enquiry and for this reason it is useful to review these decisions. The first consideration is the number of participants.

6.4.1 A matter of size

Even from within a declared interpretivist paradigm it is important to defend the small number of research conversations re-presented in this study. The study's epistemological framing means validity claims are made with reference to its processes, and internal coherence, rather than the quantity of participants. The frequency with which quantification issues arise in qualitative interviews is attested by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded collection of essays from experienced qualitative researchers, *How many qualitative interviews is enough?* (Baker & Edwards, 2012). This edited collection of 'expert voices' acknowledged a widespread concern amongst qualitative researchers regarding the quantity of interviews required to establish validity (Baker et al, 2012). This anxiety is firmly located as stemming from the template of quantitative methodologies. Some participants report examples of critical feedback on article submissions, e.g. 'of course, with a bigger dataset' (Baker & Edwards, p.39). In

defending a thickly described engagement with two rights respecting early years leaders it is worth noting that while there are two participants the study also features a further two subjectivities, my 'self' and Ursula. The conduct and methodological processes of this study are, intentionally, unique. They are the enactment of an iterative process which, intentionally, contrasts with hypothesis testing. The study identifies some of the influences and shaping arising from successive engagements with participants, including the attendant development of the author's thinking. The intention of this study was to co-construct accounts of a relationship between the educational past and present of rights respecting early years professionals rather than discover pre-existing, verifiable truth(s). A corollary of this is that the phronetic conceptual framework is not replicable, though principles from it would be relevant to other studies of educational or social practices and behaviours. Accordingly identifying, negotiating participation, and developing professional research relationships with two experienced rights respecting early years leaders, whilst self evidently limited, is considered to be a strength. For this endeavour to understand and disseminate experiences influencing practice centred on realising young children's rights, depth of engagement was more important than quantity of participant partners breadth. This defence notwithstanding opportunities to undertake research conversations with other rights respecting early years leaders could strengthen the case for enhancing the training of early years educators in England. Fuller consideration is given to this in the concluding chapter.

6.4.2 Replication matters?

This section builds on the discussion of sample size above by addressing a second related positivist metric: for a method to be valid it needs to be replicable. Replicability is an attractive metric; by adding to the number of people, or instances, sampled it strengthens the possibility of developing theory, theory which could be used to account for, or predict, material or human behaviour. In bio-medical research, where the tenets of positivism are deemed critical, there is recent evidence of methodological uncertainty. In *The reproducibility crisis*, Hunter (2017) contests the idea that evidence from a meta-analysis of bio-medical research indicating that 50% of studies are replicable, constitutes a crisis. What is interesting, and relevant here, are his closing sentences.

Having declared that measures to increase the percentage of reproducible studies would need to include all relevant

> […] actors, from researchers to funding agencies to journals and eventually commercial players as the main customers of academic research. (p.1496)

He proposes a radical suggestion:

> […] it may also require new ways to conduct research and validate experimental data. (p.1496)

This study did not set out to produce a predictive account of rights respecting early years educators. It is useful here to reprise this study's inception. Educational narratives, to which I attribute my professional values, specifically regarding children's rights, prompted this enquiry into the educational biographies of early years leaders actively engaged in promoting children's rights. Had the focus remained exclusively on my experiences and ideas, the study could have been vulnerable to accusations of solipsism. Rather, the opening narratives provide authorial contextualisation, as well as indicating a pathway towards understanding some formative experiences of professional colleagues, and a format for re-presenting the conversations. In summary replicability, while vital in some fields of enquiry, is neither appropriate or desirable for this enquiry into social behaviour. Moreover, even where it is vital, declining rates of replicability in certain disciplines are leading to epistemological re-evaluation. In this study it is the very lack of replicability which is asserted as one of its chief merits. Evaluation by integrity of method and process rather than replicability is what has been sought. The methodology was bespoke; respectful of and responsive to participants. From an interpretivist perspective, replicability could be construed as a weakness.

6.4.3 Concerning generalisability

Just as replication followed organically from sample size so generalisability links closely to replicability. In combination, an appropriate, generally large, sample size and a replicable methodology can lead to generalisability. Whether generalisability is either possible or desirable has been a site of contestation within qualitative research. Flyvbjerg (2006) contends it is possible to generalise from small scale qualitative studies and

> Geertz treats thick descriptions as documenting the way in which symbolic codes shape the behaviour of, or are used by individuals and groups involved in some event. (Jorgensen, 2009, p.73)

Rather than seeking generalisability the author sought a methodological process which would flex in response to empirical engagement as the study unfolded. An example of this is the adaptation made to the choice of location for the research conversations. This was consequent on the practise interview and Conversation 1. In this way the methodological approach intersects with aspects of action research cycles (McIntosh, 2010). Another methodological consideration was the concept of interview and its appropriacy for professional dialogue. I adapted the concept of interview to that of research conversation as a more suitable, professionally balanced, form of enquiry. The methodology is inductive. This was intentional; in an interpretivist paradigm it constitutes a strength. As with the methodology so too with the analysis:

> Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis. (Patton, 2002, p.306)

The methodological principles of the study—inductive enquiry, thick ethical reflection and reflexivity and mutual professional respect—whilst not unique, could be applied to other studies as outlined in chapter 7 (7.6).

6.4.4 Layers of veracity: subjectivities and ethical thick description

The research conversations re-present both participants' subjective experiences of their educational biographies. Juxtaposing them against the author's narratives provides both complementary, and conflicting, evidence on the development of rights respecting values. Having sought to include researcher subjectivity as a significant feature of the study, it follows that the narratives presented in Chapter 1 constitute evidence. In terms of fact checking only the most recent, university based narratives, are readily verified. Readers are invited to take on trust the verity of the more distant in time narratives. What of their presentation? This cannot be mimetic. Recollected details have been selected and organised. In order to orientate readers, as much contextual information as possible is provided to fulfil thick description and capture the mise en scene. A repeated

motif of starting with environmental sound was used to cue readers into an organised presentational style. There will be errors. The tables were family style, the floor wooden, the walls lined with gymnastic apparatus but the numbers of tables are surmised. I cannot recall the faces of the 'dinner ladies', as children and teachers then described lunchtime supervisors. Similarly in the north London primary school scene I remember it being a morning and dark. I think it was November. I cannot be sure. I would argue that these equivocations are not sufficient to render the narratives invalid on grounds of purpose. The intention of including these narratives was to illustrate the development of my thinking about young children's rights in educational environments. What can be attested is a retelling of these seminal moments (Webster and Mertova, 2007) from my educational biography. Colleagues in schools, in London and Calderdale as well as University colleagues, have heard me retell these events as a way of depicting my own values and their well-spring. In theses oral retellings I intend to convey perceptions and experiences which have contributed to the forming, and re-forming, of my praxis. It has been relevant to provide the same perceptual background to orientate the research conversations.

Having defended the study against two critiques of validity it is useful to rehearse the merits of a different metric, thick description. Borrowed from anthropology by qualitative researchers it is plaited into this study's methodological rope to provide readers with sufficient relevant contextual detail to be able to evaluate procedural validity (Ryle, 1971; Geertz, 1973). In order to establish degrees of veracity in first person narratives, two evidential tests can be applied: the factual and the perceptual. For this study it was how early years leaders developed their professional values which was most significant.

> […] thick description attempts to get beyond superficial description to see the richness of thought and purpose that might lie behind the action. (Jorgensen, 2009, p.70)

6.5 Understanding research conversations reflexively

> While in principle there is recognition that reflexivity is important in data analysis, in practice, there are few examples of reflexive accounts of, or accounts of reflexivity in qualitative data analysis. (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p.418)

In re-presenting data within an interpretivist paradigm in this study it has been important to acknowledge the part played in the data gathering process by the author/researcher. In a spirit of transparency of method I have attempted to declare my positioning throughout. It is useful to pause and problematise this endeavour. Hollway and Jefferson (2001) identify the 'transparent self problem' and the 'transparent account problem':

> Our current view is that subject accounts are not completely transparent but that there is nevertheless a relationship between people's ambiguous representations and their experiences. (Hollway and Jefferson, 2001, p.3)

Having analysed both research conversations, this section considers the value of reflexivity in the study. Despite Hutchinson's (2015) and Pillow's (2003) critiques, reflexivity is both the starting point of this study and a strand in its methodological rope. Nevertheless within an interpretivist paradigm it is valuable, arguably essential, to set out a researcher's subjectivity as far as possible:

> Hindsight has enabled us to understand and articulate how our doctoral research was the product of our academic and personal biographies. (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p.420)

Farquhar crystallises the requirements of researcher narrated accounts of research conversations:

> This connectedness must be demonstrated through analysis so that as well as learning about the story, the reader understands the role of the researcher in acquiring and representing that story. (Farquhar, 2012, p.360)

If human understanding is forged, analysed and expanded using narrative structures it will be isomorphic to reflect this in recounting the mutual understandings relating to

rights respecting educators constructed through this study. The description of points and stages links to McCormack's moments (2004) but the phrase 'decided by the teller' exposes a latent risk: that a one dimensional, rather than multi layered, narrative will emerge. Incorporating the insights of conversational research partners, including reflections and details of adaptations, is intended to balance such a one dimensional perspective. Similarly deciding, defining and defending the re-presentation of conversations in which the co-constructed knowledge of previous interviews shapes subsequent encounters needs to be acknowledged. Holliday reflects that he has learned to be less inquisitorial:

> The setter of the agenda constrains the answers. (Holliday, 2016, p.17)

This statement aligns with Berger's perspective. In a television interview with Jeremy Isaacs (BBC, 1995) prefacing the broadcast of Ways of Seeing, Berger is asked to describe the themes of his work. He replies saying that the framing of the question restricts the nature of a response. Specifically he claims all his work is about displacement but that that isn't what he starts with on any given project. His description of the impact of a question on respondents is particularly vivid. The analogy he uses is putting the coat on inside out to indicate that posing the wrong questions or questions at the wrong time can result in confusion. The author was guided by this in devising the elicitation prompts and not interrupting participants during the conversation. To close this consideration of reflexivity, it is useful to include two further personal narratives evoked for me whilst analysing the research conversations. In the course of recording and analysing the conversations, the following two personal narratives were evoked. The first was prompted by James' recount of his PGCE training. I recalled the interview I had for a place on the Post-graduate Certificate in Education programme at Goldsmith's College, London. During the interview I was asked, 'Why do you want to teach young children after studying for a degree in Philosophy and Literature?' In response I indicated a desire to put the time I'd spent thinking about thinking to some practical good. As part of a generation schooled in the notion of dedicating a working life to public service, the enactment of my selfhood was to be directed towards realising opportunities for infant age children (5–7 years), as early years pupils were then called.

Following a year working in a benefit office where I met people who struggled with basic literacy skills, it felt intuitive to me that the phase of education teachers could have the most impact on children's life chances was infant age children. My teaching career began with a class of fourteen 5 and 6 year olds in Tottenham, North London, in an educational priority area (EPA). It is the site of events described in the second narrative in Chapter 1.

The second recollection prompted by listening to recordings of both conversations and reflecting on the links between Elaine's and James' biographies and praxes, was the title of the author's Masters degree dissertation, 'Becoming a teacher: staying a teacher' (1998). This submission examined illuminative, biographical stories which had contributed to the values and praxis of a feminist teacher with a particular focus on mechanisms she used to sustain her values in an, often, hostile environment. In a series of interviews a member of the local authority equalities service accounted for her feminist praxis by referring to gender determined, life-limiting decisions made by teachers and policy directives throughout her schooling, in the north of England in the 1950s. Both these personal narratives are included to connect my subjective experiences with those of both participants.

6.5.1 Lost in compression?

The re-presentation of the research conversations is a precis of the research processes involved as well as the conversations themselves. An authorial voice is used to achieve Holliday's 'distance'. Although some detail, such as walking around the school, is included, much is omitted. As an example, Elaine has long, brown hair which curls at the bottom. On the day of our conversation she was wearing a close fitting, dark blue jersey dress with a low cut neckline. I was reminded of the book *That's funny. You don't look like a teacher* (Weber and Mitchell, 1995). This example is included to illustrate how even an attempt at a comprehensive account will, consciously and unconsciously, omit, overlook, and discount a great deal of detail. As stated above, a narrative re-presentation of conversations holds no possibility of mimesis. However acknowledging the process of selection constitutes an aspect of storying stories (McCormack, 2004).

6.5.2 Conversations or not?

Mann (2011) claims the ubiquity of interviews can desensitise researchers to their forms, roles and expectations. In the case of conversations this is even more the case. Refining the methodological noun from interview to conversation has been important in this study. While sensitive to the co-constructed nature of the conversations, and conscious of including some of 'my' self in the conversation it was important to listen, and learn, from Elaine's and James' biographical narratives. While I might be pleased that my voice is relatively unobtrusive it could be argued that to call such an uneven division of words a conversation is inaccurate and that 'interview' is a more accurate description of these exchanges. Were 'conversation' the noun being used, that would be the case but these are research conversations; consequently they are qualitatively different from day to day conversations. The critical difference lies in the preliminary work and organisation involved in a research, rather than spontaneous, conversation (Kvale, 2007; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Deliberations regarding location and organisation of a communicative channel or research environment on a specified theme distinguishes the conversations re-presented here from spontaneous conversations. Having used my self from the study's inception, my unfolding role was to identify participants and build meaningful research relationships before analysing and re-presenting what was shared between us.

> We articulate how our theories are joint constructions of knowledge produced through their interaction between respondents' accounts and how we make sense of these accounts. (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p.424)

6.6 A synthesis of learnings

> Research has been for me a life-long journey of discovery - of who I am, of the world around me, and the meaning of life. (Gadon, 2006, p.40)

As a novice researcher I am not intending to make claims on the same scale as as Gadon, but there are several ways in which undertaking this study has expanded my understandings of: the omission of children's rights in English early years curricula; the principled, unshakeable commitments, by some educators, to respecting children's rights

as well as some sources of their convictions, and their generous willingness to spend time conversing about their ideas; the importance of listening; the dynamic and multiple nature of identity and its formation and the joys and vicissitudes of undertaking social research. Since, as the study has indicated, there is an extensive overlap between professional and personal spheres of experience, much of the learning, summarised below, will affect my personal, as well as professional, life.

I have learned that a desire to bring about change, and willingness to sustain a commitment to respecting children's rights, doesn't necessarily arise from negative experiences. The narratives of both participants attest to having had been taught by teachers respectful of children some time before publication of UNCRC. What was illustrated were relationships between pupils and teachers characterised by adults who had a willingness to listen, learn, understand and where possible accommodate ideas, requests or insights expressed by children.

There were two further grounds for optimism. I learned there are values driven early years leaders who not only have radical ambitions for developing learning environments in which young children's understanding of their worlds can flourish, but who see the promotion of rights respecting practices as paramount for a successful setting. In addition there are local, national and international charities and agencies actively working to help realise young children's rights in compassionate, empathetic visionary ways, ways which shine a light on the possibility of consigning some excessives of child coercion to history.

Methodologically and professionally I have learned to keep quiet, listen better and look closer. These insights have been gained from reading, reflecting and re-reflecting on a practice interview and two research conversations. These expanded understandings have relevance in my work with students, and colleagues, as well as in social encounters including with young children.

This discussion has brought together shared perspectives, on rights respecting praxis, of two distinct early years leaders with a case for reflexivity in a study connecting the situational with the biographical. Bringing them together has helped establish and understand the links between the educational pasts and present practice of two

committed early years educators. The thick reflections on the research conversations are intended to counter what Holstein and Gubrium describe as:

> […] standardised survey interviews which seek to strictly limit the interviewers and restrict the respondents' range of interpretive actions. (2004, p.157)

Thus both the professional and theoretical dimensions of the study rest on the quality of relationships. It is an argument of the study that this coherence endorses a case for drawing on personal biography in training educators of young children. Details of the implications will be developed in the final chapter.

6.6.1 Children: constructed, respected, included?

In England, formal education is a significant part of young children's lives. It houses a substantial amount of their interaction and thereby constitutes a significant part of the moral responsibility of a country towards its children. This study has presented evidence from policy, research and educational settings which endorses a case for strengthening rights respecting practices, including young children's participation in educational settings. The study claims there are three, intertwined, elements to the case for rights respecting practices with young children in early years settings: the moral, relational and pragmatic. Pring helps to, briefly, restate the moral case:

> I wish to argue that what makes sense of the curriculum, in educational terms, is that it is the forum or the vehicle through which young people are enabled to explore seriously (in the light of evidence and argument) what it is to be human. Such an exploration has no end. That is why teaching should be regarded as a moral practice. (Pring, 2005, p.101)

Pring is referring primarily to children aged 11 and older. However the endeavour of exploring seriously what it is to be human begins at birth, is relational and for its fullest realisation is, partly, reliant on the insight and commitment of educators who are knowledgeable, affectionate and respectful in their dialogues with young children (Trevarthen, 2009; Rogoff, 2003). These references cover the moral and relational. I will leave the pragmatic to Alexander (2010). In his insightfully titled review of primary curriculum, *Children, their world, their education*, he critiques national teaching initiatives such as the literacy and numeracy hours as instances of a state theory of learning. He

draws a parallel between political attitudes towards professional educators and the curricula experience of children:

> Pupils will not learn to think for themselves if their teachers are expected to do as they are told. (Alexander, 2010, p.308)

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Learning from researching rights respecting early years leaders

> […] respect for the right of the child to be heard within education is fundamental to the realization of the right to education. (GC12, para.105)

Eliciting narratives concerning values forming events and people from two rights respecting early years leaders has provided endorsement for Goodson's (1981) entreaty to contextualise professional biographies. This study's focus on early years educators has contributed to redressing an imbalance identified by Court et al (2009) regarding teacher identity research with 'pre-school teachers.'

The concluding chapter presents what has been learned about early years leaders' motivation towards, and enactment of, respectful praxes and considers professional implications arising from the conversations for educators and policy makers. The chapter combines a reflexive review of the content and conduct of the research conversations with claims to have made a contribution to knowledge. Synopses of participant responses to the research questions are outlined. Implications and recommendations for pre and post qualification early years educators arising from the conversations are reviewed. Dissemination opportunities and possibilities for future research are presented.

7.1 Study overview

This professional study into realising young children's rights used purposive sampling and appreciative enquiry to elicit critical events from rights respecting early childhood leaders committed to realising young children's rights in early years settings. It was undertaken in the context of one of the youngest school starting ages in rich countries (Riggall and Sharp, 2008; Unicef, 2007).

National, and international, surveys evidence decreased levels of child well-being and increased mental distress amongst younger and younger children in the UK. In

combination these features sharpened an unease in the author regarding alignment between early years curricula developments in England, Articles of the UNCRC and evidence concerning young children's learning. This unease was intensified by talking with successive cohorts of students, who had spent their childhoods unaware of their entitlements. Divergence between research developments respectful of children's rights, since 1989, and a curricula trajectory in England, since 1996, directed towards assessing younger and younger children against defined outcomes, solidified an interest in exploring a tension between these arcs, tension exemplified by the absence of any reference to the UNCRC in EYFS and National Curriculum. This despite the requirement of Article 42 to:

> […] make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.

The author reviewed her own experiences, as a pupil, teacher and lecturer, in order to fashion a way of understanding the why, what and how of rights respecting leaders. In light of her own narrative accounts the author sought to understand connections between critical events and formative educational experiences of early years leaders and their rights respecting praxes. Examples of pedagogies and provision which respect young children's rights were illustrated. An ambition of the study was to disseminate examples of rights respecting pedagogic practices, within a mandated curriculum, to interested early years leaders. Methodological questions about how to learn respectfully from rights respecting educators have paralleled the substantive enquiry.

Court et al 2009 noted literature focused on teacher identity has not focused as closely on those teaching young children as those working with older age groups. Analysis and reflection on the development and maintenance of two unique professional identities prioritised their individual experiences and critical events before identifying common themes.

7.2 Research questions revisited

The study, as a whole, addressed the five research questions, or foci, with which it began.

Does my abiding interest in young children's rights, as represented through biographical narratives, resonate with rights respecting early years leaders?

Both participants made spontaneous and explicit links between formative experiences and current ideas and practices. Elaine recounted a series of critical events from pupil-hood through her early career in teaching to leadership of two settings to which she attributed a developing awareness of children's rights in education. This chronological, episodic presentation echoed the format of the author narratives set out in the opening chapter. The research conversation with James comprised an overarching narrative within which critical event episodes emerged. Both unique co-constructed accounts of critical educational events had connections with the author's educational biography in ways that were explored in Chapter 6. The critical events outlined resonated with the author's experiences of values forming narratives as having:

> [a] profound effect on whoever experiences such an event. (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p.77)

What stories do early years leaders share in accounting for their enduring commitment to rights respecting praxes?

Both participants readily shared narratives, large and small, indicating events and people which had shaped the development of their rights respecting pedagogical values. These added to the narratives of Ursula and the author. As well as descriptions of being respected by significant teachers, the research conversations included examples of how each leader enacts, and communicates, rights respecting values. The narratives demonstrate a commitment to the provision of a cohesive learning experience which promotes respectful engagement with children, carers and educators. The importance of language and communication was emphasised in both research conversations. Further, both participants articulated clear visions of how they hoped children learning in the settings they lead would benefit from respectful provision.

What, according to the participants, do rights respecting practice(s) look like in their setting?

Both participants indicated that rights respecting values underpinned every aspect of the settings' provision: pedagogical decisions; opportunities for children to be listened to,

and make choices and suggestions; interactions with children, carers and colleagues; and organisational design and decor. An acknowledgment of children's rights was visible in both learning environments on posters and signs, some of which made explicit reference to the UNCRC, others of which were informed by its principles, in particular Article 12, affirming that children have the right to be heard in all matters affecting them.

What would be the most appropriate, respectful way of enquiring into the existence of a relationship between the personal educational biographies and current praxes of these particular early years leaders?

The study as a whole, but specifically Chapters 4 and 5, respond to this question. In Chapter 4 the metaphor of ancient Egyptian rope making is used to indicate the construction of an iterative methodology and co-construction of meanings from the research conversations. Principles learned from a developmental research process are isomorphic with the respectful pedagogies which the study has been concerned to illustrate. Sharing the study's methodological approach of combining purposive and appreciative enquiry, with Ursula, Elaine and James afforded a positive introduction to research relationships which unfolded in unique ways with each professional. From then on respecting the professional contexts of participants, being clear about requests for their time, offering guided choices about meeting locations and offering opportunities to engage with, and modify, the transcript and analysis were the study's respectful principles.

What could be learned that would strengthen early years training in order that educators are facilitated to respect young children's rights?

Reflections on the responses of James and Elaine to this question are considered in below.

7.3 Ways of making knowledge claims

> […] meaning is socially constituted; all knowledge is created from the action taken to obtain it. This further suggests that what passes for knowledge is itself a product of interaction. (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p.9)

Claims that this study makes an original contribution to knowledge are organised into two sections. The first focuses on ways in which claims will be made. The second specifies overlapping claims to sophic and phronetic knowledges. Knowledge is a big word. It has heft. Redolent of Aristotelian Scientia its use in an empirical enquiry signals certainty. Its pre-eminent cultural status is partly manifest through expression, most commonly in the singular form. In comparison with making knowledge claims contributing to insight(s), even understanding(s), may appear to lack gravitas. Not so. The semantic heft of knowledge is weakened, epistemologically, by evidence of its vicissitudes. Claims of factual status, vaunted as incontestable, in time have been supplanted by conflicting 'truths'. Notable examples of such revisionism include descriptions, and applications, of time and space, women's capabilities, I.Q. tests, maternal deprivation and stages of children's development. It is the very modesty, and implicit, acceptance of other perspectives, inherent in the words 'insight' and 'understanding', which confers strength on them. Accordingly these are words I wish to use in making claims for this study.

7.3.1 Contribution to sophic understandings

> The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies into which they are born. (UNICEF, 2007, p.1)

For early years education to contribute positively to children's current and future wellbeing, it is important that young children have reflective educators sensitive to the possibilities of rights respecting praxes and aware of the impact of respectful, and disrespectful, pedagogic practices.

> Children need well educated educators who engage in professional and sensitive reflection, who think about their work and who respond to new ideas and new experiences drawn from reflection on their practice and relevant research. (Nutbrown, 2011, p.177)

The study has affirmed the significance of early educational experience in the construction of professional identity (Arvaja, 2016; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Flores and Day, 2006; Goodson, 1981). This has implications for training early years educators. According to Flores and Day (2006), teacher education, taken here to include all those training to work with children from birth onwards, should place a stronger focus on giving students opportunities to reflect upon their personal biographies and schools' cultural contexts in order to understand the relationships and possible tensions between these. It is important to develop practices that would actively support reflective identity work, and hence promote professional self-understanding (Arvaja, 2016; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011).

In educational contexts, whether pre-or post training, identity work can be enhanced through personalisation and subjecting personal experiences to reflection and analysis. This provides possibilities for the (re-)negotiation of one's I-positioning and 'being, thinking and acting' as a teacher. (Arvaja, 2016, p.392). On the basis of the research conversations it is argued that close consideration of self, motivations and inspirations, in order to develop respectful pedagogic practice, could benefit both young children and their educators. By invoking sophic knowledge which such training practices could contribute to it is, perhaps, worth noting that the assertion from UNICEF, above, works just as well, and arguably better, using the word 'wisdom' instead of 'standing', thus:

> The true measure of a nation's *wisdom* is how well it attends to its children.

7.3.2 Contribution to phronetic understandings

> If reason is value-laden and truth socially produced discursive authority (who controls the agenda) is of paramount importance. (Weiner, 1994, p.100)

Of equal importance to the focus on rights respecting praxes was the crafting of a conceptual framing with both strength and flexibility to accommodate individual styles

of responses to the research conversations. In this enquiry phronesis, an epistemological concept which straddles classical philosophy and postmodernism, has been the lodestar (Chapter 4). The reflexive manner in which the research conversations were undertaken and analysed make a contribution to knowledge in ways which have practical application(s).The crafting of authorial narratives provided foundations and for the study and declared researcher positionality. These orienting narratives prefigured the importance of a thick ethical description ethic of care for a professional research study. Three implications arise from completion of the study: disseminating examples of good practice to interested parties, fashioning further research conversations on rights respecting practices and training implications.

Recommendations arising from analysis of the conversations comprise reflective opportunities for early years trainees and post qualification early years educators are outlined below.

7.4 Connecting training with a human rights analysis of educational biographies

> We have to reconnect our studies of schooling with investigations of personal biography and historical background. We are arguing for the reintegration of situational with biographical and historical analysis. (Goodson, 1981, p.69)

Data from the research conversations indicate rights respecting educator identities combine personal and professional experience. Educators' identities contribute to pupils' identity construction, including their relationship with schooling (Kelchtermens, 2017; Collinson, 2012; Court et al, 2009; Ball, 2002). Where pedagogic relationships are characterised by respect there is, according to Elaine and James, an emphasis on listening to children and active encouragement for children's positive participation in all aspects of their learning. Elaine and James' atypical praxes are predicated on discourses of children, childhood and learning which align with definitions cited in Chapter 1 (Noddings, 2012a; Freeman, 2007; Johansson, 2005; Covell and Howe, 2001). Collectively these define children as social actors, experts in their own lives, skilled at

directing their own learning, entitled to express themselves in all matters that concern them and to be treated with respect and dignity.

Elaine and James' reflexivity and sensitivity towards the implications of their own childhood experiences for young children's learning has implications for strengthening the training of early years educators. Their narratives suggest that the inclusion of critical reflection on early years trainees' educational biographies using the perspective of human rights and the UNCRC would help highlight the impact of rights respecting and rights disrespecting behaviours on pupils. Developing not only reflective, but reflexive, early years educators offers an opportunity for realising young children's rights (Nutbrown, 2011). For this to feature prominently in early years settings, knowledge of the CRC—its history, scope and application—in early years education would need to be included in training provision. Were teaching about the CRC added to early years training programmes, not only would it address the UN Committee's criticism of the absence of the CRC in teacher training (2002), it would promote a framework for respectful relations between adults and children in settings. The current iteration of Teachers' Standards (Early Years), 2013, does not include any reference to UNCRC. The word 'respect' does not feature at all. The sole use of the word 'dialogue' is in relation to professionals talking with each other. Additionally inclusion in the EYFS of teaching about, and through, the CRC would further strengthen a changing discourse in child-adult relations in early education. In addition to complying with the Convention's requirements this would inform children, directly, of their entitlements. If a cycle of non-rights respecting pedagogy being reproduced in settings is to be arrested, knowledge of the Convention and training which includes respectful pedagogic approaches (Smith, 2015; Struthers, 2015; Sellers, 2010; Johannson, 2005) is vital.

7.5 Principles for rights respecting professional praxis

Analysis of the research conversations identified five overlapping rights respecting pedagogical principles held in common by both Elaine and James. These were: respecting children's rights as a non-negotiable principle, promoting respect for children's participation, the development of a setting wide respectful culture, promoting

relational learning and enabling rights respecting practices within a required curricula framework. These principles are underpinned by UNCRC Articles 2, 3, 6, 12, 13, 28, 29 and 42, General Comments 1, 7, 12, 14, 17 and Concluding Observations on the third, fourth and fifth Periodic Reports, set out in Chapter 2. An assertion from General Comment 12 (2009) encapsulates their significance:

> Human rights education can shape the motivations and behaviours of children only when human rights are practised in the institutions in which the child learns, plays and lives together with other children and adults. (CRC/C/GC/12 p.21)

Settings wishing to focus on rights respecting pedagogies but not intending to adopt the RRSA might consider how well their existing practices accord with each dimension and identify areas for development.

7.6 Disseminating narratives of rights respecting early years leaders

In order to disseminate this study's narratives and share examples of rights respecting settings, departmental funding will be sought to present to interested professional and academic colleagues. This would build on connections made with early years educators from two seminar series, Thoughtful Children (2013) and More Thoughtful Children (2014), co-ordinated by the author. Ideally a presentation would include the study's participants. A focus of the presentation would be to share the five principles held in common by the two participants and propose them as prompts for in setting reflection. Doing so would provide an opportunity to gauge levels of interest for creating a network of educators interested in promoting and enacting young children's rights and considering the experiences articulated by the participants. In turn this could lead to recording further conversations with rights respecting educators. Another plan, for extending rights respecting practices, arguably with a longer reach into the future, would be to include undergraduate students in discussions, debates and practice sharing. Fashioning further research conversations talking about children's rights would seem to be important and useful. Several possibilities present themselves: conversing with more rights respecting early years leaders to hear their accounts of connecting present praxes

with educational biographies. Connecting rights respecting leaders and interested professionals together for a larger conversation, small conference or colloquium would contribute to raising awareness of young children's entitlements and exemplar practices.

With the exception of some rights respecting settings, young children in England are unaware of the rights accorded to them by UNCRC. Neither the spirit, or specifics, of the UNCRC are part of the EYFS (2017). The assessment requirements of both the current and pilot Early Years Foundation Stage, alongside Ofsted inspection frameworks, militate against the promotion of rights respecting practices. An intentional aspect of plaiting purposeful sampling and appreciative enquiry into the methodological framework of the study was to enable dissemination of stories of realising young children's rights with interested early years educators. The early years leaders featured in the study have developed and sustained a commitment, in principle and practice, to rights respecting practices throughout their teaching careers. These practices connect explicitly to the CRC, in particular to Articles 12 and 13, which involve listening to, including, and valuing children's contributions and respecting their choices. Accounts from the research conversations articulate connections between rights respecting experiences as pupils and rights respecting praxes as professionals. They also provide stories of success and manageability in realising young children's rights within a required curricula framework. These narratives are available to be shared with early years professionals who may be interested in promoting rights respecting practices but have difficulty envisioning their practical realisation. While Elaine and James are not alone in their explicit commitment to rights respecting practices, the low numbers of early years settings enrolled on the RRSA programme, Chapter 1 (1.4.1), suggests they are unusual. Guided by the positive dispositions of both participants, the author views James and Elaine's narratives optimistically. In a curricula environment unsympathetic to children's rights they provide examples of positive practices aimed at realising young children's rights in early years settings.

7.7 Future research

Four possible directions are suggested by this study for future research. One is research directly with young children, a second would be undertaking research with training programmes interested in developing human rights focused reflections on the educational biographies of trainees. A third avenue for future research would involve researching with settings interested in reflecting, either on their educational biographies from a human rights perspective or on the five principles of rights respecting praxis identified as held common by the study's participants. Finally at a macro level it would be instructive to research the inclusion of UNCRC in national curricula, and educator training programmes, in signatory states.

Despite a growth of research literature which respects and includes young children's voices, more needs to be published. In particular, as evidenced in this study, more literature which explicitly addresses respecting children's rights in early years settings is required. A respectful research development from this study would be to work directly with young children in rights respecting settings. Using an appreciative enquiry approach for researching with children could include inviting them to share examples of where they felt their voices counted.

Undertaking research with departments of education in Higher Education to engage trainee teachers and early childhood students in exploring their educational biographies from a human rights perspective has the potential to support pedagogic respect through deepening an understanding of the importance of listening to and consulting with children (DfE, 2014; Lansdown, 2011; Clark, McQuail and Moss, 2003).

Starting with local interest, the author would contextualise and introduce five principles of rights respecting praxis for interested educators/settings and engage in follow-up discussions about how settings could begin a reflective process either by reviewing their educational biographies using a human rights perspective or by examining their practice by, initially, selecting one of the five principles.

Documentary research into the presence, or absence, of teaching about the UNCRC in educator training programmes amongst signatory states would help uncover

whether the experience of young people in England ending their childhoods unaware of the existence of the UNCRC is unusual. In other words how many signatory states are not adhering to Article 42.

The final words in the study are left to a child who, in an Ofsted consultation entitled 'The UNCRC: How children say the UK are doing?' declared:

I need education about my rights. (Ofsted, 2014, p.31)

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Appendix

9.1 Appendix A: Participant Information Form

Faculty of Arts, Creative Industries and Education
Department of Education

Realising young children's rights: Illuminative instances from early childhood leaders' committed to respecting children's rights

Participant information

Thank you for considering contributing to this study which I am undertaking for a professional doctorate in education (Ed.D). If you do decide to take part I hope you find it useful and enjoyable. The information below is intended to answer what, why and how questions. It is set out under the following headings.

- Purpose
- Identifying conversation partners: An invitation
- A professional, ethically sensitive research conversation
- Agreeing the text
- Confidentiality
- Consent and Right to withdraw
- Time Commitment
- What will happen to the research conversation?
- Data storage

Purpose

My interest in young children's rights began in my own childhood and has continued throughout my career as an educator of both young children and students. I am particularly interested in the relationship between the Early Years Foundation Stage

(EYFS) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In the climate of an outcomes curriculum, it is important to cast a light on early years leaders committed to respecting young children's rights. This is the research focus for my doctorate.

I would like the completed thesis to provide a basis for sharing, with professional audiences, the significance for children of early rights respecting, or disrespecting, experiences as well as early childhood settings which are successfully pursuing rights respecting practices.

Identifying conversation partners: An invitation

Rather than seeking a representative sample of early childhood leaders this study intentionally focuses on early childhood leaders with a commitment to realising young children's rights. I am inviting you to participate because through professional contacts I understand you are currently leading a school, or children's centre, committed to respecting children's rights. Listening to experiences you have had which contributed to your commitment to young children's rights would be very helpful in building a picture, or narrative, of the development of your professional values, what maintains them and how you manage to realise them within a prescriptive curriculum.

A professional, ethically sensitive, research conversation

For a study about respectful educators it is particularly important that my research practices reflect the highest standards of ethical practice. This project is conducted under the aegis of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf. The intention behind having a professional research conversation, rather than an interview, is that a conversation suggests more dialogue between the participants than a series of questions. Talking together about the genesis and maintenance of your commitment to respecting young children's rights I believe would make a valuable contribution to existing knowledge about professionals working with young children. With your agreement I would like to record and transcribe the conversation. This increases the conversational nature of the dialogue because I do not need to make notes.

Agreeing the text

Once our conversation has been transcribed I will return a copy to you. You may, or may not, wish to clarify, change or remove parts of the transcription. Once you have returned it to me with any alterations I will use it in the findings section of the thesis. When I have finished writing up the section which includes your 'story' I would like to share that with you for final verification.

Confidentiality
Because the setting will be anonymised it will be your choice whether to, and if so, how, to change your name. I hope we can talk about this when we meet.

Consent and Right to withdraw
If you would like to participate in the study please sign the attached consent form.

What is the time commitment?
A recorded conversation, at your place of work, at a time of your choosing, of up to one hour. Rereading the transcript and presentation of the data to confirm they are an accurate representation of your 'self' and professional values.

What will happen to the research conversation?
Once the data has been agreed it will be included in my doctoral thesis for the purposes outlined above.

How will I find out about the research and what is happening in connection with it?
I will keep you informed about the progress of the doctorate and planned dissemination activities for example professional meetings, conference papers or journal articles.

Data storage
During the time of the research project sound recordings and transcripts will be stored securely, on a password protected computer.

What if I need more information or would like to talk informally first?
If you would like to ask questions either before, or during, the research period please contact me.
Helen.butcher@uwe.ac.uk
Department of Education, Faculty Arts, Creative Industries and Education
Frenchay Campus, BRISTOL
BS16 1QY
Direct line: 01173284230

9.2 Appendix B: Consent Form

Faculty of Arts, Creative Industries and Education
Department of Education

Realising young children's rights: Illuminative instances from early childhood leaders' committed to respecting children's rights

Participant Consent Form

If you are happy to participate in the study of Rights respecting early childhood leaders in Bristol please complete the following details.

I have read the participant information sheet and confirm that I give my permission for details of the research conversations to be reproduced in the doctoral thesis outlined. I also understand that I have the right to;

- anonymization
- amend or delete data in the transcript
- withdraw from the study

Name ……………………………………………………………….

Your name (please print) . . . .

Your email address . . . .

Signature* . . . .

Date . . . . *

Thank you very much. Your contribution is greatly appreciated

9.3 Appendix C: Ethics Approval

Amendment to Existing Research Ethics Approval

Please complete this form if you wish to make an alteration or amendment to a study that has already been scrutinised and approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee and forward it electronically to the Officer of FREC (researchethics@uwe.ac.uk)

UWE research ethics reference number:	ACE.16.12.016
Title of project:	Realising young children's rights: researching conversations with rights respecting early years leaders
Date of original approval:	16/12/2016
Researcher:	Helen Butcher
Supervisor (if applicable)	Dr. Jane Andrews

1. Proposed amendment: Please outline the proposed amendment to the existing approved proposal.

Addition of 4 categories, indicated in bold below, to Section 11 *How will the results of the research be reported and disseminated?*

☒ **Peer reviewed journal**
☒ **Conference presentation**
☒ Internal report
☒ Dissertation/Thesis
☒ **Other publication**
☒ Written feedback to research participants
☒ **Presentation to participants or relevant community groups**
☐ Digital Media
☐ Other (Please specify below)

2. Reason for amendment. Please state the reason for the proposed amendment.

Requirement from viva examiners

To be completed by supervisor/ Lead researcher:

Signature:	
Date:	*28/9/19*

To be completed by Research Ethics Chair:

Send out for review:	☐ *Yes* ☐ *No*
Comments:	
Outcome:	*X Approve* ☐ *Approve subject to conditions* ☐ *Refer to Research Ethics Committee*
Date approved:	*8/10/19*
Signature:	

Guidance on notifying UREC/FREC of an amendment.
Your study was approved based on the information provided at the time of application. If the study design changes significantly, for example a new population is to be recruited, a different method of recruitment is planned, new or different methods of data collection are planned then you need to inform the REC and explain what the ethical implications might be. Significant changes in participant information sheets, consent forms should be notified to the REC for review with an explanation of the need for changes. Any other significant changes to the protocol with ethical implications should be submitted as substantial amendments to the original application. If you are unsure about whether or not notification of an amendment is necessary please consult your departmental ethics lead or Chair of FREC.

9.4 Appendix D: Transcript Research Conversation 1 (Elaine)

So, teacher. Yes. This is me as a child. I'm probably four or five. And Mrs [REDACTED] she's called – I'm sure she won't mind me using her name. She's still in, you know, contact with my family and very lovely she was. But a child was feeling unwell; she wanted to go to the toilet; they were on their way to go to the bathroom to be sick, and she helped them along their way and caught it in her hand. And I did think, gosh, that is real dedication. And I suppose what stands out for me with that is it's a real sense of those relationships – that love, that nurture, that care. And, actually, that's what I was shown at primary school. At a small C of E village school. I remember it feeling like that. 146

H Mm-hmm.

But I also remember- Well, I say remember, I was reminded of this story by my mum fairly recently, being in probably year 5 or year 6 and the headmaster, who was also the teacher at the time, sharing some information with us. History. Something about a pilot flying over. And he described the story. He said someone – he flew over, and apparently, I don't remember the details but I put up my hand and I said, 'or it could have been she'. And he said, yes, you're quite right – it could have been she.

So, a bit of thinking there that it was important to have a voice, I suppose. 109

Yes. I was quite well behaved. You know? I made good choices. I would probably say, all the way through my schooling career, really. But I think I was always given the chance to have a strong voice. I always had good relationships with the adults I was taught by. All the way through, you know, primary and secondary, I had good relationships with the people who taught me and felt a sense of respect for them, but also a sense that they were listening and hearing and understood. When the school banned salt, I took in low salt and they said that was fine. I was probably encouraged to do that at home. I had a mum who was encouraging me to do those sorts of things – ooh, there's no salt but you like salt on chips. What about this as a solution? Maybe take that in. Those sorts of things. So that's back to childhood times. 188

H Hmm. Hmm.

In terms of actual time during school whilst I've been teaching and leading, lots of moments where it becomes clear that children's voices are absolutely essential to listen to. I think I learnt in my NQT year that, you know, never underestimate the value of children's contributions. It's very unusual for it not to have some connection to the question you've asked. It would be easy to think when you ask what 7 times 3 is and they've said fish that they've really not understood but, you know, something along the line in the way you asked the question or the way

you will have put them to that answer, they're, you know, not just deliberately making up nonsense.

So, to remember that, actually, the contributions that children make however wacky they might seem at the time, being really important, was something I probably learned quite early on in teaching, I think. 128

And then more specifically around the rights respecting agendas, you want me to give a couple of examples particularly around that, yes?

H 0:03:22

H Mm-hmm.

I know when we first introduced rights respecting at [REDACTED] we were very clear that we wanted it to fit within our already strong element of pupil voice. We were redeveloping the playground. They wanted a stage; we didn't have one so they asked the caretaker, "Could we build a stage?" and we got a stage for our creative arts outside during lunchtime.

So that for me was a real strong example of the children wanted something in particular, they were able to articulate it, we had a discussion about it, we did a plan for it. It was about enriching the curriculum during lunchtimes. But a very tangible example for them to see that their voice was being heard. You know? They said that this is what would make the difference to make lunchtime learning more like classroom learning, I suppose, and they articulated that, we made a case for that, we got one built and they got to see the benefits of that. And I think that's really important. 172

You've got to follow through, I think. That's key. If you're interested in listening to children's voices, it has to be genuine pupil voice at every level.

I also think that it's easy for us to think about listening to pupils when they're older, maybe. You know? Or five and six. Well, we'll make them the school council because they're the older children. And I think that's a missed opportunity and as the head of an infant school previously we didn't have any

year five-six, so, we made the decision that, actually, right from reception, as soon as they were settled, reception and year 1 and year 2 would all form part of the School Council.

Taking it home, making the message really clear in terms of, you know, children. We decided at Ashley Down to grow rights respecting from the child up rather than the other way around, having visited some settings where they were looking at the UNCRC. Some early year settings, nursery and childcare settings, actually, where it felt to me like there was just a portfolio of evidence and I couldn't see any impact in terms of children. We did it the opposite way around, really. We did a little bit of staff development so they had a sense of what it was and what it was about, but we grew it from the children up. Now, that means you're dealing with a group of, you know, fairly well educated children going home and talking about rights and responsibilities [throughout] the context for their families.

So, quite quickly we invited families in to learn about it and we talked about, 'okay, when you say it's time for bed and they say, but I have the right to play, you need to remember your top trump card is that one around the best interests of the child'. So we did a bit of discussion with families about, you know, understanding it, getting to grips with this new language that we were skilling the children up with. And then quite quickly after that we had lots of children coming in with examples of, you know, a picture of a tree that was in their garden that, you know, that was getting damaged by the next-door neighbour in a particular way. So, a picture of the tree with some notes on there about the tree has the right to be safe and what they were going to do about it. So, taking their learning out beyond their own home environment and into their community is quite key. 172

That's probably a rambling answer, but gives some examples.

H Those are all really positive examples. Some people's anecdotes that they've shared around what constructed their set of values as rights respecting were less

positive – for example being made to eat their custard in the school dinner hall as it emptied and held behind.

Yes, yes.

H You can't go out to play until-

Yes, yes.

H - or as a qualified teacher, some child being cast aside into another room. And there's- an accompanying phrase – there's no room for individuals in my class.

(Laughter) Right.

H Do you have any-

That's a good question. And I think you're right: in my propensity to look for the positive examples it's probably come out there. But there are. I think sometimes you have a behaviour strategy that is that the children need to leave the learning space and go to a different room. And my first, let's say when I was an NQT, I know that there was a behaviour strategy, but there was a recognition in that school that, actually, if a child came to you for some time out, some thinking time, I think probably different staff approached that in different ways, initially. One might have been a stern face and a cross-cross and more shouting; and some might have been actually having a bit of a conversation about it, a bit of a dialogue about it. And I am much more learning towards the second example, but I think it took us a little bit of time as a staff to recognise that, actually, if a child's been sent out of one room because of, you know, poor behaviour or not the right choices, is it then helpful when they're in flight or fight mode, is it helpful to have that extra discipline or would it be better to have a more restorative, more rights-respecting type approach? And I think we came to that because, you know, there were moments where it didn't feel like it was a very rights-respecting approach – so where children were being told off in one room and then told off in another. So we rethought that, basically. 211

I don't have any particular memories myself of awful memories. I know as a child my dad was made to eat macaroni and cheese and therefore doesn't eat it now, and I think that means that at home I had one slightly tougher cop in my mum and a much more gentle' don't worry if you don't like it eat what you like and leave what you don't like, but don't talk about it type of approach from my dad. So I don't have any of those, personally. But sometimes- you do sometimes, remember you know, 'you can't do PE so you'll have to do it in your pants and vest' and all those old-time stories which are about making children feel uncomfortable. 101

And I had a new family visit the other day and the dad said to me that he'd been told that their three-and-a-half-year-old was asking too many questions, basically. I described this as a school of enquiry and wanting to really listen to children's voices, that, we would be encouraging that rather than discouraging it.

So, yes, I think you still definitely hear descriptions of things that feel less than rights respecting.

H Thank you. My understanding of the current climate in early years is that even though there are now fewer assessed outcomes, it is nevertheless by definition a top-down, you could say outcomes-driven-

Mm-hmm. Well, they changed it—didn't they?—from all the lovely characteristics of learning chopped out of what's now called early years outcomes, and that's the document.

H Yes.

Yes. So you're right: outcomes-driven – absolutely.

H I was interested in how you approached your commitment to children's rights in their learning with that current climate of, you know, top down.

Yes. That makes sense. And the word I suppose that wasn't quite on your lips there but was on mine is "justify", even. We're in that much of a climate that it is about justifying that that's why you're doing it because you're dedicating time

to something that actually isn't going to affect you directly, you know, there's a big question over that but, you know, it's not measured in terms of GLD or good-level development, which is what our children will be measured in now.

So, it used to be NI72. In terms of data for end of early years, it used to be NI72, which stands for national indicator 72, which is a complex way of describing that they used to want to know when children reach the age of 5 and the end of their reception year, which were the children who were now achieving 6 out of the scale points of 9 thought to be average? 6 being average in PSED – personal, social and emotional development – and also communication, language and literacy. Now that felt like, you know, a relatively sensible measure. They also did quite a lot of work on making sure that they were gathering data about all areas of learning in early years, and what we've got now- what we're now working with is GLD, which is good-level development where again they're combining different levels of learning, different aspects of learning, and looking for an overall average. Then a list of the areas of learning, but now that list of the areas of learning has increased to go beyond communication, language and literacy and personal, social, and take into account other areas of writing, mathematics, reading, you know, those other basic skills type areas.

I think that it's great that personal, social and emotional development is still within there in terms of what's collected so I think, you know, we could be in dark, dark times when we were looking for reading, writing and maths data for our four- and five-year-olds. So, we're not there. We will be putting them through a phonics test almost immediately after. So, you know, there is something to note there in terms of they'll still be assessed all through the year, checked and tested in a core area or a basic skills in terms of their phonics acquisition.

I think for us as a- You know, definitely during time at [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] - certainly during starting up [REDACTED] you have to be true to your values and your ethos and your vision and, actually, what is it that we're preparing our learners for? What is it that we want them to have achieved and

have in their suitcases at the end of their educational life and beyond and into citizenship? And you have to keep asking yourself those questions. You know? Mick Waters talks about some fantastic stuff around. You'll go into schools and they're not talking about certain things and they say we've just got to get on and he wants to say get onto what? You know? What is it? If you're not responding to certain things that are happening locally or nationally or- and he talks about our hopes for our young and I think that's really key.

So, I would say that we would hold true to that ethos and the rights respecting values of children having a voice and a whole raft of other things around relationships and time and space and use of the outdoors and, you know. I heard someone talk this morning and they were talking about two pillars in education; quality of learning in the curriculum and also the quality of the relationships, and that's not dissimilar to here. We've got sort of ten things but they broadly link to those two areas.

It has to be a recognition that in order to support children to acquire everything they need to in terms of learning in the greatest sense of the word, they need to have an understanding of their own rights and responsibilities, and that of their colleagues, their peers, the adults around them, and really grow that sense of a rights-respecting school or, you know, a strong sense of children's rights, and also adult rights and community rights and all those aspects right from the start.

So I think definitely here, it would have been easy for us when, you know, it was the beginning of the year, brand-new school, no toilet roll, no bins, brand-new children, all the resources in a pile, 50 kids, lots of families, all new staff, it would have been easy for us to think, do you know what? We'll deal with rights respecting at a later stage. But there was never an inkling of that. That was never on the table as an option and neither did anybody want it to be. We all knew that it was absolutely intrinsic and key to what we needed to achieve and, you know, we've got a real range here in terms of children and needs and behaviour and, you know, we have some children who have required lots of additional support with the choices in their behaviour, and that takes up time and capacity,

but it's all the more important to stand true to those ideas and aspects of what is it then about being a rights-respecting school or whatever that means?

For us I think the United Nations convention is great. The Unicef stuff, and I've worked with [unclear] world before, but it's almost beyond that. It's not about the kite mark. It's not about getting that badge. It's not really even about going onto the [unclear] environment and looking at all those resources; it's really about the ethos of culture, and that being we're growing a community here and we need our children to have a sense of- It's like the rules but they're not rules for us – that's the thing. We're not using the word "work"; we use "learning". We're not talking about rules; we're talking about rights, responsibilities and respect, and that's what it's about for us.

So, those things are absolutely crucial in our curriculum vision. [REDACTED] have a tree of learning for life and at the trunk of the tree are all those things around inclusion and personalisation but also rights and responsibilities, respect, all that stuff around relationships because, actually, you need all of that at your core to be able to access the rest of the curriculum. It's that initiative that then allows me to justify it, and when I see children carrying out behaviour which is in line with the learning they've thought about, i.e. what is right, what it means to feel proud, what the right to be heard looks like, it's a lot more concrete, I think, for children. They buy into it; they have a sense of it; they understand it. And in the same way that we, you know, we're a 'no-sticker' school; we just don't have stickers. We talk about learning and it's about children celebrating their own learning. It's intrinsic rather than external rewards. It's them celebrating their own achievements. But, coupled with that, you need a language to understand with them about why you're expecting them to behave in certain ways. Otherwise it's again just led by the adults; it's just talk around behaviour in the same way that the learning we want to be driven by the children; we want the culture to be driven by them too.

Again, rather rambling, but… (Laughter)

H Thank you. But like you say, it is demanding and it's clear how passionate you are. I wonder if there are any sort of resources or what it is that keeps you going when things are tough in terms of that unshakeable commitment to children's rights?

Yes. That's a good question. When you first said resources I thought you might mean things. Worksheets. Obviously there are none of those. There are some characters, some puppets, and some actual physical resources that help with the process but you're right – you mean personal human resources. I suppose it's a genuine commitment? It's a privilege to be able to work in this way with a team of staff who understand it and work with the children, but our children having the opportunity to have their say and to move things forward is not about us rewarding them with that. It's not about that being a privilege. It's an absolute core right. It's nothing less than should be expected, I think. So it's a real belief that, yes, that will help our GLD, yes, that will help our children become better learners. Yes, therefore, our data, you know, hopefully will look good because they are skilled up to be able to tackle the curriculum as it comes over the next six years, seven years, as they move through the school. But more important than that in terms of them actually remembering that they are developing human beings. And we talk about humane beings. I've done some reading around building a kind of humane culture, and it is that. It's about they're only here for a short period of time. These are the, you know, the formative years where they're making all those connections, all those judgements and they're forming all their opinions. So we hold a real sense of responsibility for helping to guide them to make good, positive, ethical whatever right choices are, and it's our responsibility to do that – it absolutely is. So, you know, regardless of whether we've got lots of things changing in terms of national curriculum and what Heads are expected to do and paying performance reviews and, you know, what's happening with pupil progress and what's happening about assessment and all of that, in a sense, is, you know the small bits. On your way in you probably saw a cushion that says 'remember to think about the small things'

because, actually, you realise that they were the big things and I think that's quite key.

H Hmm. And I feel, like you, but I think I'm right in saying that not every setting

- would subscribe to exactly the same understanding and articulation and enactment around children's rights. How do you account for that, that you're quite unusual? You in the school. And what might change that?

Yes. I mean, I think your point at the beginning of that question around the enactment of, and that's something that Robin Alexander talks about in terms of, you know, you can write a curriculum or you can write a policy, but it's actually about how it's enacted that's key. I think that's really important. And I think, you know, I had six months of writing things, and this is, you know, January to July, writing a lot of theory and all those things as well as, you know, part-time headship and doing the building and all those things, but I had a lot of time to do some thinking and really thinking about creating a vision, but I was very cautious about writing too much or prescribing too much or shaping too much, you know, on my own, in a range of different spaces, because I think you only genuinely get a policy that's meaningful or an approach or a set of procedures or any of those other things you're expected to generate when it's being enacted. So for me, the last three months where we've got a group of adult learners and children and families and the communities growing around us who are receptive to the vision and able to shape the ethos and the culture, and translate, you know, some of those broader, big ideas into actual experiences, tangible opportunities for children to enact that vision, that curriculum and beyond, has been quite key.

I think you're right in a sense that not everybody- I mean, there are certainly some schools who would, you know, certainly the pastoral stuff, they wouldn't feel it's their responsibility, necessarily, and I think, you know, that kind of went in waves, politically, didn't it? It sort of went in waves and the bit around are we there to provide, you know, some of the additional services, a team around the child and some of those bits and out-of-hours curriculum and do we need to provide all those things or is it just, you know, the hours of the school day and basic curriculum and that's it or- I think there are a range of schools who take

different approaches on that. I think lots of that depends on your context, depends on the community that you're supporting and working with.

So, I spoke to a Head the other day who did a big shift around behaviour, because there were really lots of exclusions and you know, we just- we don't shout at children in our school, and they'd re-thought the whole thing. He'd had a moment when he went to a meeting with another local Head where they'd used that phrase and pretty much what we've been saying for years and years, in Bristol that, you know, we just won't have that said around the children like [these] *don't* or *won't* or *can't*. But, you know, he'd been told ' the most you can hope for in terms of an inspection is this (low) grading. And he called his staff in immediately and sort of said, 'you know, I never call you in but what I want to tell you is that is not acceptable. I don't want anybody thinking or feeling or saying those sorts of things, because actually we have high aspirations here and we're going to fly and our children will.' I found that very moving.

So I think schools have tipping points—don't they?—where they realise they need to shift and change things. I think you're right – there'd be loads of schools where-- they wouldn't touch the rights-respecting ethos; they just wouldn't think it was part of their remit, really. I think, depending on the children that you're working with, a family [and their] need, and that I suppose, you know, it might be easier to feel it wasn't part of your remit if there wasn't a real need for it and if you felt that children were coming in through the doors on time and well equipped and leaving at the end of the day and you felt that you were getting that extra set of what it means to be beyond the curriculum.

You know? We talk about the curriculum and then some. If you feel they're getting their "then some" somewhere else, I think that might be a reason for just not bothering to feel you needed to do it. I'd still counter that. You know? In my previous setting we had children certainly coming in getting their "then some", but we shaped and worked and you've got a team of children who, you know, if you've got a group of children who come in understanding about rights and responsibilities and you work with them then they will fly with that because

they don't all get to interact with each other if they're just, you know, in their own homes, so I'd still argue that there's a place for it. But I think it could be driven- I mean, it certainly could be driven by just an absolute under-the-under-the-cosh type working on standards, and you cannot let up on English and maths. It could be that that means that people don't. So again, back to that, you know, earlier we were talking about the justification for it, I think it's easy to feel if you've just got to get those results up, if you're just on a standards agenda, then you can't even take the five minutes out to think about those bits with the children. So those would be my reasons that people might not. 971

H And if you could do one thing to increase the reach of rights respecting, whether it's under the Unicef guide or child up, what would you do?

I suppose that somehow showcasing that connection between the curriculum in its simplest term, as it were, and the breadth and depth that you can get in terms of a community curriculum if you do embrace a rights respecting type ethos. I would want that to be something that children put together themselves. We have a small cluster of schools across Bristol who work towards rights respecting and I somehow managed to end up trying to do a bit of co-ordination of that. And there was a real sense within those schools, seven or eight schools across Bristol, that it would be great to have showcasing event.

We did have a conference the year before where children came and they shared different aspects of practice in their schools, and that was great, and the next step would be to take over City Hall to do a bit of showcasing - you talked about that being a bit of an exploratory of democracy. We did talk about that a year or so ago and I think what would be great is if we could get a group of children to go and articulate that. We did enquire but we were told that the price to hire City Hall was however much, so at that point I think we felt that perhaps we needed to look again and rethink because I'm not sure we were on the same track. (Laughter) 142

But that's the way I would do it. I would encourage other schools or other settings or wherever to embrace it by showing them a real outcomes-focused piece of evidence. I think that's the way to really show the difference and encourage other people to recognise that they're intrinsic. They're connected. Your early years outcomes will be improved if you take, you know, grasp this and take it on, or your Foundation Stage, Key Stage one or two, three, four, whatever results. And I know there are some primaries and secondaries working really well to sort of rights-respecting ethos, and they're really seeing fantastic outcomes for children and young people families in their communities, so there are some really good examples out there of great practice where it can make a real difference. 111

H Thank you. And is there an anecdote from September, between September and now, that you could point to with some children here that kind of typifies or you simplify some of the processes? Or value.

Yes. That's a good question. Well, we had- One of our teachers had an observation the other day where it was me and the Head, the executive head, of my previous setting. He has a bit of a sense of the rights-respecting agenda but certainly a sense of the importance of those relationships and creating a culture of, you know, a culture and a community of respect, definitely, and we did this sort of joint lesson observation and he came in and saw the children in their two home zones, which is an interesting sight in itself – two groups of children in effect in two classes but with no wall between them. Interesting for him. Interesting for me - still. And we were observing, obviously, one group of children with the teacher as part of her NQT assessment, and he noticed that that quality of relationships but I made a point of recognising that it wasn't just between the adult and the children; it was very much between the children and the other children. So, one child wanted something. The adult hadn't spotted they wanted something, so one of the other children recognised they wanted it, got up, got the thing they were missing and needed and took it back to them. That was a nice little example.

I also think definitely here in terms of the language, we're thinking really carefully in this school community about the language, and when children start to take on the language of learning, that's really key for me. It's not specifically about rights respecting particularly but, you know, when they're talking about 'I left my sweatshirt in the caf'é or 'I'm going into the garden room', they're taking on the language that the adults are using and modelling and owning it, and for me that is soft stuff but it's an example of how they feel part of, you know, their community is growing, the school is growing with them. So they have a sense of the school and it growing around them and they know about, you know, owning this space, and I think that's all part of this recognition, that this is their learning space. Yes.

H That's such a lovely thing to end on, that this is their learning space, and it's so apparent everywhere here. Thank you so much.

Pleasure. No worries. Thank-

9.5 Appendix E: Transcript Research Conversation 2 (James)

H: Okay. I think you know that at the moment, my working title is realising young children's rights, and I am quite pleased with the nuance of realising young children's rights, conversations with rights respecting early childhood leaders of which you are one.

J: Yes.

H: And I was just conscious of how people become constructed as values driven professionals which includes an emphasis on, you know, or a focus on respecting young children's rights. I have seen here that you have got the convention on your notice board and obviously that is not widespread.

J: No, no.

H: So it is evidenced. Not that I am in here in any way in an inquisitorial way. It's an interest and I am conscious that my own interest is generated by some key moments that occurred while I was a pupil, while I was a teacher and since I have been at UWE. I

have checked this out with other colleagues and they also had some stories from their educational biography, so I just wondered if you could..

J: Gosh yes, I can certainly talk you through. I guess my earliest memories of education go back to early primary school, a couple of vague memories of pre-school but, ironically, I think it was actually the traumatic attachment issues around actually letting go of the parent and actually then having to separate that I remember. So that was interesting because that's the only couple of things that I distinctly remember, one or two very vague memories, at least I think I remember them, of those attachments and having to break that attachment from the main carer. My primary school, I have very fond memories of that, that was a slightly different education perhaps than other people had because it was a prep school that was run by nuns for a period, and then the nuns actually withdrew and then it became taken over. I think over that time I was afforded lots of different opportunities really to develop as 'the whole child' I would say. I look back now, at the time I didn't realise it, but I do now. I had opportunities for a kind of an enriched curriculum that enabled me to explore my artistic, creative, musical, dramatic educational side as well. I think a lot of what we were taught was via the church teaching. I wouldn't consider myself religious any more but I do value certain teachings that religion can offer, the moral side of things, there was a morality that I think was instilled as well by being brought up by nuns. There was also a discipline side to that, there was very much a sense of right and wrong, you know, what was and wasn't acceptable. I became the Head Boy of that school. So in year six there were additional responsibilities which I then had around being an ambassador for the school. So if we were out and about or if there were certain key events, the Head Girl and the Head Boy tended to have a bigger part to play as a representation of the school in its wider sense. That was really enjoyable, so again, I remember we did so many different things. Funnily enough I was looking back through my primary school sort of portfolio we should say where I had kept all my reports from reception through to year six and funnily enough now I look back, my character then was still the same character that I am today and the teachers actually being able to pick up on and comment on those things. It is really interesting because actually you don't always realise until you go back

actually certain characteristics are already formed right back as far as reception, which is essentially where it started, and you could kind of track all the way through what the teachers said. But fundamentally they suss you out themselves, they spend a lot of time with you don't they, Monday to Friday, well nine till three you should say. So looking back that was interesting, and funnily enough the reason I had to go back there was the Head Girl got married in December and I went to the wedding, so we had been friends since we were 3 and kind of maintained that, and although we had grown apart slightly as we got older, we have kind of come back around again as we have kind of gone our separate ways. Although ironically we haven't gone our separate ways, because she went to Durham like I did, she then studied a PGCE in Exeter like I did, so we both went into the teaching profession. We both ended up having done very similar things and we both ultimately still share very similar interests. She is very much a big rowing fan and I was a big rowing fan when I was at university as well. So it has been really lovely just being a bit nostalgic actually and going back to that, and looking at the values and what we have taught, and the lifelong friends that you have actually developed. Although there is only one, still to have just that one connection all the way back. And funnily enough my music teacher who taught me piano in year four was leading the choir at her wedding, so I thought well I never know when I might see this lady again, so I went over and I said hello and introduced myself again, and it was lovely to just re-connect and reminisce. There were other parents at the wedding of children who had gone to the school they weren't in our year .but again being able to have those conversations with them, reminisce over times and kind of find out what their children were doing and
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where they had gone and have those conversations about what kind of values they could have instilled in the children because a lot of them had gone on to be sort of professionals. But again from a young age it was always geared, I think for success, that was always something that was instilled in us was that achieving the best you possibly can, albeit your own best. There wasn't necessarily a 'this is what best looks like.' But it was essentially anything is possible as long as you do your very best and try your hardest then nobody can say otherwise, there is no fault, there are no issues are there? So from

there I went on to an all boys secondary school, again it was a private fee paying school in Bristol, it was QEH and that was a very different, but at the same time also very similar in its expectations. I didn't really know what to expect, I had moved up there with four of us that had come from Sacred Heart but only two of us were in the same class together. So I was in a class of, I think it was mid 20s, and I only knew one other person when I first joined the school and the two others that were in a different class but the mix wasn't huge. So again you kind of have to almost re-invent yourself in a way, you find new friendship groups, you kind of get opportunities to explore new things. So rugby was something that I had never had the opportunity to do before but because I had grown up a little bit earlier due to the fact I think my father has MS and was in a care home from when I was about 10. Prior to that I had been a child carer which I guess is where a lot of my beliefs about child's rights and values come in and their needs for certain things to be met. I think I had grown up a bit earlier, I was a bit more mature than others. I don't know how much detail you want to know Helen but physically I guess I had hit puberty a bit earlier, so I was a lot more grown up than a lot of the other boys, so I somehow managed to quickly make my way up to being sort of the star player of the first team, having never played before, because I was physically stronger than a lot of the other year 7 children. Later on in life that obviously crept up on me and they also became a lot more stronger and my kudos at the first team rugby was no longer quite so esteemed, but I ended up playing first team rugby throughout my time at QEH. Again there is a real value to a team sport like that, but a team sport for me which is still rooted in the key principles of rugby, which a lot of that is about respect, values, team work and that really is, and even now today if you know I am a big rugby fan still and when you compare you know, football and rugby you have got a huge amount of respect for the referee still, the crown mingled up, you don't get the violence, you don't get any of those sorts of issues, and again that is about having those values instilled. Sport actively promotes that and does not tolerate or accept anything different. It is why I can't stand watching football at the minute [laughs] and that was again, so there was an academic balance there as well as again trying to encourage us as students to find out what we were good at, our strengths. So I was in the choir for the first year

or so, my voice broke far too soon but I sang in full Blue Coat uniform in Bristol Cathedral in the Christmas carol concert to a full packed audience, attended things like Charter Day service at the cathedral. QEH was granted a charter by Queen Elizabeth 1, and all of those traditions, so I was able to really actively involve myself in the tradition of the school and I was very proud of its heritage and its history, and that was instilled in us a lot actually. The motto was, Whilst we have time let us do good. I make time to do some charity work as well now because I passionately believe in that motto that was instilled in us.

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I think it is still there today and I've realised that because I have started picking up a lot of charity work. I make time to do some charity work as well now because I kind of passionately believe in that motto that was instilled in us. So as I got a bit further up, again the academic side of things was pushed hard. I became a senior prefect which I was actually asked to become. We could apply for Head Boy or the School Captain,, or you could apply to be a House Captain. Now traditionally if you were any of those roles you automatically became a senior prefect of the school. I applied for School Captain but was unsuccessful in that and as a result I kind of fell through the net because I hadn't applied for a position of seniority in any of the others. So after a couple of months, in the January the headmaster actually approached me and invited me to join the senior prefect team essentially he kind of created role because I think they recognised it, it had been something that had slipped through the net and I actually still played a very active part in the school life. I was giving prospective tours to parents, to prospective teachers, because they were just about to open the junior school so they had asked me to show prospective Heads around the school as part of the tour. I was a peer supporter so I was supporting younger students if they needed to just have a buddy that was older to talk through anything, you know, and again that was a kind of selective group of upper 6th who were peer supporters. So all the way along I think I have realised when I looked back to my reception report which said 'he is a very caring and conscientious young man' actually that hasn't gone, that is actually still there. I just think I have been therefore sort of shaped by other opportunities that have enabled me to

really kind of develop that and I understand that myself. I then applied for university and I had an offer from Cambridge and I had an offer from Durham. I went to the Cambridge interview because it was a very gruelling process, and I genuinely didn't think I would stand a chance because I did have an AS level chemistry, so I had an ungraded mark and I made that clear from the outset. But my main interest was education, and again that was a mistake because I enjoyed chemistry and I particularly had a lot of respect for the teacher but actually it wasn't my strength because it was too mathematical and maths isn't my strongest point. I don't believe I am not good at maths but I find it harder and fundamentally I should have taken another subject which actually was more in line with my interests. I look back I wish I'd have carried on with French, but I didn't and I have learnt from that. But needless to say I went to my interview and I remember I had quite a gruelling but fundamentally rewarding interview with Cambridge. There was one question that I had to just discuss the philosophy of education with a lecturer and I came out of that thinking there's no chance, no chance whatsoever I have got this. The questions that they were asking were obviously very open ended questions and they were really just trying to drill into my understanding, my thought processes. Again I see that now, but at the time I was thinking there was a right and a wrong answer whereas they were actually asking things. I remember questions like, Talk to me about education, and then there is that awkward, oh gosh where do I even begin? and okay let me pause, And I just articulated myself and my vision, and I look back now and I think okay clearly they saw something in me that meant that actually it was worth offering a place to despite the grades not necessarily being on target. Fundamentally I didn't get the grades to get the place and actually I do think that was the best thing for me now because although I am quite academic I don't think I would have coped brilliantly well in such a high pressured academic environment. For me actually there is a lot more to who you are and Durham enabled me to still develop all of that. I don't think the academic pressures of Cambridge would have done and I don't think I would have enjoyed it at all, and I think it was absolutely the right thing because I hadn't got the grades. So I then ended up in a university which is still a very highly regarded university but one that with its collegiate system enabled there to be a good

level of competition and rivalry between, and so you could find that right level, because you didn't just have to play university level you could play at college level, so you had that ability to find your feet and the wealth of opportunities that were available there, so I joined the boat club. Probably you will see a pattern here emerging. I became an executive member of the boat club and so therefore was integral in its driving forward and through that came lots of opportunities to row or lots of different courses around the UK and we even competed in Austin in America, which again was just a phenomenal experience and one that really developed your sense of teamwork. [conversation was interrupted briefly by others passing through the lobby] Sorry, yes I will carry on, so it kind of gave me opportunities I guess to have leadership in a way that was, at a level I could manage alongside my work. I found that it really strengthened my character. You know, I have used this in job applications. Actually being on the river at 5 o'clock in the morning when you are cutting through ice because it is so cold up there, really is a test of your revolve and determination. Because it is dark, it is cold, it is freezing, you are up early you know, you have not slept an awful lot and you make an active decision. Because the student lifestyle is one that is perceived to be a lot of socialising and potentially when it was back then because we are talking almost a decade ago now, alcohol was very prime at the time. There were lots of alcohol poisoning deaths related to that overloading in freshers week and stuff like that. It kind of meant that I had to make an active decision, did I buy into that or did I actually do something completely different. Did I kind of use it as almost a reason not to drink or naturally was that something that I was dawn to anyway? But a part of me wanted to kind of engage in a sport that I thought I would never be able to engage with at any other time in my life and rowing was one of those kind of traditional university sports. And I did want the traditional university experience of red brick institution which also gave kind of the traditional sport, and that has been one of the biggest selling factors with any of my job interviews that I have gone to, was being able to talk through my role in the boat club and what skills it demonstrated that I had that I could bring into teaching, and it was something, the feedback I had had before was that there are very few people that have ever had that kind of ability to talk through what they could offer, and when I was

applying for a job as an NQT I remember one time, I was whittled down from 160 down to 6. I was one of the six that they interviewed, and I did ask them, although I was unsuccessful, I did say 'Well will you just give me some indication of, what was it of my application that made me stand out amongst 160 others and again they (0:19:51.9) explained because the enriched sort of opportunities that you have had but that you have demonstrated what you have taken from those and what you could continue to then offer as a result of that has been really shone through.

So again I am kind of grateful for those opportunities I think because while you are in there you don't really realise the value of them, you go along with it, and it is not until you step back, like we were saying before we started. It is all depositing down and it is not actually until you go, 'oh wow I actually know where that has come from there, that's that, but that was nine years ago and I am now realising, actually yes, that moment in time was actually more crucial than I realised or more valuable to me now. It depends I guess on what we put a value on really, but that is a topic of conversation for another time [laughs]

So then after university I was determined I was going to be a teacher that was always..

H: Can I just interrupt, what was your subject?

J: I read education studies and geography.

J: Yes. So I knew that I was going to go into teaching from the get go. Trying to articulate why and how I knew that was very difficult, but all I can ever remember was, even from a young age I would want to mark books. I would sit, even with my own books I would tick through them and that role playing, you know. It might have been that was just because I'd maybe had what I consider to be a very lovely, you know, very lovely early experience of teachers and teaching and you know, all those sorts of things. I don't know, but essentially that was something I was determined to do. The nursery that we are in now opened in [REDACTED] and so being involved in that educational establishment again was something that I had grown up with all throughout my childhood. I had left secondary school in '99. Even at junior school I had been privy sort of and part of, you know, an ethos creating an educational establishment and that drive and that vision.

H: That was family.

J: Family, yes, yes. So again I went into teaching, never intending to necessarily step directly into the nursery but I went into teaching and I did my PGCE. I did have very good feedback in my PGCE placements, and one of the head teachers had told my by then boss that if she could literally clone me and repeat me time and time again and send me out to schools she would. I think she had written 'he's the best thing since sliced bread' and that was lovely to hear. And I think that just came down to, because there was a genuine passion to provide an education for these children that gave them the same sort of education I had, albeit in the state sector. So actually for those parents who may not have been in a position to afford to buy into that smaller class size, I was determined to still give those children that same opportunity without necessarily having it to be based on income. So I achieved a position in a small village primary school in Somerset on the Somerset levels which I taught year 5 and 6 and in that first year we started teaching SATS and I was finding my way, and the results didn't go as well as I'd hoped for at the end of the year 0:23:31.4

Some children didn't make as much expected progress and we didn't get as many of the level 5s we were hoping or should have. And I took that very personally and did take it on the chin because fundamentally it was my teaching which hadn't necessarily enabled them to really sort of shine and that was a hard blow and a bitter pill to swallow, so I was determined the following year that I wouldn't have to go through that again and let those children down, because I felt like I had let them down essentially. So the following year we have the sixth highest SATS results in the country for Key Stage 2 out of however many thousands of schools that there are, and that came from that concerted effort that I would not fail these children, and finding a way that would inspire them to learn what was otherwise quite dull and prescribed sets of grammatical structures and features and ways to conduct maths and do maths, and I really brought it back to that notion of fun. They are only going to learn if they are having fun, now how do I make subordinate courses fun, how do I make you know, understanding basic algebra fun? And that is when you have to tap in to early years, you have to tap into that idea of child initiated play based learning which is scaffolded and supported to the outcome but

actually which isn't a 'you are the recipient of knowledge and I am here to transmit that to you. Let's construct it together so that I am constructing in a way that is making sense to you', so that came about by completely restructuring how I did lessons and basically it was that idea, that notion at the time of carouselling. So actually I had child initiated activities and adult led activities, and I did half a class and half a class. So myself took one group, my TA took another group, whilst we were doing the adult led the other two groups were doing child initiated, and then half way through the lesson we swapped over. But then focussed, specifically, at their level so I could stretch those who were ready to be stretched, I could support those who needed more and resource each group more effectively.

H: Yes of course.

J: So actually you did your adult leds based on what you had done in the prior week to consolidate those adult leds, or you did your child initiated from the adult led the prior week. So that resulted in some excellent results and it wasn't through any other means. Myself and my team having had that shared discussion around how do we achieve this and how do we best get that, and the results then spoke for themselves to be honest. So those results came out in the June. By that December though I was getting a little bit fraught with just the high pressure of the role and the challenge of teaching a year, you know 36, year 5 and 6s and fundamentally trying to support and mark 36 literacy and numeracy books a day so 72 books a day within a very tight day deadline. I didn't have time during the day, during the lesson, so we at least had the two core learning lessons in the morning and then the topic activity in the afternoon. We were talking in the region of over 100 books to mark a night, and then when you multiply each of those books by at least five minutes a book, you physically do not have the man time to it, you physically don't, and what had been successful the year prior…

Audio Ends – end of part one

Part two begins:

J: … to mark books over a weekend and of an evening and plan for the next week. What I found I had to do was plan the Monday and see where it went from there and

follow the child's lead, follow what they have brought, so you are being very reflective which is all what early years practice is about isn't it. So understandably I then requested to move to reception because I wanted to teach an early years class. It was what I had realised I was really genuinely passionate about, following that child initiated lead and in a way that I thought I could do a really good job. But fundamentally I think I was a victim of my own success and the Head was reluctant to take me away from, you know, a class that was obviously working at very high performing levels. Ofsted came in that January and we were outstanding and it was probably the nicest inspection I think you could ever go through just because our results were so good. He was already coming in knowing that this is an outstanding school, he didn't do any digging, he didn't need to. He spoke to the children, he spoke to us, he could see the learning, he saw the books, he saw the displays. At that moment in time we had had a Jurassic park focus with my year 5 and 6s and we were doing literacy, and this is where it comes back to their child initiated because it was a gory story and they were able to kill themselves off in their own stories, so they had visited Jurassic park, they had had some horrendously traumatic experience if they wanted it to be, it didn't have to be, they could have gone and had very lovely experience and flown away and it was all wonderful but a lot of them enjoyed, the boys particularly, and let's face it we are trying to engage boys in writing. They loved the blood, the gore, the violence, but in a way that was actually acceptable because it was but it was and that started from one tiny idea and it led to a whole terms work on Jurassic Park and by the end of that these children had written the best part of five or six completely full A4 pages of writing with illustrations with the front cover and with the back cover blurb. We looked at all the dinosaurs that were on that island so we did non chronological reports on these dinosaurs and herbivores. Yes would these herbivores have attacked you, you knew they wouldn't so we need some carnivores in there and obviously how would we, you know where would we place them and we looked at all around that sort of thing (0:02.27.5) so it became essentially an idea of Pie Corbett's. We talked about variety but way deeper, way deeper than that notion of talk fighting and we did self assess our work and edited it. We didn't just write a piece and then go right so at the end of that, that's that done. We drafted it, we stepped away from

it. We shared it with our friends, we got our friends ideas. When you are hearing that how does that read to you. When you are reading it out loud how does that sound and it was inspiring. I was inspired by the children and I think I inspired them to realise that anyone can be a writer as well. It doesn't just have to be what you think is almost unobtainable.

H: Sure

J: So needless to say I wasn't, I wasn't allowed to go to reception. I wanted to teach Key Stage One or reception so I applied for a Deputy Head position of the school nearby which was a year one teaching post at the age of twenty five. I remember driving down the motorway driving there thinking you are absolutely crazy, what on earth are you doing but low on behold I got the job that day. It was a gruelling day. I had to do a lesson, observe lesson. I had to do a whole school assembly which I had never had to do one before really, because it wasn't my role at the other school, and it was a church school. It was about advent, it was at Christmas. So again I was like right I will come into that and I was thinking how on earth do I plug into this one. I had to do a full governing body role playing scenario.. I was given a scenario and I had to talk to them, basically around this kind of challenging issue and like you just see all their faces looking at me and again I was thinking just be yourself. You just have to say what you feel is naturally right, you can't pretend or you can't fudge it and then I had a formal panel interview so that whole process was a full days work. They actually sent the other two candidates home at lunch time and kept me on for the rest of the afternoon and I had to do a presentation to the whole teaching team and the governing body about a way to drive up standards across the school. I got the job and only thirteen days into that job we were Ofsteded and I was in post for thirteen days and their data was poor. That is why they appointed me because I was very good at analysing the data and finding out exactly where the gaps are, exactly how do we support that and what does that support look like and what do we have in place. So although their results had been below national average we were still able to show that we were a good school because the Inspector had identified that we had the capacity to improve and identify in the actual report, the appointment of the Deputy Head had enabled them to do it. Now fast

forward three years and they have only just been Ofsteded again and they are going to require improvement because unfortunately I was only there for a year and two terms because the Head (0:05:45.6) had very different values. I realised that I couldn't work in a school or educational setting where those same values weren't shared and transmitted and the Head fundamentally didn't want the same for the children. She was happy to accept lower standards and I was determined that these children had the best possible, you know not results but they had the opportunity to perform as well as they could and not just do enough. Her attitude was well as long as they do enough, as long as they get that level two and I would say well actually no, these children need to get level threes, they are actually capable of that so why are we not supporting them. So all the support went into just those ones that were potentially going to miss level two and those capable children were just left. I really fundamentally disagreed with that so I handed my notice in and I politely said I don't think my face fits here, quite frankly, it's not quite working out for the both of us and unfortunately I think it's been proven now with their last Ofsted. You know she let go of somebody who I think could have made a much bigger impact because of where I had come from and why she appointed me but she didn't allow me to do what she appointed me to do which was to help drive up standards. So at that point I was desperate to kind and get out of teaching and actually I felt like that I had reached a point of career suicide because a Deputy Head post for one year on a CV almost looks like you can't cope or at least that's the way I interpreted it that actually people would consider that you have just not been able to do your job very well. because you have done it for a year and left so that tends to indicate that there has been problems or maybe it reflects on me as a character. Coincidentally at that moment in time the manager here at the nursery was stepping down because she had child care and obviously young children and wanted more flexible shorter working day. A nursery of this size needs a more creative presence of management here from a day to day basis because you know, we are an eight six setting, fifty one weeks in the year and we have you know a hundred and forty families a week or thereabouts so, you know there is need for there to be a presence sort of all the time and it also enabled me to step into the nursery. So that was my first real, real experience of working in early years because

although the Deputy Head post had a nursery attached my responsibility was Key Stage One Checking everything was ok, tracking progress. I was having professional conversations with the foundation stage leader but not really getting too much involved in their practice and their provision and then when I came here it was a learning curve and it took a while to get into the early years, the rules and regimes around the EYFS. I call it a regime because again that legislation is very specific and whereas in teaching there it isn't quite the same. You've got your curriculum, yes but the legislation of you cans and you can'ts and your musts and all of those sorts of things and you know, you can't put a foot wrong. If you make a mistake it could actually be fundamental to your business and you can end up hugely suffering, you know requires improvement school is not going to lose children necessarily but nursery with 'requires improvement', it could be the death of it potentially. So again I had to very quickly learn a lot about early years and essentially you know there is a time of change and a new manager comes in. You've got staff, you've got parents that are used to a sort of style. I had my own views of leadership and management and how they needed to be conducted and it's enabled me to I think now actually nine years later, no seven years later sorry, seven years now I qualified in 2010, seven years later I think have really finally established where my beliefs lie. Before that I thought I knew but I don't think until you've experienced essentially birth to eleven actually that birth to eleven experience of education in its broadest sense I think. In the capacity of change and leadership and the ability to drive a vision forward of how you want education to look under your leadership it has made me question what do I value most and how do I think that value is best shaped in terms of practice and provision. So that then leads me to that idea of the rights of the child and the value of the child because I think if I hadn't of had those teachers that believed in me and they gave me those opportunities and it valued a well rounded education, I would not be sat here trying to instil younger children and practitioners, sorry and parents. Getting parental awareness of the whole child to really value that actually there is so much that we can do to support these children to be the best that they can be because we do not know if any one of these children in our care could be the next person who finds a cure for something or who goes out and does some charitable peace work that enables there

to be greater levels of peace becomes a politician and supports that or becomes an activist, enables greater rights for people. They themselves, we hope, would never limit themselves or their own beliefs but I am determined that we don't put any sort of limiting belief on what these children can achieve and when I say achieve I don't just mean education. I literally mean in the wider sense, morally, socially, academically, you know. I think because each one of these children has a unique set of abilities and talents that make them who they are. Our job is to tune into those and try and enhance those for them as well as give them opportunities perhaps to uncover other talents and abilities that they may not get the opportunity to do at home, outside in the wider world just because their parents themselves may not have had those opportunities or may not be aware of sorts of things. So educating parents around how we support children, why we do certain things we do. I have a big display over in the corridor just over there about messy play and getting parents to understand the value of mess and if your child comes home with some mess, understand what they have learnt as a result of getting a bit muddy or getting a little bit of paint on them or getting a little bit of food down them and there is a value to that. So it's getting that ethos out to those parents straightaway, why we do it, why we value messy play, why we value sensory play, why we have a communication for any spaces nursery, how we support children to enhance their language and development through our call book kind of focus we have every half a term so you know yes we are possibly trying to play the game of narrowing the gap for underperforming, although I hate that term myself, underperforming children. We are doing it in a way that doesn't single any children out of groups out but it creates an ethos across the whole nursery we are a language and communication rich setting because fundamentally if we can hit that primary for learning and support then we can support children's understanding so we can support their moral understanding, their social understanding. We can support their academic understanding and we can support their physical development through it because we can still enhance storytelling, in the broadest sense of gross motor movements, storytelling with music and movement linked to stories. You know we can do all of those things but what we can't do is try and teach those specific things when their primaries are not being well met. If a child isn't

happy, secure, well attached, well adjusted, confident in our setting they are not going to be ready to learn. We talk about school readiness but we still need to talk about nursery readiness because there is such a big emphasis on school readiness that looks like, that actually they sometimes forget and so much of that comes down to supporting the child's emotional well being. And some of that comes down again to that child knowing they are right to some extent and parents knowing this is what we value of the child. There are some rights and it's actually recognising the rights of the child are these. So they have a right to be heard and be listened to and if they are what the parents might perceive as being misbehaving then let's tune into that and actually lets unpick why their behaviour is. Some of that comes out and again to that lack of communication, they don't have the vocabulary to express it but at the same time it might be development, they are just not ready to consider other peoples' viewpoints or the needs of other children. We talk about that and we never use it here, that term terrible twos but there is a uniqueness around a two year old and I think a lot of that is a lack of empathy but they do learn it. They just need support and understanding and empathy that their actions have consequences on others and we need to do that in a way that is sensitive and appropriate for the age of the child as well. So we have been doing a lot of work recently about the child's voice and the child's rights and then seeing that their rights and that their voices being heard. One of the ways in which we have done that is trying to incorporate it into maths, so there is still an educational focus as well as the British values is that we have been doing a lot of physical representation of voting for the children so during their group times. For example, recently we have been doing, we have a large white board and along the bottom we have sort of three different things, categories so for example recently we did their favourite call book so far or story that they have learnt and during that group time each child had the opportunity to tell the group which was their favourite story and why and then go and stick their post it note above the book in a, you know in a kind of bar chart order

H: Yes

J: so that then and also we encourage them if they are able to have a go at writing their name on these post it notes so again they are given the opportunity. We are talking here

school readiness, you know but trying to support that right in a way that is purposeful and meaningful and if they couldn't they could have help, that was fine and we would post it note and they would stick it up and they were able to count how many children liked each story. As a result of that every child could see this is me, this is my vote visually

H: Yes

J: here it is. It's been counted, it's been verified, that's my name, oh look most of us think this but actually teaching its ok that others will also think something different to us but we will still like the same thing. We still like stories, we've really enjoyed them but some people like this one a bit more than this one and that one and that is absolutely fine. For me that's been a breakthrough moment as well in the staff going wow actually giving these children opportunities to express their opinions on something that is visually going up and give that vote to say this is me, I am voting for this one so we have turned it on the super heroes. We've done it on colours, we've done in on, you name it, kind of anything and everything, such as activities that they like doing. It's a way for us to also find out what do they really like doing in a way that they are able to kind of vote on and snack, we've done our favourite fruit

H: Yes

J: So they are able just to sort of build that confidence

H: (0:17:58.6)

J: absolutely and have their voice heard and be recognised and be counted physically in a way, literally be counted, you know and that's part of something we've started in our pre-school room. We have things like our digital photo frames so children are there, they are represented. It's saying, this is me, this is my work, I am celebrated and parents can come in and see we are celebrating your child, we are celebrating what they have done. We have the family books to say we value you as a family so when they register they send us photos of mum and dad and granny and uncles and aunty, whatever dog, pet and we laminate that and we bind it. It's a book and then the children have it and we talk through it and say look this is your family, these are special people to you and to us because, you know we are working in unison here. It's the best that we can get it so the

child, the partnerships are as effective as possible. So again we make it very clear to the parents right from the beginning that we want you to be involved in your child's education, we want you to have an active role in that and we value that partnership with the parents as well because that is what helps the children settle and feel like they belong. We have minime's here which are the child's sort of full height photo but shrunk down. Soas soon as they walk in they visually see themselves represented in the environment, that's on their peg display, that's on their water bottles, that's on the family boards, it's in the family books, it's in the photo frames, it's just that 'look you belong here'. This is your environment and we support your learning in this here. We keep kind of re-designing the environment based upon around how the children are interacting with it as a part of our communication spaces. Any one group of children might interact within an environment in a completely different way than your next group of children. So we will reassess where we have our water or where we have our sand, where we do our mark making, where we have our play dough as we always sort of have play dough out for physical development and their expressive arts and design and again that's become the cultural of sort of reflectivity that we developed with the scarf and so if this is not quite working, let's change it. If it doesn't look quite right, let's change it, do we just need to alter how we present it? So is it actually the location, is it how we are presenting it, is it that we just haven't quite hit the mark? Do we need to take the interest of what they've got into a different area so that then they are exploring the same level of interest with the trains, the cars, the babies, whatever it might be.

H: Yes

J: I mean I would say the trick with teaching, he said get them to write without really realising they are writing which comes down to the idea of work or play and in the last lecture I gave I shared that notion that if there is a predetermined outcome it is work. If you don't know what the outcome is going to be then it's play so actually that's the same ethos that I realised I had developed in years six and seven. I know what I need the children to know in terms of the curriculum says this but actually if I said drag them through a lesson they are working. If I support, facilitate and scaffold them to reach that they are playing and they learn then the best way because they are doing it in a way they

are engaged with in a multi sensory way. Knowing those earlier principles and I am such an advocate for those principles. Had I ever had my own Headship, which I was planning to do, had I not taken the Fork in the Road it would go to create a school which did not lose those early years principles and they were going to be actively spread across everything and I would have insisted. (0:22:12.7) I would have done my best to make sure that my team understood and valued and came aboard with that vision of children's intuitive learning. There are still challenges when you've got targets to meet with you know, with SATS, that absolutely true but there is a way that we can do it where we don't become a victim of the testing regime and the culture that education has gone into. Thankfully here we don't have SATs that although we have to track the progress and monitor the progress. There are still tensions there around my beliefs about having to track six month old babies every half a term and monitor and put them into a percentage of who are achieving and who are not achieving. But that said I would sit and argue the toss with an Ofsted Inspector face to face if they came in and wanted to see that progress and I would say it's there and I would show it to them.

H: Yes

J: but this is why I do it only for a certain amount of time per year because I absolutely refuse to fall foul of the system. It's not valuing the child and the individual and it's just looking at the children as a percentage.

H: Yes

J: how confident they are here, their articulation, you know the way that they can sit and have conversations with you why are we not assessing them on those life long skills rather than have they had the opportunity to understand that they couldn't draw information from a computer? They have a long time to learn that. There is an abundance of technology out there, is it really the fundamental thing that we do it in early years right now, no not to me it isn't. So there is a tension here around our values, around what we believe and what the legislation of the EYFS and then the Regulation of Ofsted actually insist that we have to show.

H: Yes, yes.

J: but we do very much believe in those rights of the child and hence why we have you know their you know, the rights of the child on our display for parents to make it clear to them as they can come in.

H: Sure

J: There is fundamentally a lot of literature out there and you've got the European rights of the child sits alongside British values which sits inside your safeguarding and your practice around behaviour and everything you do to support the privacy of the child. (0:24:39.5) So essentially it has to be embedded into what you do and just make parents aware of it and make practitioners aware that this is why we are doing it because it's drawing upon several different areas

H: Yes

J: so again we have it on the display board for the parents to see because I use it as a talking opportunity and I give a talk to say to them be aware this is what your buying into. So there are some of those that don't directly apply to us but then there are others that do so often we refer back to it when they ask about behaviour management

H: Yes

J: you know, do you have a naughty step or a naughty chair or whatever and I'm like, well first of all we will never use that word here. That is such a bad word in the nursery, no child is naughty. I then go into the opportunity to say children have a right to be heard and to have their voice heard, to be respected. If they are behaving in a way that we might not consider to be particularly appropriate then we need to unpick that. We need to go get down to their level, make them feel valued, make sure that they understand that we are listening to them and then explain to them why their behaviour was not necessarily acceptable in that moment and the consequences of that because the other child may not have been heard or is upset or something maybe broken whatever it might be Then you just see the light bulb moment go with, the parents go, 'oh ok'. The children value and respect why routine is in place, they understand the consequences of if they don't do this and they have the chance to be a decision maker. In that moment in time there is a decision to make

H: Right

J: Do they make a decision or don't they.

H: Sure

J: Do they choose to throw that toy

H: Yes

J: or don't they and we need to

H: Yes

J: learn that ability to assess for themselves their behaviour and manage their own behaviour. That's fundamentally some of the ways I think it's easiest to get the parents to understand the rights of the child and not try to have it the other way round that we are not here to control them or dictate their day for them. Actually it's a very different way we are in charge in this setting, where the rights of the child is paramount. We do also do adult led support as we monitor, we assess and we will support their learning but that comes out of what we have observed as being their interest. Or we observe this being where they are developing and it is that whole assessment observation and planning cycle comes from the child at the heart, it's got to. You know so we focused our latest core books all around dinosaurs. We established that traditionally, again I am not one to gender stereotype but traditionally the boys were needing a text which enabled them to be more physically active and engage with it in a greater way so we had to find a story that would enable us to really live it out and go and stomp around and roar and you know all those sorts of things. And again it's very encouraging for the parents, if your child comes home and starts roaring that they are not being aggressive, they are reliving their play and they are exploring. So understanding the difference between aggression and them just being a dinosaur exploring that they've taken on a role that's fantastic and that's creative and wonderful. You know it helps us to get them to eat their lunch when they are chomping like a dinosaur and it'll be like chomp, chomp you know with reluctant eaters. So we have to, you know we have to sell that to the parents and make sure that they understand all of this but it's fab we love it and I could go on and on. I'm very passionate about it but it's a case of in a nut-shell I guess. Has that answered the question for you?

H: Oh my goodness.

J: Taken you through the journey.

H: It certainly has

J: Where I came from and where I am today and how I am trying to instil others, you know not just the practitioners in the setting, but through the students that I have been coaching, or through the lectures that I am giving it's trying to inspire that passion that I have and that vision and my thoughts

H: Well thank you so much. James just to finish I just wondered if there is a little story recently either on your walk rounds today or some other time that made you think yes, when either a child was speaking to another child or to an adult, which illustrates..

J: Yes I do.

H: I'm not surprised.

J: It was last Thursday. It was breakfast and I noticed specifically because actually it was a child's last day. She was the youngest child when I started here. She was six months old when she started here and she is moving away to the other side of town so I made the effort to actually do breakfast that day so I could sit with her and just share a moment I would treasure. There were three children originally sat at the breakfast table, herself, another girl and another boy so the children sort of self served their breakfast. It's in a kind of large tupperware box and you have a scoop. So they were able to scoop cereal into their bowl (0:30:38.9) it looked a bit like porridge so the conversation leads onto 'oh look we have a kind of a daddy bear, mummy bear and baby bear sat at the table' and we are retelling Goldilocks and the three bears about the chairs being too hard, too soft, just right, the porridge being too hot, too cold, just right. You know I went back to a core text that they had learnt several months ago and we retold the story just sat there at the table because we were mixing a porridge. One child who has Downs Syndrome then joined the group for her breakfast and they were supporting her. At the start they were supporting their storytelling. They were mixing their porridge so a child with Downs Syndrome comes along and, with some support but as independently as possible, self served her breakfast and I was doing my best to sign my name to support communication with her although I am the first to admit I am not the most proficient sign user but I know enough basics to help her kind of know that again she is valued

here and trying to communicate with her in a way that she can understand. So she sat down and she starts joining in mix, mix, mix, mix. I said to them, 'well girls we need to finish up our breakfast now because although this has been a hugely wonderful experience we are now running out of time and we actually need to get tidied away'. They start clearing but the child with Downs Syndrome is still mix, mix, mixing and I said oh guys we going need to support [REDACTED] to eat her breakfast now as she is not going to do it. Another child looked across to the second girl and she looked at the child and she signed to her with her tongue and said, 'you need to eat your breakfast now' and the child with Downs Syndrome then carried on with eating her breakfast. In it was pure joy just watching another child help support another child because we had given them the tools to communicate. And seeing the child with Downs Syndrome know that her friends are trying to work with her because she doesn't have much language at all and would struggle with interactions without their help(0:33:07.1) And that moment stuck with me because it was natural for the other child just to do it. It wasn't oh don't forget we have to sign this, it was, she just did it in the moment because she knew that, that child needed slightly different support to help her and understand and I just sat there and I think this is what it is all about. This is what supporting early education is all about because in that moment. We had one child understand that in order to help support another child she needed to adapt her own way of communicating and it was completely spontaneous. In just that one moment I was so proud of what we do because of exactly what it was. It was just a joy to see and yes for me that really sticks out. We are actually understanding that we have created a culture of inclusion implicitly here, no matter [0:34:18.2] what level of support is needed we have embedded it as part of our inclusive practice rather than any withdrawal method. Having done the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination I was adamant that any child with additional needs that comes into our setting, we embed what we do and we transform or we practice around the child. I am not a fan of withdrawing for intervention at all. I think it just singles children out. I think it makes it very clear that there is difference and difference is only there because we allow it to be there and it shouldn't be. That partly comes back to having a disabled father from a very young age.

So generally I am passionate that disabilities should not be a barrier for anybody to access something that should always be very straightforward. So again I think that's where that passion and support for anybody with additional needs comes in. So yes in a nutshell that is the kind of story that I think you might highlight hopefully.

H: It certainly does James. You've been so generous. I feel that you've read, in the deepest sense of the word, what those prompts meant and have created an organic holistic response in everything you do in your response.

J: I'm glad it's been of help.

H: Yes thank you so much.

J: You're very welcome. It's nice to sometimes actually just sit and be able to talk.

H: It is.

J: and me just focusing on the vision as well