Retention of
Early Years Practitioners
in Day Nurseries

Margaret Christine Simms

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Copyright statement

Abstract

This study investigates the attitudes, values and perceptions of early years practitioners, to question what factors cause them to remain in day nurseries when research indicates a general undervaluing of practitioner needs (Cameron, Owen, Moss 2001). The study sits within the broader context of retention at a time when practitioners are constantly affected by change in the sector. The passion of practitioners in the research is evident, so too is the exploitation of it.

The importance of the investigation lies in recognising that raising the quality of provision through qualifications pays no regard to the emotional needs of early years practitioners. If, as this study suggests, some practitioners are stressed at work, this has the potential to affect colleagues and children. If the only time we pay heed is when allegations of malpractice surface, we will have to wait for more children and practitioners to suffer before anything is done to address the situation.

The wellbeing of early years practitioners has been brought into question through this investigation. I suggest that the absence of professional wellbeing negates any attempt to recruit or retain early years practitioners to work in day nurseries. Those of us who are concerned with the welfare and education of children should focus for a moment on the welfare of practitioners who provide their education and care. Those who are able must be proactive in offering funded creative opportunities for reflective practice with the aims of assuring practitioners that we value them and care enough to help safeguard their wellbeing.

DEDICATION

For My Amazing Family

Just do it!

IN MEMORY

Mum

Dorothy Mary Holland

(Née Bacon)

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge with grateful thanks Professor Morwenna Griffiths and the countless people who have made this academic and very personal journey so memorable.

Nottingham Trent University technicians, librarians and administrators – your support has been invaluable.

Family what can I say?

Without you, there was no way.

Friends close and kind,

such encouragement is hard to find.

Thank you all.

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Method	Rationale	Technique	Process	Timing
Survey	To gather standardised information through appropriately structured questions to provide insight into the main question of 'What induces early years practitioners to remain in Day nurseries?' (in 4.1; 4.4.1).	Postal Survey Questionnaire	Adapt survey questionnaire Select sample and pilot Administer questionnaire Input questionnaire data Analyse data	05/03 – 10/03 10/03 – 01/04 02/04 – 03/04 11/04 01/05
Observation/ Participation	To back up the survey and seek further insight into apparent gaps left by the survey questionnaire findings (in 4.4.5)	e-forums	General Observation Sample	01/01– 12/06 12/04 – 9/05
Interview	To facilitate probing of questions and answers; create a forum for practitioners' voice to be heard in the research; form a more detailed picture than is possible through the survey (5.4).	Semi-structured follow-up telephone interviews Semi-structured Face-to-face group interview	Design interview schedule Prepare checklist Conduct interviews Analyse data Develop schedule/tools Conduct interview	08/05 – 10/05 10/05 – 01/05 10/05 – 11/05 10/05 – 12/05 10/05 – 12/05 01/06
Stories	To obtain an additional perspective on Day nurserie and help address my own potential bias (in 5.5.2)	Email Question	Email question	08/06
Reflective Researcher Journals	To facilitate the researchers' critical thinking through notes, artefacts and other writings.	Writings Artefacts	Data collection, recording, critical thinking	2000-2010

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

1.1 The Research

The aim of the study is to develop my own researchful understanding of the perceptions of early years practitioners who work in Day nurseries in Nottingham. Mercer, Rawstone (2001; 2002) and others assert that the early years sector sustains a reputation of low pay, low status (Tweed 2001; Cooke and Lawson 2008; Cameron, Mooney and Moss 2002) and lacks a career ladder (Daycare Trust 2004, p.16; DCSF 2006; Daycare Trust/National Centre for Social Research 2007). Moreover, practitioners are overworked and undervalued (Cameron, Owen and Moss 2001; Children's Workforce Development Council 2006). Retention problems are prolific.

According to the Childcare and Early Years Survey 2007 (DCSF 2007) 154,000 paid and 15,000 unpaid childcare staff worked for almost 13,000 full day care providers. Sixty-two percent of full day care providers reported having lost at least one member of staff during the year - almost twice as many as nursery schools. The survey showed that half of the practitioners who had left their employment might have found other jobs within the sector. The implication here being that half may have left the sector entirely. A large number of early years practitioners left their jobs, but many more remained. The phenomenon of retention amongst these practitioners is worthy of exploration.

The debates on the benefits of good quality education and care for young children include, but are not exclusive to, the needs of children and the quality of the education itself. When arguing that the quality of education and care received by young children is paramount, it is logical to assume that issues most directly affecting quality are a priority. I would argue that whilst the debate has concentrated on these two central components, there are others. The quarter of a million early years practitioners whose training and qualification needs are potentially being addressed for the sake of the children's education and care have their own set of needs, and such needs are on the periphery of current debate.

I refer to training and qualifications as external issues, as opposed to the internal issues of perception such as how practitioners feel about their work and workplace. The purpose of this research is to contribute to an alternative line of thinking which places the needs of practitioners, in fulfilling their role, in the same central position alongside the needs of the child with whom they work. This research aims to begin to make amends for the lack

of centrality of early years practitioners in research (in 1.1). It is the attitudes, values, and perceptions of these practitioners that, for me, hold much intrigue as such concepts dominate the investigation. In valuing the attitudes, values and perceptions of practitioners themselves, further light may be shed on the challenges of retention that face the early years sector.

Given the above state of the sector, my research explores reasons why some practitioners choose to remain in Day nurseries when others are leaving and so inform the retention debate. The questions I explore are:

1. What attitudes do early years practitioners hold concerning a range of aspects relating to work in Day nurseries; what influence, if any, do these attitudes have on retention?
2. What values are important to early years practitioners; do these influence their reasons for remaining in or leaving their workplace, if so how?
3. What perceptions do practitioners have concerning their sector, for example its status?

Traditional professions involving work with young children include, for example teachers, social workers, and health workers – but not early years practitioners in Day nurseries. The prestige usually afforded to traditional professions is yet to be associated with childcare. Even so, early years practitioners - like their counterparts in other professions - require training and formal qualifications (Oxford Dictionaries 2008) and the acquisition of specialised knowledge and skills (Merriam-Webster 2010) in order to carry out their work to the required standard. Yet, the need for childcare workers to perform their duties in a professional – 'that is courteous, conscientious, and businesslike – manner' (Merriam-Webster 2010) was highlighted by the quest for quality early years provision (Meeting the Childcare Challenge 1998). In 2006, a pathway for achieving so-called 'Early Years Professional Status' was made available to early years practitioners (DCSF 2006; 2009), its implications are discussed later (in 2.3).

Pursuit of quality and professionalism is in part, due to increased awareness of the need for children to be safe (DfES 2003) and able to enjoy quality care and education that promotes their social, physical, intellectual, emotional and language development, in order

that they may attain their full potential in life (La Valle and Smith 2009; Wilkinson 2009). Supporting children in these goals requires all who work with them to combine their knowledge and expertise. Thus, early years practitioners are encouraged to step up to the same platform as others who work with children in traditionally recognised professions.

The welfare of young children is important. Due consideration must also be given to the practitioners who work with them. Therefore, this investigation places practitioners in Day nurseries at its centre. It is their attitudes, values and perceptions of their work and workplace that for me hold much intrigue. As such, the views of practitioners are dominant.

A qualitative interpretive approach to studying retention of early years practitioners in Day nurseries is currently lacking. The approach is well suited to my investigation because it permits the use of qualitative methods, such as naturalistic observation and participation, interview and stories, through which to elicit perspectives of participants. Conclusions drawn from the analysis and discussion of the findings seek to address a gap in knowledge relating to retention of early years practitioners.

1.2 Personal and professional journey

This section outlines a brief summary of my personal and professional journey towards the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and from childminder to early years consultant. The journey's significance to the research is that it has afforded me a deep understanding of work with young children. It has positioned me amongst those whose vocation is to enhance life and learning opportunities for young children and those who work with them. I reflect on more than twenty years of working to enhance provision and practice in the early years sector; the roots of which are embedded in a personal need to help provide quality environments through which young children have the opportunities to develop their full potential.

I could not have known when I engaged the services of a local childminder thirty-five years ago that the experience would eventually give rise to my research. For me, using a childminder was fraught with difficulties; the two main ones being pain of separation from my child, and guilt at leaving my child with the childminder. A third difficulty was my dissatisfaction with the minder whom I perceived lacked understanding of my problems. Subsequent experiences of using childcare provision were no better. From a purely personal

standpoint I found childcare provision wanting. I became a childminder myself in 1986 and made every effort to avoid replicating my own negative experiences in the parents of my 'minded' children. Three years later, I set up community childcare provision for families with young children who lived in and around Bilsthorpe, in Nottinghamshire. I attribute the success of this provision to the fact that children, parents, and practitioners thrived in the encouraging and supportive environment we had created. Visions and aspirations were established. I took a route into early years lecturing others went in different directions.

Along the journey, I have heard a disproportionate number of complaints from students and practitioners about working in Day nurseries in comparison to other types of provision. Naturally, practitioners who lack initiative or rebel against leadership tend to have difficulties, although in my experience even the most enterprising, biddable and conscientious practitioners may be distressed by unrealistic expectations placed upon them in some Day nurseries. Concerns from personal experience and professional career converge at this point, to raise questions about what factors cause early years practitioners to remain in Day nurseries.

1.3 Rationale

The rationale for undertaking this particular piece of research is because at the time I enrolled for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Nottingham Trent University, I was working as a Recruitment Strategy Officer at Nottingham City Council. My role was to implement the National Childcare Recruitment Strategy (DfEE 1998) at a local level. This gave me considerable opportunity to study the incredible challenges and changes facing early years practitioners in Nottingham. The frontline professional positioning I occupied lent itself very well to academic study; tantalised by the combination of the two, I took every opportunity to contribute to wider national debate on recruitment and retention. Rolfe interviewed me as part of the *Recruitment and Retention of Childcare, Early Years and Playworkers: Research Study* (Rolfe *et al.* 2003). The aim of Rolfe and colleagues was to provide examples of good practice to disseminate to Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships in England. Such opportunities helped provide valuable insight into contemporary issues affecting the developing national and local early years workforces. I debate some of these issues in Chapter 2: *Literature Review* and Chapter 3: *A Local Perspective.*

The justification for doing this research now is that, prior to the commencement of the National Childcare Recruitment Campaign (2000) the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE

1998) highlighted a need for an increased number of early years practitioners to work with young children across the expanding sector. A huge expansion of the sector and its workforce has occurred since then. During the lifetime of my study (2001-2009), extensive changes have affected early years practitioners – few, I feel, encouraged them to remain in Day nurseries. Given the average length of experience in the early years sector is less than seven years (Evans 2009), it is reasonable to conclude that one cohort of practitioners has already entered and left the profession since the campaign began. Issues mentioned earlier of low status, low pay and feeling undervalued are still contentious. Therefore, in carrying out this research I seek to address gaps in published research regarding the retention of early years practitioners in Day nurseries (in 2.9).

1.4 Mapping the Thesis

Offered here is a navigational map of the thesis. Briefly, there are seven chapters, a references section and an appendix. Already discussed are the research question, aims, rationale, and justification for carrying out the study. Chapter Two: Literature Review contextualises the study, and critically reviews existing recent research, pertaining to some of the main issues affecting recruitment and retention of the early years workforce which impact on practitioners in Nottingham's Day nurseries. Justification for citing earlier publications is that I consider the research therein to have affected development of current practices in the sector. Many more studies have influenced the sector's development; I acknowledge these as background reading in order to keep the thesis to an appropriate size (in 1.5).

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The purpose of Chapter 3: A Local Perspective is to situate the research participants in the enquiry, and contextualise Day nursery provision and practice, thereby incorporating the essence of change that affects practitioners working in Nottingham's Day nurseries – and hence, my research participants.

Chapter 4: Methodology debates ontological and epistemological issues, and positions the research in the interpretative paradigm. Chapter 5: Method discusses the qualitative methods of interview, naturalistic observation and participation, and story. Pertinent extracts from my research journal are also included here; their primary purpose is to locate the researcher within the inquiry. Chapter 6: Results and Discussion presents and discusses themes

drawn out from analysis of the data. I conclude the investigation in Chapter 7: Conclusions and Implications for Future Practice.

Finally, I note that one way I have ensured the centrality and voice of participants in the writing up of the research is by including their quotes. I have not changed the quotes gathered as written data either grammatically or in any other way.

1.5 Parameters of the research

Acknowledging and identifying the parameters of the research helps to position it within the broader contemporary debate on retention in the early years sector. Parameters have been set according to their direct bearing on retention of early years practitioners in Day nurseries in England. These are for example, literature included in the review, geographical boundaries, time-line of the research and sample size. Accessibility of published UK early years research has increased dramatically in recent years and the literature review chapter is necessarily selective.

Time and financial constraints associated with undertaking a part-time Ph.D. programme of study - whilst raising a family and working – contribute to the fact that the research is, inevitably, a snapshot of the 'reality' of a small sample of the experiences of early years practitioners working in Day nurseries. I carried out the main fieldwork between February 2004 and January 2006 with early years practitioners and students in Nottingham.

Before summarising this chapter, I note three changes to the original title of the thesis. Formerly the thesis was entitled '*Recruitment and Retention of Early Years and Childcare Practitioners in Private Day Nurseries: What induces practitioners to remain in Private Day nurseries*'. Now current title '*Retention of Early Practitioners in Day Nurseries: What induces early years practitioners to remain in Day nurseries?*' is a more accurate reflection of the research. I achieved this through the following amendments:

- omission of '*recruitment*', as the study focuses on retention
- omission of '*and childcare*' to bring the title more in line with current termnology
- omission of '*private*' as the writing up process brought with it a realisation that I could not be sure that a common and consistent definition of 'private' Day nurseries existed between the practitioners and me. I could be sure that, as far as I took the

practitioners' word for it, all data does refer to Day nurseries - many of which are under private ownership.

1.6 Summary

In this section, I have introduced the research as a qualitative interpretive study, which places practitioners at the centre in order to investigate their reasons for remaining in Day nurseries. Noting that amongst the extensive changes affecting early years practitioners - few encourage them to remain in Day nurseries, I have identified a gap in research which my study seeks to help address.

I have explained that childcare work is not perceived as a profession, in the traditional sense of the word. The poor reputation of the sector has surfaced and I have highlighted the existence of retention problems. I have made mention of moves to ensure practitioners themselves achieve a professional status which enables them to work alongside other professionals to encourage young children to attain their full potential in life.

In recalling relevant parts of my personal and professional journey to Ph.D., I have identified not only a root of the research topic and its aims, but also communicated my vision and aspirations for enhancing early years provision and practice per say.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sources and framework

Sources of literature for this review of retention of early years practitioners in Day nurseries include consultation and policy documents, bibliographies, books, journals, conference proceedings and presentations, media, periodical indexes and abstracts, professional networks, reports and thesis.

'Professionalisation' of the sector, professional practice (Anning 2005; Moyles 2006; Osgood 2006, Reardon 2009) and professionalism (Brock 2009) are essential to current retention debate and interlinked with a range of key issues which includes – but is not limited to - pay, training, qualifications, and status. 'Standards of training and achievement' now required of early years practitioners in Day nurseries equals those of schoolteachers and teaching assistants' (DCSF 2007). Potentially, early years practitioners may argue that their standards of practice are equivalent but their pay and conditions are not. From a government perspective, one practitioner who holds Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) that is 'broadly equivalent to Qualified Teacher Status and a degree-level standard' (DCSF 2007), will help a setting achieve 'equivalent standard.' However, the pay for practitioners with EYPS is not on a par with that of teachers in early years settings (in 2.7.2). Later, I pursue further the impact of 'professionalisation' on early years practitioners (in 2.3).

In framing the literature review I have chosen to draw on Brock's (2009) model of professionalism which she elicited from her empirical research with a small group of 12 early years educators in 'nursery, foundation stage/early years units, reception classes, independent schools, Sure Start, workplace nurseries, college and university' (ibid. p.3). Although small, the perspectives of people from a range of different settings are important to the retention debate; this is because early years practitioners in Day nurseries are required to work in an integrated capacity with other early years professionals. Therefore, for early years practitioners in Day nurseries to be counted as 'professional' by their colleagues they must be perceived to attain to similar standards. Brock's seven dimensions - knowledge, education and training, skills, autonomy, values, ethics and reward emerged from what Ryan (2009) refers to as 'a clear examination of what components contributed to a model of a professional across many disciplines'. These dimensions are pertinent to the retention debate as practitioners seek recognition and reward for their professional practice.

Key retention issues such as pay, training, qualifications, and status are then, for the purpose of this literature review, framed by knowledge, education and training, skills, autonomy, values and ethics, and reward. Connections made between sections of the framework helps broaden understanding of the other. Similarly, connections made between previous research and my own aims to increase the knowledge base relating to retention of early years practitioners in Day nurseries. Much of the literature is fundamentally concerned with meeting the needs of young children. Although not necessarily at the forefront of the work, this ethos pervades various strands of the literature. The strands to which I refer are:

- Quality of provision and the early years environment in which, for example, Sylva et al. (2004) and Nutbrown (2006) explain the importance of well-resourced opportunities to play and learn, enabling children to plan progressive steps of learning and achievement for themselves and so facilitate growth of independence.
- Early years policy (Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay 2005)
- Early years practice, which deals with delivery of care and education (Edgington 2004) for child development (Bruce 2006; Tassoni 2007; Brownhill 2009) and leadership and management (Moyles 2006).

My research is most closely associated with early years practice. It develops a new strand of 'early years practitioners' and links to Moyles' (2006) approach to leadership and management which takes emotions in to account in the workplace. The interface between practitioner and child is arguably the most important element of all strands because it represents a meeting place where influences and ideas are cultivated and exchanged. It is in this arena that the child is being prepared to 'make a positive contribution' in later life (DfES 2004). Research in this body of work relates to the different aspects of early years practice, for example training, qualifications, pay and status (Owen, Cameron and Moss 2003) and more recently leadership and management. Research into early years practice has consistently sought to develop and improve the sector by ascertaining the perspectives of practitioners. In effect, practitioners' opinions have been utilised as a channel through which to investigate issues and challenges facing their sector. My study seeks the views of practitioners to their work and workplace for the sake of enhancing their experiences of work in Day nurseries, and of the sector. It is not evident from the literature that this is usually the case.

There is agreement in the literature pertaining to existing studies of recruitment and retention of practitioners in Day nurseries and the sector as a whole. Issues relating to

quality, training and qualifications, career progression, job satisfaction, pay, status, and the working day, are important to effective recruitment and retention of early years practitioners working in Nottingham's Day nurseries. Rolfe *et al.* (2003) found that recruitment, rather than retention, was the focus of the EYDCPs, suggesting this may be due to concerns relating to staffing new provision in order to meet Government targets for provision of new childcare places. 'In some cases study participants were attempting to meet targets with only limited expansion of provision (ibid., p. 86). Commonly EYDCPs felt they had no real influence on retention, apart from encouraging participation in training. Rolfe *et al.* (ibid.) considered the lack of emphasis on retention to be a problem, as the following quote suggests:

> The emphasis on recruitment and sidelining of retention is problematic because, unless issues of retention are addressed, efforts expended on recruitment are likely to have only short-term benefits (Rolfe *et al.* 2003, p.86).

Conversely, managers and owners in thirty-three nurseries in the North West of England who participated in a study by Carroll *et al.* (2008) did not feel that 'staff turnover was a major problem in their particular nursery'. According to the researchers, this 'possibly reflects the nature of the organisations prepared to participate in the study'. Cameron (2003) also found evidence of contradictory opinion on retention suggesting most private Day nursery managers and owners predicted that, as far as they could envisage, they would remain in their setting. Half of other practitioners disagreed. Cameron *et al.* (ibid.) concluded that salaries determined staff turnover (in 2.7 *Reward*). Studies reveal a sense of urgency prevails concerning the need to address pay and status in the sector (Evans 2005). However, these appear to relate more to raising the quality of provision, than paying a fair wage.

Summary

The body of early years literature in the UK has increased considerably during the lifetime of this study. I have utilised the resource to make a contribution of my own to the research into retention of early years practitioners in Day nurseries. I have positioned my own strand *early years practitioners* research within the established *early years practice* strand. Finally, I have explained how Brock's (2009) seven dimensions of professionalism help frame the literature review. I now go on discuss the dimensions of knowledge, education and

training, skills, autonomy, values, ethics and reward – through a review of the literature pertaining to each.

Retention of early years practitioners in Nottingham's Day nurseries is dependent on issues such as quality, training and qualifications, career progression, job satisfaction, pay and status. An unequal balance exists between the emphasis on recruitment and retention. An overemphasis on recruitment is problematic if the sector is unable to retain its early years practitioners.

2.2 Knowledge
2.2.1 Overview

A substantial body of knowledge exists amongst practitioners, lecturers and students who have acquired specialised knowledge (in 1.1) for work in the early years sector; such knowledge is a professional requirement without which practitioners may feel - or give the impression of being - insufficiently qualified for the job. The sector has accumulated a further body of knowledge, much of which emanates from research findings. The review draws on some of this knowledge as it pertains to retention of practitioners within Day nurseries. Not included in this section is a study of the nature of knowledge, this follows in Chapter 4: Methodology.

I have grouped the literature into three sub-headings that separately and corporately explore a body of knowledge about the sector that influences retention of practitioners in Day nurseries. The sub-headings pertain to knowledge about: the following:

- Childcare as Women's Work
- Early Years and Childcare Provision
- Quality in Early Years and Childcare Provision

2.2.2 Childcare as Women's Work

Considered here is literature pertaining to knowledge of childcare as women's work. It is not my intention to argue the case for, or against, childcare as women's work; rather I accept that traditionally women, not men, generally take on the main responsibility for the care of young children in England.

Women were the main child carers in the 1970s the era in which I became a mother and first used childcare services (in 1.2). Longitudinal studies of parenting since then have found that mothers spent more time with children than fathers, whilst fathers stated that they wanted to be able to spend more time with their children. Mothers thought they did most of the childcare (The Centre for Longitudinal Studies Institute of Education 2005). Today men are sharing more of the childcare at home, but they are not necessarily choosing to work with children. Typically, more women than men choose childcare as a career. More mothers than fathers progress to work with children (Rolfe 2005; Beckett 2006).

A generalised view of childcare being something that women do is still prevalent in society today. Rolfe at al (2003) accept childcare is traditionally the woman's role. Similarly, according to Ellison, Barker and Kulasuriya's study of parents (2009, p.32) 'women are more likely to agree that mothers are responsible for childcare while men are much more likely to agree that fathers should be responsible for providing. Further debate on learned or innate gender traits, and nature versus nurture, are not germane to the particular focus of this study. Rather, for the purpose of the research both standpoints are accepted.

Formal childcare arrangements, such as those made between parents and their chosen childcare provider, were in place long before the 1970s. On whether mothers of young children should use formal childcare opinions varied. Government propaganda during the Second World War, for example, alleged children thrive better in nurseries. One of the reasons for this was that assertion was that large numbers of men had been injured or killed in the conflicts and women needed to take their place, so young children need to be in nursery. At the end of the war, home was declared to be the best place for children and women were told they were needed there (Reynoldson 1991). The provision of childcare during these critical periods of history appears to contradict Brooker's observation:

> …only in the past half-century has it become the norm in many societies, including the UK, where public policy now encourages mothers to enter or re-enter the workforce before their children are 3 years old. Public policy in the future may revert back to a stand for childcare in the home rather than in institutions such as Day nurseries (Brooker 2008, p.99).

The notion that young children thrive best in their mother's presence developed from the commonly cited work of British psychiatrist and psychoanalyst John Bowlby (1966). From his observations of homeless young children during the Second World War,

Bowlby concluded that a young child's healthy mental development depended on a continuous, satisfying and enjoyable reciprocal relationship with his or her mother, or another woman who acted as a substitute mother (Bowlby 1966). This extreme example of children being away from their mothers has since been misinterpreted. It has been advocated as a reason for women to stay at home and raise their own children, an opinion endorsed by literature which suggests that mothers were the only ones capable of providing appropriate care for the young child (Orr 1997). For contemporary observers to align their thinking with misinterpreted perceptions of childcare is understandable, particularly since the overall quality of provision has been questioned in recent years, and children have not always enjoyed continuity of care. Some early years students and practitioners are of the opinion that mothers – not others – should care for young (Cameron, Mooney and Owen 2001). This begs the question of whether some women choose to work with children because they see themselves as a substitute mothers for those who choose, for whatever reason, to go out to work. Whilst I steer away from the psychological implications of this question – leaving it to experts in that field – I introduce here the notion of intrinsic motivation that I will discuss later in my literature review (in 2.2.2; 2.4.2; 2.4.3; 2.7.3).

Rutter (1972) in his 'reassessment' of Bowlby's work on maternal attachment recognised a need for children to have a secure base with satisfactory care - although not necessarily from their birth mother. Such a notion is reiterated by Abbott et al. (2002) who agree that care of children up to the age of five years has a significant impact on their life chances. This potentially helped pave the way for society to recognise the choice of future generations of mothers to share the care of their children with others. Elfer (2007, p.111) recognised that 'Early-years policy has turned 180 degrees' since the end of the Second World War as mothers are again given 'active encouragement' to go out to work. Any move to persuade mothers to return to work relies partly on adequate childcare provision. According to Rolfe (2006), more women returning to work after childbirth creates a need for more childcare. Crompton (1997) and Cameron, Mooney and Moss (2002) found that demands for parental choice largely replaced strong opposition to women with young children going out to work. This concept was by no means universal. Full Time Mothers (1998) for example argued that the government's pledges to help achieve better outcomes for children and get more mothers into work were incompatible. Little value was attached either to the opinion of this group of full time mothers, or working mothers until 1997 when national steps were being taken through the National Childcare Strategy to reduce poverty and

exclusion (Cameron 2002) by actively encouraging mothers to go out to work, as Elfer (2007) had recognised.

Traditional attitudes towards childcare then, prevailed well into the 1970s. A decade later statistical records began to indicate that fathers were taking a more active role in the care of their children, whilst more mothers with dependent children went out to work (Wheelock 1990). However, there was no natural progression of fathers into childcare work, as is the tendency with some mothers. A very small percentage of childcare workers in the Britain are men (between one and two percent). The 2002-3 Childcare and Early Years Workforce Survey (DfEE 2004) and successive surveys (DCSF 2006; 2007; 2008) found that the majority of men who worked with older children, for example in after-school clubs, rather than with young children in early years settings. Rolfe (2006) found this one of the most interesting aspects of her study of *Gender Segregation in the Childcare and Early Years Sector.*

Opinions vary on whether or not men should work with young children. Some see benefits to men working with children. The Daycare Trust (2000) suggests that men bring a different perspective to a child's learning. A postal survey carried out by Cameron, Owen and Moss (1997) of all colleges in England that offered the CACHE Diploma in Nursery Nursing and the BTEC Diploma in Early Childhood Studies showed that most tutors and students were keen for men to work with young children. They also thought that the number of allegations of child abuse would increase. Tutors and students were concerned that the presence of more men in the workforce would have a negative impact on women's opportunities to progress. Testimonies from male childcare workers have been widely published since the beginning of the National Childcare Recruitment Campaign in 2000, with the aim of encouraging more men to work with children (HM Treasury 1997, DfES 2001). Cameron, Moss and Owen (1999) and Owen (2003) found that some men are choosing childcare as a career the second time around. However, whilst the Women's National Commission (1991) advocated that women were encouraged by the government to take up traditionally male-orientated trades to redress the employment demographic imbalance of the day (EOC 2003) there is no evidence to suggest that there has been any significant increase in the number of male childcare workers in the UK.

Reports from the Office for National Statistics (2003) confirm increased numbers of women who are mothers in the workplace. By 2008, just over half of women with a child

under five years of age in the UK went out to work. The figure rose to seventy percent for women with children over the age of five (Office for National Statistics 2008). Rolfe and Nadeem (2007) contribute the changes, to some extent, to part-time and flexible working patterns which have opened up opportunities for men and women to consider jobs and careers not previously available to them. Observers suggests that this has resulted in many parents agreeing to share the care between themselves (Equal Opportunities Commission 2003) However, parents in Ellison, Barker and Kulasuriya's study (2009) tended still to follow the more traditional pattern of the woman being the main care-giver.

There is an apparent dichotomy between twenty first century views of the 'involved caring father' childcare and traditional views on childcare as women's work. To what extent the notion of the 'involved caring father' is 'culturally embedded' in British life (O'Brien 2005) is debateable as the quote below shows:

> We are used to the expectation that men will take a greater part in the upbringing of their own children – as fathers. But the idea that men should play a greater part in taking care of other people's children – as a job – is less familiar (Owen, Moss and Cameron 2003, p.1).

Summary

In this section, I have considered the literature pertaining to knowledge of childcare as women's work. Contemporary fathers are sharing more of the childcare than has traditionally been the case but the majority do not choose to use their experience and expertise to work with children outside of the home. Men bring a different perspective to a child's learning, but fathers tend not to naturally progress to childcare when they have looked after their children. Government drives to encourage more men to work with young children have a long way to go to tip the balance of the traditional view that childcare as women's work.

The issue of whether or not mothers of young children should go out to work has opinion divided. Some of the reasons put forward here for this division, are the split between people who think that young children will not thrive without their mothers, and those who think they will thrive; those whose perception is that others can care for children as well as mothers, and those who think they cannot. Many mothers of young children who want go out to work need childcare, but again there is disagreement about whether formal

childcare is appropriate for the child. In the next section, I use the literature to review early years and childcare provision in the UK.

2.2.3 Early Years and Childcare Provision

The modern day early years sector has grown out of traditionally disparate childcare provision that offered limited opportunities for childcare workers. In this section, I use the literature to discuss this growth and progression. I will identify various alternative employment opportunities that now exist for early years practitioners which potentially influence the retention of practitioners in Day nurseries.

Prior to 1988, a range of childcare provision existed in England the aim of which was to provide opportunities for young children to play and develop. Some of this provision, such as crèche, toddler group, and playgroup, was for parents, mostly mothers, to frequent with their young children (Pre-school Playgroups Association 1990; Pre-school Learning Alliance 2008). People who worked in these settings tended to be female volunteers. Childcare provision for working parents included childminders, and full day care, such as Day nurseries, family centres, and nannies. In these settings childcare workers were generally paid.   The needs of a few local parents typically led to the establishment of childcare provision. Consequently, provision was of a disparate nature (DfEE 1988). Largely then, the range of provision can be categorised into that which parents attend with their young children, and that which enables parents to go out to work or pursue other activities. A further distinction is that childcare workers in the first category of settings tended to be on a voluntary basis, whilst in the second group they received remuneration. Further similarities and differences between the types of provision related to purpose, opening hours, the age of the children catered for, the training required, qualifications and experience of the workers (Nottinghamshire County Council Social Services 1988).

A range of different job titles and roles were associated, but not confined to each type of provision. For example, playgroup leaders, crèche supervisors and nursery nurses worked in nurseries. Job specifications, where they existed, varied between occupations and provision. Qualifications, where asked for, were inconsistent in level, title and content. However, the common ground was that regardless of type of provision, occupation, job specification or qualification, each person was significant to the existence and expansion of the early years sector workforce as a whole; all were there to provide play opportunities and care for young children.

Day nurseries, in which practitioners provide full or part-time care for children from the age of six weeks up to five years, have existed in Nottingham for over a hundred years. This extract from a Nottingham Evening Post article shows a local pride in Day nursery provision and training for practitioners:

> Before the Second World War, Nottingham was at the forefront of nursery education and by 1939, the city had three nursery schools – at Brierley Street, King Edward Park and Clifton Boulevard.
>
> The need for a national training scheme became irresistible and there is no doubt that Nottingham was among the prime movers and shakers. So much so, that the Nottingham Nursery Nurse Training Centre was opened on February 20, 1947, on the top floor of what was then the Institute for the Deaf on the corner of Forest Road and Noel Street. There were 20 students (Smart 2007, p. 37).

The first nursery nurses to train in Nottingham enrolled at the centre on Forest Road, Nottingham. The training programme gained accreditation through the Nursery Nurse Examination Board and became known as the N.N.E.B. It consisted of two days a week in college, and three days in a placement. Progression to the second year required girls to have a good standard of education. Students put theory learned in the classroom into practice with the children. Day nurseries took first year students. Nursery schools took the more experienced second year students. From the outset of nursery nursing, it appears that a good education and commitment to training were standard requirements for work in Nottingham's Day nurseries.

One sign of a major upheaval in childcare came out of the Excellence in Schools White Paper (DfEE 1997). This visionary initiative situated a range of inclusive services for children and families in one place. The intention was for childcare, health, education and social care practitioners to work together to provide integrated better quality services for children and families in so-called Early Excellence Centres (EECs) (Ball 1994; Bertram and Pascal 2001; 2002; Owen, Cooke and Jones 2005; Sure Start 2008). A mapping of childcare provision needed to take place before integration with other services could begin.

The first unified attempt to map all childcare provision in the UK was by the Early Years National Training Organisation (EYNTO) on behalf of the Government (Callender

2000; Cameron 2001; EYNTO 2001). The EYNTO performed a strategic leadership role offering practical guidance to organisations, individuals and Local Authorities about the skills and qualifications needed in order to develop the workforce and to support an expansion of early years provision. The mapping exercise required Early Years and Childcare Units across the country to carry out audits of childcare provision in their local authority (Briggs and Potter 2000; City of Nottingham Early Years and Childcare Unit 2005) and thus inform the national childcare picture. The lack of baseline data regarding all provision for young children complicated the EYNTOs mapping exercise. Even so, the task resulted in a more comprehensive picture of provision been made available than had been previously been the case. Amongst the many settings placed on the map were seven thousand five hundred registered and non-registered Local Authority Day nurseries offering 264,200 childcare places (EYNTO 2001). The mapping exercise identified a number of occupational groups of people working within childcare settings. These were categorised:

- assistant

- supervisor

- manager

- practitioner/owner/manager

These four categories gave a broad indication of the occupational groups but they were not definitive. Moreover, these groups did not necessarily define the job roles within each category. Individual Day nurseries and other providers each had their own ways of defining job titles and job roles. For example, practitioner/owner/managers were found to have direct and indirect involvement in the delivery of early years provision depending on the setting. Managers managed all aspects of provision; some also supervised and might be practitioners who had direct and daily contact with the children. Hands on practitioners, who worked directly with children and families, could be supervisors, deputies, team leaders, or nursery nurses. The disparate nature of provision meant that attaining precisely defined categories was unviable.

The EYNTO's attempt to profile occupation groups resulted in an approximation of the enormous number of people working within each type of provision. Bearing in mind that data was not always available, and that historical data sets were to some extent unreliable, the EYNTO *Sector Workforce Development Plan for the Early Years Care and Education Workforce in England* (EYNTO 2001) estimated the early years workforce to be around 643,000. Furthermore, an unknown number of people worked in crèches, family centres, out of

school provision and on holiday play schemes. The 643,000 estimated staff working in the sector comprised of 62,346 staff in Day nurseries, 108,660 in playgroups, 85,808 registered childminders, and 100,000 nannies. Nevertheless, the mapping exercise ensured the availability of more information about the different job groups within Day nurseries and other settings than was available before the mapping exercise. There is clearly a range of different jobs within the set of occupational definitions in the early years workforce (DfES 2004; CWDC 2007). The above calculation of the number of staff working in Day nurseries includes staff in Local Authority Day nurseries, nurseries run by voluntary organisations, workplace nurseries, and privately owned nurseries.

Rolfe (2006) agrees with Clemens (2006, p.2) that 'over [a] quarter of a million people work[ed] within childcare settings' in the UK. Childminders, although part of the early years workforce, were not included in this count because their work was undertaken at home rather than in childcare settings. The number of practitioners appears to have declined since the 2001 count, but this is not the case. Statistics in 2001 included Day nurseries, playgroups, childminders, and nannies. Statistics in 2006 referred to Day nurseries, playgroups, and after-school provision. This makes comparisons difficult.

Integration of services and so-called 'extended services' (DfES 2005) provided new and diverse opportunities for early years practitioners in terms of their work setting and job role. Opportunities to broaden their experience and progress became apparent, for example through work with the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative (NNI) that aimed to meet the needs of families in some of the most deprived areas of the country (HM Treasury 2000; Communities and Local Government 2008). One of the criteria for success of Day nursery provision established under the NNI was its potential for sustainability. Campbell-Barr (2009) found that in the interest of sustainable childcare, it was business experience rather than experience of running a childcare business, or experience of working with children that was one of the main criteria for government funding. In her case study of the way in which providers operated their businesses in one Local Authority in England, Campbell-Barr demonstrated that:

> …they can be classified as being business orientated, care orientated or having a combination of these two approaches. These orientations are largely determined by the provider's attitudes towards making money and the needs of the child (Campbell-Barr 2009, p. 76).

However, the NNI criteria for success had implications for the retention of early years practitioners in Day nurseries. Evolving from the notion of neighbourhood nurseries, Sure Start Local Programmes and Children's Centres too offered integrated services and diversification opportunities for early years practitioners Day nurseries. Children's Centres were developed from the Government's Sure Start Initiative with the intention of safeguarding children and improving the overall image of the sector (Her Majesty's Government 2006; National Quality Improvement Network 2007) and creating more integrated local childcare places so that parents could go to work (Osgood 2000). Children's Centres adopted a similar approach to that taken by Family Centres and Early Excellence Centres (Warren- Adamson 2006).

The need for a common definition of 'childcare' became evident once the process of integration had begun. The definition adhered to in my review of the literature is one put forward in the House of Commons (2005) and Chapter 21 of the Childcare Act 2006 (UK Parliament 2006). 'Childcare' means 'any form of care' offered to a child. This includes 'education or any other supervised activity' (UK Parliament 2006, p.10). The Act is clear about circumstances to which the term 'childcare' does not apply in regards to children up to the age of five years, for example, informal childcare undertaken by parents, relatives and friends. A common definition of 'childcare' is only useful when applied universally. Bryson, Kazimirski and Southwood adopt a 'very inclusive definition' of childcare (2006, p.1), asserting that parents tend to use the term 'childcare' to describe all kinds of care of children whether formal or informal.. When seeking parents' views and experiences of using childcare the researchers asked parents about the times that their children spent with other adults at home - including 'informal care such as grandparents, and formal care. The question covered times when the parents were working, as well as times when they were not (ibid.).

Not everyone appreciated the move towards integrated services for young children; some thought it would not meet the needs of young children (Full Time Mothers 1998). Others, like two-thirds of providers in Callendar's study (2000), avoided answering a question on whether they would be willing to offer additional services that would integrate care and education for young children. In agreement with Calder's notion that, 'Day nursery workers have tended to believe that cognitive development of the child belongs to nursery teachers and nursery education' (1990, p.253) Callendar (ibid.) surmised that perhaps participants accustomed to providing daycare could not conceive of the idea also

incorporating the education aspect into their provision. Taggart (2004) reports attempts made to bridge the divide between those providing care, education, and a combination of both. Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) (DfEE 2001) led by drawing up and implementing Strategic Plans to draw people with relevant expertise and knowledge together to facilitate integration (Careers and Occupational Information Centre 2000).

Callender (ibid.) utilised the literature, existing data, secondary data sources, interviews, focus groups, and a postal survey of 1,281 childcare providers to investigate not only barriers to the quality of provision but also take up of childcare places. Findings showed that Day nurseries provided more than a quarter of all childcare places. The smallest Day nursery provided seven places and the largest offered one hundred and fifty seven places for children up to the age of four years. Day nurseries, in particular, found staff terms and conditions 'the greatest obstacle to delivering quality care' (ibid. p.102). Not all practitioners have reasonable terms and conditions of employment. I therefore count these as 'reward' when I review literature pertaining to this issue. A further concern of some of the nurseries in Callendar's study was the 'ability to recruit suitably qualified and experienced staff' and the 'costs of training' (ibid. p.103). The perception that training costs are prohibitive is unfortunate as training and appropriate qualifications are vital for effective practice to enabling practitioners to fulfil their role. According to Rolfe (2003), some providers see training as optional. In 2.3 below, I will debate the implications of barriers to accessing training for practitioners.

Integration required a new type of early years practitioner who could provide care and education for young children, these educarers Rodd (1997) argues in Osgood (2004, p.20) should learn to become empowered and:

> …develop into intrinsically motivated, responsible and independent professionals, confident to take risks, engage in collaborative ventures and undertake reflective self-evaluation (Rodd 1997 in Osgood 2004, p.20).

Rodd contended educarers could then influence policies and create change rather than ignoring or abdicating responsibility to others to undertake on their behalf' (Osgood 2004, p.21). This argument resonates with the views and attitudes of respondents in my studies. Despite feeling powerless and therefore resignedly and resentfully accepting reforms to

which they felt opposed, there was strong evidence of a commitment to heighten professionalism and promote collaborative, socially responsible practice.

Regardless of the inception of the educare concept Hastings (2008) highlights the divide which exists between childcare (inclusive of education) [offered by early years practitioners in Day nurseries], and education [offered by teachers in nursery schools], as most teachers tend to be better trained and more highly qualified than early years practitioners in Day nurseries. The intertwining nature of care and education has implications for early years practitioners and teachers in terms of appropriateness of their education, training and qualifications, and experience in providing quality care and education for all children to reach the Early Learning Goals (Early Years Standards Team 2007; DCSF 2008) for example. The contribution of Brooker (2008, p.10) to the debate is that most practitioners and policy makers agree it is impossible to separate care from education, as children need both. Further, parents in a small-scale longitudinal study of the longer-term impact of families' involvement in Sure Start reported improved quality in services (Simms 2006). I assert that Children's Centres have led the way in helping to build working relationships between professionals from different services:

> Sure Start Children's Centres are leading the way with inter-professional co-operation. A superb example of this kind of co-operation, made possible only through inter-professional relationship building, may be seen where a Family Support Social Worker, Child and Family Workers, Playworkers, Speech and Language Assistant, Early Years Lead and Midwife in two Sure Start Children's Centre in Nottinghamshire, have built a strong team around the children and families in their area. This has resulted in parents recommending Family Social Work Support to one another (Simms 2006).

Summary

Nottingham was at the forefront of Day nursery provision in the 1930s. Since then, a transformation, begun in the late 1990s, has resulted in traditionally disparate childcare provision becoming integrated early years provision. This has greatly impacted practitioners in terms of their own education, training, qualifications, and experience required to provide educare alongside other professionals.

Integration is not without its challenges. However, ascertaining common understandings of terms such as 'childcare' has helped, as has dissemination of good practice found in Early Excellence Centres, Children's Centres and the like.

Having discussed what integration of care and education, and early years services means to practitioners, providers and some parents, I move on to explore ways in which 'quality' itself is and defined and understood.

2.2.4 Quality in Early Years and Childcare Provision
2.2.4.1 The quality debate

The quality debate came to the fore as part of a government drive to raise standards and improve quality of childcare provision (Office of Public Sector Information 1989) (in 1.1; 2.1). Practitioners may be empowered by understandings of quality; and more able to be proactive in taking their sector to a higher level. As well as various definitions and concepts of quality, an overabundance of ideas exists in relation to quality of interactions and experiences of, and between, staff, parents, and children. Within the early years sector quality is a concept that defies unanimous definition. Quality standards of provision and practice, although set, are baselines that are subject to interpretation by those whose duty is to attain them. The review of quality considers these ideas and their implications for practitioners in Day nurseries.

Tanner, Welsh and Lewis' (2006) conceptual model of quality places subjective and objective understandings of quality at either end of a continuum, along which may be placed varying perceptions of quality held by parents, practitioners and providers (Mooney and Munton 1998). Pence, Moss and Melhuish (1990) extol the significance of quality to the early learning experiences and development of young children in their paper 'Children's views on Quality Childcare', establishing the need for a coherent definition of 'quality' in childcare

(Pence and Moss 1994: Daycare Trust 1997; DfEE 2000; Melhuish 2004). The children consulted in the 1994 and 2004 studies described quality characteristics of the staff who worked with them in terms of [respectively], being caring, attentive, who like and respect children, who take time to listen, and are affectionate, responsive and readily available in adult-child interaction (DfES 2005; Daycare Trust 2004). Both these sets of quality indicators are quite different to the perspective on quality put forward by the government of the day.

Defining quality in its purest and most simple form, the *New Choice English Dictionary* refers to a degree of excellence or a high standard (Peter Haddock Limited 1997; Soanes and Hawker 2008). Both definitions of quality seemingly render the adjective 'good' redundant. Interchangeable usage of the terms 'quality', 'good quality' and 'high quality' is the norm. *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (DfES 1998) talks about 'good quality' care and education in the early years, which has been endorsed by successive commentators (Wallace 2008; Bryson, Kazimirski and Southwood 2006; La Valle and Smith 2009).

Whilst recognising high standards of early years provision and practice it may be relatively easy, reaching agreement on a definition of quality in context is more problematic. Inability to define or even conceptualise quality has caused concern and discrepancy in standards of childcare provision. Osgood and Sharp (2000) advised that individualised concepts of quality would not meet standards of provision required by the government in the twenty first century (Department for Education and Skills 2005). However, a single definition of what constitutes quality may not be achievable; as already mentioned, the baseline standard of 'good' has been set (Office of Public Sector Information 1989; Department of Health 1991; Office for Standards in Education 2001; Sure Start 2003; La Valle and Smith 2009). The National Quality Improvement Network (2007) stress that this is a minimum standard that providers must strive for; it is inseparable from issues such as training, qualifications, career progression, pay, retention, and status that are discussed later in this chapter.

Quality in early years provision is then a constructed concept, subjective in nature and based on values, beliefs and interests (Wallace 2008) 'rather than an objective universal reality' (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 1999, p.5). David at al. (2003, p.74) agrees that 'quality is

a value-laden concept, which makes comparisons, particularly those across national or cultural boundaries, difficult to interpret'.

> [Quality is] …reflected in the nature of the staff employed; the terms and conditions of employment; staff turnover; the attitudes and approach of the staff to care and education; levels of qualifications of staff; staff development; the staff and child ratios and the amenities provided (Callendar 2000, p.89).

According to Melhuish (2004, p.5) these are 'structural aspects' of quality - a reflection of quality in the working environment. Such a perception of quality does not set either a level or a standard to which staff, terms and conditions, turnover, qualifications, staff development, staff to child ratios or amenities should comply. Further, the definition appears to rely on the reader's preconceived notion of quality.

Not all perspectives on quality are conflicting ones; subjective aspects of quality Callendar (ibid.) identifies are similar to those of early years providers and parents (Daycare Trust 2004). More than half the parents surveyed by Melhuish (ibid.) agreed that the most important factors in the provision of high quality childcare are the presence of well trained, committed and well rewarded staff.

Overall, according to successive surveys of parents' perceptions of quality in early years and childcare services, views have remained positive over the last five years:

> Overall, 60% of parents thought that provision in their area was either 'very good' (19%) or 'fairly good' (41%). Around a tenth of parents (13%) had a poor opinion of the quality of local childcare provision - 9% said 'fairly poor' and 5% 'very poor' (DCSF 2009, p.81).

Trustworthiness and reliability amongst early years practitioners are further key indicators of quality provision. Whilst 'mistrust of quality' influences parents' choice of childcare (ibid. p.15) 'Where parents hold negative perceptions of quality they may choose

against going out to work in favour of caring for their child personally' (HM Treasury 2004, p.14). Regardless of the many perspectives on quality, all potentially influence the perspectives and practice of early years practitioners in Day nurseries.

An extensive review of the literature does not reveal a working definition of quality in the context of early years. The apparent avoidance of such a definition invites interpretation of quality from personal and professional perspectives. It can be argued that the standards set by the government to meet the challenge of providing 'good' quality childcare provision (as mentioned earlier) are subjective as they are not founded on a universal definition or understanding of quality. Nevertheless, there is agreement on how quality manifests itself within the sector; therefore, quality is tangible. Furthermore, reflections of quality, such as training, qualifications, reward, coincide with the requisites for professionalism.

> The quality of service provision for young children and their families varied enormously across localities and districts, with uncoordinated and patchy services being the norm in many areas (Glass 1999, p. 261).

Glass (ibid.) found high levels of qualified professionals staffing Early Excellence Centres (EECs.). Bertram and Pascal (2000; 2001) regarded EECs as exemplary for their high quality, integrated early childhood education, professional leadership and status raising qualities. Bertram and Pascal (2000, p. 80) also referred to the existence of inequalities in EECs such as 'diverse and sometimes inequitable' terms and conditions of work. Early years practitioners and students working in EECs were able to avail themselves of free on-site training supported by EYDCPs (DfEE 1999; Bertram 2001) which was credited with the ability to enhance professional competence and improvement of Day nurseries and other provision (Bertram and Pascal 2002); a concept endorsed by the DfES (2005). Rolfe et al (2003, p. 97) assert '… at the end of the day it is quality that is important and that is where a shift in culture is needed'. Rolfe (ibid.) suggests that increased diversity too would enrich the quality of children's experience. A survey of two hundred and fifty one registered Day nurseries carried out in between 1999 and 2000 Cameron, Owen and Moss (2001) found childcare students and practitioners are overwhelmingly young white women with an average age of twenty-four years.

Munton, McCullum and Rivers (2001, p.12) found a 'lack of awareness' in the 'implementation and use of quality improvement and quality assurance systems by Day

nurseries' in 1999. Day nursery practitioners were 'not getting involved in formal accreditation schemes on any great scale as yet'. I suggest that this was, in part, due to continued subjective perspectives of quality that may have hampered involvement. By 2003, fourteen Day nurseries were working towards 'Quality Counts', the quality assurance mark of the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA 2002) supported by the Nottingham City Early Years and Childcare Unit. Nottingham later developed its own 'Quality Kitemark' for nurseries and other childcare providers that aimed to encourage reflection and evaluation of practice and provision (Nottingham City Education Department 2005).

Responsibility for monitoring and regulating quality in the developing early years education and childcare sector was transferred in 2001 from Local Authorities to the Early Years Directorate (an arm of Ofsted) (Office for Standards in Education 2008); the change placed early years education and care 'under the power and responsibility of the education profession' (Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay 2005). Since then responsibility for monitoring, regulation and inspection of Day nurseries has remained within Ofsted. However, the composition of Ofsted itself continued to evolve with the aim of meeting the needs of all services for children, young people and families. In April 2007, as a requirement of *The Education and Inspection Act 2006* (Office for Public Sector Information 2006) Ofsted became the *Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills*, yet, as though to mask its many changes, the Ofsted acronym was retained. Complex change within Ofsted is beyond the parameters of my research, save to say that its responsibility to early years settings remains to ensure appropriate levels of quality of childcare provision in relation to current legislation and policy (Sure Start 2006). Most recently, Ofsted, in its desire to 'focus on the quality of provision in the early years sector', has outsourced the day-to-day inspection and registration of early years settings:

> These changes will bring greater value for money, giving Ofsted the ability to work in a more flexible way, better able to respond to the challenges of a changing national agenda while maintaining high standards of inspection. Over time, the outsourcing of day-to-day management of inspection will create opportunities for strong early years practitioners to train to inspect and to work closely with experienced inspectors and share good practice (Ofsted 2010).

The impact on Day nurseries of outsourcing regulation and inspection will be revealed over time. What is currently apparent is that '…opportunities for strong early years

practitioners to train to inspect [settings]…' may have future implications for the retention of early years practitioners in Day nurseries:

- the introduction of a new concept, that of a strong early years practitioner which needs defining

- a new progression route for early years practitioners to inspection

- loss of so-called strong early years practitioners to the sector who may otherwise have:
  - remained in settings as role models and helped raise quality of practice and provision
  - progressed to Early Years Professional Status
  - progressed to train other practitioners, for example in Further Education or Higher Education

There is potential here for further study to investigate the impact of these implications on retention of early years practitioners in Day nurseries.

Ninety four thousand registered childcare settings from the statutory, private, voluntary, and independent sectors provided good quality childcare in the UK between April 2003 and March 2005 (Office for Standards in Education 2005). The implications being that over half (at least forty seven thousand registered childcare settings) did not. These statistics do not serve the interests of raising the status of either childcare provision or its practitioners. The following year eleven hundred settings (inspected between April 2005 and June 2006) offered inadequate provision. This represented three percent of the total number of providers inspected. While this is a very small percentage, these figures represent a large number of children who were receiving less than adequate services and practitioners who were responsible for providing it. If only five practitioners per provider were employed in inadequate settings this would amount to over five thousand five hundred practitioners. In reality, most settings employ more than five practitioners. Second inspection by the Early Years Directorate, judged that most settings had recovered from their inadequate status to comply with the standards required of them. Ofsted dealt severely with those who had not. For instance, providers were encouraged to resign or their registration was cancelled (Office for Standards in Education 2006).

One reason for settings being judged 'inadequate' is staff shortages, that is, each member of staff employed is responsible for more children than is recommended under the 1989 Children Act (Department of Health 1991; HMSO 2004), meaning that they are less able to facilitate positive interactions and maintain a safe environment (Munton et al. 2002). Recommended ratios of staff to children in Day nurseries are:

- 1:3 babies and young children up two years of age
- 1:4 children between the ages of two and three
- 1:8 for children aged three to five years.

The danger of allowing provision to run without the full quota of staff puts everyone at risk. For example, the practicality of one practitioner carrying three babies to safety in the event of a fire is difficult. Further problems ensue if members of staff are required to ensure the safety of more children. Early years practitioners commonly quote the above ratio, However, The Guidance and Regulations to the Children Act declares that higher ratios of staff to children may be justified if staff are not qualified, are inexperienced, or if there are babies that need constant attention. Some practitioners may not be aware of the justification for staff to child ratios in Day nurseries. Owners, managers, and others in positions of leadership, are responsible overall for ensuring quality in their setting and thus safeguarding the wellbeing of children and staff.

2.2.4.2 Implications for practitioners

Moves to raise standards and improve the quality of childcare brought an unprecedented need for early years practitioners in the UK to comply with numerous constantly changing initiatives. Moss (2001) asserts that quality services depend on the people working in them – a notion somewhat overlooked in the earlier quest for quality under the National Standards for Daycare (Ofsted 2001). The standards focused more on resources and environments (Nursery Education 2001; Ofsted 2001; Sure Start 2003; Children's Workforce Network in England 2007) and on supporting children's learning and care in their earliest years (Office for Standards in Education 2001; Papatheodorou and Moyles 2008; DCSF 2009) than on practitioners themselves; nevertheless contributions to

the quality debate have culminated in the imposing of a prescriptive process for the attainment of quality, with wide-ranging effects on practitioners; all aspects of their work, and vocational preparation for it, are affected. Listed here are some of the changes which have been imposed upon practitioners for the sake of quality.

- Foundation Stage (QCA 2000; DCSF 2008) and Birth to three matters: A framework to support children in the earliest years (Abbott et al. 2002), both of which were later replaced by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfES 2005; Early Years Standards Team 2007).
- Every Child Matters (DfES 2003)
- Every Child Matters: Next steps (DfES 2004)
- The Children Act 2004 (HMSO 2004)
- Children's Workforce Strategy: A strategy to build a world-class workforce for children and young people (DfES 2005),
- Childcare Bill (DfES 2005)

Each time something new is introduced practitioners are expected to update their knowledge in order to comply. Compliance with knowledge and understanding is, I suggest, most beneficial to practitioners who then know why they are doing what they are doing. Practitioners are then equipped with the appropriate tools with which to attain the desired. Potentially one way to gain new understanding is through training. It could entail observing others whose practice is already implement in accordance with the changes. Experiencing first hand the impact of particular policies on provision and practice may equip and empower practitioners. However, such involvement depends on Day nurseries firstly seeing the need, secondly releasing staff and thirdly encouraging practitioners to execute new practice.

No clear definition of quality is available to practitioners amongst the policy and practice documentation. This leaves practitioners open to imposing their own perceptions of quality reflected in, for example, the structural aspects (above) of the nature staff employed, conditions of employment, attitudes and approach of staff, levels of qualifications and staff development and staff to child ratios (above). Further, these perceptions may or may not be compatible with those of the Day nursery.

This situation may explain in part Penn's observation of evidence of varied levels of quality across the sector:

> Whilst quality of the private [for profit] sector is very variable, the poorest provision is to be found in the private sector, and the most reliable in the state sector (Penn 2009, p.30).

This is not to say that a clear definition of quality would alleviate the problem, indeed not, as it too would be subject to argument. However, in the absence of clarification the discerning practitioner may take solace thus: although National Standards (Ofsted 2001) and its successor the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF 2008) set minimum requirements for quality provision and practice, if taken only as the intended quality baseline, practitioners may be instrumental in bringing about continual improvement in their workplace. In the example of Early Years Excellence Centres (above) professional leadership, enhanced status and competence were characteristics present with high quality; the implication being that, in effect, early years practitioners are in a position to be able to restore their own reputation (in 2.6.1).

There are possible assumptions about practitioners who work in poor quality Day nurseries. One is that practitioners are entirely responsible for poor quality provision; another, that all practitioners in poor quality settings are poor quality themselves. These assumptions do practitioners a disservice. Many factors influence quality, not least the values and ethics of the leadership (in 2.6). Even so, Ofsted closure of consistently poor quality provision implicates staff and affects retention.

Summary

Provision, whilst running to some extent on individual perspectives of quality, still needs to meet the various quality perspectives of its users, i.e. children and parents, but a common definition of quality does not exist amongst them. Practitioners are at the forefront of service implementation and susceptible to differences in understandings of quality. If viewed as minimum standards to be improved, practitioners may enhance the quality and reputation of themselves and their setting.

2.3 Education and Training for Early Years Practitioners

2.3.1 Integrated education and training

Prior to the radical overhaul of recent years, it is fair to say that a miscellaneous assortment of training and qualifications was the norm (Ball 1994). Ball (ibid.) and Anning (1999) recognise a link between the appropriate training and childcare. Ball's perspective is that inadequate training is unacceptable; like Bowlby (1966), he was of the opinion that inadequate childcare may lead a child to disaffection and delinquency in later years. Anning (1999) perceived that early years practitioners who are educated and trained to a sufficiently high standard are an asset to quality of provision that supports children's education and care. This notion of sufficiency in terms of training and education has changed – and is still changing – in pursuit of quality and integration across the sector. I use the literature in this section to review the recent 'radical overhaul' of early years education and training in terms of some of the effects it had on practitioners, not as a debate on the pros and cons of different qualifications.

If, as Melhuish (2004, p.7) suggests, '…children who attend higher-quality childcare provision make better academic progress…' and 'higher quality' is a product of sufficiently trained and educated practitioners, it can be argued that practitioners' training and education affects children's academic progress; therefore making worthwhile a thorough examination of education, training and qualifications for early years practitioners.

The EYNTO (2001) identified different qualifications and levels of qualification within the occupational group mentioned earlier (in 2.2.2). This made possible, for the first time, comparisons of qualifications across the sector by highlighting similarities and differences in training and qualifications required for particular job roles. In some cases, lack of parity created difficulties for practitioners wishing to move to new jobs where their current training or qualifications were insufficient. For example, training for playgroup staff encouraged children to learn through play, training for Day nursery staff supported care and development of young children and training for practitioners in nursery schools placed the emphasis on education. Parity and integration was resolved somewhat through modular or unitised early years training programmes. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are a case in point. Accreditation of prior experience and learning (APEL) enabled practitioners to incorporate what they already knew with new learning sufficient for the job in hand.

Accreditation required a new framework of qualifications (Office of Public Sector Information 2007).

In 1998, Abbott and Pugh recognised that to prepare early years practitioners for the changes ahead they needed a pathway of progression to appropriate training and qualifications. Subsequently, the development of the 'climbing frame' model (QCA 1998) - on which were placed a range of endorsed qualifications (Abbot and Pugh 1998) - made possible the comparison of qualifications needed for different jobs. Furthermore, it enabled practitioners to identify potential progression routes.

Even after the introduction of the climbing frame, the guide to qualifications for work with young children issued by the Department for Education and Skills (2004) included nineteen different job roles, eighteen corresponding qualifications, and five different levels. At least six different awarding bodies accredited the qualifications. This gives some indication of the potential for bewilderment of people who may be considering working with children. Qualifications that survived various debates and reviews (QCA 1998; Murphy 2000; Nursery Education 2001; Sure Start 2004; QCA 2008) for inclusion in the framework underwent further review to establish a common core of skills needed by everyone who works with children (DfES 2005).

The Children's Workforce Development Council (2006) advocate that achieving a progressing career is potentially more feasible than was previously the case, with the introduction of a generic training and qualification units in 2010. This Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF) aims is to support integration of services, practice, and qualifications across the entire children's workforce. However, the Children's Workforce Development Council (ibid.) foresees one of the consequences of this advancement is the potential for practitioners to leave lower paying settings in favour of higher paying settings. The framework of qualifications is not static; refinement continues (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2008).

The identification of occupational groups and practitioners within early years and childcare provision, and the refining of qualification and training were antecedents to strategies for developing practitioners into a workforce (Moss 2006). Traditionally, as we have seen, people who worked with children were many, but they were not perceived as a

workforce. The idea of an early years workforce *per se* is a more recent phenomenon. The literature reviewed suggests that *early years workforce* is the current collective term for practitioners who work with young children in the UK (DfES 2005, p. 26; Moss 2003). The workforce concept appears to relate to developing frameworks for, and taking steps towards, integration of services and qualifications and training to achieve common goals, rather than encouraging the practitioners themselves to meet, develop and grow together as a *force*. A 'force' implies strength and power, whilst a workforce is more a group of employees. The move towards one workforce is another example of practitioners being 'done to', rather than being 'proactive in' taking a stance to unite themselves into a body of experts and professionals in their field. However, the prospect of practitioners finding empowerment within the workforce is potentially more likely than was previously the case when each setting was autonomous and practitioners isolated.

For development of the early years workforce to be successful there was a need for shared understanding of the terms used to describe people who work with young children in Day nurseries and other types of provision. The generic job title 'Early Years Practitioner' has become interchangeable with the former titles given to people who work with children in Day nurseries, such as 'nursery worker' and 'nursery nurse'. After several years of phasing out the nursery nurse job title it reappeared in the policy document *The Children's Plan Building brighter futures* (DCSF 2007, p.31) which provided the framework for a further ten-year plan of reform for fully integrated services for children and families. It is debatable whether early years practitioners consider themselves as such; sector e-forums such as Nursery World 'Have Your Say' (used in my research) finds practitioners commonly referring to themselves as *nursery nurses*. Nevertheless, shared understandings of the terms used to describe people who work with young children in Day nurseries, and other types of provision, are helpful to the transition towards integrated education and training of the early years workforce.

2.3.2 Perspectives of education and training

Bertram and Pascal (1999, p. 38) noted that 'At least half of all UK childcare staff were working without the benefit of specialist training for the job'. According to Cameron, Owen and Moss (2001) one-fifth of staff who led registered private and voluntary Day nurseries between 1999 and 2000 had no relevant qualifications; one third of all staff in other types of childcare provision were not appropriately qualified. When Callender (2000) carried

out her investigation of 1,281 childcare providers (in 2.2.2.) of which three hundred and seventy one were Day nurseries, eighty percent of staff were qualified to work unsupervised with young children. Despite a general lack of training and qualifications, Cameron, Owen and Moss (2001) identified a high degree of commitment to childcare work and high levels of job satisfaction (in 2.4 Reward).

Lack of, or low levels of, qualifications are blamed for provision inadequacy (2.2.3). When early years practitioners have no, or low, qualifications it does not necessarily imply lack of intelligence or initiative. The inference could be that have not yet undertaken the required training, or had the opportunity to acquire the specialised knowledge and skills sufficient for their role. Lack of qualifications may be due to an inability to achieve in a particular area. Thus, delivering certain educational aspects required in contemporary childcare provision, for example, may be challenging. Such a practitioner is unlikely to present a professional approach to educating the child but may well be highly professional in terms of caring for the child.

However, as Paige-Smith and Craft (2008) contend in Waller (2009, p.204):

> … if only the most highly qualified are described as professional, what does that say about other working in related subsidiary roles? Are they at best para-professional (such as paramedics) or non-professional workers and at worst un-professional? No-one who takes their job seriously, whatever their role or status, would wish to be described as unprofessional, so a corollary of professionalization of the workforce must be promotion of a professional and reflective approach across all job roles and levels within the sector, not just at graduate leadership level (Smith and Craft 2008 in Waller 2009, p.204).

Munton (2001) and Melhuish (2004) affirm Ball's (1994) assertion that effective and continuous training leads to good quality provision, and quality perceived to be a consequence of integration education and care, training and qualifications and services. However, the insistence on an integrated qualification for all early years practitioners may present an obstacle to progression and retention. Further, it may result in the exclusion of practitioners who are unable to achieve in every aspect – and at the level - required of them.

The possibility of quality enhancement arising from integration of practitioners whose expertise is either education or care is not a feature of current plans to progress the sector.

Munton (2001) and Melhuish (2004) further argue that the existence of poor quality childcare and poor staff training and qualifications are self-perpetuating (Figure 1: Self-perpetuating poor quality/poor staff training and qualifications).

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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│     Poor quality childcare provision │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Poor staff training and qualifications │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
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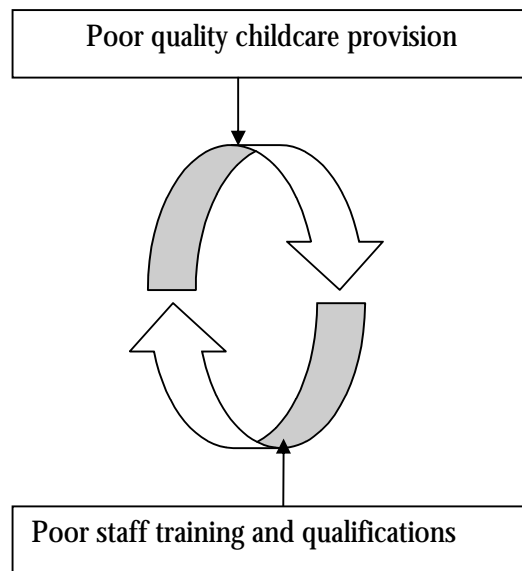
Figure 1: Self-perpetuating poor quality/poor staff training and qualifications

The opposite is so; the existence of quality childcare and sufficiently training and qualified practitioners is potentially self-perpetuating, as one learns from and facilitates development of another. This may be the kind of environment envisaged in the implementation not only of the educare concept, but also of the drive towards professional practice in the sector.

The literature reviewed reveals no objection to professional behaviour being manifest amongst practitioners. However, there is disagreement concerning professionalisation of the workforce:

> …the current process of professionalising the early years workforce is alienating practitioners and skewing efforts to drive up quality of service. This is manifested in the

> complaints about the dominance of paperwork over direct
> work with children and of qualifications over broader skills
> and experience (Cooke and Lawton 2008).

From this perspective, direct contact with children by skilled and experienced practitioners appears to be preferred over professionalisation of the sector, but the two are interconnected and must exist together if the workforce is to retain its practitioners.

2.3.3 Implications for practitioners

The parallel notions that insufficient training impedes quality of provision and practice (Callender 2000; Munton 2001) (in 2.2.2; 2.2.3) is endorsed by Bertram *et al.* (2002, p.12) who claim that access to 'increasing levels of training and professional development' benefit practitioners as qualification levels and quality of provision are improved. Regardless of the connections between qualifications, training and quality provision both Callender and Munton (ibid.) found that practitioners have little opportunity to train due to the prohibitive costs and time. Further, David *et al.* (2003, p.10) advocate practitioners cannot 'fulfil their important role' when denied access to education and training. Moreover, they call for:

> policies which enable the recruitment of only those who will
> be committed practitioners, and to enable access to training
> (David *et al.* 2003, p.149).

Not all who avail themselves of training opportunities actually enter the sector (Cameron, Owen and Moss 2001). Neither are education and training alone sufficient to ensure retention; this state David *et al.* (2003) requires change of policy relating to conditions of service.

There is broad recognition in the sector that appropriately qualified early years practitioners are an asset to Day nurseries and 'training is widely recognised as promoting retention' (Rolfe 2005, p.59). Nevertheless, acquisition of vocational qualifications is problematic for some providers and it is common for practitioners to undertake additional training in their own time with little incentive in terms of status and pay (Cooke 2008).

> Vocational qualifications were generally seen to principally
> benefit the worker by enhancing their future job prospects.
> .Many providers were reluctant to pay for such training,
> unless subsidised by their EYDCP and staff were rarely
> allowed to attend courses or to do course work in working

hours. Consistent with employers' views, staff undertaking vocational training were usually motivated by the prospect of finding a more senior post elsewhere, often because of limited opportunities with their current employer (Rolfe 2005, p.60).

Skills for Business (2007, p.4) called for 'greater investment and transparency in the system of training and qualifications' and more support for employees and employers to gain the skills needed to provide quality childcare (DCSF 2006). Enhanced opportunities for practitioners to train and gain further qualifications – moves which were intended first and foremost to help raise the status of work with children, and the quality of provision and practice, so that children's levels of achievement would be enhanced – are no doubt beneficial. Facilitating practitioners' access to training and qualifications is vital. The *Every Child Matters* agenda is concerned with monitoring progress (DCSF 2009).

Rolfe (2003) expressed concern that the QCA mapping of job roles to qualification levels, defining of progression pathways and quality improvements had come too late for academically minded girls who had already chosen different career options outside of childcare. This exacerbated the problem of poor staff and therefore poor quality provision. Nonetheless qualified and experienced practitioners, previously limited in their progression choices, are now encouraged to undertake an Early Years Foundation Degree and Early Childhood Studies Degree (Snape, Parfrement and Finch 2007; O'Keefe, 2004; Sure Start 2004). This claims Hastings (2008) is a positive step that will encourage a level of professionalism in early years practice and practitioners (Osgood 2004; Nurse 2007). Importantly, costs – which were identified as a barrier to practitioners accessing training, may be alleviated due to the government's funding of supply cover as part of its strategy to ensure a graduate leader in every setting by 2015 (DCSF 2007, p.10; DCSF 2009).

Whilst, in theory, a new progression pathway exists for early years practitioners to attain EYPS there is not yet a training pathway for Level 3 practitioners to attain Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). Therefore, acquisition of this elite status excludes the majority of the early years workforce in Day nurseries who are qualified to Level 3.

Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) and its standards are set at graduate level. Only those who demonstrate these Standards will be awarded of EYPS. Furthermore, all candidates will need to hold at least Level 5 qualification before undertaking one of the training pathways for EYPS.

> Over time, CWDC will look at pathways to EYPS for those
> with Level 3 qualifications and significant relevant experience
> (CWDC 2010).

Whilst some practitioners who achieve EYPS will already be working in Day nurseries, others will not. The implication being that many experienced and qualified practitioners will be 'led' by a colleague with EYPS whose experience of professional practice is limited. Ideally, colleagues at all levels will pool their knowledge and experience to enhance their own and one another's practice. However, in agreement with Muijs *et al.* and Rodd (2004; 2006) I suggest that there are implications for Level 3 practitioners currently in positions of leadership and management. By virtue of 'exclusion', these practitioners may resent the privileged positioning in the sector of those who hold EYPS. Development of an EYPS pathway for Level 3 practitioners will take time. Until then practitioners who desire to maintain their leading role must undertake and successfully complete a degree – whilst they are working. Not all of these practitioners will want to reach degree level; others may not have the opportunity or academic ability to do so.

Summary

There is agreement in the literature that trained practitioners are essential to quality provision. Findings suggest that access to increased levels of training and professional development is beneficial to practitioners, provision and the education and care of young children. Access to higher-level training required for leadership and management of Day nurseries and other provision may ease due to the funding of supply cover. This should enable providers to release practitioners for training.

Parity of qualifications and levels of qualification, and the notion of sufficiency for different job roles, may impede progression of some and facilitate it for others. Refinement of appropriate qualifications is brought up to date with the new *Integrated Qualifications Framework* (IQF). If IQR qualifications are the only ones permitted for work with children then access to, and support for, training to gain these qualifications is imperative, not only for practitioners to do their job properly, but also to aid retention. Conflicting perceptions of EYPS leadership may challenge staff teams in Day nurseries and other settings. Potentially, the situation may ease if the intimated progression pathways to EYPS for Level 3 materialises.

2.4 Skills

2.4.1 Skills for quality through integration

There is 'compelling evidence' to suggest that highly skilled practitioners are the decisive ingredient for improving quality (Cooke and Lawton 2008, p.6). The literature emphasises the relationship between skills and quality and identifies the difficulties of defining 'skills' in early years. Work with young children requires the use and acquisition of a range of skills, made more diverse since integrated working became the way forward for attaining (in 2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3 2.3). The acquisition and use the so-called Common Core Skills for integrated working (in Implications for practitioners later in this section) is additional to proficiency in universal skills, such as communication (with colleagues, parents and children) and job specific skills like nappy changing.

2.4.2 Perspectives of 'skills'

Skills identified by fifty-three practitioners who participated in a study to 'explore issues around work motivations, pay, training and career aspirations' (Cooke and Lawton 2008, p.6.) include the following:

- patience
- a caring attitude
- flexibility
- understanding of children's development
- confidence in dealing with parents
- emotional resilience

It may be argued that most of these 'skills' actually describe essential qualities or characteristics for work with children and that demonstrating some of the qualities, patience, caring attitude, flexibility and resilience for example, on a daily basis, is a skill to be acquired. Moreover, I suggest that whilst practitioners themselves may be self-assured, confidence in dealing with parents - or other aspects of the job - grows with knowledge of the job and ability to perform it well.

Cooke and Lawton (2008, p.25) describe the above attributes as being 'beyond formal qualifications' (indeed participants portray them as such). The acquisition of practitioners' understanding of, for example, child development – to the degree required for work with children, rather than bringing up one's own children – tends to be through experience underpinned by training and qualifications. Some participants suggested that manifestation of skills was not dependent on qualifications and that actually, some highly qualified practitioners in the study may not display these skills as well as some less qualified ones.

Brophy (2004 p. 185) refers to Cszentmihalyi's (1993) concept of intrinsic motivation that 'emphasize[s] our subjective experiences during task engagement' suggesting that 'becoming absorbed in a task …can occur' when the 'challenges [of the task] are well matched to our current knowledge and skills'. The implications for early years practitioners are debated in the following section.

2.4.3 Implications for practitioners

Job specifications for early years practitioners tend to link 'skills' together with, for example, 'abilities' or 'interests', as demonstrated below by the extract from a typical early years practitioners job specification on the Nursery World website:

SKILLS AND ABILITIES

- Good organisational skills
- Excellent communication skills
- Ability to record actions and interventions accurately and legibly
- Ability to maintain confidentiality
- Basic IT skills
- Ability to work on own initiative

(Nursery World 2010)

The words 'skill' and 'ability' are linked but not interchangeable; a practitioner may have the ability to plan activities, but not have learnt the skill. Practice generally facilitates better performance of the skill. Subject to individual ability, one practitioner may develop expertise in a particular skill whilst another perform the adequately. If as Brophy (2004) implies intrinsic motivation may lead to practitioners being absorbed in skills that do not challenge them beyond what they perceive they are able to accomplish, increased opportunities to develop intrinsic motivation will not only enhance the professional status of practitioners (Rodd 1997; Osgood 2004 in 2.2.2.) but also develop expertise in a wider range of skills. This applies to practitioners in my study whose skills are practical and child-orientated. When expected to undertake tasks they feel less proficient in or less motivated to do – that interrupt contact with the children – practitioners tend to complain. Excessive paperwork is a typical example of such a task.

Skills acquisition may depend on the learning environment. The importance to practitioners' professional development of fertile learning environments for developing skills is emphasised by Moyles et al (2002) in Parker-Rees and Willan (2006, p. 306) below:

> … a vast and complex array of skills, attributes and characteristics are required for early years practitioners and these are developed in the context of sound underpinning management structures which systematically support the

professional development of practitioners whose initial and continuing train opportunities may be either limited or ad hoc (Moyles et al 2002).

I referred in my introduction (in 1.1) to a dictionary definition of a 'profession' as being 'a paid occupation, vocation or calling requiring training and formal qualifications' (Oxford Dictionaries 2008) and 'the acquisition of specialised knowledge and skills' (Merriam-Webster 2010). The range of knowledge and skills broadens with each change in policy. For example, an early years practitioners' typical working day reportedly involves dealing with a large quantity of paperwork required by Local Authorities (Early Years Foundation Stage Forum 2008) in order to comply with many changes brought in to support children's learning and care. Participants in Rolfe's study (2003, p.67) indicated:

> This was a negative feature of the job even if their employer allowed time to do it at work. Such tasks were seen as reducing time which could be spent with the children and therefore seen to have a negative impact on the quality of care (Rolfe 2003, p.67).

The following quote indicated agreement with Rolfe's findings:

> There is evidence to suggest that the current process of professionalising the early years workforce is alienating practitioners and skewing efforts to drive up the quality of services. This is manifested in complaints about the dominance of paperwork over direct work with children and of qualifications over broader skills and experience (Cooke and Lawton 2008, p.7).

The findings raise questions about professionalism and implementation of policy changes (Cooke and Lawton 2008). One recommendation put forward (ibid., p. 36) was the convening of Early Years Practitioner Boards as a 'vehicle for employee voice in policy development and implementation at all levels'. There is a deeper issue here; it is the question of what practitioners themselves can do to overcome any sense of powerlessness, whilst effectively accommodating change.

A further set of specialised skills the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge also exists for the early years workforce (CWDC 2010). Practitioners need to acquire and demonstrate

these too. There are six different categories in the Common Core of Skills element, each with sub-categories as follows:

- Effective communication with children and young people and families
  - Listening and building empathy (10 skills)
  - Summarising and explaining (4 skills)
  - Consultation and negotiation (7 skills)

- Child and young person development
  - Observation and judgement (10 skills)
  - Empathy and understanding (4 skills)

- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children
  - Relate, recognise and take considered action 8 skills)
  - Communication, recording and record keeping (3 skills)
  - Personal skills (5 skills)

- Supporting transitions
  - Identify transitions (3 skills)
  - Provide support (8 skills)

- Multi-agency working
  - Communication and teamwork (6 skills)
  - Assertiveness (5 skills)

- Sharing information
  - Information handling (4 skills)
  - Clear communication (2 skills)
  - Engagement (3 skills)

The explicit nature of the Common Core of Skills makes it a potential 'template' for the preparation of job specifications that match the actual requirements for practitioners in early years workforce. Being able to perform proficiently the skills expected of one's profession implies professionalism (Brock 2006) but there are other considerations, such as already mentioned by participants in Cooke and Lawton's study. The manner and attitude of these practitioners, in behaving professionally, is distinct from 'being a professional' with the accompanying 'status, reward, public recognition of the profession (Helsby 1996 p.138).

Specific tasks required of early years practitioners to facilitate children's learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF 2008), are outlined in The Occupational Summary Sheet for All Early Years Workers in Day Nurseries (CWDC 2008) which is underpinned by the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 (UK Parliament 2006; Early Years Standards Team

2007). Roles and responsibilities prior to the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage align loosely to these specific tasks.

There appears to be more for practitioners to do under the new system. However, the effects of changes mentioned at the beginning of the chapter have been gradually incorporated in to long the working day, The Occupational Summary Sheet for All Early Years Workers in Day Nurseries reflects these changes. Hence, rather than enforcing total and sudden change upon early years practitioners, their roles and responsibilities have gradually drifted from what they were under the national daycare standards to what they are under the new requirement of the EYFS.

Summary

The sector is inconsistent in its use of the word 'skills', sometimes confusing 'skills' with 'abilities' and 'qualities'. Holding a qualification is not necessarily synonymous with the ability to perform a particular skill. Contrary to these opinions, I have used the literature to argue the importance to practitioners' professional development of fertile learning environments to develop what Moyles et al (2002) refer to as '…a vast and complex array of skills, attributes and characteristics…' A glimpse of this 'vast and complex array' (ibid.) is seen in Common Core of Skills element of Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the early years workforce (CWDC 2010). Acquiring the skills and evidencing the ability to perform the skills to a professional standard is usually through the gaining of an award or qualification.

Practitioners who combine professional manner and attitude with demonstrable skills at the required professional level are an asset to Day nurseries and deserving of the status, reward, and public recognition of being a professional. A workforce that functions at the professional standard required of it is deserving of a pay on a par with other professionals in comparable roles. I take up the issue of pay later in the chapter (in 2.8 Reward).

2.5 Autonomy
2.5.1 Current debate and implications for practitioners

The dividing up of the physical space in Day nurseries in to a number of different rooms/areas/units to accommodate the needs of babies, toddlers, and pre-school children (Ofsted 2001), means that an autonomous early years practitioner is required to

lead/supervise staff members in each area. Each leader/supervisor must be qualified to Level 3 or above (the level at which a practitioner has the ability to perform the skills required for independent and autonomous working). Skilled and autonomous practitioners are equipped to act as role models for staff in their unit. Whether or not they are prepared for leadership is contentious. Autonomy asserts Williams (2002, p.194) is a result of 'successful training'. According to the DfES (2005), the need for quality leadership from professionally mature leaders who value and respect the work of early years and childcare practitioners has been, to some extent, neglected. As already mentioned, EYPS aims to tackle this neglect, but from a limited perspective. The broader approach is to recognise autonomy as an obvious precursor to leadership and enable urgent access to appropriate training for the majority of practitioners who are not graduates, but are room leaders who are 'consulted as experts' with 'knowledge and expertise (Brock 2009, p.5).

Autonomy is then, the norm rather than the expectation in Day nurseries. Autonomous practitioners are fundamental to the existence of the sector. Whilst Cameron, Mooney and Moss (2002 p.579) finds childminders enjoying their autonomy because of their ability '…to exercise some control over how they work ….', Brock (2003) reports practitioners in nurseries 'losing opportunities to be creative and autonomous professionals' as a consequence of the 'filtering down' to early years provision of 'stresses to meet the demands [to implement the National Curriculum]'. Moss' contribution to the debate (2006) is that 'increasing regulation of managerial regimes' erodes 'the professional value of autonomy'. Studies of Human Resource management assert that participation at the planning stage accommodates the emotions and leads to job satisfaction:

> When workers area allowed a greater degree of autonomy in
> how the work is carried out, the emotional aspect of work
> can be a source of job satisfaction (Carroll et al 2008).

Further, Carroll et al. (2008, p.61) suggest that 'Childcare work has a high emotional content' and that 'behaviour and appearance when interacting …are seen as 'crucial', particularly in jobs that are 'typically performed by women'. The emotional aspect of the work can be a source of job satisfaction (in 2.7 Rewards) when similar values are expressed in the workplace, but potentially problematic when values are contrary (in 2.6.2). According to Munton et al (2002) anger arose when practitioners were dissatisfied with their job or did not have good relationships with their supervisors.

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The demands of familiarisation with, and implementation of, the Early Years Foundation Stage and other changes, suggests that practitioners have little time for reflecting on their practice, which according to Connor and Wheeler (2006, p.6) '… promotes autonomous learning and aims to develop understanding and critical thinking skills'.

Cooke and Lawton (2008) suggest that early years practitioners have a limited understanding of how to expand their horizons into the wider children's workforce. It is customary for career progression to denote a move into management. A typical route is from unqualified trainee, to assistant practitioner, then qualified practitioner, followed room leader/supervisor or manager with two years post-qualifying experience. However, more recently there is potential for providers to ask for higher levels of qualification seemingly opening up more opportunities for practitioners who hold them (Skills for Business 2007). This gives the appearance that career progression is only for the more highly qualified practitioners. Similarly, larger organisations are, by nature, more likely to have opportunities for career progression than smaller organisations; again giving the appearance that career progression is limited, this time for practitioners who want to work in larger organisations. Such perceptions are endorsed by EYFS and in agreement with Cooke and Lawton (ibid.) I suggest there is potential for practitioners leave if the next step of the ladder is not vacant. The impact on retention of the requirement on Day nurseries to position Early Years Professionals on the top rung of the ladder – particularly externally appointed ones - is a topic for further research as evidence eventually becomes available.

The last time policy change so radically affected practitioners' progression was perhaps, at the beginning of the century; with the introduction of integrated education and care (in 2.2.2). Some practitioners who desired to progress into other types of settings needed to update their knowledge and skills (Sure Start 2004). Then, new thinking around quality practitioners did not necessarily equate to length of service. Such thinking caused contention amongst some, for example, playgroup workers who were notoriously dedicated in the long-term and those who held the Diploma in Playgroup Practice (DPP). It was not their long-term dedication and commitment that was in question, but rather whether they were abreast of current practice, which required knowledge and understanding of compliance with anti-discriminatory practice, equality of opportunity, child protection, health and safety, curriculum planning and early learning goals. Playgroup leaders, although autonomous, qualified and experienced were not permitted under the new regime to work

unsupervised in a Day nursery until they complied with the qualification requirements of the day.

A tendency to overlooking the needs of autonomous practitioners does not itself prevent practitioners in Day nurseries from progressing up the career ladder. However access to leadership of settings has been barred to those practitioners who – for any reason – area unable to gain Early Years Professional Status.

Summary

Autonomy is at the heart of early years practice. The sub-division of the physical Day nursery environment - to meet the different needs of children - requires autonomous practitioners who can take the lead. These practitioners are fundamental to the existence of the sector.

Typically, narrow understandings of progression have prevented practitioners from broadening their horizons into the wider workforce (Cooke and Lawton 2008). Often, early years practitioners aspire to management in their setting and may leave if the position is not available.

Perspectives on progression are changing. Settings are recruiting more highly qualified practitioners. Length of service a criteria for leadership in the past is seemingly now inadequate for leading Day nurseries. The impacts of these changes on retention are issues for future research.

2.6 Values
2.6.1 Current debate
Reviewed in this section is literature pertaining to early years practitioners feeling undervalued, and nursery work and its workers being 'seen as low status/undervalued' (CWDC 2006, p.29). Beginning from the standpoint that values are 'Principles or standards of behaviour' (Oxford Dictionary 2008) that are palpable in Day nurseries and influence 'what we do and how we do it' (Haydon 2007, p.9) us in what we do.

Values reflect in many ways. For example commitment – to and from practitioners and providers, their attitudes to work, workplace and one another, the nursery environment and approach to children's care and education and training opportunities, as well as status and reward. The list is
not exhaustive.

Part of current debate on values is the issue of who should work with young children. I explore some of the values that potentially have resulted in the majority of early years practitioners in the UK being able bodied women (in 2.2.1). I summarise these now in two groups referring to them as Values of society concerning work with young children and Values of men concerning work with young children.

Values of society concerning work with young children:

Early years settings should employ women and be vigilant if employing men a generalised view exists of childcare being something that that women do is still prevalent. Today's parents, childcare tutors and students are not averse to men working with young children but think the number of allegations of child abuse would increase and are concerned that the presence of more men in the workforce would have a negative impact on women's opportunities to progress.

Values of men concerning work with young children:

It is less acceptable for men to work in early years settings than to care for their own children at home, although men share more of the childcare at home than was previously the case, they are not necessarily choosing to work with children. More women than men tend to choose childcare as a career. Whilst few men see work with young children as career progression from fatherhood some choose childcare as a career the second time around. Opinions vary on whether or not men should work with young children. It is more acceptable for men to work with older children. (Most of the 1-2% of male childcare workers in Britain works with older children).

Values are apparent in Day nurseries. Research shows that it is not women, but mainly white able-bodied women who are able-bodied. The question of why Day nurseries do not generally employ anyone other than able-bodied has remained largely unanswered. Nevertheless principles are held concerning disabled people and work with young children – if anecdotal.

Such principles are apparent in documentation concerning recruitment of students seeking EYPS states that candidates must be physically and mentally fit:

In selecting the experienced candidates for the validation pathway, phase one training providers are required to ensure candidates meet the following entry requirements:

> • be physically and mentally fit to work as an Early Years Professional (CWDC 2006, p.16).

Disability does not necessarily equate to lack of fitness as ability does not always equate to physical or mental fitness. My concerns are that the requirement to be 'physically and mentally fit' will be broadly interpreted as a principle that people who are disabled can not work with young children in a leadership capacity or even at all with young children. However, where values are inclusive, seeing potential in men women and men of all cultures, there is potential for a diverse workforce, which better represents the different cultures of children in Day nurseries.

Values then, held by all who have an interest in Day nurseries, impact on early years practitioners' work and workplace. Values are apparent in Day nurseries and influence retention. There is wide spread support for the principle that early years setting should employ able-bodied women and be cautious when considering employing men. I use the literature in the following section to introduce the notion of values that are compatible, conflicting and replicable.

2.6.2 Values: Replicable, Compatible and conflicting

Day nurseries see to recruit who agree with and will replicate the values therein. Whether externally or internally appointed early years practitioners will be required to adhere to the principles and standards of behaviour in the setting. To 'recruit in [one's] own image is a 'safe bet' Brown, Hesketh and Williams (2004, p.11). Depending on practitioners' perceptions of the expression of values in the workplace, replication may enhance retention or increase loss (in 2.6.1). To illustrate the point, when a Day nursery functions in an environment of trust and mutual respect a practitioner with similar values will work to sustain it. Conversely, a Day nursery that is lead in an authoritarian manner may encourage replication of the leadership style in practitioners who agreed with these values. Researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders also influence retention with their values.   Values like quality (in 2.2.3), are subjective in nature. Values then influence retention; are subjective in nature; are replicable.

Values and ethics, 'the moral principles governing or influencing conduct' (ibid.) should be clearly defined to facilitate effective leadership and management in early years settings and help 'ensure staff like-mindedness' (Moyles 2006, p.66). Staff like-mindedness - or compatibility of values - is desirable for retention. Brock reiterates Moyles concept of values compatibility thus:

> Sharing of a similar ideology based on appropriate knowledge, education and experience … Beliefs in principles for appropriate provision that meets the children's and families' needs (Brock 2009, p.5).

Whether of not values held by practitioners are compatible or conflicting with those of their managers, employers, and parents and wide-ranging outside influences, such as government policy, is important to the quality of the working day. Practitioners are more likely to feel valued when the value placed upon certain aspects pertaining to themselves and their practice is equal to, or exceeds their own expectations. Too often practitioners report feeling undervalued. Later in this section, I use the literature to consider this in terms of the conflicting value placed on early years practitioners' qualifications.

Overwhelmingly women rather than men work with children. The values expressed by the childcare tutors and students above are from a mainly female perspective. Whilst overall, the values expressed are that work with young children is for women and men, men themselves appear not to prefer working with young children. It is possible to reason then, that in these studies at least, men believe that women should work with children. I go on to explain reasons why holding these values affects diversity of the workforce and is a retention issue.

Deeply entrenched male values, and female reservations on who should work with young children mean that recruiting men in Day nurseries is a challenge; this in turn means that '…give[s] the sector an image of a low valued workforce' (CWDC 2006 iii). For example, in year one, quarter four, of the recruitment campaign the majority of enquiries received in Nottingham City Early Years and Childcare Unit were from women (Simms 2001). One hundred and seventy three women and sixteen men expressed an interest in working with children. Ninety-three women and five men were enquiring about work in early years settings the remainder preferring to work with older children. Without recruitment there is no retention. However, there is an argument around whether successful

recruitment of men would raise the pay levels of practitioners. The issue is debated later (in 2.7 Reward).

Men are just one of the under-represented groups that the National Childcare Recruitment Campaign (2000) intended to reach, others were people over the age of forty, people belonging to so-called 'ethnic minority' groups and people with disabilities. In the example in the preceding paragraph twelve of the women described their ethnic origin as Asian or Pakistani, eight as African or Caribbean. No data was available on the ethnic origin of the eight enquirers who were male. The remaining women and men stated their ethnic origin as White British or White other. Successful recruitment and retention of people from these groups would, as rhetoric suggests, course create a more diverse workforce representative of the families it serves (DCSF 2009).

Elfer (2006, p.113) refers to Roberts' (1994) notion of conflicting values that may be apparent when there is a difference between the task that staff believe they should be doing according to the values of the Day nursery 'and the task that can be discerned from how the staff actually behave'. When values do not resonate with a practitioner (or *vice versa*) there is potential for irrevocable issues to affect adversely retention. Whilst practitioners and Day nursery managers or owners may have a shared belief in the importance of quality education and care for young children, they may have different values concerning how to achieve it on a day-to-day basis. My research shows that compromise of these values is a concern that can escalate into a retention issue. If as Rolfe (2005, p.58) suggests practitioners confirm 'employers' beliefs: the most valued feature of the work was contact with children…' practitioners' values are comprised when paperwork and other duties erode that contact time. Conversely, failure to carry out non-contact type duties out efficiently compromises the values of the Day nursery and is problematic in terms of accountability and Ofsted regulation. Staff management style is a further example of where values conflict. Whilst managers find the authoritarian traits of 'shouting and slighting' acceptable, it is problematic to practitioners (ibid. p.59) particularly in a setting where workers are there to educate, care for and be role models to young children. As with my own research, interpretation of this kind of behaviour as lack of respect, and undervaluing of staff is evident but it could I suggest be avoided with a universal commitment to a standard of ethical behaviour.

Another area important to practitioners is the value placed on their work. Research findings reiterate practitioners' claims 'that their work' is 'not valued sufficiently highly both within the early years field and by society at large' (Cameron, Own and Moss 2001, p.7). Working with children of all ages can be a challenging and satisfying job, requiring a wide range of skills. However, in the eyes of many, it is seen as a low status, low pay occupation which anyone can do. These perceptions apply today as they did before disparate childcare provision became a 'sector' (in 2.2.3). According to the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (1998, p.13) such perceptions make it difficult to recruit people of the right calibre to the profession and to retain them. The DfEE went on to acknowledge that this complicates retention issues for providers who understand the importance of staffing their settings with 'the right calibre' of early years practitioners. Cameron, Moss and Owen (1999) note that the term 'low status' is often used when referring to work with children, in conjunction with 'poor quality' (Bertram and Pascal 1999 p.40; DfES 2005, p.15).

Despite efforts to raise the profile and status of work with young children - as an important part of the government's plan to provide quality childcare which would enable parent to go out to work (in 2.2.2) - nursery work and workers are still 'seen as low status/undervalued and unprofessional (CWDC 2006, p.29). Cooke and Lawton contend (2008. p.6) 'The impact of low status may be making it harder for practitioners to form mutually supportive relationships with parents. Simultaneous labelling of work with children and visioning of long-term strategies (HM Treasury 2004; DfES 2009) for transformation of childcare into an early years sector (Cameron, Mooney and Moss 2002; Wood 2007; Campbell-Barr 2009) have resulted in national prominence of work with children; but prominence and status are not the same. The following quote highlights the government's promise to raise the profile of the vocation, implying also enhancement of status:

> …the government will raise the profile of work with children, young people and families and underline its importance so that clear national messages are sent about the status and esteem of careers in children's services (DfES 2005, pp. 11-12).

Barber (2000) asserts that the status of nursery nurses was undermined by the changes made when the qualifications climbing frame was introduced (in 2.3). This was due in part to the replacement of the title 'nursery nurse' to 'nursery assistant', thereby diminishing the perceptions of nursery nurses as to their status within their own sector (Barber 2000). Tweed (2001) find no evidence to suggest that a changing the title to 'early

years practitioner' helps raise status either. Rolfe (2003) disagrees. The National Guidance Research Forum (2004) found little evidence to support the notion:

> Employment within the sector suffers from a contradiction. It provides childcare and education for children in a very formative period in a child's development. Therefore, it is vital that staff working with babies and children are well trained. Paradoxically, the early years sector has suffered from under-investment and low status. It is regarded as a low paid sector with low levels of qualifications, high staff turnover and growing difficulties in recruitment (National Guidance Research Forum 2004, p.1).

According to the CWDC report *Recruitment, retention and rewards in the children's workforce* (2006, p. 1) status will rise when a 'workforce identity' is developed. Osgood (2006, p. 9) refers to this as 'the state driven professionalism agenda' which 'presents an attractive and seductive opportunity to raise the status and prestige of ECEC' (Early Childhood Education and Care). Whilst enhanced professionalism is beneficial, if defined by standards against which practitioners are monitored and assessed, there is a danger of emotion being overlooked (ibid.).

2.6.3 Implications for practitioners

Having reviewed literature relating to qualifications for workforce development, effective practice and quality (in 2.2.2; 2.2.4; 2.3.1) it is not surprising that some practitioners feel undervalued. Previously a good education and commitment to training and an N.N.E.B. were standard requirements for work in Nottingham's Day nurseries. Day nurseries and practitioners valued the N.N.E.B. It was the only qualification accepted for work in Day nurseries in Nottingham for many years even when other qualifications were introduced. Then, as now values pertaining to qualifications shows a conflict in relation to what Brock calls 'shared ideology based on appropriate knowledge, education and experience' (2009, p.5). Currently, EYPS undermines level three qualifications (2.1; 2.3) and puts up a barrier to access to leadership. For practitioners who have worked hard to gain their qualification this is unacceptable and is a further potential reason for feeling undervalued.

Early years practitioners argue that their work is the same as that of teachers and they should earn an equivalent wage. This reflects the value practitioners place on both themselves and their work but conflicts with the values imposed on the sector for reasons of quality improvement in Day nurseries. However, the issue is an interesting one when,

seemingly job roles are difficult to define in early years: The *Occupational Summary Sheet for All Early Years Workers in Day Nurseries* (CWDC 2007, p. 2) defines the job roles of people who work in Day nurseries. In so doing, it appears to have reverted to a separation between the roles of teacher as educator and nursery nurse as carer, before going on to make a contradictory statement about the purpose of the nursery nurse role. It maintains that early years and nursery teachers:

- develop and implement work schemes and lesson plans in line with the requirements of the foundation stage
- organise and develop the nursery learning environment and resources in order to facilitate the learning process
- establish relationships with pupils to facilitate their learning and develop and maintain relationships with parents and guardians to further support pupils
- assess and maintain records of progress

Nursery nurses on the other hand perform the following duties:

- care for children
- feed, bathe and dress babies
- encourage older children to learn skills like dressing themselves
- through activities like play, counting games, storytelling and outings, they help children to develop social, number and language skills and discover more about the world (CWDC 2007, p. 3).

By way of contradiction, the CWDC goes on to state that:

> Nursery nurses carry out an important role in caring for, educating and playing with babies and young children, helping them to develop and learn (ibid.).

Literature reviewed suggests that it is apparent in the following points. Haydon asserts (in 2.6) 'what we do is influenced by our values' and some women may choose to work with children because they see themselves as substitute mothers (in 2.1) or, as in my own case, someone who could support the enhancement of quality facilities for young children and families (in 1.2). Also high levels of commitment are found amongst early years practitioners even though pay is low (in 2.7.2).

Summary

Values are replicable. Compatibility of values is desirable for retention. Conflicting values may adversely affect retention. Feeling undervalued may be the result of a mismatch of values.

2.7 Reward

2.7.1 Rewards for early years practitioners

The literature review reveals that rewards for early years practitioners are not necessarily financial incentives. Recruitment campaigns promote work with children as rewarding knowing that low pay (Professional Association of Nursery Nurses 2002) is an unlikely incentive. I use the literature now to review some of rewards for early years practitioners in Day nurseries; these rewards are pay, job satisfaction and opportunity to use the passionate they feel about work with children. I begin with pay.

2.7.2 Pay

Cameron, Owen and Moss (2001) stress low levels of pay in the sector indicate work is not sufficiently valued (in 2.6) and this concern needs addressing if the government is to achieve its aims of getting more parents in to work. Rolfe (2003) asserts that early years practitioners' pay is not a retention issue until linked with other issues, but along with Cooke and Lawton (2008) finds that it does contribute to recruitment difficulties:

> Low pay, low status and the high proportion of females in the
> workforce interact and reinforce one another. Low pay poses
> recruitment and retention challenges (Cooke and Lawton
> 2008 p, 6).

However, if increased childcare provision is an indication that more parents are now working, and an integrated workforce is developing (in 2.2.2; 2.2.3; 2.3) the aims of the government have to some extent been achieved. Yet low pay in the sector is still an issue (Cooke and Lawton 2008).

Practitioners in Day nurseries appear to accept the low rate of pay when they take on work in Day nurseries. While some practitioners in the sector find compensation for low pay in the shorter working day this is not the case with those who work in Day nurseries:

> Only Day nursery workers complained of long contractual
> hours. For other child care workers the shorter working day
> was a source of job satisfaction which compensated for low
> pay (Rolfe 2005, p. 59).

Cooke and Lawton (2008) report that early years practitioners in Day nurseries earned around £3.00 an hour in 2004; this gradually rose to £6.80 an hour in 2008. Rolfe

(2003) found that there are difficulties in calculating hourly rates for practitioners who work long hours in Day nurseries and carry out duties such as planning and preparation at home. According to Daycare Trust (2008) calculations, the national average was £9.88. National pay scales, against which practitioners may compare their salaries, are not readily available. According to Early Years Educator (2000) and The Cabinet Office (2002), early years practitioners earn less than domestic cleaners and checkout operators. Regardless of this, as mentioned previously early years practitioners are committed to their work (in 2.3.2).

Existing studies suggest that low pay within the sector is not just a hindrance to further development of the early years workforce (Children's Workforce Network in England 2007) it is also one of the 'greatest obstacles' to the delivery of quality care by Day nurseries (Callender 2000, p.15). Providers accept that 'poor wage levels' impede the recruitment of 'good quality staff' (Callender 2000, p.90). Tweed (2002) and Owen (2003) and agree with Callender that recruitment problems in the sector are due to low pay. Cooke and Lawton add their concerns to this ongoing debate:

> Perpetuation of low pay undermines the efforts to raise the quality of the early years workforce and the services it provides' and 'sidestepping the issue [of pay] will severely limit the impact of proposals to improve quality' (Cooke and Lawton 2008, p.6).

Furthermore, new pay related problems occur that may influence retention with the attributing of quality enhancement to practitioners with EYPS. This is a position recognises by, for example, the General Teaching Council who raise concerns about the pay of Early Years Professionals and Early Years Teachers in Day nurseries:

> Inequalities of pay and conditions in the EY sector are not just unfair – they impede most effective deployment of EYPs and limit [Continuing Professional Development] CPD possibilities (General Teaching Council 2009 pp.1-2).

There are tensions within the broader sector concerning the consequences of rising pay levels (Vevers 2004). NDNA (ibid.) and Evans (2005) find that the sector agrees in principle to bringing pay into line with the national minimum wage for example, but in practice warns that parents would have to pay more for childcare in order to compensate for the increase. Early years practitioners and those with EYPS are deserving of reward and parity for their work (NDNA 2003) but when quality is ascribed to EYPS over the

qualifications, training and experience of all other practitioners there is potential for a further divide and increased claims of being undervalued in Day nurseries (in 2.6.1).

One reason for this is the inference that the way to show leadership in Day nurseries is by attaining EYPS, and practitioners who do so are more deserving of support than those without EYPS:

> It is now essential that those EYPs –already showing leadership through their participation in such a new programme – are provided with the professional support and structures necessary to enable them to carry out their transformative leadership as effectively as possible (Aspect 2008, p.11).

One of the difficulties for Day nursery owners in considering pay increases is that the majority share of childcare fees is used for staff salaries. Therefore, any increase incurs a loss in profit margin, or higher fees for parents (Vevers 2004). Evans (2005) suggests that the conflict lies between providers pricing themselves out of the market or losing practitioners who leave for better pay. Osgood (2006, p.10) argues that 'an ethic of care and emotional labour are cornerstones to practitioner's professional identities'.

Early years practitioners are required to further their professional development by attaining higher level qualifications but Bishop (2005) found no evidence to suggest that the salaries of early years practitioners working in Day nurseries would increase accordingly or that they would be equal to their newly qualified teacher counterparts. The Children's Workforce Network in England (2007) advised that disparities in pay would hinder the successful development of an integration workforce. Miller and Cable (2008, p122) find 'a yawning gap' separating the average age, level of qualifications and pay of nursery workers and teachers. Cooke and Lawton (2008, p. 6) argue that 'low minimum qualification requirements and the absence of a clear career ladder hold down wages and impede quality'. Moreover, they find evidence of 'frustration' in this regard amongst participants in their study *For Love or Money: Pay, progression and professionalisation in the early years' workforce*::

> There was frustration that differences between the responsibilities of early years workers and those of professions such as teaching are lessening but gaps in pay and status are not (Cooke and Lawton 2008, p. 7).

Men in Childcare, Rolfe and Daycare Trust (2003; 2006 and 2008) agree pay in the sector is low because the majority of practitioners are women (in 2.2.1; 2.6.2). Low pay is not confined to women in the early years workforce. According to the New Policy Institute (2009), there is a general tendency for women's pay to be lower than that of men and that regardless of the threshold for low pay, or indeed the sector, twice as many women than men are low paid. An influx of men into the profession may help increase pay levels (Daycare Trust 2002) but low pay potentially deters men from entering the profession. As the sector has not experienced an 'influx' of men, this idea is not possible to investigate. Neither is there any evidence to suggest that the very small number of men who have entered the profession in recent years has affected pay levels in Day nurseries. Moreover, the literature offers no concrete evidence that men would enter the profession if pay were higher. If indeed, pay is an obstacle to men becoming early years practitioners potentially, and it increases substantially, proportionate to professions such as teaching or child psychology which men do enter, work in Day nurseries may be a viable alternative.

Not only is pay in Day nurseries low but the hourly rate is much reduced by the number of hours that practitioners regularly work The National Audit Office (2003) confirm the long working day experienced by some early years practitioners, where nurseries provided services from six o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock in the evening. The 2001 *Survey of Childcare Workers* established that, on average, nurseries were open forty-nine hours per week (DfES 2002). Findings from the Professional Association of Nursery Nurses (PANN 2002) survey of its members who worked in private Day nurseries, showed, from the thirty-three percent of practitioners who responded, that full-time members of staff worked an average of forty-three and a half hours a week. Over one third of staff worked up to ten hours over their contracted hours, with some working between ten and twenty additional hours. One survey respondent reported a working week of between forty and fifty hours, another between fifty-six and sixty hours. PANN reported:

> Our findings supported our fears. Day nursery staff on the whole remain unrewarded for their critical contribution to children's care, learning and achievement. The pay of nursery staff is non-statutory and pay rates are almost entirely discretionary. The result is that many receive a salary that is little over the minimum wage. This is insulting and hardly reflects the training, qualifications, and expertise of daycare staff. Our members are trained and qualified professionals who work extremely long hours and make a valuable

contribution to children's care and development (PANN
2002, p.1).

Summary

There is agreement amongst researchers that pay in the early years sector, where the majority of workers are women, is low. Whilst there is a suggestion that an influx of men in the sector may help increase pay levels few men are interested in working with young children; those who are may be deterred by the low pay. Moreover, one of the reasons given by Day nurseries for maintaining low levels of pay is that wage increases would incur higher costs for parents. This is the same for male staff as it is for female staff.

Findings show that early years practitioners who work in Day nurseries accept to some extent, low levels of pay in their sector. Studies suggest that low pay will not hinder development of the workforce. Regardless of the lack of financial reward for practitioners in Day nurseries, the literature reveals high levels of commitment. There is a suggestion here that the overlooking of pay increases and other extrinsically motivating incentives (Adonis 2005) will continue so long as early years practitioners' intrinsic motivation remains. According to Adonis (ibid.), replication of intrinsic motivation is not possible through external incentives:

> No amount of extrinsic motivational techniques can replicate
> the enjoyment employees get from truly loving what they do
> (Adonis 2005, p.13).

Policy over the last decade devoted itself to enhancing quality of provision and practice and developing a highly skilled and qualified workforce able to deliver integrated education and care for young children; rightly so. Early years practitioners have benefited from dissemination of good practice in, for example, Early Excellence Centres (in 2.2.2; 2.2.4; 2.2.5). Day nurseries that have complied with the requirements of each change could not have done so without the support of their practitioners. It is feasible then for practitioners to compare their pay with that of their counterparts in other types of provision. It is hope to earn an equivalent salary to colleagues in similar job roles.

2.7.3 Job Satisfaction

Existing research has consistently reported widespread agreement on job satisfaction amongst early years practitioners. Cameron (2007) study found high job satisfaction amongst

childcare workers. Rolfe *et* al (2003, p. 66) interviewed thirty-nine managers in a range of settings including Day nurseries in Nottingham, and fourteen childminders, regarding various aspects of their work and workplace. The study found 'For some [practitioners] intrinsic satisfaction of the job was paramount' (in 2.4.3).

Further practitioners, including those in Day nurseries, found job satisfaction in the company of children and helping them to develop:

> Many childcare workers simply enjoyed the company of children, seeing to their needs and interacting with them, but many also gained satisfaction from seeing children develop their skills, particularly in social interaction, and confidence. Childcare workers delivering early education to 3 and 4 year olds, in schools and some Day nurseries, also said they enjoyed helping children to learn (Rolfe 2003, p. 66).

Definitions of 'job satisfaction' are open to interpretation. Brooke's (1998, p.139) defines job satisfaction as 'the emotional state of liking one's job'. 'Job satisfaction' in early years research tends to be a self-defined term. The DfES used the notion of job satisfaction to attract people to work with children 'Working with Children of all ages can be a challenging and satisfying job, requiring a wide range of skills' (DfEE 1998, p.13). The title of the first childcare recruitment campaign *Do Something You Love for a Living* (DfES 2001) reflected the notion of job satisfaction.

Rose (2003, p. 503) suggests that a 'league table' of occupational job satisfaction exists with childcare workers amongst the highest over a wide range of occupations. This resonates with the earlier reference to being absorbed in a task (in 2.4.2) and also to

Brophy's suggestion (2004, p. 186) that 'in a pure state of intrinsic motivation, there is no awareness of means-end separation … or of striving to achieve some goal separate from the ongoing activity'. Whilst Rolfe suggests that job satisfaction is a possible incentive

for men to enter the profession, no literature has been reviewed which supports this case (in 2.2.1; 2.6; 2.7.2).

Practitioners are not always clear as to which occupational group they belong. This may be due, for example to lack of clarity in occupationally defined groups or because of the wide range of childcare related jobs and numerous job titles. Practitioners who hold a nursery nurse qualification, such as the N.N.E.B., would potentially place themselves in the category of nursery nurse. However, others may also choose that same group in the absence of what their considered viable alternative.

A job, almost by definition, embodies an exchange of effort (more exactly, the ability to expend effort) for rewards that are primarily material, and in particular financial, though never exclusively so. Any explanation of job satisfaction should never overlook this material exchange relationship.

> Poorly paid childcare workers with low negotiable skill, have higher overall job satisfaction levels than sales managers enjoying fat bonuses; cleaners with low negotiable skill qualifications are likely to have far higher levels of job satisfaction than the school teachers whose classrooms they tidy up (Rose 2003, p.506).

Moyles (2001, p.81) considers whether it is possible 'to work effectively with very young children without the deep and sound commitment signified by the use of words like 'passionate'; asserting that commitment and 'passion' 'can work against' practitioners. For example, when they complain about pay but remain committed to their work, providers may not respond to the need to increase salaries, and practitioners are supporting the financial sustainability of the business by helping to keep the wage bills down (Department for Education and Skills 2005).

Summary

Definitions of 'job satisfaction' are open to interpretation. Reports are that job satisfaction is high, paramount and widespread amongst practitioners. Studies find that job satisfaction is particularly present when practitioners have the opportunity to be with children and help them develop.

2.7.4 Implications for practitioners

Notably wide-spread agreement is found in the literature that early years practitioners experience job satisfaction. Not only that, levels of satisfaction are high, and practitioners are more satisfied with their job than people in many other occupations. However, work in Day nurseries involves many different aspects with which practitioners may or may not experience satisfaction. If as Brooke's suggests (in 2.7.3) job satisfaction is 'the emotional state of liking one's job' then each aspect of the job must be investigated from this perspective. If practitioners as participants in research set-aside aspects of dissatisfaction and focus more on the emotional state of liking, for example direct contact with children, which may be intrinsically satisfying, there is as Moyles asserts (ibid.) potential for their commitment and passion to be exploited.

2.8 Summary in relation to the research questions

Research question 1: What attitudes do early years practitioners hold concerning a range aspects relating to work in Day nurseries and what influence if any do these have on retention?

Review of the literature suggests that:

- Being an early years practitioner in a Day nursery is a job for women. Men could do the job but allegations of child abuse would increase.

- Quality is important and practitioners want to do a good job.

- Early years practitioners enjoy being with the children and gain satisfaction from helping them to develop and learn.

- Practitioners tend to find authoritarian leadership problematic.

- Practitioners are role models for the children.

- The working day is too long.

Research question 2: What values are important to early years practitioners and do these influence their reasons for remaining in or leaving their workplace, if so how? Review of the literature suggests that:

- Some practitioners believe mothers care for their own children.
- There has been a tendency for practitioners in Day nurseries to believe that nursery teachers are responsible for a child's education.
- Proper ratios of staff to children are important.
- Practitioners value direct contact with children over paperwork and other tasks that take them away from the children. They see non-contact time as reducing the quality of care.

Research question 3: What perceptions do practitioners have concerning their sector, for example its status? Review of the literature suggests that:

- Practitioners value their work and perceive it as undervalued by others.
- Practitioners perceive themselves to have less opportunity to be creative and autonomous than was previously the case.
- Practitioners are frustrated because their pay and status does not increase in relation to the responsibilities they have similar to teachers. Lack of parity they perceive to be unfair.

2.9 Conclusions and gaps in knowledge

What I have found out from the literature review is a potential for the overlooking of underlying needs of early years practitioners in Day nurseries. This may be due to the propensity of research, or practitioners who are research participants, to view satisfaction with some aspects of the job that are more important to them to minimise dissatisfaction with other aspects. The implications of continually referring to early years practitioners as experiencing widespread satisfaction is potentially continued disregard of those aspects of the job with which practitioners are dissatisfied.

Unless practitioners gain/regain their autonomy, it will continue to erode; thereby adding to the wearing down of practitioners that is already taking place because of long hours and paperwork overload for example. If early years practitioners are intrinsically motivated, and emotionally strong, they may potentially remain in Day nurseries. Although, pay and opportunities for progression in more integrated settings such as Children's Centres may be an allure to practitioners. Day nurseries lack diversity in their workforce. There is

little evidence to suggest that a more diverse workforce would make any difference to retention of staff.

Nottingham's early years practitioners, highly respected for many years, have not escaped the transformation of the sector which, it could be said, has made ineffectual the level three qualifications that for many years stood practitioners in good stead for leadership positions in Day nurseries. Nevertheless the list of skills practitioners are supposed to acquire and exhibit continues to grow.

Autonomous practitioners whose professional manner and attitude are on a par with the status expected on Early Years Professionals are not given credit under the new regime. The influence of varying perspectives of quality that manipulate provision and practice has overtaken the need for quality of the day-to-day experiences of and reward for practitioners in Day nurseries. Furthermore, the progression route to leadership in Day nurseries, whilst hindered for some is for others blocked.

It is clear from the vast amount of available literature that early years practitioners and their work in Day nurseries continues to interest researchers. If research informed policy has influenced change for the better in the quality of provision and practice, surely it would be of benefit to the sector for policy makers also to take note of research that hears the voice of early years practitioners who feel undervalued even though, they are committed to and enjoy working with young children. During the course of my review, I have found little to suggest any such plans are afoot.

Having used the literature to review the 'state of knowledge' (Bell 1993, p.19) in the field of retention of early years practitioners, with a focus on Day nurseries I find a number of questions arose, remained unanswered or are in need of further clarification:

1. How, if at all, does practitioners belief that mothers should be available for their children impact on attitudes, values and perceptions of participants to the job. Do practitioners believe that these values are a factor that contributes to the workforce being mostly female?

2. Are practitioners in my study aware of the sector's 'low status, poor pay and conditions' reputation? Do they accept that cost of staff wages and training are a major obstacle to running Day nurseries, or not?

3. Practitioners repeatedly claim that their work is undervalued, so what makes participants in my study remain in Day nurseries.

4. Do participants in my study feel that they have the appropriate experience and qualifications for the job they are doing?

5. How do practitioners feel about training and opportunity to progress?

6. What can participants add to the notion that qualifications are a prerequisite to provision good management?

7. Do practitioners recommend working with young children in Day nurseries to others?

To help gain further insight into these questions I incorporate the issues raised into the schedule used for follow-up interviews in the fieldwork (in 5.5.2).

CHAPTER THREE: A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

3. A Local Perspective

3.1 Context

The purpose of this chapter is to situate the research participants in their local environment, and contextualise Day nursery provision and practice that affects early years practitioners in Nottingham. Here geographic and demographic perspectives of Nottingham and its people precede a local perspective of day nurseries and their workforce in Nottingham City.

I have chosen to draw upon my experience as Recruitment Strategy Officer for the Local Authority in Nottingham from 2000 and 2003 (in 1.3) as a means of developing a local perspective of the early years workforce. The post was 'central to the drive to recruit more people into the workforce to work with children from birth up to the age of fourteen years' (Arme 2000). The experience gained whilst holding it provided insight that was otherwise not possible. Post-holder experience and reflection upon it are therefore relevant here.

3.2 Nottingham City: Geographic and Demographic Perspectives

Locality

The names of the different geographical areas of Nottinghamshire, Greater Nottingham, and Nottingham tend to be used interchangeably, although each defines quite a different area. The City of Nottingham is surrounded by Greater Nottingham, which is contained within the County of Nottinghamshire. Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, and Northamptonshire constitute the East Midlands region, which is in central England. Figure 2: Nottingham in the East Midlands below illustrates the positioning of Nottingham City within Nottinghamshire and the East Midlands Region (Childcare Link 2009).

East Midlands #5

(Childcare Link 2009)

Figure 2: Nottingham in the East Midlands

Local Authorities govern Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire separately; each is responsible for ensuring the quality of early years provision within its own area. Nottingham City is where the Day nursery sample in this study is situated (in 5.2; 5.3.1; 5.4.1.1; 5.4.2.1; 5.5.2). Students in the group interview were working towards NVQ 3 Childcare and Learning Development (CCLD). They worked – or were on work placement in - Nottingham, Greater Nottingham, and Nottinghamshire. One e-forum respondent had previously worked in Nottingham. The remainder gave no indication whether they were from Nottingham or the surrounding areas.

Nottingham is a labyrinth of caves and underground passageways carved out of its sandstone bedrock that made it a popular habitat for paupers who travelled from miles around to make their home beneath Nottingham Castle. The castle boasts an angry history of successive invasions and conquering. Nottingham Castle was built by the son of William the Conqueror. It was owned and inhabited by King Henry II in 1155, Richard the Lion Heart in 1194, King Edward IV, Richard III and Charles I (White's Directory of

Nottinghamshire 1853 2003). Nottingham's favourite 'hoody', Robin of Loxley, lived just a few miles outside of the City when Lion Heart was king.

Nottingham used to be an industrial city with hosiery, tobacco, bicycles and coal mining. In the last fifty years, Nottingham's transport network has progressed from trolley bus (Bradley 2009) to state-of-the art tram (The University of Nottingham 2007).

The estimated population of Nottingham was 288,700 in the 2001 census. Just under half of these were men and women of employment age (Nottingham City Council 2008), 8,800 were babies and young children under the age of five years. According to the Summary of the 2005 Annual Childcare Audit (City of Nottingham Early Years and Childcare Unit 2005), the majority of early years workers in Nottingham were below the age of 40. Forty percent were under the age of twenty-four. Only nineteen percent were over the age of forty.

Whilst Nottingham's gender profile is evenly split with less than one percent more men than women in 2001 (Nottingham City Council 2008), its early years and childcare workforce is not. According to the 2005 Childcare Audit, ninety eight percent of all men do work with children this tends to be in settings for older children and young people rather in Day nurseries (City of Nottingham Early Years and Childcare Unit 2005). This coincides with the literature review (in 2.2.1).

Eighty-five percent of people who work with children of all ages in Nottingham are white (City of Nottingham Early Years and Childcare Unit 2005). People from non-white ethnic groups comprise approximately fifteen percent of the childcare workers. This is unusual, as shown in Chapter 2, as the majority of people who work with children identify themselves as 'white'. The National Childcare Recruitment Campaign (DCSF 2009) aimed to address the ethnic, age, gender and ability imbalance by appealing to the diverse national population.

In Nottingham in 2005, there were 7,355 people identifying themselves as Asian or Asian British, just over 11,582 Black or Black British and 2,971 Chinese and other ethnic groups. Additionally, 8,370 people classed themselves as Mixed: White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, and White and Asian (Office for National Statistics 2004). These

figures suggest that there is no shortage of potential for diversifying the early years workforce in Nottingham, and specifically in Day nurseries in Nottingham.

Deciphering statistical information from the census in relation to the number of people in the early years workforce in Nottingham is problematic because, although the census trawls broad occupational areas, it does not adequately distinguish between occupations. For example the category of 'nursery nurse' sits within the broad occupational area of 'personal service occupations' along with 'dental nurse', 'care assistant' and 'sports and leisure assistant' (Office for National Statistics (2004).

A further complication of interpreting census statistics for the purpose of my research is that 'nursery nurse' is the only category in the census to describe anyone working with young children outside of the educational context of 'teacher'. Therefore anyone working in a crèche playgroup, toddler group or as a childminder may classify themselves as 'nursery nurse' in the absence of another appropriate category. Nevertheless, as the census indicates a ratio of four-to-one with 5,529 females and 1,272 males indicating that they work in personal service occupations of which nursery nursing is one (Office for National Statistics 2004).

Figure 3: Nottingham Neighbourhoods below depicts the division of Nottingham City into eight distinct areas, known as wards. With the expectation of City Centre, each ward comprises a number of neighbourhood areas; many, but not all have some Day nursery provision. Neighbourhood Nurseries (mentioned in 2.3.1) were situated according to these boundaries.
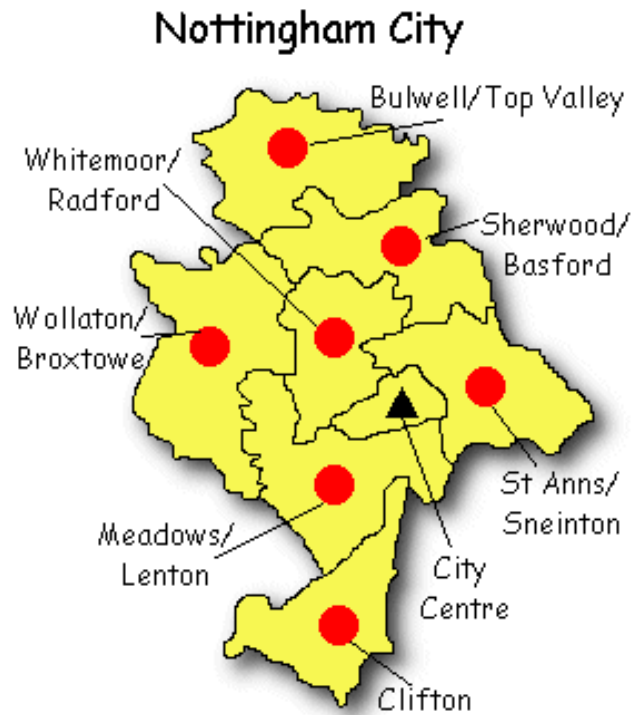
Nottingham City #1

(Childcare Link 2009)

Figure 3: Nottingham Neighbourhoods

Summary

In this section, I have situated the Day nursery sample and research participants in their local environment, provided a demographic perspective of Nottingham and offered a brief history of the area and its people. The relevance here is to show that participants working in those Day nurseries are subject to the same changes and standards affecting practitioners in Day nurseries across the country. Therefore, when drawing conclusions from my research I will be able to look at it in the light of a broader context put forward in the literature review.

3.3. Day Nurseries in Nottingham City

3.3.1 Provision

Nottingham City offers all of the different types of provision for young children discussed earlier in 2.3.1. Ofsted (2008, p.27) identified seven types of childcare including childminder, sessional day care, out of school care, crèches, multiple day care, independent school and full day care which includes Day nurseries.

In 2000, at the beginning of the national campaign to increase childcare provision and recruit practitioners there were fifty-five private, voluntary, and independent sector providers (Briggs and Potter 2000). However, in their Childcare Audit for the 2000-2001 Early Years Plan, in Nottingham found the distribution of Day nurseries to be uneven compared to where children lived (ibid. p.42). Moreover, there were apparent inequalities in accessibility of available childcare places. Briggs and Potter note:

> For every four children that live in the Park [one of the most affluent areas of the City] one nursery place is available whilst for every ninety-one children in Bilborough one place is available. Five wards had had no nursery places at all (Briggs and Potter, 2000 p.42).

By 2005, the number of providers had risen to seventy-three because of strategic plans to expand the sector. Sixteen of these were classed as Neighbourhood Nurseries, which tended to be run by private sector providers who were not required to have any former experience of the early years sector. Between them, the private, voluntary, and independent providers offered 3,646 childcare places across many areas of Nottingham (City of Nottingham Early Years and childcare Unit 2005). However, the places were for children up to the age of eight years, so the figures include for example after-school/out-of-school care (Nottingham City Council 2008). No clear indication of the number of young children cared for by early years practitioners in Day nurseries was available. As categories of data have become more relevant to current needs clearer indications of the number of childcare places in Nottingham's Day nurseries have become available.

Appendix 5: Childcare places in Day nurseries across Nottingham in 2005 (City of Nottingham Early Years and Childcare Unit 2005) indicates the availability of childcare places at this time. There is a more equitable spread of childcare places than was previously the case in the Childcare Audit for the 2000-2001 Early Years Plan in Nottingham above (Briggs and Potter 2000)'. However, some areas have less access to provision than others do, for example Clifton South, Clifton North. Provision in Bilborough was limited in 2000 but in 2005, it was non-existent.

Summary

According to reports by Ofsted the quality of full day care provision (including Day nurseries) Day nurseries in Nottingham compared favourably to England overall between

April 2003 and March 2005, and between March 2005 and August 2008. The percentage of 'Good' judgments was higher than the percentage in England as a whole except for in the Standard 4: Care, Play and Learning. The percentage of 'Unsatisfactory' judgments was lower than the percentage in England as a whole except in the Standard 3: Documentation and Standard 5: Equipment for Children. Documentation was particularly problematic for new providers. Nottingham was particularly poor at Standard 2: Organisation which included adult:child ratios, space and resources. Nottingham has no scores of 'Excellent' but scored slightly higher than England overall in all areas including 'Leadership and Management' and 'Organisation'.

3.3.2 Quality

Quality of Day nursery provision (in 2.2.3) is important to the needs of children and their parents who are using the service. To ensure that it meets appropriate standards of quality regulation and inspection visits are carried out (2.3.1). Different areas of provision within a setting are judged against national standard, for example, the standard of 'Care, Play and Learning' (Sure Start 2003). Provision is also graded according to how well it is led and managed (Office for Standards in Education 2005; 2006):

> 1 – Outstanding
> 2 – Good
> 3 – Satisfactory
> 4 – Inadequate

Ofsted regulation and inspection reports are in the public domain (Office for Standards in Education 2009). Records show that Ofsted awarded quality judgments of 'Good' to seventy-eight percent of new full day care providers (including Day nurseries) in Nottingham between April 2003 and March 2005. Ofsted inspected sixty-three new and established full daycare providers including Day nurseries between March 2005 and August 2008, seventy-six percent were judged to be 'Good', twenty-two percent 'Satisfactory' and two percent 'Inadequate'. This compares favourably to England overall.

The percentage of 'Good' judgments passed by Ofsted on all but one area of the National Standards, that is Standard 4: Care, Play and Learning (Sure Start 2003), was higher than the percentage in England as a whole. The percentage of 'Unsatisfactory' judgments,

passed by Ofsted, on all but two areas of the National Standards was lower than the percentage in England as a whole.

The two areas needing improvement related to Standards 3 and 5, respectively documentation, which is records, policies and procedures required to enable the setting to function efficiently, and safely (Sure Start 2003, p. 8) and equipment for children (Sure Start 2003, p.15). Ofsted found that documentation was causing a particular problem for new providers in England between 2003 and 2005 in Nottingham. The percentage of new providers whose documentation was deemed to be unsatisfactory was almost double the percentage of England overall.

Nottingham tended to have four times as many problems as England overall (Office for Standards in Education 2005) concerning organisation measured against Standard 2 which included adult:child ratios, space and resources. In this area staff are required to demonstrate a clear sense of purpose, be well qualified, use their time and resources well and make effective use of records (Office for Standards in Education 2005; Sure Start 2003).

The problem arises again of interpretation of the statistics as all of the above figures refer to full day care which, in this context, includes Day nurseries, children centres and family centres. Individual circumstances are masked by the categories under which the data is collected. However, the fact that Ofsted reports are in the public domain means that individual providers can be tracked and changes noted from one inspection to another if such details are required.

Since 2005/2006, Ofsted have recognised and celebrated outstanding provision on their published list of 'Outstanding' providers. The 'Outstanding' grade seems to be quite elusive, as only a handful of Day nurseries in the East Midlands have achieved this overall grade since the inception of Ofsted's outstanding providers list. Whilst Nottingham has yet to feature on the list, Day nurseries in Nottinghamshire, Derby, Derbyshire, Leicester and Leicestershire, Northampton have all made the grade.

On close examination Ofsted findings for 2005 to 2008 show how Nottingham providers fared in relation to England as a whole, on inspection of quality in eight main areas. The areas are: Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Enjoying and Achieving, Making a Positive

Contribution, Organisation, Quality of Teaching, Partnership with Parents, and Leadership and Management.

In the judgment of 'Outstanding', Nottingham was below England in all areas. For example, in Nottingham no providers were classed as outstanding in the area of 'Leadership and Management' and none in 'Organisation', whereas in the whole of England the score was 8.3% and 5.5% for each respective area.

Where quality judgments of 'Good' were concerned Nottingham scored slightly higher than England overall in all areas of the National Standards, including 'Leadership and Management' and 'Organisation' (Office for Standards in Education 2008). Just under two percent 6% of full day care providers in Nottingham were judged to be 'Unsatisfactory', this was in the area of organisation (Office for Standards in Education 2008). Poor organisation appears to be a recurring challenge for a minority of Nottingham's full day care providers.

Summary

According to reports by Ofsted the quality of full day care provision (including Day nurseries) Day nurseries in Nottingham compared favourably to England overall between April 2003 and March 2005, and between March 2005 and August 2008. The percentage of 'Good' judgments was higher than the percentage in England as a whole. Except for in Standard 4: Care, Play and Learning. The percentage of 'Unsatisfactory' judgments was lower than the percentage in England as a whole except in Standards 3: Documentation and Standard 5: Equipment for Children. Documentation was particularly problematic for new providers. Nottingham was particularly poor at Standard 2 which included adult:child ratios, space and resources. Nottingham has no scores of 'Excellent' but scored slightly higher than England overall in all areas including 'Leadership and Management' and 'Organisation'.

3.3.3 Training, qualifications and progression

A comprehensive training plan is available for early years practitioners in Nottingham City (Nottingham City Council 2009). Nottingham City Council Early Years and Childcare Unit has supported training for early years practitioners in Nottingham for a decade. Recently the Unit and School Service have amalgamated into 'Curriculum and childcare 0-7 years'.

The notion of distinct levels of qualification was brought to the fore in early years with the introduction of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in 1988. The idea behind NVQs was to recognise and accredit competency in knowledge, skills understanding and experience of a specific job role. There were misunderstandings in Day nurseries and elsewhere, as to the academic equivalence of NVQs (Roe, Wiseman and Costello 2006, p. 27). For example, completion of Level 2 was equivalent to five GSCEs at Grade A-C. Previously students enrolling on the NNEB were required to have 3 GCSEs at Grade C or above, including mathematics and English. There does not appear to be any consistency here as completion of NVQ Level 2 leads only to an assistant role. Misconceptions of the accreditation meant that young girls with low or no qualifications were recruited into Day nurseries and trained to level two, rather than being assessed on what they already knew. This had implications for the quality of provision and practice.

I use the example of NVQ in the brief overview below as a simplification of the numerous different qualifications to show how they correspond to job roles of early years

practitioners who participated in this research. NVQ provided the climbing frame structure (in 2.3.1; 2.6.2) which led to the current National Qualifications Framework.

Level two

Assistant practitioners at this level are required to work under the constant supervision of more highly qualified practitioners (as mentioned above). Progression was from level two to level three.

Level three

Level three is equivalent to 'A' level. This is the minimum level required for an early years practitioner to work unsupervised; it is considered appropriate for progression to leadership when combined with two years experience.

Level 4

The introduction of level four qualifications provided a progression route for level three practitioners and accredited recognition for those working in position of leadership such as Day nursery managers.

Qualification levels of practitioners in Nottingham

When attempting to ascertain practitioners' qualification levels in Nottingham inconsistencies in data sources cause problems. For example, results of the Annual Childcare Audit are presented in percentages of the whole, but the total number of early years practitioners working in Day nurseries is not given. Nevertheless, indications of the level of qualification held by certain percentages of early years practitioners in Nottingham, are adequate for the purpose of bringing a perspective of the local early years workforce in Nottingham to this chapter.

According to the Annual Childcare Audit 2005, three percent of all early years practitioners working in Nottingham's Day nurseries had achieved level four. The majority, sixty-three percent were level 3, twenty percent level two and fourteen percent below level two.

Eighty seven percent of practitioners in leadership roles were qualified to level three. A further twelve percent had progressed to level four. Two percent had been appointed to leadership positions at level two, that of an assistant practitioner working under constant

supervision. Whether or not these two percent were working towards level three, or owned the Day nursery is not known. Conversely, six percent of assistant practitioners held the level 3 qualification. These practitioners may have recently qualified, be waiting for a suitable progression opportunity or may be content in their current role.

Summary

This section I have outlined some of the training and qualifications offered to practitioners in Nottingham, much of which has been supported over the last decade through a comprehensive training plan held by Nottingham City Council Early Years and Childcare Unit. I have highlighted some of the misconceptions and inconsistencies regarding different qualifications and implications for the quality of provision and practice in Day nurseries.

In this section also, I have shown that in the majority of practitioners, sixty-three percent in 2005, were qualified to Level 3, thirty four percent Level 2 or below. Three percent of all early years practitioners working in Nottingham's Day nurseries had achieved Level 4. Whilst two percent of all practitioners in leadership positions had not yet attained the required level of qualification for their role, the majority held the required Level 3 qualifications some had also achieved Level 4.

3.3.4 Pay

The average salary for Day nursery managers in Nottingham in 2005 was £7,045. Early years practitioners qualified to level three who were not managers earned on average £12,057, An average of £10,179 was paid to level two practitioners and £8,951 per year to those workers who were not yet qualified to level two. Taking level three practitioners as an example, one who was working a forty hour week would earn on average £5.70 an hour. However, this figure is very much dependent on the actual number of hours worked. This could be as much as ten hours a day in some cases.

Concerns were raised by the Children's Workforce Network (2007) that lack of parity in pay could impede integration of the workforce.

Summary

Here a brief example of pay for early years practitioners shows that the average pay for a Level 3 practitioners based on a forty hour week was £5.70 an hour. However, it is not uncommon for practitioners to work more than forty hours a week.

The perception that retention of qualified and competent early years practitioners depends on raised standards and increased provision is only one perspective. There are others. In Nottingham maternity leave, not returning to work after having a baby and career change have all had a negative influence on retention. Furthermore retention in Day nurseries fluctuates depending on the number of practitioners transferring from one type of provision to another. Workforce mobility, seen as some to as problematic was encouraged by others. There was no clear indication of the turnover of practitioners in Nottingham's Day nurseries between 2004 and 2005. A range of reasons given by settings for staff losses may have been precise accounts, or their own perspectives. Unsuitability of staff and pay were the main reasons given.

3.3.5 Retention

The Early Years National Training Organisation (EYNTO) state the retention of a qualified and competent early years and childcare workforce depends on raised standards and increased provision (EYNTO 2001). Whilst this may be true, it is, only part of the story. Evidence in Nottingham suggests that maternity leave, not returning to work after having a baby and career change are all circumstances that negatively affect retention rates. Twenty-eight percent of early years practitioners move from one area of childcare to another. This means for example, that retention may decrease at a Day nursery and increase at an after-school session as the early years practitioner fits her family commitments around her work. The term 'workforce mobility' (Ennals 2007, p.1) is commonly used to describe this phenomenon of practitioners moving from place to place. One perspective is that workforce mobility is a problem that the sector needs to 'tackle' (ibid., p.1). Another, also from Ennals (ibid., p.1) is that mobility across the children's workforce should be encouraged for the successful delivery of the Every Child Matters agenda (DfES 2005) to safeguard children (HM Government 2006).

In 2004/2005, twenty-nine percent of childcare workers left their jobs for reasons mentioned above. Of these, twenty one percent had a career change or left the sector altogether (City of Nottingham Early Years and Childcare Unit 2005): Again these figures relate to the whole childcare workforce in Nottingham which includes, childminders, out-of-

school clubs, holiday care, crèche and playgroup as well as Day nurseries. It does not give an accurate indication of the turnover of early years practitioners working in Day nurseries alone. Nor is it clear whether the reasons given by providers who completed the 2004/2005 audit are precise account or whether they are merely perspective on reasons for staff leaving their setting. What is clear is that at any one time a large section of the workforce is 'mobile'.

Various additional reasons given for small numbers of staff leaving Nottingham's workforce in 2004/2005 included moving house (17 staff), family commitments (8 staff), redundancy (5 staff), retirement (2 staff), illness (2 staff), going to university (5 staff), better pay (10 staff), dismissal (5 staff) and unsuitability for work with children (5 staff). No reasons for dismissal were given but the implications are that staff were in some way unsuitable for the job. Consequently, ten members of staff were unsuitable, making unsuitability and pay the two main reasons for staff leaving their settings in 2004/2005.

3.4 Summary

The perception that retention of qualified and competent early years practitioners depends on raised standards and increased provision is only one perspective. There are others. In Nottingham maternity leave, not returning to work after having a baby and career change have all had a negative influence on retention. Furthermore retention in Day nurseries fluctuates depending on the number of practitioners transferring from one type of provision to another. Workforce mobility, seen as some to as problematic was encouraged by others. There was no clear indication of the turnover of practitioners in Nottingham's Day nurseries between 2004 and 2005. A range of reasons given by settings for staff losses may have been precise accounts, or their own perspectives. Unsuitability of staff and pay were the main reasons given.

3.5 Conclusions

Although it is not possible to separate Day nurseries from other types of full day care provision Ofsted reports have shown that provision for young children in Nottingham tends to compare favourably to England overall. Nottingham's providers do not excel nor are they particularly poor; rather they tend to be of 'Good' quality. Notably Nottingham was particularly poor at Standard 2: Organisation which included adult:child ratios, space and resources and Standard 3: Documentation or paperwork. Both these areas are identified by participants in my research as aspects of the work and workplace with which they experience dissatisfaction.

Nottingham's annual childcare audit finds that the majority of practitioners working in Day nurseries in 2005 were qualified to the level required of them, which is Level 3. Almost all of those in leadership positions were also appropriately qualified at a time when Level 3 and two years experience in the job were considered sufficient for supervising other staff. Although some practitioners had achieved Level 4 there was no progression for them beyond that which was already available at Level 3. Two percent of all practitioners in leadership positions had been appointed without the appropriate qualification. This is not to say that these room leaders (in 2.5) or managers were not able to supervise staff successfully, but there are implications for the retention of practitioners who were appropriately qualified for these positions and were not appointed.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

4. Methodology

4.1 Overview

This chapter examines the interpretive approach used in the study to facilitate an investigation of practitioners' 'realities' and illuminate issues influencing retention of early years practitioners in Day nurseries. The chosen approach permits a combining of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to study and interpret attitudes, values and perceptions of practitioners to their work and workplace.

4.2 Ontological and Epistemological Understandings

Beliefs about the nature of knowledge and epistemological beliefs influence the methodological decision-making processes of educational research; they influence its positioning within a broad research paradigm, and direct its particular methodological pathway, methods and techniques.

I argue that a world that exists based only on my view and knowledge of it is merely a reflection, with inevitable prejudices. Holding only subjective ontological views opens oneself up to accusations of discouraging, even quashing objective debate. In opposition, if the world exists according to individuals with different views, rather than surmising that there are different perspectives of one world, one may argue that we are not all looking at same world and that many worlds and many realities exist. If though, there are many people experiencing one world (and we know that our experiences are different) we may argue that each person has their own reality. Reality is subjective. Understanding the reality or experience of others is problematic because of the subjective observation of the observer. The interpretivist research paradigm considers this. In formulating conceptions of existence and reality one may begin to deconstruct one's raison d'être. For example, is existence concerned more with taking from the world than giving to it? Is there in fact a reason for being, or is existence meaningless?

This chapter examines the interpretive approach used in the study to illuminate issues influencing retention of early years practitioners in Day nurseries. An interpretive approach facilitates investigation of practitioners' 'realities'. It allows a combining of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to study and interpret attitudes, values and perceptions of practitioners to their work and workplace in order to shed light on the central question of what induces them to remain in Day nurseries.

Awareness that people think differently helps address researcher bias (Marshall and Rossman 1995) as may experiences of self-study (Griffiths 2006) and other researchful pursuits. For example, the art of conducting interviews may help improve practice (Simms 2006). All offer opportunities for reflexivity, which in turn facilitate the development of researchers' own understanding and values (Griffiths 1998). The experience of heightening understanding and determining values may be effectual in raising awareness of personal or professional bias, which is an essential component of good research practice; although Griffiths (1998) contends that practice does not lead to perfection, as even good research and research design can be improved upon (Patton 2002).

'Transient knowing' is the term I use to explain this find-and-go-seek process because what I claim to know at this moment is subject to change. Therefore, my claim is to transient knowledge. 'Change' does not necessary mean changing direction. It may mean modification. For example, as a snowball may change in size, weight, consistency and even temperature when rolled in more snow. Change may be transformative - as a snowball to water; though the snowball disappears its elements exist in the water.

Acknowledging that there are different ways of acquiring knowledge is just one aspect of epistemological discussion. How we know what we know, and determine truth are also factors to consider in the pursuit of appropriate research methodology. A case in point is this, believing some early years practitioners are undervalued, is not the same as knowing that they are undervalued. Belief implies a sense of personal involvement and subjective thinking associated with 'practitioners feeling undervalued'. Travelling further along this critical thought trail, so called cognitive dissonance occurs where belief and knowledge conflict. I argue that crossing the threshold into knowledge involves affirmation of knowing that will involve substantiation by further evidence; this can be in agreement with me and/or others. In the case of this study, the acquisition of knowledge involves constant regeneration and consolidation of thought and thinking; or as Griffiths supposes (1998, p. 82) 'knowledge bears the mark of its knower'.

4.3 Nature, Purpose and Research Paradigm

The research makes no claims of being either experimental or a scientifically tested study of cause and effect. It does not rely upon the 'formal steps of logic' found in deductive reasoning (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007, p.6). An example of a possible line of

thinking in deductive reasoning may be 'All Day nurseries employ early years practitioners, females are early years practitioners, females work in Day nurseries'. As far as I am aware all Day nurseries, in the UK at least, do employ early years practitioners, some females are early years practitioners, as are some males; some females, but not all, do work in Day nurseries. Such reasoning has no value and is not helpful to this research because it offers no new information or insight.

One of the aims of the research is to help fill gaps found in the earlier literature review. The rationale for positioning the study within the context of educational research is that according to Griffiths (1998, p. 69) 'there is widespread (though not universal) agreement that educational research is concerned with improvement of the practices of education'; it is 'inextricably intertwined' with 'politics and decision-making' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007, p.7).

Early years practitioners, although possibly unaware of it, are similarly 'inextricably intertwined' in contemporary political activity and decision-making processes in which their sector is submerged. This research is a contribution to the debate that informs that process. Hence, I argue the methodological considerations of this research from within a broad interpretivist paradigm.

Interpretivist methodologies (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007) and methods 'favoured in interpretivist studies', include 'naturalistic forms of data collection', such as informal interviews and observations (Burton 2005, p.22). The interpretivist does not seek statistical representativeness, or aim to claim generalisation. Rather, as in this study, effort is concentrated on bringing 'detail' and understanding to lived experience (ibid,, p.22). The interpretivist approach contends that reality (in 4.1) is dependent on the interpretation of people and 'the observer makes a difference to the observed' (Wellington 2000, p. 6). Woods and Trexler (2001) suggest using an interpretivist approach to investigate human phenomena whilst reserving the positivist approach for the study of animals. Interpretation itself requires a robust methodological framework in order to claim validity (Bassey 1992; Pollard 2002). Burton interprets Punch (1998) as suggesting that researchers who take an interpretivist approach 'need to show on what evidence they base their findings' (Burton 2005, p.27).

Whereas natural and social sciences attempt to 'discover natural and universal laws to determine and explain human behaviour' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007, p. 7),

constructivists take the view that knowledge 'consists of those constructs about which there is 'relative consensus' (Guba and Lincoln 1994, p.212). Research in the positivist paradigm looks for the existence of reality that is not dependent upon the interpretation of people; such reality is considered by the positivist researcher to be fact. Whatever their preferred paradigm, researchers do well to guard against a dogmatic or blinkered approach, which elevates their particular paradigm, to the detriment of alternative paradigms.

Investigation of 'realities' in the interpretivist paradigm requires a methodological approach that focuses on observing the subjects. I use the term 'observing' in a broad sense rather than a literal sense of carrying out observations. Interpretivists tend to favour qualitative methods of data collection but do not rule out the use of quantitative methods - the predominant choice of positivist researchers. Interpretivists utilise quantitative method to investigate qualitative phenomena (Greenbank 2003).

Patton (1990) argues phenomenology as a research paradigm is a reaction against the positivist paradigm. There is no doubt that feeling undervalued is a widespread phenomenon amongst practitioners in the early years workforce (CWDC 2006). Carrying out a phenomenological investigation of behaviour patterns of practitioners who feel undervalued, to find out what induces them to remain in Day nurseries, would entail identifying a sample of practitioners who feel undervalued. This could potentially cause difficulties for practitioners within their setting. The phenomenological position emphasises that humans live within an inter-subjective world where they can only approximate shared realities (Orleans 1998). Although the study group may all feel undervalued, the feeling may be different in each case and may result in different behaviours. Practitioners working in the same Day nursery may have similar experiences but each experience is unique, and its effects on the person unique. For example, practitioners may feel simultaneously fulfilled and frustrated; fulfilled by meeting the needs of young children and frustrated at feeling undervalued for doing so. It is the attitudes, values and perceptions of early years practitioners in Nottingham that the research methodology is designed to liberate. Miles (1993) notes approaches to qualitative data analysis are similar in the phenomenological and interpretivist approaches. However, the phenomenological approach is not in this case the most appropriate methodology.

Positioning in the interpretivist paradigm, favouring a qualitative approach which is 'uniquely suited to uncovering the unexpected' (Marshall 1995), does not necessarily require

a shying away from quantitative method, as a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches may facilitate deeper insight into participants experiences (Bell 1993).

In agreement with Marshall and Rossman's assertion that 'A strong autobiographical element often drives the scholarly interest' seems to be the case (1995, p.17). It is 'common in accounts of action research, where research journals are often used. 'The final report often contains references to writers' own lives: their development and personal experiences' (Griffiths 1994, p.72). This study is not directly autobiographical; it is not a study of one's own situation; it is not then action research. It is, though, autobiographical in an indirect 'once removed' sense, as family member 'once removed' from the direct family line. The autobiographical nature stems from the researcher's own experience of childcare, as a mother, a practitioner, an educator of practitioners, a researcher of practitioners and a consultant for practitioners. The researchers' experience in this regard – though not reported - exists in the drive behind all that is the research.

Qualitative research is also, to some extent, biographical in eliciting people's stories. For participants involved in this study there is an element of the biographical in that they are relating their experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of their work and workplace. Qualitative research depends on participants divulging their own thoughts and experience rather than saying what they think researchers want to hear.

In this section, I have discussed what constitutes educational research, the aims of methodology, and different methodological approaches; supported the argument for the integration of qualitative and quantitative in educational research and positioned the research in an interpretivist paradigm. The chapter continues with an exposition of the quantitative and qualitative methodologies I have chosen to make the research an accessible and valuable contribution to the debate on retention of early years practitioners in Day nurseries.

4.4 Research Approach and Process
4.4.1 Quantitative and qualitative methodology
The research approach depends on the type of question and to whom or what it refers. My central research question asks early years practitioners working in Day nurseries in Nottingham about their attitudes, values and perceptions of their work and workplace (in 1.1; 2.2.2; 2.6.1; 2.8). I chose therefore to employ quantitative and qualitative methodologies

in a complementary fashion to gain breadth and depth (Bryman 1988; Wellington 2000; Silverman 2001) in the research and facilitate insight into the participants' experiences (Bell 1993). The quantitative approach sought statistical information through a survey questionnaire (in 5.2 and Appendix 1: Survey) and the qualitative approach enabled naturalistic study of individuals through interview, observation and participation (in 5.3; 5.4; 5.5).

The concept of viewing a central point from different standpoints to elicit information, illustrated later (in 5.1; 5.2) demonstrates that the order in which an object or issue is viewed has a bearing on the perspective of the viewer, so too in this research. To investigate the research questions from several different perspectives I developed the research design shown in 5.2. I conducted the fieldwork between February 2004 and August 2006 - a period of two and a half years. If the order of data collection methods was changed, for example the survey being carried out after the group interviews, it is possible that the questions asked would have been quite different because of practitioner input very early on in the research process. The research design shows the survey as my starting point.

4.4.2 Ethics and bias

There are ethical issues involved in using different methodologies (British Educational Research Association 2009). 'Research with human participants is an intrusive process (Lewis and Lindsay 2000, p.3), to which a 'system of moral principles' should be applied 'to prevent harming or wrongdoing others, to promote the good to be respectful, and to be fair' Seiber (1993). The standards Seiber applies to conducting sensitive social research are equally relevant to the pursuit of knowledge through educational research. A thorough assessment of potential risk to educational research participants and others must be undertaken prior to, and throughout the study. This suggests Seiber (1993, p.19):

> …means learning to perceive risk factors from the perspective of the persons who will be affected, remembering that not everyone perceives things as the researcher would (Seiber 1993, p.19).
> .

'Maintaining open and honest professional standards is fundamental to research' (Nottingham Trent University 2008). The University approved this study through its usual channels.

According to Saint-Germain (2008, p.1), 'ethical issues arise due to the purposes of research, the subject matter of research, and the types of methods that are used'. Moreover, 'the products of research in the public sector may be to provide tools for manipulation (ibid,). When considering the subject matter Saint-Germain insists on taking care where there are risks and potential dilemmas involved in participation. The importance of recognising how risks may occur cannot be overstated; to underestimate risk is to potentially compromise participants' confidentiality, privacy and safety. To endeavour to protect the vulnerable and maintain confidentiality, trust, loyalty and relationship is to attain high ethical standards.

Participants are potentially made vulnerable through the giving of data to the research, more especially when data that conflicts with the ideals of fellow workers, managers or Day nursery owners. McCalla-Chen (2000) raises this issue of 'moral dilemma' faced by research participants 'deciding to reveal tensions between actors'; such dilemma is pertinent to this research, for example in the issue of access through the 'gatekeeper' (Wellington 2000, p.56). Access to survey respondents for this study was through Day nursery managers and owners. The ethical consideration here was the welfare of participants who may choose to put in writing less than positive attitudes, values and perceptions of their work and workplace. To observe ethical protocols (The Open University 1991) is to empower managers and owners as gatekeepers, who as such are in a position to influence responses, filter out negative responses, or address the criticisms levelled at the nursery without the researcher being at all aware of the difficult position that their research has caused for the respondents.

A further aspect of the vulnerability of respondents is within the peer group where there is disagreement concerning responses, potentially causing factions within the Day nursery. There is potential for participant vulnerability in the workplace through the gifting of data to the research, particularly where that data conflicts with the ideals of fellow workers, managers or Day nursery owners.

Furthermore, participants can expect protection in terms of identity, not only by name but also in terms of anonymity of participant passionate voice. The research manages the former by substituting numbers for survey respondent names, and pseudonyms for interview and story participants. Where several participants express similar attitudes, values

and perceptions, a single voice is unlikely to be identifiable; however, findings relate to just one participant action must be taken to protect the identity of that participant. Researchers have an obligation to raise the awareness of participants concerning their right not to take part in the research, or indeed to withdraw if they see fit. I make every effort to protect the relationship between the research participants who have entrusted me with 'snapshots of their reality' and myself. I take seriously my responsibility to protect their identity.

Along rather different lines to the ethical issues directly affecting practitioners, were decisions regarding the use of a research tool designed by other researchers (in 5.3.1). In this case, the survey questionnaire designed by Cameron et al. (2001) for their study of early years students and practitioners. In this case, I obtained permission from the researchers to adapt their questionnaire for my own research. The study took place between 1998 and 2000 and was the first of its kind in the UK. Conclusions drawn in the study relating to the perceived undervaluing of practitioners, resonated with my own professional disquiet regarding an apparent anomaly of practitioners both loving their work and feeling undervalued. Influenced by the methodology, I had considered the survey to be a useful starting point for my own study (in 4.4.5).

Research questions themselves are open to bias. The question, the way the question is asked, and who is asking the question, the perceived reason for the question being asked are all potential precursors to bias. Where the subject of the questions is potentially contentious, for example issues of pay, hours and leadership, respondents may expect the researcher to be looking for evidence to support claims on one side of the argument or another. Silverman's (2001, p.13) notion of 'authenticity' is one way of attempting to overcome this problem. I take up this discussion on authenticity later (in 4.5).

4.4.3 Survey

Survey methodology is clearly quantitative in that it provides statistics, but it may also have qualitative facets. It investigates 'soft' data of the kind qualitative researchers are interested in. To this extent the survey questionnaire is, as Wellington (2000, p.101) says, 'quantitative in method' and 'qualitative in nature'. My rationale for including survey in my methodology was that it enabled the gathering of standardised information through appropriately structured questions to provide insight into the main question of the research, that is, 'What induces early years practitioners to remain in Day nurseries?' (in 4.1; 4.4.1).

Wellington (2000, p.101) hesitantly agrees with Bell's supposition (1993, p.14) that surveys may provide answers to the questions what, where, when and how questions. Bell contends that surveys 'are not useful for finding 'why?' … or proving causal relationships' (ibid., p.8). Wellington goes one step further by suggesting qualitative data may also be collected through surveys 'which may contribute to the development of theory as much as interview or observational data (ibid., p.101).

Inevitably, survey methodology is used to study a snapshot of the respondents' 'reality' at the time the survey is carried out (in 1.5). Incorporating the survey into a longitudinal design permits the taking of a series of snapshots (Simms 2006) thereby capturing a longer-term impression of respondents' 'reality' rather than a snapshot; rather like a video as compared to a single photo.

Where causes of changing realities are being explored, longitudinal studies have the advantage. From experience, the researcher who establishes a relationship of trust with respondents is able to gain deep insight into their attitudes, values and perceptions – even outside of the particular issues under investigation. However I thought the snapshot approach would suffice, as I had chosen to use the survey in conjunction with follow-up interviews (in 2.9; 4.4.7; 4.4.9; 5.5.1; 5.5.2). Furthermore, the snapshot type approach, a feature of the 'cross-sectional study' (Cohen and Manion 2000, p.179) is 'comparatively quick to conduct' with a 'stronger likelihood of participation as it is for a single period of time' (ibid.). One potential disadvantage of using the snapshot approach in my study is that survey questionnaire responses may be affected by the circumstance or mood of the day. I would argue that this may be said of any single method or data collection technique. My approach was to work within the recognised procedures of interpretivist methodology by incorporating a mix of quantitative survey and qualitative interview method and techniques. Drawing on methods appropriate to the chosen methodology together helped created a more robust research mechanism with which to carry out my investigation.

Methods were selected for their potential to elicit relevant quantitative and qualitative data from practitioners in relation to the research questions. Combining survey questionnaire with interview, for example, meant that I could conduct follow up interviews with the sample of survey questionnaire respondents some eighteen months after the survey was

carried out. Cameron et al. (2001) used a combined approach which enabled insightful research into perceptions of practitioners and students about their work. I felt that this was a strong reason to utilise the approach in my own study. Another advantage of using survey methodology along with follow-up interviews was that it helped to identify those respondents who remained in or moved on from the Day nurseries in the eighteen-month period between the survey and the interviews. 'Revisiting' the respondents facilitated opportunities to take a more personal approach toward investigating the kinds of questions Bell refers to as 'Why?' questions.

Perceived challenges to using survey methodology were administrative and human. Administrative challenges included, although hardly calculable, the cost of administering the postal survey questionnaire and the logistics of providing reply paid envelopes. Nottingham Trent University Education Research Unit bore the costs of postage and printing of reply paid envelopes. Perceived human challenges were not so straightforward. Dealing with perceptions is an internal problem as opposed to the administrative challenges, which were external.

My perceptions were that use of survey depended upon support from people in three distinct groups, these were staff at Nottingham Local Authority Early Years and Childcare Unit, Day nursery managers and owners, and, thirdly, early years practitioners. Their support was imperative for the following reasons:

The Early Years and Childcare Unit

The Early Years and Childcare Unit was a central source of support for Day nurseries within the geographical parameters of the research – Nottingham. It was also my place of employment. Consent of the relevant personnel in the Early Years and Childcare Unit to carrying out the research was therefore imperative. To do the research without informed consent I felt would be taking advantage of my position in the Unit. In addition, it was important to me to be as transparent as possible with colleagues who worked closely with the Day nursery owners and managers so that colleagues felt informed about the research and able to respond to any questions from owners and managers, who were also potential gatekeepers to the information I needed from early years practitioners. Furthermore, support of my managers I felt would help progress the research, whereas undertaking the research without their approval may not have done so.

<u>Day nursery managers and owners</u>

Day nursery managers and owners are effectively gatekeepers to the Day nursery because in the literal sense they monitor and control access to the nursery for the safety and protection of the children and staff. In terms of access to information and communication coming in and out of the nursery, it is reasonable to expect this is also, to some extent monitored or controlled. As such, managers and owners have the power to grant or deny access to practitioners, and hence the data. Once made, the decision to permit access to data also opens up opportunities to consciously or subconsciously influence and/or vet practitioner responses to the survey questionnaire.

Involvement in the study is the prerogative of potential participants. I did not take their willingness to respond for granted. One possible reason for non-involvement, I perceived, was lack of time to complete questionnaires. Another, that managers and owners might be uncertain about the kind of responses practitioners may give, or mistrust my motives for carrying out the research - which brings in to play Cohen, Manion and Morrison's notion of the 'informer' (2007, p. 123). I perceived several reasons why managers and owners would want practitioners in their settings to participate in the research. They may recognise the value of the research to their own setting in terms of being able to gain insight from survey questionnaire responses into attitudes, values and perceptions of their staff. They may recognise the potential of the research to future retention practices, and as such, they may be willing to support the research project. In the event, there were no overt problems of access. That is to say, no managers or owners openly complained about the survey. Some did not return completed surveys but without explanation. Others returned just their own survey and none from their staff. This may be due to bias on their part, misunderstanding of the purpose of the survey, or a goodwill gesture because practitioners were too busy to complete the surveys.

<u>Early years practitioners</u>

The participation of early years practitioners was fundamental to the effective collection of sufficient data to be able to count the survey a success. I considered that participating in the survey would afford early years practitioners one opportunity to reflect upon their job role and attitude to their current workplace, and to give voice to their levels of satisfaction in a new arena.

There were numerous reasons why I could not presume to take practitioner participation for granted. These included:

- lack of interest in, or opinion on, the issues raised in the survey questionnaire
- not wanting to populate the questionnaire with personal feelings, professional perspective, information, and experience
- uncertainty or mistrust relating to the origin and purpose of the survey questionnaire
- doubt as to the value of their responses to the study or
- hesitancy with regard to writing down information that may be difficult for others to hear

Some potential reasons for early years practitioners being willing to participate in the survey were feeling valued at being asked to participate and having an interest in the issues raised in the survey questionnaire.

In selecting the sample for the survey, (Wellington 2000) stresses the importance of having information on the population from which one takes the sample. This sampling frame determines the actual sample of the population to be surveyed (Denscombe 2003). A typical sample size for a small-scale survey may be 200 or 300 respondents, although even these relatively small numbers were not feasible within the time and financial constraints of my study (Cohen and Manion 1994, p.111). My research is 'micro-scale' in comparison 'medium/large scale research' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, p.44). Although very small, carrying out the survey enabled the collection of a range of qualitative primary data on attitudes, values, and perception of practitioners in Day nurseries in Nottingham. I discuss analysis of the data later in the chapter.

Adaptation and pilot

Having received permission to use and adapt the survey questionnaire (in 4.4.3), I made several changes to enable collection of data specific to my research question. These changes included:

- omitting irrelevant questions
- rephrasing some questions
- redefining the scoring system.

Phrasing survey questions can be difficult. For example, one question in the original survey read 'I do not care what happens to this place when I leave'. Narrowing the scoring continuum I felt would minimise participant indecisiveness. The structure worked well for me as it separated the job satisfaction questions from the ones about current workplace. I also considered the layout of the questionnaire and included space for participant comments.

The piloting of research tools (5.2.1; 5.4.1.2; 5.4.2.2) helps to identify weaknesses and anomalies, and so avoid difficulties at the actual survey stage. The approach used in my research is similar to that used by (Murray Thomson 1998). It involved selecting a representative sample with similar characteristics to the study group, explaining the task, administering the questionnaire, discussing areas of difficulty, revising the questionnaire and finally thanking the pilot participants. Thanking participants was particularly important to the ethos of the research, which is to maintain the centrality of the early years participants who have taken part in it. In discussion with pilot participants and their tutor, we found an element of their course to which could be accredited their work with me, as another professional. This does not mean I paid practitioners to be involved; rather it showed my appreciation of their involvement *after* the event.

Piloting of the survey questionnaire took place before posting the final version of the survey to Day nurseries in Nottingham. The remit of practitioners who participated in the piloting process was to give honest feedback on the survey questionnaire. I read out the questions and invited constructive criticism of each one. The first pilot was carried out between November 2003 and December 2003 with fifteen student early years practitioners in college. The second pilot took place in January 2004 with a different set of four students and one staff member at another college. None of the students involved in the pilot participated in either the final survey questionnaire or any of the interviews.

The piloting process proved extremely beneficial as it resulted in a number of changes to the survey questionnaire before posting to the study sample. These changes included:

- Use of language; for example, one group challenged the use of the phrase 'the activity of looking after children', as they suggested that activity referred

to the planning of play activities. 'Working with children' they accepted as a viable alternative as it gave clarity to the question.

- The rating scale came under scrutiny and participants recommended changes that clarified interpretation of it.

The intense process of, and reflection on, piloting helped to ensure that the survey questions adequately addressed my research questions (Survey audit in Appendix 1: Survey).

The piloting process sought to ensure addressing of anomalies prior to administration of the survey questionnaire, thereby making the tool appropriate for the collection of data on practitioners' levels of job satisfaction and approach to their current workplace. Data collected, using the final version of the survey questionnaire, was foundational to the fieldwork activity.

Sample

When I undertook the fieldwork for this research there was no data available on the numbers of practitioners working in Day nurseries in Nottingham. Briggs and Potter (2000) carried out an audit of the number of practitioners in all settings including Day nurseries. (It was not possible to define the population in terms of individual practitioners but it was possible to define the population in terms of all Day nurseries in Nottingham. This population exists within a broader population of Day nursery settings across the UK where thousands of practitioners work with young children. Studying a large sample of the broader population is more the privilege of research teams rather than the individual researcher due to the manageability of such a project.

Revisit, reflect, reassess

The initial analysis of the survey data surprised me and I felt the need to revisit, reflect upon, and reassess my original thoughts on the perceived undervaluing of practitioners in Day nurseries (Ely et al. 1997). Overall respondents did not appear to be particularly dissatisfaction with aspects of the job or their current workplace. This was surprising because of the relative consensus that exists amongst practitioners and commentators that there is a tendency for practitioners to feel undervalued.

The main issues I revisited were accuracy and interpretation of data. Firstly, concerning accuracy of data was the question of whether the survey questionnaire

respondents had given an accurate indication of their attitudes, values and perceptions, or they ticked boxes indiscriminately. Secondly, whether some respondents were accepting of a certain level of dissatisfaction to the extent that they stated that they were satisfied. Thirdly, I considered whether some respondents were prepared to tolerate certain unsatisfactory aspects of the job because of their satisfaction of working with children. In considering these issues, I revisited the issue of how I would know what there was to be known about the attitudes, values and perceptions of early years practitioners in Nottingham's Day nurseries. In considering these matters, serious doubts arose in my mind about my own preconceptions of work in Day nurseries; these preconceptions although subjective, were contributing factors in my rationale for undertaking the research.

Reflection on all of the above involved retrieving the source and circumstance of each mentally stored piece of anecdotal evidence, then re-evaluating it in the light of present day early years practitioners in Day nurseries. There were four elements to this reassessment as I now go on to explain.

Reassessment of my rationale for carrying out the research to reflect on the anecdotal evidence I had stored mentally for a considerable number of years, and consider whether my perceptions were no longer applicable to early years practitioners working in Day nurseries – and specifically Day nurseries in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

1. Consider the relevance of my long-held notion to retention of today's practitioners. I mentioned earlier the disproportionate number of complaints about work with young children that came from early years students and practitioners working in Day nurseries compared to other types of childcare and education provision for young children (in 1.2).

2. Focus on two very specific aspects of the data from the postal survey questionnaire: the most surprising and contradictory. What surprised me most was the overall sense that respondents to the postal survey were satisfied with their job and workplace (Appendix 1: Survey). This contradicted my expectations in relation to respondents' levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the amount of stress arising from their work. Together, the elements of this third stage of my re-evaluation reminded me that one of my reasons for carrying out the study was rooted in the anecdotal

evidence. I mentioned earlier that even the most enterprising, biddable and conscientious practitioners can find unrealistic expectations of them distressing (in 1.2).

3. The fourth element was to revisit the literature and check my stance in the reading of it to ensure that I had adequately acknowledged bias. Afterwards I concluded that it was crucial to revisit the broader national perspective in order to minimise any researcher bias. Therefore, having funnelled from the broader national perspective discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review to a local perspective discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology I introduced an additional tool into the research. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.3) in writing about qualitative researchers, suggested naturalistic observation and participation.

4.4.4 Naturalistic observation and participation

Qualitative methodology encourages the researching of issues from a number of perspectives as it 'reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question' (Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p.5; Young 2001). There are no hard and fast rules in qualitative methodology or in educational research as to the timing of the introduction of additional perspectives. I therefore took the liberty of introducing naturalistic observation and participation to back up the survey and seek further insight into apparent gaps left by the survey questionnaire findings.

As already mentioned, interpretivist methodologies and methods favour naturalistic observation and participation. Although the way in which the research utilises this methodology may be unconventional, I advocate that applying naturalistic observation and participation to an electronic forum rather than a physical forum, is merely utilising current technology to the fullest advantage in order to understand what induces early years practitioners to remain in Day nurseries.

4.4.5 Interview

According to Briggs, interviews 'fundamentally, not incidentally, shape the form and content of what is said' (1996, p. 73). The semi-structured interview utilises a question guide, allowing deviation and flexibility, and inviting opportunity for extension and probing of questions and answers in contrast to the rigidity of the conventional structured format (Smith, Harre and Van Langenhove 1995; Wellington 2000, p.74). I wanted to let

participants speak about the topics under research, and at the same time, provide more in-depth information about, for example, qualifications, career path, years of service and reasons for practitioners in Nottingham remaining in the sector in order to illuminate their attitudes, values, and perceptions about their work and workplace. For this reason, I used the initial analysis of the survey questionnaire data to inform the semi-structured interview schedule (Sharp 2009, p. 74).

In-depth interviewing is prevalent in research that utilises qualitative methods of data collection. Marshall and Rossman (1995) liken in-depth interviewing to conversation between researcher and the researched 'typically qualitative in-depth interviews are much more like conversations that formal events with pre-determined response categories' (Marshall 1995, p. 80). Semi-structured interviews help to form a more detailed picture of participant's perceptions about their job and workplace. They can may be carried out individually and in groups, face-to-face or by telephone. Collection of data using face-to-face interview technique can be costly in terms of time needed to arrange travel to and carry out the interviews, doing them by telephone helps eliminate some of these difficulties. For example, when time is limited conducting several telephone interviews in the time it takes to travel to one appointment for a face-to-face interview is advantageous. Hence, I was able to seek a more detailed picture of survey respondents' experiences by employing a combination of telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews.

Although a rich source of data, qualitative interviews are subject to interviewer bias and awareness of this phenomenon is a good starting point for dealing with it. Seeking to address one's own personal potential for interviewer bias is particularly enlightening. Investigations into one's own ontological and epistemological perceptions are thought provoking, and for me highlight a potential root of personal bias. My intention in bringing my perspective of the world, as it were, 'out of the closet', is to present a persona of transparency that invites scrutiny in the hope of avoiding accusation of avoidable bias.

Follow-up interview

Nineteen survey respondents agreed to take part in further research and provided telephone contact details; some also provided email addresses. An assumption is that survey questionnaire respondents had given due consideration to whether or not they provided contact details, and which details they provided; for example work, home or mobile

telephone numbers. The provided contact details ensured that respondents were in their environment of choice for the follow-up interviews.

Initially, I had envisaged carrying out face-to-face interviews. However, this was not practical for the following reasons:

- It was likely that participants would be at work on weekdays. Carrying out interviews in the workplace may be inconvenient or intrusive.
- Convening meetings outside of working hours may have been possible, but meeting nineteen participants individually would incur unnecessary costs in terms of time and travel expense

The most viable approach was, therefore, to conduct semi-structured interviews by telephone (as explained above). Further, this approach potentially freed interviewees from perceived or actual 'gatekeeper' influence or censorship.

I planned the schedule for semi-structured interviews after analysing data collected by naturalistic observation and participation. The semi-structured interview approach allows for the following up of emerging avenues of discussion giving a fuller picture (Smith, Harre and Van Langenhove 1995) of the participants experiences. Smith *et al.* suggest that whilst 'no automatic link' exists between semi-structured interviewing and qualitative analysis, richness of emerging themes is captured using qualitative analysis but lost in the categorisation required for quantitative analysis (ibid.).

One of the advantages of holding a face-to-face group interview is the gathering of data from several participants in less time than it takes to interview each one individually. Further, group interview minimises the power differential between researchers and researched (Gubrium and Holstein 2002) which, in the context of my study relates to age and status of researcher and researched. That is, mature professional researcher interviewing young college student/practitioner. It also related to ownership, in that the group individually and collectively owned data that I needed for my research. Carrying out the interview in a natural context - in this case, the regular classroom setting to which I was a definite outsider - gave the group power. They did not appear to see my presence as an intrusion.

The convenience sample for the face-to-face group interviews was readily accessible and willing to participate. The 'naturally occurring group' (The Open University 1991, p. 48) in the sample consisted of twenty-nine students undertaking an early years course of study in Nottingham. The duration of the group interview was one and a half hours. All group interview participants contributed data. Two members of staff helped with facilitation.

4.4.6 Stories

Qualitative research is, to some extent, biographical in eliciting people's stories. Inevitably, for participants involved in this study there is an element of the biographical because they are relating their experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of their work and workplace. Qualitative research depends on participants divulging their own thoughts and experiences rather than saying what they think researchers want to hear (in 5.5.6). Maintaining their voice is vital and Marshall and Rossman (2006, p.5) assert that 'Researchers pay close attention to the voice they use in their work as a representation of the relationship between them and their participants'. The study takes the 'holistic approach to qualitative data presentation' that Cohen, Manion and Morrison suggest 'leads to a story-style of reporting' (2007, p. 468) from which 'issues emerge as they arise' (2007, p. 468). Moreover, story facilitates access to the research for interested participants and others (Dey 1993).

4.4.7 Research journal

The research journal, or diary, is an important research method and 'a companion to the research process [es]', a familiar way of recording daily thoughts, notes and observations (Altrichter, Posch and Somekh 1998, p.10). Commonly, but by no means exclusively, used by teachers undertaking action research the journal becomes a central storage space for a myriad of thoughts, ideas and data; vital to the process of data collection, reflection and analysis. Traditionally journals are private places where access is by invitation only. Altrichter warns against the potential of journals presenting opportunities for covert and therefore unethical research. Ensuring transparency is a matter of making sure participants know that they are participating and that they grant permission for public use of the data (ibid.).

Diary, journal and log although seemingly interchangeable have quite different meanings (as above). Holly (1989) in looking to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary finds three different and separate, but sometimes overlapping definitions. One use of a log is to record performance, as a teacher recording the behaviour and progress of a child for the purpose of

mapping patterns and learning styles. This differs from diaries 'which provide a place for authors to "let it all out" without concern for how others will interpret and judge their thoughts and feelings' (ibid., p.18).

The journal combines the structured, descriptive and objective notes of the log and the free-flowing, impressionistic meanderings of the diary. In agreement with Holly (1998, p.20), a journal is a place where:

> The writer can carry on a dialogue with various dimensions of experience. What happened? What are the facts? What was my role? What feelings surrounded the event? What did I feel about what I did? Why? What was the setting? The steps involved? And later, what were the important elements? What preceded the event? Followed it? What might I be aware of if such a situation recurs? This dialogue between objective and subjective views becomes description and interpretation, allows the writer to become more accepting and less judgmental as a flow of events takes form. Actions interconnect and take on new meaning (Holly 1998, p.20).

I used graphical representation in my journals to elicit ontological, epistemological and methodological dimensions of the research and form understandings upon which I based the research approach. Steps are not taken unless due thought and consideration is given to its methodological implications.

Similarly, Clough and Nutbrown illuminate 'the process of making methodology' thus:

> The process of making methodology is taking place at all stages of the research – from early fitful interests or hunches through to the crafting of the final sentence. At all stages decisions are being made whether it be about the framing of a research question, the selection of a method, or even the use of a single word (Clough and Nutbrown 2001, p. viii).

Implicit in Clough and Nutbrown's exposition of the process of making methodology is the pace, breadth and minutiae of the research. Examples are the use of language such as 'fitful interest', 'crafting', 'framing', 'selection', 'or even the use of a single word'. The pace seems to gather momentum in reverse, by this I mean that, as the erratic beginnings of the research slow to the crucial defining and refining stages of framing and intricate selection of a single word, the research speeds towards its conclusions. Extracts from my journals are included in 5.8.

4.4.8 Analysis

According to Marshall and Rossman (1995, p.113) researchers should follow 'analytical procedures', which they fall into five modes. In 2006, after further development, the model included seven phases (Marshall and Rossman 2006). The first model uses vocabulary such as 'testable' and 'hypothesis' - more akin to scientific research. The second model uses terms such as 'immersion', 'interpretation', 'memos,' and 'understandings' with which I can more easily identify. This process reflects my own considerations of how I would analyse the data. The process involves organising and immersing oneself in the data, generating categories, themes and patterns, coding the data, offering interpretations through analytic memos, searching for alternative understandings and writing up. I explain the process here:

Organisation of the data involved reading and re-reading for the purpose of familiarisation (Dey 1993) and critical reading, sorting, filing and storing data in hard and electronic formats. The literature was categorised, numbered, filed and referenced electronically then input on 'Refworks' bibliographic software programme. Research journals and journal pages were numbered.

Survey questionnaire responses were filed according to the name of the Day nursery. Electronic data were input and analysed using SPSS computer analysis software (Connolly 2007). The e-forum data was stored electronically: hard copies were printed and filed. Interview notes and other data were 'annotated' (Dey 1993, p. 88) and stored in hard copy books for field work.

The amount of data was not anticipated – and overwhelming. My main strategy to manage the process was to work on one aspect or theme at a time, reading, discussing and viewing it from different perspectives. Categories, themes and patterns emerged from organising and re-organising the data. Concept mapping helped to summarise and consolidate information, and form new thoughts, ideas, and knowledge. I highlighted categories, themes and pertinent points. The process of jotting down thoughts on post-it notes during the immersion stage helped in the analysis (Gubrium and Holstein 2002), it was somewhat systematic and it generated new thinking. I also used the journals to jot down thoughts and expand upon them. These actions helped to jog my memory concerning previous thoughts and to signify direction for the next stage of the research. There was a continuous search for alternative understandings in the process throughout the research journey and in the process of writing up.

In the same way as described above, I generated categories and themes from data collected through naturalistic observation and participation in e-forums. The approach to analysis of the e-forums was to focus on the voice of the practitioners and to search for contrary views. Below is one of my e-forum postings and a response to it. I use it here as an example of how I generated some of the initial categories and themes during the analytical process.

My e-forum posting: If you are an early years practitioner in a private Day nursery please tell me what you think of your current workplace. Are you happy there? Why? Why not? Please tell me which town you live in. Emerging categories and themes are in emboldened text then placed in a grid for ease of access and comparison with other texts.

I am happy to help you with your research. I am a nursery manager from Edinburgh, I am happy with my workplace practice as I ensure the children are cared for and stimulated to a very high standard. I have 18 babies aged 6months to 18 months, and we have started using Birth to 3 matters as a guideline to our practice. We have also introduced baby sign language to our nursery & it is improving the communication between the children & staff. Along with many other nursery nurses I am unhappy that our salaries are so poorly reflected in relation to the hard work & commitment that we provide. But to end this on a positive note I would like to add that I am happy within my workplace practice.

Some emergent categories	From the text
Job title/ job role/ geographical area	Nursery manager Edinburgh
Aspects: policy/pay	Unhappy that our salaries
Attitude: towards e.g. policy/ practice/workplace	Happy to help you. happy with my workplace practice I ensure
Experience/perception of own And others' practice	Very high standard/ poorly reflected/ relation to hard work and commitment
Some emergent themes	
Need for affirmation	Along with many other nursery nurses
Mood	Happy
Progressive	I have also introduced

Figure 4: Emergent categories grid

Wellington (2000) suggests that input of data collected through use of survey questionnaire and initial analysis of findings, is quite straightforward. Where input is not 'quite' straightforward, due to the use of unfamiliar data analysis tools, the researcher must overcome the challenge it presents. For the researcher who is more inclined to use qualitative methods the time and effort expended on becoming familiar with the tools is well spent.

One advantage of using a statistical analysis package such as SPSS is that a large amount of data can be stored electronically and used to produce tables and graphs for further analysis. There are innumerable possibilities for cross-tabulation of data. Careful application of the process of using the tool is potentially more likely to ensure correct analysis of data.

Scrutiny of visual output from the data facilitated interpretation and helped identify area for more in-depth research. Hence, analysis of quantitative survey questionnaire data informed the focus of naturalistic observation and participation in e-forums and the follow-up interviews schedule. As Wellington (2000) warns, quantitative data alone cannot provide the depth of insight required. However, following–up survey questionnaire respondents with interviews facilitates the collection of in-depth qualitative data and potentially offers insight into the realities of the participants, as in this study.

4.5 Validity and Reliability

The study is one of experiences and 'realities'; these are subjective and susceptible to change and do not necessarily require validation (in 4.2; 4.3). Rather validity of this research is in the strict attention paid to the methodological approach. For example, there were implications in terms of validity of the survey data. Thirteen settings (68%) responded to the survey (in 5.2.2) but I did not know either their reasons for taking part, or others' reasons for non-participation. Thirty-seven individual practitioners responded from these Day nurseries. I intended to validate their responses in follow-up interviews but in the event, this happened with only seven of the survey respondents. Therefore, I could not validate most of the survey questionnaire data. Further, administering the postal survey through Day nursery managers and owners may have increased the potential for bias (in 4.4.3) and invalidated responses.

I would not use survey methodology when undertaking similar research in the future. Nevertheless, the process and analysis of the data was useful in terms of facilitating opportunities for reflecting on my reasons for undertaking the study. Hence, I have included the review of survey methodology in this chapter, but information pertaining to the actual survey questionnaire is in Appendix 1: Survey.

My positioning of the research in the interpretive paradigm considers the problems associated with understanding the experiences and 'realities' of research participants (in 4.4) on e-forums and in interviews and stories (in 5.4; 5.5; 5.6). I have acknowledged and discussed different ways of acquiring knowledge (in 4.2) and approached the study from a number of perspectives (in 4.4). Further, I have declared my position that knowledge and belief are not the same and argued that crossing the threshold from belief into knowledge involves affirmation of knowing that will involve substantiation by further evidence. I reiterate that, in the case of this study, the acquisition of knowledge involves constant regeneration and consolidation of thought and thinking (in 5:5; 5.8; Chapter 7: Conclusions and Implications for Future Practice). Finally, I claim 'transient knowledge because of the subject nature of my current knowing.

I consider my stance on the nature and acquisition of knowledge well suited to the interpretivist approach where, according to Silverman (2001, p. 13), authenticity is often the issue:

> 'Authenticity' rather than reliability is often the issue in qualitative research. The aim is usually to gather authentic understanding of people's experiences and open-ended questions are potentially the most effective route towards this end (Silverman 2001, p. 13).

I have followed Silverman's 'route' (ibid.) to achieving 'authentic understanding' of participants attitudes, values and perceptions in my research through appropriate open-ended questions that I have posed in different ways and from various perspectives (5.4; 5.5.3; 5.5.6; 5.7.2). Further, use of my research journal facilitated critical thinking and new understandings on the issues (4.6; 5.2) and constant regeneration and consolidation of thought and thinking to which I refer above.

4.6 Summary

It is clear from this chapter that my beliefs about the nature of knowledge and epistemological beliefs influenced the methodological decision-making processes, and the positioning of my research within the interpretive paradigm that accommodates my own perception that reality is subjective, consisting of many views and prejudices. To reiterate earlier critical thinking about the acquisition of knowledge, I asserted the following in (4.3):

- believing is not the same as knowing
- belief implies a sense of personal involvement and subjective thinking crossing the threshold into knowledge involves affirmation of knowing that will involve substantiation by further evidence; this can be in agreement with me and/or others
- the acquisition of knowledge involves constant regeneration and consolidation of thought and thinking

To understand how I know and what I know from this study, I needed to use a methodological approach that would allow certain liberties within its boundaries that reflected my own thoughts on the acquisition and nature of knowledge. These were the liberty to gather data of a subjective nature and interpret findings subjectively, acknowledging that these in turn are subject to interpretation of the reader and may facilitate further the retention debate.

Though the interpretive paradigm permits combined use of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, in this study, survey, interviews and stories, the quantitative was less useful than the qualitative in generating relevant data for this study. I critique my use of survey methodology in Chapter 7: *Conclusion and Implications for Future Practice.*

CHAPTER FIVE: METHOD

5. Methods

5.1 Overview

This chapter will explain the way in which a combination of methods was used in the research to collect data concerning attitudes, values and perception of early years practitioners to their work and workplace. Combining different methods of data collection to elicit information is likened here to standing on different streets and focusing the eye on the same central point. As the illustration below (Figure 5: Different perspectives – The Nottingham Council House indicates the eye focused from Smithy Row on to Nottingham's Council House sees a different view to the eye looking from High Street, and again a different view from Poultry; the perspective is dependent on the way in which it is viewed.
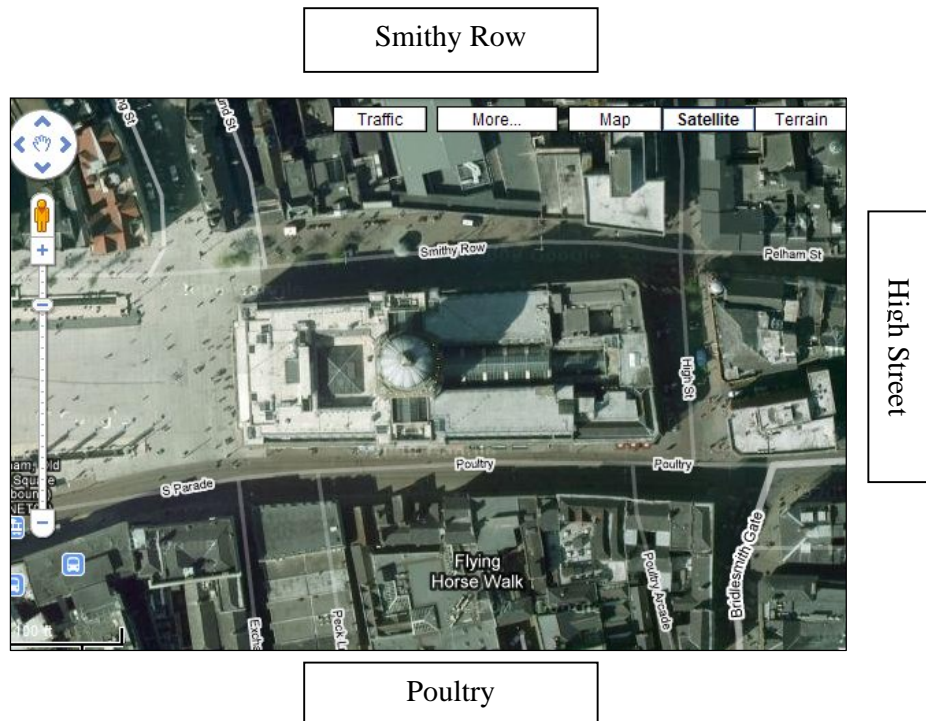

Figure 5: Different perspectives – The Nottingham Council House

The order in which the object is viewed also has a bearing on the perspective, for example, a view from a distance may give a broad overview of structure and presence that a close-up view cannot. The close-up view, however, illuminates the finer detail unseen by the distant eye. The bird's eye view, presented here courtesy of Google Maps (Google 2009), brings a different perspective that every day people on the ground may have not seen. In the same way the research uses a combination of methods to explore the attitudes, values and

perceptions of early years practitioners with the intention of gaining different perspectives on the issues, and to improve access to data (Brown and Dowling 1998). The combination of methods used in the study is research journal, survey, naturalistic observation and participation, interview and story. Techniques involved in utilising these methods include self-administered postal survey questionnaire, naturalistic observation and participation in e-forums, telephone and face-to-face group interviews and email.

Use of the above data collection methods and techniques enabled the extraction of comments made by research participants from the data. The rationale here is that the utilisation of participants' own words gives voice to practitioners and helps to maintain the centrality of people in this study (4.4.4; 4.5). In the case of data collected and presented as stories, the story as told by each person is included in this presentation of data. The rationale here is to preserve the holistic context in which the attitudes, values and perceptions of participants were originally positioned (Merz 2002) which again maintains the voice of the participant.

5.2 Research design

Having discussed the parameters of the interpretive approach taken to the study and explained my rationale for using both quantitative and qualitative methodology, I now present my model of the research design along with a brief overview of it (Figure 6: Research design) to show the process of the fieldwork over a period of two and a half years.

Stories
August 2006

Group interview
August 2006

Follow-up interviews
October – November 2005

e-forum observation and participation (core period)
April – July 2005

Survey
February - March 2004

Figure 6: Research design

- Survey: To gather standardised information through appropriately structured questions to provide insight into the main question (February and March 2004 with 37 respondents, including seven of whom participated in the follow-up interviews).

- Naturalistic observation and participation in e-forums: To back up the survey and seek further insight into apparent gaps left by the survey questionnaire findings (December 2004 and September 2005.with 50 practitioners, including 8 that responded to the researcher's specific posting; also general observation over the period of the study).

- Interview: To facilitate probing of questions and answers; create a forum for practitioners' voice in the research; form a more detailed picture than is possible with the survey.

The follow-up interviews took place between October and November 2005 with seven participants. The group interviews took place in January 2006 with 29 participants).

- Stories: To gather standardised information through appropriately structured questions to provide insight into the main question of 'What induces early years practitioners to remain in Day nurseries?' (August 2006 with three participants).

- Reflective researcher journals: To facilitate critical thinking by the researcher on a range of issues using artefacts, notes and other writing (for the duration of the research).

5.3 Survey

5.3.1 Survey Questionnaire and Day nursery population

The survey conducted between February and March 2004 used a sample of nineteen nurseries. The postal survey questionnaire went to one third of Day nurseries within the geographical parameters of the project. As explained in Chapter 3, I achieved the sample by selecting every third provider from the most up to date directory of Day nurseries in Nottingham held by the local Children's Information Service. A set of ten questionnaires went to each nursery in the sample along with a covering letter addressed to the Day nursery manager. An invitation to participate in follow-up research was included. Letters reminding managers about the survey went out in March 2004 and June 2004. The purpose of the reminder letters was to encourage managers in non-responding setting to participate in the survey.

Questionnaires required respondents to state their job title and qualification, to enable collection of data relating to whether respondents were appropriately qualified for the post they held (Sure Start 2004). Questions asked on the survey related to retention of early years practitioners. There were two parts to the questionnaire. Part A related to respondents' job satisfaction and Part B asked for opinions about the workplace.

Part A explored 20 different aspects of job satisfaction, such as fellow workers, rate of pay, and relationships between management and staff, that are integral to job satisfaction. Respondents were required to indicate their level of satisfaction with each of the twenty

different aspects listed below on a scale of 1 – 4, from 'extremely dissatisfied' to 'extremely satisfied':

- Physical working conditions
- Freedom to choose own working methods
- Fellow workers
- Recognition received for good work
- Immediate supervisor
- The amount of responsibility given
- Rate of pay
- Opportunity to use own abilities
- Relations between management and staff
- Chance to progress
- The way managed
- The attention paid to suggestions
- Hours of work
- The amount of variety in the job
- Job security
- Opportunities for training and study
- Amount of stress arising from work
- Increases in pay
- Job suiting lifestyle
- Working with children

Part B elicited respondents' opinions regarding their approach to their current workplace. Respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement as before.

- I feel very committed to this place.
- I put a lot of effort in to my work.
- I care what happens to this place after I leave.
- It would be difficult for me to find another job as good as good as this one.
- Sometimes I feel trapped in this job.

Cameron et al. (2001) raised the above issues in their original study and I thought them highly relevant to my own research (in 4.4.3; 4.4.4).

5.3.2 Survey responses

Thirteen settings (68%) responded to the survey. 37 completed questionnaires were returned from individual practitioners. I ensured anonymity by substituting a letter of the alphabet for each Day nursery, and a number for each respondent.

The survey generated quantitative data on a range of topics including type and level of qualifications held, job title, satisfaction with aspects of their job and approach to their current workplace; this was used to explore attitudes, values and perceptions of early years practitioners about their work and workplace.

5.4 Naturalistic Observation and Participation
5.4.1 Naturalistic Observation and Participation Rationale

The method of naturalistic observation and participation was applied to early years e-forums to seek further insight into some of these questions, and also to keep abreast with general topics of discussion. Practitioners repeatedly claim that their work is undervalued so what makes them remain in Day nurseries? Are practitioners aware of the sector's 'low status, poor pay and conditions' reputation? Do practitioners recommend working with young children in Day nurseries to others?

By observing the postings of early years practitioners on existing internet forums between January 2001 and December 2006 I was able to gauge which aspects of work with children with early years practitioners in Day nurseries were satisfied or dissatisfied. For the duration of my research, I listened to practitioners' voices relating to, for example, the question of whether they were aware of the reputation of their sector with regard to status or pay. Subsequent to reflecting on the initial findings of the postal survey questionnaire, I observed and participated in e-forums discussions at least once a week between December 2004 and September 2005.

5.4.2 Naturalistic Observation and Participation Sample
The e-forum sample was comprised of fifty people who posted messages relating to aspects of work in Day nurseries on www.intered.com, www.practicalpreschool.com and www.nurseryworld.co.uk between December 2004 and September 2005. Postings relevant to my research included for example, discussions on pay, workload, qualifications and the way practitioners felt treated. The sample included eight early years practitioners who had

responded to a specific question I overtly posted on the Nursery World electronic forum between April and September 2005. I asked practitioners who worked in Day nurseries to share their thoughts on their current workplace, and to say whether they were happy there and give their reasons. I also requested that practitioners divulge the name of the town in which they worked.

Only postings on issues directly relating to my study were included. Topics included, for example, stress, workload, training and qualifications, pay and conditions, attitudes, values and perceptions of working with young children, reasons for remaining in and leaving settings, theories on causes of dissatisfaction amongst staff. Discussions involving eighteen practitioners about their workplace between April and July 2005 suggested dissatisfaction within some Day nurseries.

The period of discussion and observation described above, reiterates the need to pursue this question of what induces practitioners to remain in Day nurseries. What is more, reflection on the discussion and observation informed the interview schedule used to follow-up survey questionnaire respondents.

Naturalistic observation of internet forums throughout the study indicated that where early years practitioners seemed to experience satisfaction was with the job, and where they appear to experience dissatisfaction was with their place of work rather than the actual work with children. Analysis of postings on internet forums consistently pointed to widespread dissatisfaction for example with pay, hours, paperwork, and feeling undervalued. Discussion of the findings follows in Chapter 6: Results and Discussion.

5.5 Follow-up Interviews

5.5.1 Rationale

The survey results informed the follow-up interview questions (in 5.3). Follow-up interviews took place with seven participants in October and November 2005, eighteen months after the original postal survey to gather more in-depth data on the attitudes, values and perceptions of practitioners to their work and workplace, and their reasons for remaining in the sector.

The purpose of the interviews was two-fold (i) to validate information given by respective participants (ii) to provide data for analysis of migration of the workforce to establish reasons for stability and change within the sample of early years practitioners in Nottingham.

5.5.2 Follow-up interview sample

The follow-up interview sample consists of survey respondents who agreed to participate in further study (in 5.3)

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- Nineteen out of thirty-seven survey questionnaire respondents had agreed to taking part in follow-up interviews:
- Number of contactable respondents 11
- Number of contactable respondents willing to participate 7

5.5.3 Follow-up interview questions

Follow-up interview questions include those arising from the literature review (in 2.9):

1. Do you feel that early years practitioners generally have enough training experience and qualifications for the job they do?

2. How do you feel about the support, training and opportunities to progress in your current nursery?

3. Research has shown that some Day nursery providers say that the cost of training and staff wages are major obstacles to running their nursery. What do you think? How does this affect you?

4. Are you aware that the early years sector has a low status, poor pay and conditions reputation? Is this how you see it?

5. Early years practitioners repeatedly claim to be undervalued. So why do you think they stay in Day nurseries?

6. How would you describe 'good management' in a Day nursery?

7. Has this been your experience? What would you do differently if you were a manager?

8. Most early years practitioners are young white females. Why do you think this is? What about men, people from ethnic minority groups or people with disabilities?

9. Do you think, like most early years practitioners, mothers should be available to care for their own children

10. Would you recommend working in a Day nursery?

11. Where do you see yourself in 3 years time?

5.6 Group interview

5.6.1 Group interview rationale

The aim of part two was to gain individual and group perceptions on a range of issues that arose out of the survey findings and semi-structured interviews. These issues include:

- Staff ratios
- Pay in relation to work and commitment
- Newly qualified practitioners workplace choice
- Causes of low staff morale
- Reasons for working with young children
- Staff relations with one another
- The best thing about being an early years practitioner
- Aspirations on completion of the course

There were two parts to the group interview in January 2006. The aim of part one was to ascertain the perceptions of a group of early years practitioners to the issues of pay, hours, parents, planning and managers in Day nurseries in Nottingham, Greater Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

5.6.2 Group interview sample

The group were students on the NVQ 3 Children's Care Learning & Development programme at a college in Nottingham. On their current course students area required to complete work placement element. Eight of the twenty-nine participants had work placements in Day nurseries. The work placements of the remaining participants included Day nursery provision within college, school nurseries, schools, and Sure Start Children's Centres. The average length of time participants spent in each setting as part of their work placement is five months. Further, these students previously worked in Day nurseries, school

nurseries, and Sure Start Children's Centres. All students participating in the group interview were then, practitioners with experience of working in Day Nurseries either as a paid job or through work placement at college.

<u>Group profile</u>

- 29 female participants (No males were enrolled on the course)

- Age range 16 – 23 years

- Varying levels of education and qualification:

  Qualifications already held by the nine seventeen year old participants included GSCE grades A-B, CCE, NVQ2 in Childcare, and NVQ 2 in Health and Social Care.

- The 13 eighteen-year-old participants all held a Level 2 certificates in childcare, either CCE, NVQ 2 or unnamed. I also had 11 GSCEs, two others had completed a childcare related Foundation Course.

- Two twenty one year old participants had gained NVQ Level 2 in Early Years. One twenty one year old participant preferred not to disclose her qualification status.

- The twenty-three year old participants held a CCE qualification.

5.6.3 Group interview tools

Analysis of findings from the postal survey questionnaire and subsequent follow-up semi-structured telephone interview informed the conception of tools to promote discussion amongst participant in the group interview.

Tools for part one (in 5.5.2) of the interview I call 'First Thoughts' cards and 'Quotes' (in Appendix 5: Group Interview), these were designed to prompt immediate individual responses on pay, hours, parents, planning and managers. The tools for part two (in 5.5.2) utilised a series of quotes taken directly from the e-forums on the range of issues mentioned above (in Appendix 5).

5.7 Stories

5.7.1 Stories rationale

Overall findings from the survey were mainly positive and those from the interviews quite negative. At this point in the study, I again felt the need to address my own potential bias and subjectivity by refocusing on Day nurseries from a different perspective. I sought a further perspective from three professionals who had progressed up the career ladder since working in Day nurseries themselves (in 4.4.8) and also in a range to situations where they worked alongside Day nursery managers and owners or with early years students.

5.7.2 Stories sample

The sample was one of convenience. It consisted of three former colleagues who started their careers as early years practitioners and established long-term careers in the broader early years and education sectors. Two of the sample taught early years and education students at further education colleges in the East Midlands. One of these was the tutor who assisted in the group interview. The other has worked closely with Day nursery owners and managers. The third participant was a regional manager for a voluntary childcare organisation.

An email went to each person inviting them to take part in the study by emailing to me their reflections of work in private Day nurseries.

5.8 Journals

A set of twelve journals maps the researcher's journey of this study. The journals are distinguishable by their different colours and numbers. Pages are numbered and dated. There are margins down both sides of the pages for the inclusion of directional notes, cross-referencing and coding as required. Using journals in this way facilitated a means of recording, revisiting and reflecting on many issues over the period of the study. I found this to be an extremely valuable process.

Journal entries are of an academic, professional, and personal nature. The mood of the writings is at different times urgent, casual, and deeply personal. Sketches and doodles express ideas that seemed unable, at first, to surface through spoken or written word. The practice of 'thinking in pictures' is integral to my research journey, and indeed my whole self. Journal extracts locate the researcher within the enquiry. The writing style of this section is necessarily less formal than the rest of the thesis as it explains the extracts and provides insight into the researcher. In my opinion, including these extracts of the journal in the writing up of the study helps the reader understand the knower and adds to the research by further illuminating the standpoint of the researcher.

Location of Researcher within Inquiry

The first extract illustrates my personal, professional and researcher self within the enquiry a point in time (in Figure 7: Self in the research process). Analysing the sketch some time later, I recognised my inherent nature to 'talk in pictures'. Under the heading, 'Me as a person' I have placed myself in my safe haven, surrounded by family, in the fresh air and fragrant garden.

Deep convictions, domestic duties and sense of humour are symbolised by the fish and the washing machine.
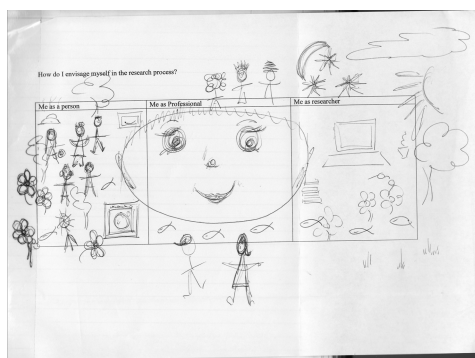

Figure 7: Self in the research process

5.9 Summary

In this chapter I have explained my use of several methods – namely survey, interview, naturalistic observation and participation and stories, and researcher journal - to facilitate collection of data and illuminate the retention inquiry. The order in which I used these methods had a bearing on the way in which the research questions were viewed by the researcher and answered by the respondents (in 2.8). A critique of the methods follows later, in Chapter 7: Conclusions and Implications for Future Practice.

CHAPTER SIX: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 Overview

The rationale for organising this chapter chronologically in order of data collection and analysis is to show how the research developed over time with the necessary inclusion of further perspectives. Having reasoned earlier that the worth of the survey was in the questions it raised rather than the questions it answered, and that the data collected is of little value to the research, the results are excluded from this chapter (in 5.9). Therefore, from this point on reference to the fieldwork includes:

- e-forums observation and participation (in 6.2)
- semi-structured follow-up interviews (in 6.3)
- group interview (in 6.4)
- stories (in 6.5)

The research methodology and research design investigated the question of what factors cause early years practitioners to remain in Day nurseries from several different perspectives (see 4.4.1; 5.2). Findings at each stage of the research informed the following stage. Hence, the attitudes, values, and perceptions of survey respondents informed the e-forum questions. Responses to the questions - along with observations of analysis of postings on other relevant topics - informed the group interviews.

A need for further perspectives arose because findings from the interviews were very different to those from the survey questionnaire. That is to say findings from the interviews were mainly negative, and from the survey mainly positive. Therefore, I sought additional perspectives from professionals who associated during their working day with practitioners and students. These three 'story' participants all began their careers as early years practitioners in Day nurseries (in 4.4.8; 5.7).

6.2 Observation of, and Participation in, early years e-forums

6.2.1 Peer support

Observation of and participation in e-forums between January 2001 and December 2006 suggested that some practitioners had turned to e-forums for advice and support from their peers as a consequence of ongoing difficulties in their current workplaces not being addressed, or resolved to their satisfaction.

From April to July 2005, discussions involving eighteen practitioners about their current workplaces affirmed the existence of apparent dissatisfaction within some Day nurseries. For example, several practitioners stated that they were confused about the status and level of 'old' qualifications, and the lack of recognition for the NNEB qualification. Successive postings reflected the experiences and perceptions of the survey respondents, in that practitioners cherished their work with children, but were dissatisfied with the amount of stress arising from their work

Naturalistic observation of and participation in e-forums suggested that satisfaction for those practitioners related mainly to the actual experience of working with young children and being instrumental in helping children to reach their full potential, whilst dissatisfaction related mostly to the workplace, some satisfaction dwelt within this.

Overt postings inviting early years practitioners to share their thoughts on their current workplace in April 2005 resulted in six practitioners responding to the message, with a total of eighteen postings during May, June and July 2005. Of these six respondents, three were nursery nurses and one was a former Day nursery manager. The other was currently working as a Day nursery manager.

It appeared that the tone of the practitioners' voices was in some cases complaining in others accepting. The balance of the satisfaction/dissatisfaction argument is that many early years practitioners are satisfied with their work and workplace. I acknowledge the voices of these practitioners in the research.

In general, practitioners tended to be satisfied with their job. Practitioners were dissatisfied about a range of issues, commonly, pay, hours, paperwork, and feelings undervalued in their workplace. Feeling overloaded with work and responsibility were also

constant causes of dissatisfaction, as was being left in charge of babies without supervision and having to take work home.

The following extracts from the raw data indicate satisfaction and dissatisfaction of e-forum participants:

> I currently work with babies and do enjoy my job. There is a lot to do alongside caring for children … I tend to take the planning home to complete, and do find it hard sometimes. One thing that I don't enjoy is that sometimes I don't feel treated with respect by the deputy manager, but that is being sorted at the moment. The wages don't reflect what we do, but at least I have got job satisfaction so I'm not concerned about the wage issue (Senior Practitioner Nursery World 2 May 2005).

> I am a nursery assistant due to qualify in August…I am at the end of my tether (Nursery World 18 Jun 2005).

> Why does it sometimes feel that there is no light at the end of the tunnel …I don't know where to go from here… (Nursery World 6 September 2005).

Postings tended to indicate that practitioners in all job roles worked hard to rectify difficulties they were experiencing. Some were exhausted and drained, as their hard work seemed to be in vain:

> I have tried in vain to make things better in our nursery but I can't do it any more. I go in the morning with a smile on my face and try to make the best of what I can…but I feel so drained and dejected when I get home (Nursery World 4 September 2005).

> I turn up for work every day as chirpy as anything and feel drained at the end of it…All the staff I work with love working with the children and work hard. It is just incredibly frustrating that situations are arising that are not being addressed properly (Nursery World 6 September 2005).

Practitioners blamed managers and others with supervisory responsibility for dissatisfaction:

> It seems to me, reading a lot of messages, that supervisors are not supervising…in our nursery we assumed that supervisors were doing their jobs but after observing realised that good nursery nurses don't necessarily make good supervisors. So

we have now got to where all the supervisors have to do a training session with the manager and also have supervisors meetings, so then everyone knows what is expected of them. This has helped all staff to realise that supervisors, the deputy and the manager have their own jobs and are not sitting in the office doing nothing. The manager's job is particularly difficult and support is needed by all staff (Nursery World 30 July 2005).

I am sad to hear that your nurseries are run by such inadequate, inefficient managers and if things are going wrong, is staff moral is low, then it is the fault of the local manager who is not doing her job properly. My nursery is the best as far as I am concerned… and where is the deputy manager in all this? She should be bringing these problems to the attention of the manager (Practitioner, Nursery World 06 September 2005).

Why is there such a finger pointing culture at the staff here? The poor girls love the children they care for…No wonder staff morale is so low. As a manager I would expect union intervention of I treated my staff so badly (Parent, Nursery World 6 September 2005).

To make matters worse practitioners' perceived that they were not being paid according to their worth. A recently qualified practitioner sought e-counsel on whether to remain in her current private Day nursery as the pay was so low. A more experienced practitioner advised her to "Stick with it for a 60p increase over 5 years." Low rates of pay and not being entitled to sick pay created difficulties for practitioners needing to support themselves.

I have recently passed my National Diploma and am being paid £4.10 an hour." (Practitioner, Nursery World 24 August 2005).

Stick with it I have 5 years experience and I am only on £4.70 an hour (Practitioner, Nursery World 06 September 2005).

All that for nearly £600 per month full time! (Practitioner, Nursery World 3 September 2005).

We won't ever get the pay we deserve; we are surrogate parents for 8 hours a day 51 weeks a year (Practitioner, Nursery World 6 June 2005).

I used to work in private Day nurseries in England but we were so poorly paid. I wanted to travel and be better paid so I went to work overseas (Practitioner, Nursery World May 11 2005).

Regardless of low pay, work overload and exhaustion, the majority of practitioners remained in Day nurseries because of the children in their care. The satisfaction of working with these children seemed to far outweigh all other problems and keep them rooted to their vocation. Only when frustration and exhaustion took over did they appear to move on.

> …should I give up and go and stack shelves in Asda for more money and more benefits? I think it is really sad as I love my job so much (Practitioner, Nursery World 12 February 2005).

> I love my job and all 16 babies in my baby room. I don't like the huge amounts of paper work… Alas, I agree with everyone else the wages area pittance for the jobs we do and are sometimes very little appreciated for our hard work, saying that though when I went in to childcare the first thing I learnt is that childcare is a labour of love not money. (Practitioner, Nursery World 07 June 2005).

> The only reason there is a great atmosphere in these nurseries is down to the resilience of the staff that really do care about their charges. What other reason is there for having a job that pays peanuts? (Practitioner, Nursery World 05 September 2005).

> I have found a new job and will be leaving soon however it will break my heart thinking of all the children I will be leaving in that hell-hole (Senior Practitioner, Nursery World 31 August 2005).

> Yes we all get into this line of work because we love working with children, but when we constantly get let down it does not take long for morale to go downhill (Practitioner, Nursery World 06 September 2005).

The final quote (above) encapsulates one of the most central, and fundamental issues for practitioners, that of whether they feel sufficiently valued to remain in Day nurseries. Further contributions to this and the discussion of whether practitioners and managers hold the key to maintaining stability in the workforce, by their mutual respect and understanding of meeting one another's professional needs, were gathered through the survey follow-up interviews.

6.3 Analysis

6.3.1 Overview

The inclusion of naturalistic observation of and participation in e-forums, although an interim measure, helped re-assess the direction of the research. A number of intriguing themes emerged from the e-forum data and I coded it accordingly. These themes included language, mood, incentives and priorities, aspirations and academic mindset, and professional mindset (in 4.4.5; 4.4.8). I used them to analyse the data in relation to the research questions. This process affirmed the need for further study. The results are analysed here in the light of respective research questions (in 2.9; 5.5.3).

6.3.2 Education and training

Questions about training related to the appropriateness of training, experience and qualifications to practitioners' job roles; support and opportunities to progress within the current workplace, and the perception that costs of training and staff wages are obstacles to running a nursery. Analysis of the data revealed in some case, quite specific answers to these questions:

Research questions 1-3 (in 5.5.3):

- Do you feel that early years practitioners generally have enough training, experience and qualifications for the job they do?

- How do you feel about the support, training and opportunities to progress in your current nursery?

- Research has shown that some Day nursery providers say that the cost of training and staff wages are major obstacles to running their nursery. What do you think? How does this affect you?

Training opportunities varied from setting to setting. Some practitioners had all the training they needed; the experience of others was that staffing shortages a barrier to accessing free external training. No practitioners who were working towards further qualifications, felt that they were given adequate time during the working day to keep up with their studies. Young girls who did not have previous childcare experience found it more difficult than the ones with experience to gain the required underpinning knowledge to support their practice. The view that maturity and experience were prerequisites for early

years practitioners was common. Practitioners who displayed these professional qualities felt able to support their peers in training (in 2.1). Even so, not all practitioners managed to complete the training and either gave up or changed course part way through.

In-house training seemed commonplace and necessary for practitioners to have any chance of keeping abreast with current practice during a period of unusually complex and extensive changes in the provision of services for young children.

Findings from analysis of data collected from the e-forums suggest that practitioners have the appropriate experience and qualifications. There are some who struggle and need further support, some who are satisfied that their qualification is perfectly adequate and others that understand the need for continuing to update whether it be through short courses or further higher qualifications.

The language used by early years practitioners involved in discussion on the e-forums was explicit. It was clear that practitioners had expectations of their work with children in Day nurseries. Choice of vocabulary used by practitioners appeared to indicate the extent of their expectation. A number of emotive words and phrases such as 'insult', 'refuse to cover old ground', 'mad' and 'disgrace' were used to denote dissatisfaction with the perception that early years practitioners were obliged to retrain or be involved in continuing professional development.

The use of language continually pointed to insecurity on the part of some early years practitioners. It was common for practitioners to use phrases such as 'various/all the people I have spoken to', 'I have a lot of people on my side', and 'I know a lot of people do as I do'. Circumstances where such affirmation appeared to be necessary were in talking about older style qualifications, such as the preference of newer qualifications over NNEB by employers and employees.

Language used by practitioners helped identify a rift between those practitioners whose attitude to training was one of non-compliance and those who were satisfied with the additional training expected of the profession. One practitioner referred to the grievances of her peers as 'whinging'. Hearing them whinge about the extra training, she said, made her 'so sick'.

One practitioner, who was in a fighting mood, was adamant that she should have her old qualifications recognised. Another appeared to be losing the fight; her mood appeared quite desperate, as she 'did not know where to go from here'. Her problem was that sometimes she felt as though there was no light at the end of the tunnel. This has implications for her well-being and retention.

According to one practitioner, not everyone aspires to the position of supervisor or deputy. Another, who had been in the profession sixteen years, left the sector because of what she perceived to be a continual expectation placed upon practitioners of further training. Practitioners who did not particularly object to updating and further training, did object to training that they perceived was covering, what one practitioner described as, the same issues in a different format. Her perception was that 'practical experience far outweighed written assignments and observation'. This practitioner questioned why devoted and experienced workers had to continually prove themselves when some of them, and she included herself, 'may not be academically minded'. The opposing perception of one practitioner with a string of qualifications who 'welcomed the chance to critique her work' was to 'stop whining and get on with it'.

Research questions 4 - 5 (in 5.5.3):

- Are you aware that the early years sector has a low status, poor pay and conditions reputation? Is this how you see it?

- Early years practitioners repeatedly claim to be undervalued. So why do you think they stay in Day nurseries?

Language used by practitioners left no doubt that these practitioners are aware of the sector's 'low status, poor pay and conditions' reputation, thereby contributing to an answer to the question of whether practitioners (in 6.3.1). The expression 'hell hole' illustrated one practitioner's perception of the Day nursery she was leaving because she had found a new job at a different nursery. The same early years practitioner used the phrase, 'break my heart' when referring to leaving the children in the so-called 'hellhole'. Words like 'drained and dejected' and expressions such as 'tried in vain', 'making the best of what I can', 'can't do it anymore' were used to describe the defeated mood of one practitioner, whilst another used the phrase 'at the end of her tether' to signify her frame of mind.

Perceptions of practitioners are that the priority of owners is to make a profit, sometimes at their expense. Providing training at no, or supplemented, cost to practitioners is one way to show to show they are valued (6.7.3). It may also help to reduce tensions relating to the requirement of practitioners to enter into contractual agreements to remain with the nursery for two years after having qualified.

Persistent complaint of too much paperwork may be a result of some practitioners not understanding the paperwork or reason for it; therefore, it may take longer to complete. Thereby reducing the amount of time practitioners spend playing with children. This resonates with the notion in the literature that too much paperwork causes complaint and frustration (in 2.3.2; 2.4.3) compromises practitioners' values (in 2.6.2) are comprised when paperwork and other duties erode that contact time (in 2.6.2: 2.8) Additionally, this attitudes to paperwork overload aligns with the local perspective on paperwork (in 3.5).

Early years practitioners agree that appropriate training and qualifications are essential for working with children. One practitioner suggested that training and qualifications were necessary only for beginning a career and progressing to the next level; a strategy that indicated limitation to the professional mindset and to the concept of continual professional development.

6.3.3 Values

One practitioner was proud to be working in what she thought was the best Day nursery. She was saddened because of her perception that inadequate and inefficient managers ran other nurseries. The well-meaning practitioner appeared judgemental or self-righteous in expressing the view that her nursery was the best. A nursery owner expressed a similar opinion in that, as the owner of a Day nursery, she felt bringing a fun and outgoing mood to the setting would reflect on the nursery.

One practitioner did not consider her 35p an hour pay rise sufficient for undertaking a course that cost £600. Additional pay, or the lack of it, was not considered a problem by the practitioner whose course fees had been paid by her local Early Years and Childcare Development Partnership. It was a problem for practitioners who undertook further training for no pay increase at all.

Seemingly, no amount of money could be offered as an incentive for continuing professional development or further training to the early years practitioners whose priority was spending time with her own children rather than studying for further qualifications.

6.3.4 Reward

Not all practitioners shared the same sense of desperation as the nursery assistant (in 6.3.6); the mood of one was optimistic. Even though she felt that respect for her deputy manager was lacking, she was optimistic that this problem was in the process of being rectified. The expressed mood of this practitioner remained the same when her thoughts turned to the wages that she perceived did not, in general, reflect the work done by practitioners; the reason for her optimistic mood was job satisfaction. This practitioner was seemingly unfazed by these aspects of her job to the extent that she felt satisfied with her job.

Some practitioners experienced extreme moods during the working day. One practitioner found it impossible to sustain her 'chirpy' disposition throughout the day. She blamed her feelings of incredible frustration on difficulties that were not properly resolved. This practitioner felt drained by the end of the day. These circumstances appeared to affect her in a negative way. However, regardless of the difficulties she experienced, she counted herself amongst all the staff in her nursery that loved the children and worked hard.

There was a general mood amongst practitioners of frustration and annoyance. One practitioner was required to sign a new contract that meant she would no longer be entitled to sick pay. She was frustrated because, by its very nature, the job exposed practitioners to the children's viruses and germs. This practitioner looked to her peers for their opinions of the new contracts. One of her answers came from a practitioner who was both supportive of her peer and defensive of her own situation. After going to some lengths to explain sick pay entitlement in her nursery, this practitioner was defensive stating that people cannot help being sick. In the same discussion, another practitioner felt hard-done-to, as, under her new contract, she would not receive sick pay. She reasoned that someone had taken advantage of the sick pay entitlement. The mood of one practitioner, who took a different slant on sick pay, was of annoyance. This practitioner perceived that, by not paying sick pay, nurseries were in effect making money. Her reasoning was that nurseries were not paying the sick member of staff, and they were not paying for someone else to provide cover so they must be making money.

The examples here indicate that practitioners do not tend to accept that terms and conditions of employment and the cost of staff wages and training are a major obstacle to running childcare provision.

Various incentives and priorities appeared to exist amongst individual practitioners concerning different aspects of their work with young children in Day nurseries. For some practitioners, additional pay and further training were an incentive.

Incentive for one Day nursery owner was not dependent on financial gain but rather on the children and the challenge that she found most satisfying. However, the Day nursery owner empathised with her staff, acknowledging that they deserve more, but directly related the low pay of early years practitioners to the fees that parents pay: practitioners could only be paid more if parents paid more for the service. After professing that her own salary was not much higher than that of her staff, the Day nursery owner reprehended practitioners for moaning about pay when they already knew how much early years practitioners earned before they entered the profession. According to this Day nursery owner, truly loving the children and wanting to help them develop is incentive enough.

The mindset of the Day nursery owner was shared by some early years practitioners in that the enjoyment of working with babies and young children was both their incentive and their priority. The mood of the two following practitioners is particularly enlightening. The first practitioner talked about the great atmosphere and resilience of staff that care about their charges. She intimated that there is no other reason for having a job that pays peanuts. The second spoke of earning 'pittance' wages, completing 'huge amounts of paperwork' and being responsible for sixteen babies. This practitioner considered her job to be 'a labour of love, not money'.

6.3.5 Retention

One early years practitioner had lost the will to fight to make their workplace a happy place to be. She described her countenance at the beginning of the working day as wearing 'a smile on my face' and at the end of the day as 'drained and dejected'; another remained optimistic about work in Day nurseries by moving from a low paid job in a small Day nursery to another job. Indications were that the size of the nursery and management of it affected this practitioners' job satisfaction.

One former practitioner blamed poor pay and insufficient training on her decision to leave the sector, and the country.

The mood of one nursery assistant, who stated that she was regularly left to care for babies on her own, was seemingly desperate; as she described herself as being at 'the end of her tether'.

Returning to one of the questions highlighted as needing further investigation following the literature review, that is, whether practitioners recommend working with young children in Day nurseries to others, this would seemingly depend to some extent on practitioners' incentives and priorities.

6.4 Summary

Findings from naturalistic observation and participation in e-forums reaffirmed the tendency of participants in the study regarding their love of work with children; this aspect was both their incentive and their priority. Analysis indicated that many participants felt that they did not have time to do any training; there were strong indications that those who did sought support of their peers through forums such as the ones observed in the study. This suggests that practitioners required more or different support to that which was available elsewhere. Findings indicated that often participants had worked hard to rectify the difficulties they were experiencing in their workplace. Training was associated with professionalism (in 2.1).

Lack of sick pay was problematic to participants who needed to support themselves. Despite low pay, work overload and exhaustion satisfaction at working with children appeared to be the main reason for most participants remaining in their respective Day nurseries. However, participants were less accommodating about the amount of paperwork they were required to do because it kept them away from the children.

The language used by e-forum participants was a clear indication that they were passionate (in 2.7.1; 2.7.3; 4.4.2) about their work and all aspects of it; similarly with the 'mood' themes that emerged from the findings. Good management helped maintain optimism, as did moving to a new job, while additional pay and training were incentives. One practitioner suggested that receiving a salary equivalent to that of a teacher would be an incentive for practitioners to remain in Day nurseries. Conversely, the perception that Day

nursery owners were making money by not paying sick pay caused annoyance and poor pay was a reason to leave.

Practitioners cited atmosphere in the workplace and resilience of staff as reasons for remaining in Day nurseries. Findings indicated that participants were proud to be working in what they perceived to be good nurseries.

The professional mindset (in 2.1) was not one that was overtly apparent, although reference to being professional did occur on occasion; this was from a defensive stance. For example, one practitioner, speaking for herself and her peers, associated further training with professionalism in the sense that she described early years practitioners as 'professional enough' to update with short courses. Short courses seemed acceptable as long as practitioners could see that they were applicable to their own needs and circumstances; what was not off-putting in some cases was feeling obliged to go on and on.

Interestingly, the one occurrence of an early years practitioner who positioned herself and her peers as professionals, wanting and deserving respect, was a practitioner working her way up to a Diploma in Playgroup Practice and was presumably working in a playgroup rather than a Day nursery.

Practitioners in one nursery took responsibility for difficulties they had experienced concerning ineffectual supervisors. In their case, there had been an assumption that good practitioners made good supervisors but that was not necessarily the case. The result was the introduction of a system of training and ongoing support for practitioners promoted to leadership positions in the nursery. The whole staff appeared to benefit from gaining more understanding of one another's jobs. There is a suggestion here that some practitioners agreed with the notion that qualifications are a prerequisite to good management of provision. Others thought that qualifications on their own do not make a good manager (in 6.3.3).

When the professional mindset of practitioners did emerge, it was through their use of language, as in using the word 'professional'. In some cases, the word seemed almost to be a mechanism of self-defence, or a bargaining tool, rather than a status of high standing or even a virtual baseline for good practice. I illustrate the point with the reasoning of one

practitioner whose perception was that early years practitioners are viewed as teachers [teachers are seen as professional, teaching is a profession] so practitioners working in Day nurseries should be paid an equivalent salary to practitioners who work in nurseries that are attached to Local [Education] Authority schools.

6.5 Follow-up telephone interviews

6.5.1 Overview

In this section are findings from data gathered from each of the seven participants in the semi-structured follow-up interviews. Full notes were taken while the interviewees spoke. During the coding of the data findings fell in to two main categories - *priority related perceptions* and *pay related perceptions* (in 6.5.9). I analysed these in relation to the research questions.

6.5.2 Annette's follow-up interview

At the age of twenty-one (almost) Annette worked as a senior nursery nurse in one of Nottingham's Day nurseries. When she responded to the postal survey questionnaire in February 2004, Annette was qualified to level two; the level appropriate for an assistant early years practitioner, and was working towards NVQ 3.

Since completing the survey, Annette had given birth to her first child. During her pregnancy, Annette had worked full-time and studied for her qualification. She completed about fifty percent of the programme before she left work and her baby was born. Annette felt that generally practitioners have appropriate training, experience, and qualifications for the jobs they hold and regrets that she did not complete Level 3.

Annette attributed the moderate amount of stress she had experienced to studying. Consequently, she did not intend to return to complete the level three qualification ordinarily required for a senior position.

> It was really hard [studying] because working full time you did not have enough time to do the work. We had to complete the work out of hours. It was quite hard. They say that there is time in the day but you never really got the chance because you are with the children - and that's the priority... when you look at what you're paid a day and totted up every child … say 40 children … £30 a day and then you look at what you earn per week. It just doesn't work out.

Annette thought her own pay could be better:

> The amount of money they [Day nursery providers] are charging for daycare they probably could afford to pay a bit more towards staff training and staff wages.

She was not aware that the early years sector as a whole is reputed to pay low wages. Neither was Annette aware of the sector's reputation in relation to low status and poor conditions.

Regarding the question of whether she thought practitioners were sometimes undervalued, Annette seemed unsure. Annette drew an association between 'paperwork' and 'being undervalued':

> Sometimes they are [undervalued]. With respect to where I worked we had a lot of paperwork to do as well [as caring for the children]. So half of the time we were doing the children's paperwork when actually we should be dealing with the child. That was hard. What we are paid to do is look after children not to do paperwork. I know every job has paper work… maybe they are undervalued.

Annette recalled that in her former workplace, each practitioner was required to complete paperwork, such as developmental records and daily reports for between four and eight children. Furthermore, they were required to compile full reports on each child every four months. After careful deliberation, Annette decided that these experiences probably meant her manager did not value her

.

When asked what she would change if she were to progress from her senior position to manage the Day nursery, Annette was not sure. One thing that did come to mind was making time for the children.

On the question of what career advice she would give someone who wanted to work in a Day nursery, Annette stated that she would recommend being a teaching assistant or a nanny.

In Annette's experience, trainees recruited at the age of sixteen earned less than what she called a 'full wage'. Trainees did not receive pay rises when they qualified. Rather Annette reported that they [managers and owners] made life difficult and got rid of newly qualified practitioners. This, she said, resulted in a massive turnover of staff.

Annette perceived that trainees at her Day nursery were required to accomplish the menial tasks. Cleaning was one example of a menial task which Annette stated "…wears very thin because you have gone there to work with kids. They stay for the children".

Although, as mentioned above Annette, regrets not having completed NVQ Level 3, she has no plans to gain a professional qualification. Annette does have a desire to open a Day nursery of her own in three years time. Annette's expects her nursery will be managed differently to the one in which she currently works. Alternatively, Annette wants to be a mum to her child or become a teaching assistant.

6.5.3 Suzanne's follow-up interview

Suzanne, like Annette, experienced a moderate amount of dissatisfaction arising from her job and current workplace. At the time of the interview in 2005, Suzanne described herself as being over forty years of age. Unlike Annette, Suzanne was aware of the low pay, poor conditions, reputation of the early years sector and has since left the say nursery that she managed at the time of the postal survey questionnaire in 2004.

Suzanne agreed with the perception of some practitioners in the research that some people go into the childcare business for financial gain, not for the children. In her experience, childcare providers do not necessarily understand the role of the practitioner. Suzanne perceived this was the cause of some practitioner feeling undervalued in some areas of their work. According to Suzanne, a good manager is someone who '…has a good knowledge of the industry and their own capabilities.'

Suzanne reported that the Day nursery she worked in at the time of the postal survey questionnaire paid practitioners £50.05 for a forty-two and a half hour working week; astonishingly this amounts to £1.18 an hour. Practitioners were allocated additional hours for curriculum planning and other activities; this extended their working week to fifty hours. Moreover, Suzanne reported that, in her experience, working from seven in the morning to seven in the evening was an everyday occurrence. On the positive, side practitioners were entitled to time off in lieu. On the negative side, they conversely could not take their entitlement because the nursery was short-staffed. It was Suzanne's perception that practitioners cannot afford to remain in Day nurseries for such low wages as they have their own family commitments and responsibilities. Consequently, as Suzanne herself had done,

practitioners eventually leave Day nurseries and find other work that is not with young children.

Suzanne was quite clear that whilst she was working in the Day nurseries she stayed because she enjoyed seeing the children grow and develop:

> I see children now that are young adults that I helped look after when they were in full time nursery and they remember some of the things we did then – its great that they remember.

Suzanne also recalled the positive experience of seeing staff develop from their 'relatively inexperienced' state to qualified early years practitioners with the help of appropriate training. Ongoing training, she indicated, was essential for keeping up to date with current requirement and legislation. However, whether or not practitioners are able to update is 'up to the employer and what they can afford to let you do'. Suzanne reported that was one of the benefits of doing training 'in-house'.

6.5.4 Jennie's follow-up interview

At the time of her interview, Jennie was expecting her first baby; she was between twenty-five and thirty years of age, and had held a level three qualification for almost ten years.

Jennie's length of service meant that she had worked under a number of managers, although she herself had not held a managerial position. Her experience had given her insight into a number of different aspects of her job and she had developed firm opinions of what she liked and did not like about work in Day nurseries. Jennie also had ideas of how to make improvements.

Jennie's perception of training in her current job was that staff were supported 'quite well' and 'get all the training they need'. Jennie's perception was that she and her colleagues were quite well paid.

Jennie's perceived that the owner of the Day nursery in which she previously worked 'tended to want to make profit out of it and not put money in'. According to Jennie, staff

were under-resourced and consequently had difficulty providing a quality environment and activities for the children.

Travelling to her current place of work takes Jennie thirty minutes longer than to her previous Day nursery, but, as she says, this is 'swings and roundabouts because she now works thirty minutes less each day.

She was aware that work with young children in Day nurseries had the reputation of not being very well paid, with poor conditions, and hazarded an opinion on why this might be, adding her opinion of managers:

> I don't know if they think we don't do very much we just sit
> and play with the children all day, I don't know. We are
> definitely undervalued by the managers.

Jennie's experience had given her insight into a number of different aspects of her job, as mentioned earlier. Jennie perceived that mangers undervalued early years practitioners. She recommended that managers should give lots of praise, say things like, "it looks nice [and] that's a good idea and mean it, [and] buy boxes of chocolates to make us feel more appreciated'.

Jennie's concept of a good manager was she who did not just sit in the office doing paperwork but was willing to 'get their hands dirty' and 'do what we are willing to do'. Jennie gave examples of changing nappies and helping out with the lunchtime rotas. These she perceived were the kind of actions that would help early years practitioners to feel valued by their managers. Indeed it was her experience that she felt more valued in her current Day nursery where the manager did help out than in her previous nursery where the manager was 'always in the office'.

Jennie thought that if she were a manager she would emulate the style of her current manager and 'muck in'. Furthermore, she thought that she would not want to be 'stuck in the office doing paperwork'. She would make every endeavour to provide her staff with the resources that they need.

When asked her opinion on why many early years practitioners in Day nurseries were young females, Jennie reasoned that 'girls from school tend to think it is an easy job and they

can come in and earn some money by not doing much'. Jennie also suggested Day nursery providers employed younger girls to save on wages, adding:

> I think sometimes if they've not got brains as much as some
> other people, they think well it's a job and I'm earning money
> and it doesn't use as much brains as in a shop or office.

Jennie commented that she had been working in a Day nursery far too long and would not recommend it, although she conceded that it depended on the nursery adding:

> I mean I think it is a good career and if they haven't got the
> brains so much and they did not do very well at school and
> things like that it is a good job because you can learn as you
> go along. You do learn a lot of training and new ideas though.
> So yes, I probably wouldn't really.

Jennie was not the first early years practitioner in this research to raise the issue of trust. She empathised with mothers who needed to work but would not consider putting her own baby in a nursery:

> I probably wouldn't trust people in the nursery. I know what
> we say to people and tell them and whatever else…

Jennie did not intend to return to work in Day nurseries after she had her baby. She was contemplating childminding in her own home rather than 'looking after other people's children all day in a nursery setting and then coming home and do it at home as well'.

6.5.5 Tracey's follow-up interview

Tracey had gained NVQ Level 2. She felt that her level of qualification, training and experience were inadequate for the job she was doing in her current Day nursery. Tracey explained her prolonged period of dissatisfaction she experienced with the amount of stress arising from her work. Issues stressful for Tracey related mainly to training, in that training was available 'out there'. However, Tracey's experience was that the Day nursery manager prevented her from accessing training because she would not permit time off to attend the course. Tracey perceived that to attend the training she would have to either take the time away from work as holiday or give the hours back at another time. Tracey normally worked a forty-hour week. Tracy expressed her attitude to management (in this case the Day nursery owner) thus:

> Management aren't interested in training to be honest. They
> do not want to pay out. We are always getting messed about

> with our wages… I know someone who works in another nursery and it is completely different, everything's done by the book. The wages are great, she loves it there and basically it's not like ours.
>
> We don't get sick pay and we get most of our illnesses from the kids… If you try and do anything about it you just basically get told where the door is…We are just a number there. We are easily replaced. And she [the owner] does not care. This is how it's always been and it's getting worse. They are in it for the money. They don't care for the staff. They don't care how we are treated or how we feel…

Tracey's perception was that 'everybody feels the same'. A few practitioners who had completed their training at the Day nursery were looking for other jobs. According to Tracey, one practitioner who returned from working aboard to complete her level three qualification left as soon as she had done so.

Tracey was aware of the sector's poor reputation. She did not think problems were only in her current workplace.

> We are not recognised. It's like nursery nurse … oh yes it's an easy job looking after children all day - it's not. It really isn't and no-one realises until they actually come in the nursery. There are 19 children in my room. I look after them with a trainee. It's not regulations really but it's not every day. Like tomorrow will be easier. The children are all right but just the fact that you know, it's not going by the book is it. If anything happens…
>
> It's alright when you are with the kids… I really, really do not want to leave the children because I'm actually in the pre-school now and all the children I've got with me I've had since they were babies in the baby room…I've got to go while I can before I get attached to any more. I am looking for another job.

6.5.6 Sally's follow-up interview

Sally has ten years experience as an early years practitioners is currently manages a Day nursery. She is unhappy about the levels of stress she experiences at work, which she attributes to inadequately trained practitioners and poor use of her time. Sally feels that present-day practitioners do not have the appropriate training, experience, and qualifications for the job:

> They need to know about the Childcare Bill, the Foundation
> Stage and everything… training to implement theory is
> lacking… there is a lot of responsibility to being a nursery
> nurse. Some people think that we only wipe noses and bums,
> but we do as much as nursery teachers and get less holidays.
> There is no incentive.

Sally stressed the importance of having a reliable team. Her experience was one of high turnover which had left her feeling 'disillusioned about recruiting decent committed childcare workers' and frustrated when they 'perform really poorly in their probationary period'. Most of the people applying for work in her nursery were she said, young white girls. Older women, she perceived, found the hours inconvenient as they had children of their own.

According to Sally, good managers are objective and consistent. Signs of poor management are lack of understanding, inflexibility, lack of support, letting off steam and lack of resources. Sally would like to be able to spend more time supporting her staff instead of collecting fees from parents. She perceived that lack of investment in her staff, in terms of both time and money result in poor quality care. Sally conceded that salaries were the main financial cost in her Day nursery adding 'but if you want quality you have to pay for it'.

According to Sally the low pay, poor conditions and poor reputation of the sector is due to people's perceptions of work with children under 5 years of age. However, she feels that the government's investment in childcare is helping to change that.

When asked her opinion on practitioners who feel undervalued in Day nurseries Sally suggested that they should either be proactive in doing something about it or 'get out'.

Sally had outgrown her current role and hoped to improve her career prospects over the next few years

6.5.7 Anthea's follow-up interview

Anthea's is twenty years of age. She has recently achieved her Level 3 qualification and felt the support she received from her nursery was 'okay'. She worked full time and had difficulty finding time to study. She perceives that progression for newly qualified

practitioners is problematic because once qualified they are no longer required by the nursery:

> When you qualify they make it difficult for you and they get rid of you; some incentive! They have a massive turnover of staff.

According to Anthea, early years practitioners tend to appropriately trained and qualified for the work they undertake. Anthea empathised with the research that indicated some Day nursery providers see the cost of training and staff wages as major obstacles to running their nursery (in 2.7.2) and contemplated some of income and outgoings of a nursery:

> I can see their point. I pay £62 for two days [for my child to attend nursery]. Out of this they provide meals – that are not substantial. They have up to 40 children – times £31/day …

Anthea was not aware of the sector's low status, poor pay and conditions reputation. When asked why she thinks practitioners remaining Day nurseries when they claim to be undervalued Andrea commented, 'That's a tough one.' After some consideration, she linked 'being undervalued' to time spent completing paperwork:

> We have a lot of paperwork. Half our time is spent doing it. We are paid to look after children. We are a bit undervalued.

Good management to Andrea means 'making sure staff spend time with children, and doing some paperwork'.

> I am a Keyworker. I have to do a minimum of 4 and maximum of 8 or 9 reports 3 times a year. I have a folder to fill in; being in pre-school I have to do planned and focused activities.

When asked her opinion on why most early years practitioners are female, Anthea stated that one man worked in her nursery.; he had done for a year and 'the kids connect with him'. Andrea did not think that mothers should be available for their children adding – 'maybe some'.

Anthea's plans for the future included doing 'something better'. Possibilities were a Teaching Assistant, Private nanny, a mum and owning her own nursery. She did not want to be working in a Day nursery in three years time for the following reasons:

> Low money…bitchiness of young women. You are taken on
> at 16 to train, and not given a full wage. Trainees do menial
> tasks like cleaning – it wears thin. We want to work with kids.

Anthea's perception is that practitioners 'stay for the children. It is hard to leave them'.

6.5.8 Dora's follow-up interview

Dora is a senior practitioner with a Level 3 qualification. She found books and the internet most helpful during her training. In terms of continuing professional development Dora perceived that 'there are always courses to go on'. Her current Day nursery uses agency staff to cover practitioners on training.

Dora indicated that practitioners paid their own training costs. She raised the following points in this regard:

> Owners make a lot of profit. The government see childcare as
> a priority. But we have to pay for our own training. It is an
> obstacle. They should make it more appealing to attract
> people that want to be there. It [childcare] is too easy to get
> into. There is a big turnover of staff. They take on young
> girls. They have boyfriends and have children.

Dora was unaware of the sector's low status, poor pay and conditions reputation but commented that she 'can believe it' because '[practitioners are] always moaning about it'. Dora's attitude towards pay was this:

> Wages are rubbish. Others say 'why should I bother'? They
> get fed up. At our nursery there are 13 children and 5 staff.
> We do school runs, snacks and lunches. The children are
> always screaming. The parents are always complaining; it gets
> you down when they have a go at you. You just have to tell
> yourself, I know I am doing a good job. Room staff ring in
> sick and you know they aren't. There is such a big turnover of
> staff. Children get upset about changes in staff. There is also
> a high turnover because staff are so bitchy.

Dora wanted to spend more time with the children instead of doing paperwork:

> We want more play and less paperwork. They should keep
> paper work to a minimum. We have to make stock lists, sign
> to say we've cleaned the toilets…it is all useful but we should

be playing with the children.

My self and my colleagues get bogged down with the amount of paperwork. Whatever happened to just spending time with the babies? Given the choice that is what parents would want. In fact my parents are shocked when I show them their child's profile. They think they are in a nursery to play and learn to be sociable. Meanwhile we are suffering policy and procedure overload.

According to Dora some early years practitioners are undervalued an others are not:

Some are excellent practitioners. They are genuine, loving and caring. In Day nurseries some are bitchy and quite greedy.

Dora defined 'Good management' as 'a line of respect from both ends'. She clarified this in the following way:

You have to get a balance. Go on the rota. Get your hands dirty. Managers get above themselves. They have no extra training. They move up the ranks – up the ladder. It can be negative management.

Dora was felt that 'it would be nice to see a male' and that it would be good for children to 'look round and see mixed race … parents would like it'. She gave the following opinion on why most practitioners in Day nurseries were young white girls:

In some cultures girls stay at home. The mother stays at home and the man works. Some people would not want to interview white and black.

According to Dora, mothers should be available for their children. Although some say they have no choice, Dora believes every one has a choice:

They think they have to go to work but they could have less. They want the best and nice things. They work full time Monday to Friday 7.30 a.m. – 6 p.m. Children's behaviour can go down. Safety is a big issue. They regress.

Dora recommends working in a Day nursery but with reservations:

They are not all bad. Don't make a career out of it. Go to the NHS or social Services. I don't think much of (Dora named a

nursery) it looks good but they are materialistic. The children
are not stimulated. The wage pays for their [staffs] social life.

6.5.9 Summary

Values Priority related perceptions

<u>Practitioners</u>

Participants tended to feel well informed about their responsibilities to maintain records of the children's progress towards their developmental and learning outcomes and accepted 'paperwork' as an integral part of their job, but cited an overload of paperwork as a problem. The complaint arose due to the amount of paperwork they were required to do. The amount of paperwork was problematic because participants saw their priority as being with the children, in terms of spending time with them and giving them their full attention.

Practitioners were clear that spending time with the children was one of their priorities. Other duties and responsibilities, practitioners accepted as part of their role but were dissatisfied and sometimes stressed when perceiving that they did not spend enough time with the children.

The perceptions of priorities expressed above are similar to those expressed by practitioners on the e-forums. For example, the practitioner who cared for sixteen babies would undoubtedly be responsible for completing a huge amount of paperwork during her working day, and it is not possible to complete paperwork and give babies the full attention and care they need.

Working forty and fifty hours a week was a common occurrence. If the week consisted solely of child contact time, forty hours divided, for example, between sixteen babies grants each baby half an hour a week of one practitioner's time. Whilst participants appeared to yearn for more time with the children, they did not want to give the appearance that they just sit and play with children all day.

<u>Managers</u>

On occasion participants accused managers of spending most of the day in the office doing nothing, rather than setting an example of good working practice with the children in the nursery.

<u>Owners</u>

A commonly held perception was that the main reason for Day nursery owners being in business was to make a profit. Moreover, some participants perceived Day nursery owners to be making their profit at the expense of practitioners. There was little evidence that practitioners sympathised with this stance. They were unable to understand how children were not always the primary reason for being there.

<u>Pay related perceptions</u>

The appeal for more time to play with the children appeared to eclipse the dissatisfaction with poor pay. Participants' perceptions of pay were that it was poor. Furthermore, it was poor in relation to the amount of fees that practitioners were aware that parents paid for their child's care.

Participants gave little or no consideration to any other costs that incurred in running a Day nursery. This rudimentary view of the financial aspect of Day nursery finances appeared to be responsible for the perception that owners are only in the business to make a profit. Such a view is evident in Annette's experience (in 6.5.1.2)

Findings from the semi-structured telephone follow-up interviews indicated that opportunities for training appeared to vary from one setting to another. Whilst participants from one setting seemed to have all the training they needed, participants from another setting found that even though free training was available to them, there were barriers preventing them from accessing it as often as they would like. Perceptions were of staff being the main barrier to accessing external training.

No participants who were working towards further qualifications, felt that they were given adequate time during the working day to keep up with their studies. Participants' perceptions were that young girls, without prior experience of caring for children, found it more difficult to gain underpinning knowledge required to support practice than those with experience.

The view that maturity and experience were prerequisites for early years practitioners was common, as was the notion that practitioners displaying maturity and experience were able to support their peers in training.

Perceptions were that not all trainee practitioners managed to complete the training; some either gave up part way through, or changed to a different course do to something other than childcare.

The concept of in-house training seemed common to all participants. Practitioners thought that in-house training was necessary if they were to have any chance of keeping abreast with current practice.

6.6 Face-to-face Group Interviews

6.6.1 Attitudes, values and perceptions

used three tape recorders to record the face-to-face group interviews. I transcribed and coded the data, analysing it in relation to the research questions. The twenty-nine participants in the face-to-face group interviews, profiled earlier (in 5.4.2.1) were not afraid to say exactly what they thought and seemed not to hold anything back. Findings of the attitudes and perceptions of participants from part one and part two of the group interview are combined because participants interlinked issues in their responses, so by keeping these connections together, the practitioner voice is maintained.

General perceptions of working in Day nurseries as opposed to any other kind of setting varied. For example, a few participants recalled positive experiences of Day nurseries but 'It depends where you go.' Several agreed that Day nurseries were 'Boring.' One participant stated that Day nurseries were 'Quite laid back but they are not very good pay.'

When asked to feedback their first thoughts on private Day nurseries two participants chose not to respond. Responses of the remaining participants were:

- Lovely/Love work there/Not as good as other nurseries/
- Good/Good and bad/Good, crap pay/ Nice to work in, however
- Not very good pay/not very good pay
- Bad/Get treated bad
- Children/Get to know all the children as they come regularly/ they charge to take care of children
- A range of ages/Range of ages from a few weeks old/Children, age group,
- Boring/Boring/Boring
- Crap!/ Crap money/ Crap pay/Crap hours and pay
- Rubbish pay/Rubbish pay
- Long hours, bitchy/Bitchy

6.6.2 Pay in relation to hard work and commitment

The majority agreed that the pay was 'rubbish' and 'you would get more in McDonalds.' A teacher advised one participant not to work in a nursery 'because it is horrible pay and it is not the line of work that you should go in to.'

Group consensus was that the pay was poor in relation to the hard work and commitment provided by practitioners. One participant reported that the earnings of a Junior Sales Assistant at Next are equivalent to those of a nursery assistant. Another, that 'you can earn more working in a restaurant than you can in childcare – and childcare does not pay tips!'

No one received sick pay. One participant started a conversation with her peers around about her:

Frankie: It should not matter [about the pay] if you like doing it [working with children].

Sophia: Unless you have got a house to run.
Frankie: At the end of the end of the day, it's the children.

Trish: That's why we are here; that's what you are doing it for."

Sophia: Everyone else is doing it, but they live at home. I live by myself so if I have cheap wages, how would I support myself if it is crap wages?

Farrah: I know someone who has just finished her level three she is just about to buy her own house and everything.

Sophia: Last year I was supposed to be doing a level two and one only got £300 a month.

Francine: I get that as a sales assistant at the Co-op'.

Researcher: Is it satisfying?

Francine: No, because it's not what I want to do, but doing nine hours a day, five days a week and you are only getting £300 a month for it…

Sophia: You get more on the dole than working there.

6.6.3 Hours

Everyone in the group held the perception that Day nursery hours are long. Participants worked full time. Shifts were either seven, ten hour or twelve hours long. No one worked on Saturdays. When asked for their first thoughts on private Day nurseries, participants written responses were:

- No comment. No thought
- Long (15 participants)
- A lot of hours
- Very long
- Too long (2 participants)

- Long days
- Early start then could be late finishing
- Sometimes go to slow
- Fairly long hours for low pay
- Crap hours and pay
- Crap schedule
- Absolutely loads
- More hours in holidays e.g. No 6 weeks like holidays in schools.

6.6.4 Parents

Parents gained the approval of about half of the participants who enjoyed chatting to them about their children. A small group of participants relayed their discussion about parents:

> We were talking about them being stuck up. They wear their suits and think they are good with their posh jobs. You know when they come in and they ignore you … and it's like at the end of the day, you are there looking after their kids for free.

A further discussion ensued about whether wearing a suit necessarily means that a person is 'stuck up' and has 'a posh job', or whether that is a perception. When asked for their first thoughts on parents' participants written responses were:

- Great – come and have a conversation
- Lovely
- Nice (2 participants)
- Get on nicely with them
- Like chatting to them
- Very friendly and chatty
- Friendly (10 participants)
- Friendly easy to talk too, helpful
- Some are friendly
- Friendly and rude
- OK
- Good but annoying
- Some can be friendly
- Communicate with parents
- Never get chance to interact with them as we
- collect the children from outside

6.6.5 Day nursery managers and owners

A common perception regarding managers was that they spent all day 'in the office doing paperwork' rarely seeing the children. One student described as a 'nightmare' a

situation where three different managers had come and gone in a four-month period. When asked for their first thoughts on managers, participants written responses were:

- Brill!
- Cool
- Great
- Very good
- Nice
- Friendly
- Friendly, easy to talk to, helpful
- Ok
- Alright/Alright – some of them
- Qualified at the same level
- Good/bad
- Good in some
- Don't really talk to her/don't see them
- Bossy
- Can be bitches, quite controlling
- Horrible, unsociable
- Not nice (evil)
- Haven't got one
- Don't have one; don't work in a Day nursery

When asked for their first thoughts on Day nursery owners, participants written responses were:

- Glamorous
- Fantastic
- Good
- Friendly
- Nice, friendly
- Nice (3 participants)
- OK to get on with, quite friendly
- Some alright, some suck up
- Good/bad
- Unsure
- Don't really see them
- Never seen the owner
- Who owns it?
- Don't know them
- Don't have one
- Stuck up
- Ignorant
- Horrible/unsociable

- Owners(3 participants)

6.6.6 Staff to child ratios, relations and morale

Another participant was 'counted in the ratios but never left unsupervised.' Whilst some nurseries seemingly adhered to ratios of staff to children, participants reported others as lax. However, there appeared to be confusion about who is included in the ratios according to the National Standards for Full Day Care (in 3.3.1; 3.3.2; 5.4.2). Students expected maturity and professionalism of their peers and thought that staff should not 'bicker and fight like school girls as the children pick up on it' (in 1.1; 2.1; 2.2.2; 2.24; 2.3.3). The group agreed that all nurseries are different and experiences were by no means all negative.

> When I went to a different Day nursery for my work experience, they all treated me like a member of staff yet I was not even training.
>
> The only two nurseries I have been at were absolutely brilliant and the school that I was at was horrible.
>
> I like Day nursery better than school. You have more fun there and you can do more as well.
>
> Where I am I just love it to bits.

Some participants were required to wash pots and run errands when they would rather have been working with children.

The group were unanimous in their decision of what was the best thing about being an early years practitioner as illustrated by the following quote:

> What you get out of it being with the child and watching him grow up. Just think, you see that child take his first steps with you, you know, with your help, look how rewarding that is.

6.6.7 Progression and aspiration

Popular opinion amongst participants was that they did not intend to work in Day nurseries once they qualified. First choices included Sure Start, schools, social work and higher education. One student who did want to work in a Day nursery thought that she would want a change after a while; another wanted to own her own nursery. All intended to be working with children in some capacity.

6.6.8 Summary

Research question 1: What attitudes do early years practitioners hold concerning a range aspects relating to work in Day nurseries and what influence if any do these have on retention?

The attitude of the group towards parents was generally positive in that participants tended to enjoy communicating with them about work-related and other issues. A few held the belief that parents were 'stuck up' or 'posh'. This impression seemed to be because some parents wore suits when they dropped off their children at nursery. One opinion was that parents 'ignore' practitioners. This was a particular problem for practitioners who felt that they were looking after the children 'for free' (6.6.4)

Participants held a range of perceptions regarding Day nursery managers and owners. Managers ranged from Brill to evil and I don't have one; owners from glamorous to horrible. A common perception was that managers spent all day in the office doing paperwork. Owners tended to be more elusive. Practitioners who saw their nursery owners tended to view them in a positive light.

Participants expected maturity and professionalism of their peers and thought that staff should not 'bicker and fight like school girls as the children pick up on it'

Evidently, participants agree that the working day is long and often very long.

Research question 2: What values are important to early years practitioners and do these influence their reasons for remaining in or leaving their workplace, if so how?

Participants were aware of the importance of adhering to appropriate staffing ratios.

Participants valued direct contact with children over, for example washing pots and running errands.

Research question 3: What perceptions do practitioners have concerning their sector, for example its status?

Commonly participants perceived that they worked harder and longer than shop assistants work – although not on Saturdays - but earned less pay. However, shop work is less satisfying because it is not what they want to do.

Popular opinion in the group was that they did not intend to work in Day nurseries once they qualified rather they would migrate to Sure Start, schools, social work, higher education or to won their own nursery for example. All intended to be working with children in some capacity.

The group reached a consensus on pay. Generally, pay was rubbish'. It did not reflect practitioners' hard work and commitment. The absence of sick pay was an issue, as was trying to train on no - or very low, wages.

Participants held different and sometimes quite opposite perceptions of work in [private] Day nurseries, for example:

- lovely - crap
- love to work there - boring
- quite laid back - get treated badly
- Some participants preferred to work in Day nurseries rather than schools, for others it was the reverse.

6.7 Stories

6.7.1 Overview

I sought further perspectives of work in Day nurseries from highly experienced professionals in September 2006 (in 5.5.1). Olive, Teresa and Tara had all begun their careers in Day nurseries before progressing to high profile positions in further education and the voluntary sector (in 5.5.2). As discussed earlier, there is an element of biography in qualitative research and it is important to maintain the voice of the participants, which is why I present here the full and unaltered content of the story data (in 4.3; 4.4.3; 4.5).

6.7.2 Olive's story

> Day Nursery experience: Not good I'm afraid! The staff were young. Very often qualifying and not fully qualified staff were used as qualified staff. Officer in Charge & Deputy should be super-numery, but this was not always the case, sometimes they [unqualified staff] were looking after their own group of children.
>
> We had very little time for record keeping, planning etc. The days were very long; we opened up 6:45 a.m. and locked up at 6:30 p.m. There was no dinner break if members of staff were off sick. No time for staff supervision or for staff to attend training in their work hours. There was very little support from or communication with the proprietor. We always had the bare minimum of staff to just cover with lots of moving of children between the rooms to get the ratios right. This is why I could only do it for about a year before I thought enough is enough and I left my position without having another job to go to.

6.7.3 Teresa's story

One nursery was struggling to make ends meet. To help rectify this difficulty staff were not paid for a number of weeks and were told to reduce the children's food consumption to save costs. Children were then provided with basic minimal food and were often given leftovers.

A nursery that was preparing for their OFSTED inspection and aware that their previous report identified that the nursery required new resources, decided to purchase toys from a well known store. However, the toys remained in their boxes and inside the carrier bags on the day of the inspection, and the owner commented to the inspector that they toys had just been purchased and would be catalogued and put out the following day. However, the toys were never used by the nursery but returned to the store the following day.

In a large nursery children and staff always appeared happy, relaxed and the atmosphere was 'buzzing'. This nursery had a well qualified staff team who worked hard to put children's needs first. The one area from the many areas of success that stands out about this nursery was the lunchtime routines. In all of the nursery rooms staff encouraged independence, by asking children about their likes and dislikes and children were appropriately encouraged to self select food, clear away and be sociable with adults and children. To my delight I often saw children making healthy choices and I found it refreshing that children were given such valuable opportunities.

In one nursery staff lunch times were very difficult for everyone. There was never quite enough staff to cover for staff to leave the room, therefore staff were expected to eat their lunch while children were sleeping and limited to the number of times they could go to the toilet, which meant that staff often had to use the children toilets within the nursery rooms.

At a large Day nursery, continuing professional development was a priority for all staff at all levels. There was an allocated member of staff that had the responsibility for training and development and all staff was given opportunities to attending training courses and each had a professional development plan. Staff were encouraged to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses in a positive way and this helped to inform their professional development plan. When staff attended training the costs were paid and any of the staffs personal time used was paid or time of in lieu was provided. This nursery had a strong reputation and had an excellent staff retention rate.

To help reduce staff stress and show appreciation for staff one nursery owner provided a weekly opportunity for staff to take advantage of a free beauty treatment. Staff took it in turns to access these treatments and enjoyed the opportunity for a stress free half an hour.

Pay of those staff who were employed prior to the minimum wage was not upgraded when it came into force. When staff were finally paid the correct rate they were not backdated with the money they were owed.

One Day nursery owner treated it's staff badly, for example poor levels of pay, no holiday or sick pay, training opportunities, staffroom, and long hours, that the nursery manager was the only member of staff to go into work one day, leaving many parents without childcare.

6.7.4 Tara's story

Well where do I start? The two stories that stick in my mind are very upsetting stories and disturbing, particularly being a young newly qualified nursery nurse at the time. Both of these stories come from the same, quite large nursery.

I was outside with the 3-5 year olds in the courtyard playing and supervising the children, this always seemed like a one man job because other staff usually another one or two just stood and nattered about what they did at the weekend. I dreaded the playground duties with the deputy manager who I worked with in the 3-5 room (if you could call it that). The playground duty was often a terrible experience for me, never mind the children. It consisted of a lot of emotional bullying, shouting and taunting the children. I did my up most to comfort the children, playing and supervising the activities as well. But my practice was looked on as wrong and inappropriate. I felt this as comments like "Just stand here with me!" was given and the evil eye was sent across the playground if I ever interacted and with the children.

This particular day one of the children (4 year old boy) did not share his bike. He was yelled at by the deputy, telling him to stand in the corner of the playground. I felt that the boy was often picked on and I was I suppose scared at the time about telling his mum about what was happening in the nursery. She collected him every day from nursery and it was always on the tip of my tongue to tell her but sadly it never came out! The boy who was a very dominant, confident character amongst his peers quickly turned in to a frightened, scared and withdrawn child at the sound of the yelling deputy. After 30 seconds of standing alone in the corner of the playground the manager came out into the playground and said also at the top of her voice. "Don't tell me that P is up to no good again?" The manager grabbed the boy forcefully by the wrist and pulled him into the nursery. The deputy followed leaving myself outside with the rest of the 3-5 year olds (approx 12). From the position of the outside area, I could no longer see P. except he was pushed near the toilet area. I could see the manager to his level shouting at the top of her voice about how he is such a horrible boy and asking herself why it's always him she has to speak too. At this point I was no longer interacting with the children just stood with my feet like they were stuck to the floor, my body all numb. A mixture of feelings I experienced that day, anger, hurt pain, and frustration. I so wanted to rescue P. but at the same time I had a duty of care to the others in the playground and didn't want to leave them. That day I went home and wept!!!!!

Another time a deputy manager was force-feeding a child that did not want any more dinner. I questioned her but was quickly rudely spoken to in front of other staff and children. I said she was a hard woman and allowed the child to go and sit on the carpet with the rest of the children; she said I was too soft and ordered me into quiet corner where she was going to speak to me. I knew what was coming

probably just as the children did harsh words and a lot of bullying. She cornered me in the room telling me to sit down on the chair, the only chair in this area. I refused, not wanting to be at a lower level then her; this made her even angrier. I cannot remember the exact words that were exchanged at that moment but bringing it all back brings a tear to my eye now.

The impact of the interpretation of these stories on the researcher is powerful. The 'realities' of the participants would be lost if the stories were presented any other way than in their full content (in 4.2). The interpretivist approach used in the study contends that reality is dependent on the interpretation of people (in 4.4) more so when interpreting the interpreted realities of the participants. The issues raised in the stories can, therefore, be viewed and interpreted from many different perspectives (in 4.4.1; 4.5; 5.1; 6.1) by those of us who are concerned with the recruitment and retention of early years practitioners and providing quality environments through which young children have the opportunities to develop their full potential. The interpretation offered here is mine.

6.8 Summary

The perspectives of the three professionals who told their stories about Day nurseries from their own perspectives and without specific questions reflected, to some extent, the attitudes, values and perceptions of participants in the follow-up and group interviews. Analysis of the data (in 6.3) showed the attitude of respondents concerning their previous roles as early years practitioners in Day nurseries is that wanted to do a good job. Respondents appear to have experienced extremes in Day nurseries relating to quality of care, provision of resources, staffing and use of staff time for example.

Respondents emphasised the importance of providing children with quality care. They perceived an authoritarian style of leadership as negative and, in one case, bullying. This was difficult to cope with and particularly upsetting to witness when addressed at the children. One respondent was reportedly ostracised for trying to comfort the children to whom this occurred.

Respondents valued appropriate staff ratios to the extent that staffing problems at times prevented access to training, habitual understaffing caused one person to leave the nursery. On the other hand, valuing of practitioners was evident in the report that an allocated member of staff had responsibility to ensure equitable access to training, at no cost of the nursery. Further, this nursery encouraged reflective practice, a trait of professionalism (in 2.1). This nursery had a 'strong reputation' and excellent retention. The suggestion here is that practitioners appreciate cost training opportunities and that cost paid training, and a professional working environment are some of the rewards that ensure practitioners feel sufficiently valued to remain in the nursery. Moreover, this nursery recognised that stress so provided access to free beauty treatments to help reduce it.

Regarding the reported incident of toys purchased for an Ofsted inspection, no explanation of the nursery owners' actions is available. However, if one accepts the judgement of the Ofsted inspector (in 3.3.2), and the 'reality' of one story participant, one perception is that the owner was trying to avoid having poor practice identified a second time. From the perspective of the respondent, the reputations of the nursery, its owner, the manager, and the practitioners are at stake. Poor resourcing shows potential disregard for the children; this and the attitude of the owner influence the working practice of early years practitioners who are required to plan for and provide opportunities to facilitate children's learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Perhaps the nursery was in financial

difficulties. Whatever the reason perhaps a more acceptable course of action is to borrow toys from a toy library or share with another setting, thereby preserving one's reputation.

Another theme that emerged from the stories related to feelings, for example, feeling valued or satisfied. My perception is that factors influencing feelings of being valued included receiving support and encouragement, having a designated person in the nursery for training and development, having a personal professional development plan, attending training paid for by the nursery, working in a nursery that had a 'strong reputation' and evidence of being appreciated. Conversely, there were also factors that caused practitioners to feel undervalued. Pay that was lower than the minimum wage was an issue, as was lack of holiday or sick pay. So too were having to work particularly hard for long hours when no cover was provided for staff who were sick; inadequate ratios of adults to children, training undertaken in practitioners own time, staff working in positions inappropriate for their level of qualification, insufficient time to complete paperwork, little support from the owner and being bullied by superiors.

Use of language (6.3.3) emerged as a theme from Tara's story. She uses the first set of words below to describe her own experience and the second to describe her observations of some staff interactions with children:

> Upsetting; disturbing; dreaded; terrible experience; scared; anger; pain; frustration; wept; cornered me; bringing it all back brings tears to my eyes now.

> Emotional bullying; shouting and taunting; yelled at; grabbed the boy forcefully by the wrist; pulled him into the nursery; pushed; bending down at his level shouting at the top of her voice; frightened; withdrawn; standing alone in the corner; force feeding; harsh words.

Story data gave a clear indication that there were certain factors that contributed to feelings of wellbeing and being valued. For example Teresa describes a Day nursery where staff 'appeared happy and relaxed [and] the atmosphere was 'buzzing''. Staff were well qualified, hard working, concerned first with the needs of the children in their care and encouraging them to be independent. All of these factors indicate that early years practitioners observed in that Day nursery were satisfied with their work and workplace and felt valued. Like Tara and Olive, Teresa also refers to her feelings in the story, this time it was the feeling of 'delight' at the choices she had observed the children making.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

7. Conclusions and Implications for Future Practice

A thorough critique of the research methodology and method shows how each aspect contributed to the whole. Utilising survey methodology in the interpretivist paradigm meant I was able to accept, and argue the worth of, data that is a snapshot of the respondents' 'reality' at the time of the survey (in 1.5). Further, by incorporating qualitative follow-up interviews with the survey I intended to create a more robust research mechanism that would substantiate survey data and provide further insight into the attitudes, values and perceptions of the survey respondents.

Upon reflection, I would not choose to use survey methodology in the future. My shortsighted interpretation of a 'successful' survey questionnaire focussed more on administration of the questionnaire than validity or reliability (in 4.5). It was difficult to discern the existence of potential bias in the data because of the way in which the survey was administered (4.4.2). Further, the response was considerably smaller than needed to make a worthwhile contribution to the investigation.

Nevertheless, without the survey there would be no follow-up interviews and no opportunity to use analysis of the survey data to help formulate additional questions for group interview. Moreover, reflecting on the data from the follow-up interviews caused me to revisit my own subjective preconceptions and rationale for undertaking the research, which in turn heightened my understanding of the research methodology and kept my own bias in perspective.

I do not regret having attempted to the survey method in my research because it would have been difficult for me to collect data from an equivalent number of respondents through face-to-face interviews for example, within the time and financial constraints of the study (in 1.5). However, with the benefit of experience, if I needed to access practitioners through Day nursery managers and owners again I would take a more personal approach; rather than sending a letter I would telephone each manager or owner and request an appointment to discuss participation of their staff in the research. Then I would use qualitative methods to collect

data directly from participants in order to maintain confidentially of responses and anonymity of participants. This way it would also be possible to ascertain the size of the population as a whole and sampling too would be more accurate.

Qualitative methodology when positioned within the interpretative paradigm was suitable for investigating the realities of practitioners in Day nurseries because it allowed me to use naturalistic methods of data collection to elicit detail and bring understanding to participants' lived experience (in 4.3). Further, as an interpretivist, I did not seek statistical representativeness, or claim generalization; rather, I am at liberty within the research paradigm to be subjective in my interpretation of the observations made in the study (4.1).

As qualitative research is to some extent biographical in eliciting participants' stories (in 4.3) naturalistic observation and participation, interview and stories generated meaningful data from several different perspectives in relation to the research questions. It helped maintain the centrality of practitioners in the research and gave voice to their realities. This 'biographical' element extends to the inclusion of extracts from my research journals; including them in the thesis invites access to my own thought processes during the journey (4.4.4).

Applying naturalistic observation and participation to early years e-forums achieved its aims of gaining insight into the inquiry. Using this method, I was able to gauge practitioners' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with aspects of their work. This enabled me to listen to practitioners' voice on for example pay, workload, qualifications and the way practitioners felt treated. Reflection on these discussions and observations was a valuable precursor to drawing up the follow-up interview questions because it provided a further perspective that I might otherwise have missed (Appendix 2: Follow-up interviews). This method too was also useful for identifying some main areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

The interviews were rather more enlightening than the survey, particularly the group interviews; here the attitudes of participants were prominent in their exchanges with one another and the researcher. Moreover, both the interviews and the stories gave voice to participants' own words; they helped maintain the centrality of people and preserved the holistic context in which the attitudes, values and perceptions of participants were originally positioned; these were two of the main considerations in my research. If I carry out a study with similar aims to this one in the future I will be most likely to employ qualitative methods as they were most conducive to eliciting insight into the research questions (in Chapter 6: Results and Discussion).

Seventy-seven early years practitioners took part in this investigation of what factors caused them to remain in Day nurseries. These were:

- Survey   37 (including 7 follow-up interviewees)
- e-forum   8
- Group interview   29
- Stories   3
                    ‾‾
  Total   77
                    ‾‾

The passion of these practitioners was evident during the collection and analysis of data using qualitative methods and techniques. Practitioners gifted data generously to the investigation and I thank them again for their candid contributions. Enjoyment of working with children was the primary reason for early years practitioners in this study remaining in Day nurseries. Satisfaction with other aspects of the work and workplace was evident but practitioners gave no indication that these were good reasons for staying in the setting.

Answers to some of the questions that had arisen in the literature review, emerged from analysis of the data. For example, I was able to draw the conclusion that because practitioners experience a great deal of satisfaction from working with the children, they would recommend it as a career for others. However, there is sufficient dissatisfaction amongst practitioners to conclude that certain reservations may accompany that

recommendation. Further, practitioners may suggest alternative work in children's centres and school nurseries because of the potential for more pay and holiday incentives. A further question carried through from the literature review concerned practitioners perceptions of running a Day nursery, specifically whether they were aware that some owners found the cost of staff wages and training a hindrance to running the provision. The conclusions drawn from the study are that practitioners appear to be more concerned that the nurseries were running well so that children had everything they needed. If this meant sacrificing their pay, many of them did so, for as long as they were able.

There is no suggestion that Day nursery owners should not run a profitable business, after all running Day nursery provision became big business the moment the criteria for business experience, not childcare related experience, was set as one of the main criterion for receiving funding to expand Day nursery provision (in 2.3.1). The grievance from practitioners was due to their perception that some owners made a profit out of them and the children suffered.

Aware that my claim is to transient knowledge (in 4.2) I presented my findings in Chapter 5: Results and Findings presupposing that these too were open to subjective interpretation. The question of whether practitioners were aware of the sector's low status reputation seemed incidental although some were aware and others not. The issue of low pay revealed practitioners' concerns but even after passionate objections about their low pay they remained, whenever possible, in the Day nursery; there appeared to be several interconnected reasons for this. These were; their attachment to the children, the responsibility they felt for meeting children's needs and the satisfaction gained from helping the children to develop.

Despite the qualifications overhaul of recent early years' history there are still multiple qualification routes accessible to people with varying levels of education who want to work with young children in Day nursery. Influences on qualification pathway decision-making process appear to include commitments to family, home and work as well as choice of

appropriate programmes, availability of places and relevance of courses to intended career destination. These commitments also had a bearing on the time participants were able to commit to their studies. There is much talk about the wellbeing of children and rightly so, but this investigation has highlighted the need to consider the wellbeing of early years practitioners who experience stress and heavy workload during long working days, and who then go home to catch up with planning and paperwork, or their studies. The wellbeing of practitioners is therefore the new strand of 'early years practitioners' to which I refer in 2.1.

The emphasis on raising quality through qualifications pays no regard to the needs of early years practitioners. If, as this study suggests, practitioners do experience stress at work, it will no doubt have an effect on colleagues and children. If the only time we pay heed is when allegations of malpractice surface, we will have to wait for more children and practitioners to suffer before resolving the situation. Some may argue that practitioners should not need qualifications, as parents are not qualified to care for and educate their children. This argument adds to the conclusions drawn from the results and discussion of the investigation. Without going into the whole debate about what makes a 'good' parent, I suggest that the characteristics described by the children in Pence *et al*'s study (1994) were accurate (in 2.2.4.1). These were 'to be caring and attentive', 'to like and respect children', 'take time to listen to them', 'be affectionate and responsive', and 'readily available for adult-child interaction' (DfES 2005; Daycare Trust 2004). These are essential qualities for anyone who spends time with children in my opinion. Some of these elements are not taught on early years training programmes.

I am not suggesting that qualifications are irrelevant but I do conclude that because participants in this study felt undervalued and unhappy about the stress which arose from their work, qualifications alone do not make a 'happy, relaxed and buzzing atmosphere' like the one described by Teresa earlier (in 6.7.3); nor are qualifications a guarantee that practitioners possess the qualities of a leader or manager (Moyles 2006). This investigation concludes that not all early years practitioners aspire to positions of leadership and management and so may never benefit from the awareness

that training can bring regarding issues of professionalism. However, all practitioners can learn some of the skills associated with being professional.

Implications for Future Practice

Professionalisation of the sector is not just about a relatively few people who are able to attain Early Years Professional Status; it is linked to values and rewards of all practitioners who work in the sector. My interpretation of the findings from this research concludes that participants remain in Day nurseries because of their love for children; their passion is to spend as much time as possible with them, because of the pleasure they get from helping them develop and grow. Seemingly, it is one of their greatest rewards.

In developing my new strand of 'early years practitioners' (in 2.1) and in the interests of improving retention, I suggest that reducing the time practitioners spend on paperwork is a positive move. With this in mind, I have developed an innovative concept that takes into account the needs of all early years practitioners in Day nurseries (in 5.8 Figure 12: Focus on practitioners). The concept has at its core the notion that all practitioners are valued; when they are engaged in what they do best, and pool their knowledge and experience, they will enhance their own and each other's practice (2.3.3) and the quality of provision for young children.

The concept I propose for consideration to pilot in Day nurseries is a 'practitioner focussed' model; one in which practitioners whose expertise is in childcare spend their working day caring for and playing with the children, whilst those who are qualified to educate and care do that. In addition, I introduce a new role for staff members whose expertise is 'paperwork'. In this role, team members would have or acquire appropriate knowledge in the field. The position may well suit practitioners who feel they no longer want the close contact with young children that they previously enjoyed. These staff members would support colleagues with paperwork and be responsible for cascading policy and other related guidance to practitioners. The rationale behind the model is that when practitioners are doing what they enjoy most and are best at they are more likely to feel valued and able to remain in Day

nurseries doing what they love. The 'practitioner focussed' model depends on colleagues working together as on team.

Working together requires practitioners in any Day nursery to behave in a professional manner. I argue along with Teresa (in 6.7.3) that practitioners on a professional development plan, who are given opportunities to reflect on their practice will be working in a nursery with a strong reputation and an excellent staff retention rate. This is because reflective practice is the beginning of professionalism. It is the difference between doing the job every day and doing a better job every day; a step in the direction of reaching a position of mutual respect and understanding required to meet one another's professional needs, thereby offering early years practitioners more reasons for remaining in Day nurseries. Those in positions of leadership and management in Day nurseries are no more responsible for creating a professional environment than those in other positions; each practitioner must contribute to an ethos of mutual support and understanding to ensure the wellbeing of practitioners.

Finally

Through this investigation I have achieved my aim to develop a researchful understanding of the perceptions of early years attitudes, values and perceptions of practitioners in Day nurseries. I have begun to make amends for the lack of centrality of early years practitioners in research and maintained participants voice. Further, I have shed light on some of the retention challenges in the sector and contributed to the retention debate.

The wellbeing of practitioners has been brought into question through this investigation. I suggest that the absence of professional wellbeing negates attempts to retain them in Day nurseries. The presence of wellbeing is likely to have an impact on the 'mobile' workforce (in 3.3.5) and is an area for further research. Moreover, I recommend that those of us who are concerned with the welfare and education of children should focus for a moment on the welfare of practitioners who provide their education and care. We should be proactive in offering funded creative opportunities for reflective practice with the aims of assuring practitioners that we value them and care enough to help safeguard their wellbeing.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Survey

Survey audit

Survey questionnaire Part A Job satisfaction	Survey questionnaire Part B Approach to current workplace
Explore attitudes, values and perceptions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20	Explore attitudes, values and perceptions 1, 2, 3, 5
Investigate the role of employers with respect to recruitment and retention 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20	Investigate the role of employers with respect to recruitment and retention 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Gather more in - depth information on topics being researched 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20	Gather more in - depth information on topics being researched 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Draft survey questionnaire

STAFFING STUDY – RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

SURVEY OF NURSERY STAFF

Self completion questionnaire

We would be very grateful if you could spend about 10 minutes completing this short questionnaire. We want to find out how people come into childcare work and what helps them stay in or leave the work. The questions are about your approach to work and most of them can be answered very quickly by circling a number. Your replies will remain entirely confidential. Neither your name nor the organisation you work for will be revealed through this research.

Please be kind enough to return your questionnaires in the stamped addressed envelope provided before Friday 27th. February 2004.

Please complete:

Your name:

Your job title:

Name of the setting in which you work:

Qualification(s):

For official use only:
Nursery number:
Staff number:

Final survey questionnaire

APPENDIX 2: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

Follow-up interview questions

1.   Do you feel that early years practitioners generally have enough training experience and qualifications for the job they do?

2.   How do you feel about the support, training and opportunities to progress in your current nursery?

3.   Research has shown that some Day nursery providers say that the cost of training and staff wages are major obstacles to running their nursery. What do you think? How does this affect you?

4.   Are you aware that the early years sector has a low status, poor pay and conditions reputation? Is this how you see it?

5.   Early years practitioners repeatedly claim to be undervalued. So why do you think they stay in Day nurseries?

6.   How would you describe 'good management' in a Day nursery?

7.   Has this been your experience? What would you do differently if you were a manager?

8.   Most early years practitioners are young white females. Why do you think this is? What about men, people from ethnic minority groups or people with disabilities?

9.   Do you think, like most early years practitioners, mothers should be available to care for their own children

10.   Would you recommend working in a Day nursery?

11.   Where do you see yourself in 3 years time?

Appendix 3: E-FORUM

Appendix 3: e-forum

Researcher's e-forum posting example

If you are an early years practitioner in a private Day nursery please tell me what you think of your current workplace. Are you happy there? Why? Why not? Please tell me which town you live in.

Participants' e-forum postings

To include participants' e-forum postings in their entirety would have comprised the anonymity of participants in the research. For this reason, postings do not appear in the appendix.

Appendix 4: Group interview

This tool 'First thoughts cards' helped elicit participants' perceptions on a range of aspects pertaining to their work and workplace. For ease of reading, I also present the cards in a list format.

Cream cakes   Pay   Hours

Parents   Planning   Managers

These are the ratios for staff to children:

Babies	1: 3
Toddlers	1:4
Preschool	1:8

"I am unhappy that our pay is so poor in relation to the hard work and commitment we provide."

"Most of the people I was at college with work in private day nurseries..."

"If staff morale is low it is the fault of the manager."

"It's all about the money not the staff or children…"

"I work in a Baby room and there is anything up to 11 staff in there; they bicker and fight like school girls."

"The best thing about being an early years and childcare worker is…"

"When I finish the course I will…"

Keep in touch

margaret.simms@ntu.ac.uk

'First thoughts cards' in a list format.

-
- Private Day nurseries (in 1.5)
- Pay
- Hours
- College course
- Parents
- Planning
- Managers
- Owners
- The following statements from e-forum

  observations:

  - I am unhappy that our pay is so poor in relation to the hard work and commitment we provide"
  - These are the ratios for staff to children:

  Babies   1:3

  Toddlers   1:4

  Preschool 1:8

    - Most of the people I was at college with work in private Day nurseries.
    - If staff morale is low, it is the fault of the manager.
    - It is all about the money not the staff or children.
    - I work in a baby room and there is anything up to 11 staff in there; they bicker and fight like school girls.
  - The best thing about being an early years and childcare worker is …
  - When I finish the course I will…`

- Keep in touch

  Margaret.simms@ntu.ac.uk

Appendix 5: *Childcare places in Day nurseries across Nottingham in 2005*

Childcare places in Day nurseries across Nottingham in 2005

Area of Nottingham	Day nursery places
Arboretum	137
Aspley	157
Basford	256
Berridge `	369
Bestwood	171
Bilborough	0
Bridge	169
Bulwell	242
Bulwell Forest	202
Clifton North	0
Clifton South	60
Dunkirk and Lenton	272
Leen Valley	228
Mapperley	151
Radford and Park	213
Sherwood	254
St Anns	288
Wollaton East and Lenton Abbey	156
Wollaton West	186

THE LAST WORD

"Be not wise in your own eyes …"

Proverbs 3:7