

**African Caribbean parents' perceptions of two
and three year olds' play and learning in the early
years: Understanding play and the links to
learning and development**

by

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to Lamore and Denzil Harris, my parents. Without you both this would not be possible.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to my supervisor, Andrea Higgins, for her valuable comments, patience and shared sense of humour enabling me to complete this research.

To the staff at all the settings, who showed an interest in the study and assisted in the data collection process. Most importantly, I would like to thank all the parents who gave up their time to take part and provide the much needed research material.

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Abstract

This study introduces the importance of early years education as a phase in its own right where early years settings deliver planned learning and play experiences.

The literature review highlights an emphasis on parental involvement in early years education and how best to support their children at home. It reveals gaps in not only looking at parents' understanding and values about the role of play in early learning but also the minimal focus on the views of particular ethnic groups. In an attempt to address the imbalance this study looks at the perceptions of African Caribbean parents of two and three year olds and their understanding of play and the links to learning and development.

A mixed methods design was used; both quantitative and qualitative data was collected. The questionnaire data was analysed using descriptive statistics and the semi-structured interviews conducted with eight parents were subject to a Thematic Analysis. The findings from the combined data showed that this group of parents saw the value in play-based activities and how it contributed to the development of language, physical and social skills. Parents also welcomed the benefits of play including the positive contribution it made to children's wellbeing and regulation of their emotions. Parents in this study felt that children should be given opportunities to choose activities for themselves and that practitioners should not only structure the activities but also be involved in children's play. Parents particularly appreciated activities that promoted skills in preparation for transition to school.

The findings from this study suggest a number of implications for EP practice including providing greater clarity for parents about the development of literacy and numeracy skills using play-based activities, in addition to bridging the gap between home and early years settings to support meaningful dialogue between parents and the practitioners.

List of abbreviations

ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECM	Every Child Matters
EEC	Early Excellence Centres
ELG	Early Learning Goal
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPPE	Effective Provision of Preschool Education
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYE	Early Years Education
EYFSP	Early Years Foundation Stage Profile
GT	Grounded Theory
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
KPA	Key Person Approach
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PESD	Personal Emotional Social Development
PPBS	Parental Play Belief Scale
PPLB	Parent Play and Learning Belief
REPEY	Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years
SCAA	School Curriculum Assessment Authority
SD	Standard Deviation
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SST	Sustained Shared Thinking
TA	Thematic Analysis
ZPD	Zone of proximal development

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Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Overview of chapter 1

This chapter sets out to discuss the importance of early years education (EYE) and its relevance in relation to the research that is being proposed and specifically with regards to perceptions of African Caribbean parents' view of play in the early years. Definitions of key terms including: play, early years and African Caribbean will be outlined before moving to consideration of the national context in England and the influence of government initiatives and policies to support EYE. A description is provided of the local context where the research is carried out. This chapter moves on to exploring the relevance of this research to educational psychologists and details the type of literature research that was conducted. Finally an outline of the remainder of the thesis is provided.

1.2 Definitions

1.2.1 Play

There have been ongoing challenges and debates that have taken place across disciplines, cultures and at a societal level concerning a definition of play that can be agreed on. Given the wide spectrum of behaviours that have been termed 'playful', Tamis-LeMonda, Uzgiris, and Bornstein (2002) suggested that it makes an all-encompassing definition of play difficult to articulate. Similarly, Burghardt (2012) described play as a broad construct, which made it difficult to define. In defining play Cohen (2006) described it as a multidimensional construct that varied in meaning across time, culture and contexts. Smith and Pellegrini (2013) defined play, as an

activity done for its own sake where the process is more important than the end point, is flexible and positive affect whilst Fromberg (1990) termed play as, “the ultimate integrator of human experience” (p. 232). These authors contrast play with exploration which is focused, work which has a definite goal and games which typically is more organised, has goals and is about winning.

One of the first definitions of play was provided by Froebel who defined play as:

....the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage, and at the same time, typical of human life as a whole – of the inner hidden natural life in man and all things. It gives therefore joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer rest, peace with the world. It holds the source of all that is good...play at this time (childhood) is of deep significance... the germinal leaves of all later life (Froebel, 1887, p. 55).

Gray (2008) identified at least five characteristics of play:

- Self-chosen and self-directed.
- Not having any externally imposed rules.
- Imaginative, non-literal and mentally removed from “real” or “serious” life.
- Undertaken purely for enjoyment and has no other objective,
- Active, alert and non-stressed

Gray concluded that the greater the number of characteristics present in an activity the more likely that it was referred to as play. This will be explored further in chapter 2. Given the importance of play as not only an activity in the early years through which children explore their environment but also the most important foundation for all

later learning, and having reviewed all of the literature around play it was concluded that Gray's definition with its inclusion of play characteristics would be the most appropriate for the current study. This was also in line with the researcher's beliefs and it was felt best reflected the current literature.

1.2.2 *Early Years*

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2015) highlighted the importance of the early years, as a clear and separate phase in children's learning. Whilst the term 'Early Years' has traditionally covered children aged three to eight years, confusion sets in when making comparisons because different countries begin statutory schooling at different ages. In England, Scotland, Wales and the Netherlands the statutory school age is five; children in a number of European countries including the Republic of Ireland, France, Italy, and Germany start school when they are six years of age. In contrast, the children in Denmark, Sweden, Poland and Finland start school when they are seven years old. There are further complications in the UK where children start attending a school setting in the Reception class aged 4 years 4 months upwards. For the purposes of the current research, the terminology of 'Early Years' covers children from birth to 5 years.

1.2.3 *Defining African Caribbean*

Agyemang, Bhopal, and Bruijnzeels (2005) considered ethnicity to be a multidimensional concept comprising of shared origins or social background, shared culture or tradition that are distinctive, maintained between generations and lead to

a sense of identity and group. To be a member of an ethnic group is to conform to some or all of those practices.

Anecdotally, people often use the term, Black Caribbean to refer to the population that is presented in the current study, Arnold, (2012) stated, "...many black people in Britain have chosen to be called 'African Caribbean', since they were not descendants of the indigenous people (Arawaks and Caribs)...but were descendants of Africans taken by Europeans to the Caribbean as slaves" (p. 23). As a member of this group the researcher identifies as African Caribbean and from here on in will use it to refer to the participants in the study. With this in mind however, the two can be used interchangeably.

The definition of African Caribbean is a person of African ancestral origin whose family migrated from the Caribbean islands to the UK (Collins English Dictionary, 2011) and who self identifies as African Caribbean. African Caribbean people have cultural values, which are different from other African populations in terms of language, diet, customs, beliefs and migration history (Elam, McMunn, & Nazroo, 2001).

1.3 National context

1.3.1 Early Years Education

There is increasing evidence of the importance of the early years to the development of children. Early years are now viewed as an important phase of education in its own right, however there is ongoing debate not only about the curriculum and 'what' should be taught, but also the pedagogy which refers to the 'how' or actions of the

practitioners (OECD, 2015). There is a level of agreement in Western based research from practitioners and experts that, EYE should be play-based along with a mixed method approach of child-centred and adult-initiated practices (DCSF, 2008; EPPE, 2004). Learning through play, is now enshrined in the curriculum guidance of all parts of the UK (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). The evidence suggests that the provision of planned learning and play experiences delivered within good childcare settings supports positive outcomes for children and their families (Taggart, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, & Siraj, 2015).

1.3.2 Government Early Intervention

The Children's Act 2005 defined 'early years provision' as 'any form of childcare for a child aged from birth to until the 31st August following the child's fifth birthday'. Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, and Taggart (2004), highlight the crucial role of early years settings for those who are disadvantaged due to social deprivation or special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

In the UK, childcare is provided within a range of settings but overall there are four main types of providers: childminders; childcare provided from non-domestic settings (primary or infant schools for under 5s, private, voluntary independent sectors); childcare provided from domestic settings and home childcarers (to include nannies) (DfE, 2016a). As of 2016 in England there were 1,261,000 childcare places offered through providers that were registered with Ofsted (DfE, 2017).

In England, the new national entitlement of 30-hours free childcare for 3 – 4 year-olds with two working parents was made available from September 2017, which was added to the existing entitlements to 15-hours free childcare for all 3 – 4 year olds and for the most disadvantaged 2-year olds (DfE, 2016b).

Children start school with varying levels of learning and social development, which can be attributed to different types of advantage and disadvantage (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). Historically, there was concern as to the extent to which early years providers included 'education' as well as 'care' and prepared children for the demands of a national curriculum (OECD, 2015). A number of significant changes in the area of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) over the past 20 years have led to government initiatives and policy development (DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2010; DfE, 2012). Faulkner and Coates (2013) highlight that these have led to improvements in the quality of the service in addition to access particularly for those children who live in areas of social deprivation.

1.3.3 Ethnic diversity

The societal and cultural changes that have taken place in the UK over past decades has been well documented in the government statistics websites. In particular some populations are very well represented, for example according to Oxford University Migration Observatory, as of 2018 there were an estimated 500,000 people resident in the UK who were born in a Commonwealth country and arrived before 1971 (Oxford University Migration Observatory, 2018).

The 2011 Census recorded 594,825 Black Caribbean people in England and Wales making up 1.1% of the total population. Whilst Birmingham overall had the largest Black Caribbean population living there (8%), London as a whole featured 12 out of the top 13 local authorities with the highest percentages of Black Caribbean people.

1.3.4 The African Caribbean population

June 22nd 2018 was the 70th anniversary of the arrival of HMT Empire Windrush to the shores of the UK. On board were 802 migrants, 500 were from Jamaica and the others were from a number of neighbouring Caribbean Islands including Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago. They, along, with others were invited to the UK during 1948 – 1971 to work in the new National Health Service (NHS) as cleaners, porters and nurses; public transport and manufacturing became known as the Windrush Generation.

Olusoga (2018) recounted that the initial welcome gave the impression of an organised and officially sanctioned programme of immigration however the reality was that those arriving faced “appalling discrimination”. Having arrived in the UK, life was not easy and many families experienced racism when it came to finding somewhere to live and getting a job. With this in mind many endured the challenges and made the commitment to stay and raise families. Over time this group have settled and become part of the UK.

This particular group was chosen from a research perspective because of a personal interest. It is a group that the researcher is a member of and identifies with, given the

history of the researcher’s family having migrated from the Caribbean island of Jamaica.

1.4 The local context

1.4.1 Ethnicity

The local authority that is the focus for this study is currently the sixth most ethnically diverse borough in London. The data from the census (2011) highlight that just over a third (36.2%) of respondents described themselves as White British. The second highest group is Other White (16.2%) followed by Black African, 11.4% and Black Caribbean, 7.8%. The statistics point to increased diversity and multiculturalism (Table 1).

Table 1

Ethnic Breakdown of Local Authority Population

Ethnic group	Local authority %	London %	England %
White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	36.2	44.9	79.8
White: Irish	2.1	2.2	1.0
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.2	0.1	0.1
White: Other White	16.2	12.6	4.6
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black Caribbean	2.0	1.5	0.8
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black African	1.2	0.8	0.3
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Asian	1.2	1.2	0.6
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: Other Mixed	2.0	1.5	0.5
Asian/Asian British: Indian	3.1	6.6	2.6
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	0.8	2.7	2.1

Table 1

Ethnic Breakdown of Local Authority Population (continued)

Ethnic group	Local authority %	London %	England %
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	2.5	2.7	2.1
Asian/Asian British: Chinese	1.4	1.5	0.7
Asian/Asian British: Other Asian	2.7	4.9	1.5
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: African	11.4	7.0	1.8
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Caribbean	7.8	4.2	1.1
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Other Black	3.9	2.1	0.5
Other ethnic group: Arab	0.7	1.3	0.4
Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group	4.6	2.1	0.6

ONS Census 2011

Migrants born in the EU comprises 12% of the borough’s population, with residents born in Turkey representing 3.6%, followed by Nigeria 2.7% and Jamaica 1.8%. Although the census data reported high numbers of residents born outside the UK there has been little change to the figures and these communities have been well established and settled in the borough for several decades.

1.4.2 Demographics

In 2015, Index of Multiple Deprivation, the borough was ranked as the eleventh most deprived local authority in England whilst in 2010 it was recorded in second position. (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015; 2010). The data collected when comparing the two periods suggests that the authority has become less

deprived in comparison to other local authorities when considering income, employment, housing and services, living/environment and deprivation affecting children. Despite the demographic changes the authority continues to have high rates of relative child poverty (Census, 2011).

1.4.3 Early Years

The role of Local Authorities in England in the provision of free childcare was set out in statutory guidance (DfE, 2017), ensuring that local needs are based on careful assessment of quality and capacity of childcare including aspects such as funding, staffing, premises, experience and expertise.

Within the LA that is the focus of this study, the early years provision available to children and their families includes day nurseries (public, private, voluntary and independent), playgroups, nursery schools/classes and childminders. Data from the Local Authority Scrutiny Commission, 2017 indicated the following: childminders (172), Day nurseries (85) nurseries in primary schools (155) and playgroups (20). All 3 and 4 years are entitled to 15 hours of free childcare 38 weeks of the year. In addition there is also 15 hours free childcare available for 2 – year olds who meet certain criteria (HLT, 2016).

When looking at educational attainment in the early years, data from the Local Authority profile (2019) highlights that good improvements have been made in ‘school readiness’. In 2010 48% of children achieved a ‘*Good Level of Development*’ increasing

to 71.2% in 2016 – 17 which is just below the average for England (17.5%) and London average of 73.8%.

The African Caribbean group was chosen because it is a significant population within the area that the researcher is working that has to date, not been the focus of specific attention in the literature about play and learning. It is likely that many studies taking a particular focus with regard to the general population, looking at a variety of ethnic groups run the risk of overlooking the variations that exist within cultural groups. As an under represented group in research samples, rather than making any cross cultural comparisons one outcome would be to shed light on any differences within the African Caribbean culture.

If early years settings want to work effectively with this particular group then there is a need to make sure that practitioners are aware of their views. Moreover, there is a need for African Caribbean parents to be involved and informed about research concerning play given the widespread research that highlights the importance of play in relation to development and learning.

1.5 Relevance to Educational Psychologists

There is a need for educational psychologists (EPs) to be involved in early years work given their training and understanding about child development and of the underpinning psychology, ability to work at a systems level and practice in looking holistically at educational needs and practice. Additionally, EPs have skills in

conducting research and aptitude to deliver projects and bespoke pieces of work (AEP Manifesto, 2017).

The need for EPs to work at both a 'macro' and 'micro' level was proposed by Wolfendale and Robinson (2001, 2004) framework. This has resulted in EPs being involved in a range of activities as set out in the Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Squires, Rooney, and O'Connor (2006) review of the work EPs carried out. Consultation, intervention and training were activities that featured predominantly. Shannon and Posada (2007) have examined the role of the EP looking specifically at the early years. Although, Robinson and Dunsmuir (2010) have argued that there is a lack of clarity about the role within the early years.

The current situation in the local authority where this study has been completed, is that there is senior EP with responsibility for early years. In addition, there are a small group of EPs who are specifically called upon to support early years settings. Involvement has not only been in the form of statutory work, but also included: consultation; training and delivery of specific intervention programmes. However, anecdotally it is noted that the introduction of traded services has resulted in a reduction of EPs being involved in this type of work in the early years and an increase in work that has a statutory focus.

1.6 Literature review

The literature review seeks to identify what has been accomplished previously (Grant & Booth, 2009) by avoiding duplication and allow for gaps or omissions to be

identified. The principle aim is to provide an overview of the “big picture” (Mertens, 2019) to determine where the current study fits. Boote and Biele (2005) proposed a number of objectives that a literature review should achieve, in particular to clearly set the parameters of what will and will not be within the scope of the study. Furthermore, in bringing together current research and theoretical perspectives it is important to not only summarise the existing literature but to synthesise it in a way that permits a new perspective.

There are different types of literature reviews including systematic, critical scoping or narrative (Grant & Booth, 2009). The present study will be a narrative synthesis, this being chosen because a narrative synthesis can be used with either quantitative studies or qualitative designs, which is relevant for the research that is to be completed. Also it allows links to be made between many studies covering a range of topics. But most importantly, it helped to provide the rationale for the current study. What emerged from the review of the literature was that research had been conducted but there was a lack of research involving particular ethnic groups, highlighting a gap in the research on African Caribbean parents of 2 – 3 year olds and therefore the focus of the current study.

1.7 Outline of remainder of the thesis

This thesis presents an exploratory study of the understanding and views of parents of two and three year old children who are of African Caribbean origin, with regard to play and learning in EYE. Chapter 2 will provide a narrative synthesis of the literature that takes overview of play as an area for research, its importance for development in

light of the psychological theories and the educational influences that have underpinned current curriculum practices and pedagogy in the early years. Cultural influences on play beliefs; perspectives from diverse families are addressed. A description of the research methodology used is presented in chapter three along with an overview of the researcher's ontological and epistemological positions. This chapter will provide details of the participants, how the ethical considerations in the study were dealt with together with the procedures involved in data gathering and analysis. The fourth chapter outlines the results, which are interpreted using descriptive statistics along with Thematic Analysis. The findings are discussed in chapter five in relation to the literature review. Also included in this section are the limitations of the study together with any identified modifications or improvements. Furthermore, implications for the role of the EP in supporting parents and early years practitioner's understanding of the role of play with regard to learning are suggested. The chapter also identifies recommendations for future research in the area of play and learning in EYE. Finally, the concluding chapter reflects on the current study and its findings.

Chapter 2

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin by outlining the sources employed to conduct a search of the existing literature in order to identify the necessary information to achieve the purposes of the review. The narrative review allows for the identification of gaps and consideration of sources needed to enable a current, comprehensive and relevant synthesis of the literature. After an initial outline of the sources used then the focus will be on play and the aspects that are important to explore, such as play as a subject area and the role it has in a child's development, together with the theories that provide a framework for thinking about development. These are considered in terms of the impact that they have had on practice and pedagogy. Then the review will move to look at parents and EYE from an international context with the emphasis on the UK context, specifically England. Finally, there will be some consideration of the gaps in the research that will give rise to the research questions to be explored.

2.2 Key sources

A preliminary, search of the literature was carried out with the focus on African Caribbean parents' views of play and learning in the early years, including theoretical literature and government policies. This was further supported by attendance at conferences and networking with professionals in the field of early years. A number of databases were reviewed including: British Education Index; Child Development and Adolescent Studies; ERIC (Education Resources Information Center); Education Abstracts (H. W. Wilson) and PsychINFO via the online database EBSCO (Elton B.

Stephens Company) Host. Boolean logic and search terms of 'black parents', 'carers' AND 'understanding' AND 'early years' AND 'play' or 'learning' were used. In addition, searches were completed using Google, Google Scholar and Government websites. The details obtained from the searches conducted are presented in table format Appendix 1. The doctoral thesis service ORCA in the UK, ProQuest and Diginole in the US was also referred to. A subsequent search was carried out manually using snowballing where the references and citations of key articles was used in order to identify additional papers. Any papers that met the inclusion criteria were included (Table 2) if deemed to be relevant to the research questions. Next the abstracts were read to check for relevance, following this, full texts were obtained of those selected articles that were checked and relevant to the research question, namely African Caribbean parents' understanding of play in the early years and how it relates to learning and development.

Table 2

Inclusion Criteria for Articles

Inclusion criteria	
Participants	Parents or Carers, Fathers and Mothers
Location	World wide
Design	Empirical research of qualitative, quantitative and/or mixed methods
Topic	Parents' views of play and learning in preschool or understanding of the early year's curriculum.
Dates	Up to 2017
Publication	Peer reviewed scholarly journals

A focused literature review was completed, at the end of the search twelve articles were located that were key. However, as the review has progressed nine were included as they had direct relevance to the study. Subsequent inclusion into the literature was as a result of demonstrable validity, reliability and trustworthiness. Appendix 2 provides details of the articles that were most pertinent in the literature review.

2.3 Play

In the following section the psychological theories that underpin development and how they relate to a play-based pedagogy in the early years will be highlighted. This will start by a brief consideration of the level of attention in the research on play, before moving to introducing the constructs of play and a brief overview of the benefits of play and the links to learning and development.

2.3.1 Play research

Much of the research that has so far been completed has tended to focus on two aspects, the relationship between the parent and the practitioner, which have been primarily approached from the perspective of cultural differences (Dockett & Fler, 1999; Windisch, Jenvey, & Drysdale, 2003; Fogle & Mendez, 2006; Brooker, 2010). Alternatively, the focus has been that of parent involvement (Brooker, 2011, 2003). Namely, what happens at home and whether parents participate in their children's play.

2.3.2 Constructs of play

Play is a multidimensional construct which makes it difficult to define however, the definition in Chapter 1 provided by Froebel highlights its importance in that it is not only what children do naturally but is also integral for later learning. Further exploration through considering the constructs of play is outlined in the following section.

There are studies that have sought to clarify what play is, for example Gray (2008) identified at least five characteristics of play. Firstly, is that it is self-chosen and self-directed. Many theorists have focused on the personal attributes, which include having the freedom of choice to engage in play. Secondly, the activity of play involves not having any externally imposed rules (Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg, 1983). However, it can be structured and goal oriented as in a game. A third characteristic described by Gray is that play is imaginative, non-literal and mentally removed from “real” or “serious” life. Fourthly, that it is undertaken purely for enjoyment and has no other objective, an activity for its own sake. Finally, Gray identified being active, alert and non-stressed as a fifth characteristic of play, which involves exploration and discovering for themselves. Gray concluded that the greater the number of characteristics present in an activity the more likely that it was referred to as play. It could be argued that this is a position that is largely accepted by specialists in the field and will be used as an underpinning principle of the researcher’s thinking regarding play.

2.3.3 The Importance of play for development

It has been argued that play can be seen as central to most children's lives (Goouch, 2010) in terms of growth, development and learning. According to Moyles (2010), for every aspect of human development and functioning, there is a form of play. Play is thought to be what the young child does in order to explore possibilities and thus to learn about the world. Goouch (2010) summarised it in terms of "world-making" which is achieved through physical, intellectual and social actions and interactions that can be identified as play. Given the predominance of analysis that has highlighted the benefits of play, this has resulted in fairly universally accepted beliefs around the positive role of play in terms of children's development.

Foster (1998) maintained that academic theories of human development which have gained prominence and influence Western psychology can be described as ethnocentric. In a similar vein, Owusu-Bempah and Howitt (2000) argue that the Eurocentric theory of development is considered to be the normal process for all regardless of culture. The authors went on to say that Western perspectives are by no means universal and therefore potential dangers exist in transporting dimensions of development to other cultures. However, such arguments although acknowledged have not been further explored in the current research in order to maintain the focus of play and participants views of how it relates to learning.

In order to explore this further, initially there will be some consideration of the importance of play for brain development before exploring the specific benefits to physical, intellectual, language and social interactions that are achieved through play.

2.3.3.1 Brain development

Many neurological developments take place prior to age of three (OECD, 2006). One of the advantages that have been linked to play is that it is responsible for increasing brain development and growth, establishing new neural connections and making the player more intelligent (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Sutton-Smith believes that humans are born with a huge neuronal over-capacity, which if not used will die. Arguments that counter the view of “critical periods” where a child who has had few opportunities to explore is at risk of failing to link up fully those neural connections and pathways which will be needed for later learning (Sutton-Smith, 1997) have been made by Bruer (2016). He proposes that the brain does not have a finite time frame for learning certain things.

Featherstone and Featherstone (2008) found that the powerful and self-motivated ways in which the young learner goes about gathering the experiences needed to make sense of the world, creates the much needed neural connections for thinking in their brains. The authors maintain that babies and children need to frequently repeat activities such as grasping and handling objects in order to firm up those connections which is achieved through hands on learning. Their work has informed the thinking about the brain and provided more concrete evidence of the brain and its impact on development.

Given the numbers of studies which have begun to investigate the claims of neuroscience and learning, however, Uttal (2001) proposes that there should be scepticism concerning brain imaging techniques and localisation across subjects whilst

Bruer (2016) argues that the claims regarding neuroscience and implications for learning and parenting are based on an overgeneralisation of the findings. It can therefore be argued that these studies should be treated with caution.

2.3.3.2 Intellectual development

Babies' brains are designed to make sense of the world around them. For Bruner (1983), play was about developing flexibility of thought, considered to be important because it allows infants to deal with the unexpected by extending current knowledge to that of new situations (Duffy, 2006). Several studies carried out by a number of researchers have recognised the vast and far reaching effects of play linked to specific areas including creativity (Russ, Robins, & Christiano, 1999), literacy (Nicolopoulou, McDowell, & Brockmeyer, 2006) and language (Pellegrini & Galda, 1993). Ginsburg, Cannon, Eisenband, and Pappas (2005) suggested play provides the young child with opportunities for early mathematical thinking where they experiment with shape, space, pattern and number in the environment.

Studies carried out, such as those by Gopnik, Meltzoff, and Kuhl (2001) have transformed the way we think about the early years and the human brain. Through exploration, babies discover that they can make things happen. An example of this is when they start to make cause and effect associations by learning that pushing a button to make a toy move. In doing so they begin to master the logical thinking and reasoning skills that help them make sense of the world.

2.3.3.3 Language development

The work of neuroscience indicates that there is an overwhelming contribution that conversation makes to the growth and shape of children's brain development (Gopnik, Meltzoff, & Kuhl, 2001; Greenfield, 2000).

A language rich early environment has been shown to be associated with dendritic growth in the left hemisphere's language centres (Whitebread, 2002). Adults provide experiences and materials that help children develop the broad language and logical abilities that are the foundation of later academic learning. Vygotsky (1978) drew attention to the inherent links between emerging sociability and intellectual growth through the medium of language. Bateson, 1976; Knutsdotter-Olofsson 1993, 1996 refer to the meta-communicative approach children take in their play where they produce the content of it by talking about what they do and in what way it should be done. Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson (2008) stated that during play, children communicate and interpret continuously in the negotiation with peers and role-play.

2.3.3.4 The social and emotional benefits of play

Research into the importance to babies' future development of being securely attached is widely known (Gerhardt, 2004), but there is ongoing investigation into the role attachment relationships play in terms of every aspect of brain development (Cassidy, Jones, & Shaver (2014) document the neural and physiological mechanisms through which early attachment experiences contribute to later functioning.

Play, particularly symbolic play is felt to be central to the development of self-regulation in which children learn to manage their own behaviour and emotions (Berk, Mann, & Ogan, 2006). It has been argued by Berk et al; that social play helps children learn to cooperate with others and to engage in socially appropriate behaviour. Furthermore, make-believe play has been found to be a key factor in children's social competence and ability to cope emotionally (Connolly & Doyle, 1984).

In support of the above researchers, including Singer and Singer (2005) noted that play in its many forms represents a natural age appropriate method for children to explore and learn about themselves. These skills have been recognised by Fearn and Howard (2012) for the positive impact they have on childhood wellbeing.

2.3.3.5 Physical development

Through play, children extend their physical abilities as they interact with the world around them. Physical engagement is seen by many as an essential part of all learning, Walsh (2004) emphasised the importance of the body and being physical in that it gave children a 'sense of agency' where they are able to take risks, explore, control their bodies and the environment.

In summary, evidence from studies have highlighted the far reaching effects of play. The widely held view, presented in the literature is that children make sense of the world through play and this has been linked to aspects of brain development. Additional benefits to language development, social and emotional development alongside physical development have also been noted.

Child development theories have furthered our understanding of how play can be effectively utilised and enhanced in early learning for young children.

2.3.4 Theories underpinning play

The works of Froebel (1887) and Dewey (1897) have been influential and will be considered along with the theories of child development as they provide a framework for thinking about growth, development and learning. They form the basis of much of our current understanding and practice regarding play within the UK and internationally. It is suggested that perhaps the most useful theories include the Personality Development Theories of Freud and Erikson, the Cognitive Development Theories, which feature the work of Piaget and Montessori and Social Learning Theories proposed by Vygotsky. However, there is no one theory able to account for all aspects of development (Hetherington & Parke, 1986) as it is argued that there are wider system and contextual factors that could impact on a child's development also, thus Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Theory has been included. To better understand the importance of relationships and their impact on development, some exploration of Attachment Theory has also been added.

The work of the above theorists have led the way in developing models and frameworks for understanding how children think and therefore learn. Together they will be used to explain and account for some of the basic practices being used in the early years. It is noted that Skinner and Bandura were also social learning theorists, however, given the parameters of this work and that their work along with the Moral Reasoning Theory of Kohlberg, arguably have less significance in relation to the

principles of philosophy and approaches used in EYE. Given the specific focus of the current study, these will not be included.

2.3.4.1 Froebel

The field of EYE in England has been dominated by the theories of Froebel and his followers (Brehony, 2009), where the concepts of natural development and spontaneity were first introduced. Specific learning materials referred to as Gifts and Occupations were used. According to Froebel (1887), children have certain qualities, which mature particularly when given the appropriate environment. It then becomes the role of education to ensure that optimum conditions for such development to take place are provided where the learning of specific skills will take place only when the child is ready.

In interpreting early childhood, Froebel's theory and practice clearly sees the value of play that is interlinked with the concepts of growth and development. There is an understanding that children should develop in their own way and at their own pace. This was against the paradigm and worldview thinking in psychology at the time of psychometrics and the measurement of intelligence (Brehony, 2009).

Whilst Froebel's education legacy and tradition exists to this day (Read, 2006) there have been criticisms of the approach. Firstly, that it does not offer a prescriptive pedagogy, instead it sets out an understanding of young children and of learning which serve as a guide to adult's interactions with them (Tovey, 2012). Secondly, Wallas (1901) argued that Froebel's belief in the law of inner development to enable

the pursuit of spontaneous expression resulted in children being left to their own devices without adult intervention. Finally, the manuals outlining how to use the Gift and Occupations were described by Wallas as providing the unimaginative with a superficial understanding of Froebel's philosophy.

The dominance of Froebelian theories was threatened by a variety of empiricist sciences, one example being alignment to Darwinian views of heredity and development with the emphasis on physical and "racial" degeneration. The emergence of child study proposed by Hall (1883) who was a critic of Froebel's theories; described as "nebulous speculations" and downplayed as particularly suited to women who he viewed in a maternalist light.

However, Brehony (2009) maintains that Froebel's theory of learning and the impact of his work are deeply embedded and reflected in current early years practice.

2.3.4.2 Dewey

While the influence of Froebel is well established in the early years, Dewey in a similar fashion had a child-centred view of education exploring it as a social process (Dewey, 1897). Dewey believed that learning took place by way of interacting in a rich environment and with other people (Mooney, 2000; Rushton & Larkin, 2001). Dewey maintained that there should be no separation between activity that was 'work' and activity that was considered to be 'play'. It was important for activities to be introduced that children would find appealing and engaging through a 'hands on' approach. Clifford, Barbarin, Chang, Early, Bryant, and Howes, (2005) acknowledged

that Dewey proposed that for learning to take place children need access to a stimulating physical environment that is designed according to interests and experiences of children.

A fundamental principle for Dewey is how the values and cultures of children's families and communities extend into life at school (Clifford et al., 2005). According to Dewey, the role of the adult is to ensure that meaning is given to what is learnt in school, there needs to be continuity between home and school; this can be achieved by the adult becoming familiar with children's lives at home.

One of the weaknesses of Dewey's philosophy was described as 'naïve optimism and ultimate faith in reason' (Samuel, 2015). According to Bernstein (1966), Dewey lacked a deeper understanding of self and human nature. His search for human fulfilment was limited to what was experimental and observable. Central to Dewey's educational vision was the importance of democracy. Whilst influential has been criticised in that it proposes "the cult of mediocrity and the systematic denigration of intellectual excellence" (Hook, 1969, p. 144). Lilge (1969) critique of Dewey's curriculum is that it does not give enough importance to humanities and fine arts, which are essential parts of human experience and fulfilment. It can be argued that Dewey's philosophy of education was one-dimensional.

2.3.4.3 Piaget's cognitive development theory

Piaget (1952) believed that from birth children are compelled to explore and master

their own environment. He used the term 'schemata' to describe the cognitive structures that underlie organised patterns of behaviour. He hypothesised that children went through four main periods of intellectual development and that whilst children went through these stages in the same order they did not do so at the same age. In the two periods that include the early years that are sensorimotor (0 – 2) and preoperational (2 – 7), Piaget described certain characteristics and achievements (Table 3).

Table 3

Piaget's Four Stages of Cognitive Development

Stage	Age range	Description
Sensorimotor period	Birth – 2	Identifies object permanence, the object still exists when out of sight. Recognition of ability to control objects and acts intentionally.
Preoperational period	2 – 7	Begins to use language. Egocentric thinking, difficulty seeing things from other viewpoints. Classifies objects by single feature i.e. colour.
Period of concrete operations	7 – 11	Logical thinking. Recognises conservation of numbers, mass and weight. Classifies objects by several features and can place them in order.
Period of formal operations	11 years +	Logical thinking about abstract propositions. Concerned with the hypothetical and the future. Create hypotheses and test.

Information for table from <http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/piaget.htm>

Downloaded 23.09.17

Cannella (1997) and Engel (2005) put forward a critique of Piaget's constructivist view to argue that it offers a distorted view of learning. Piaget's techniques have also been criticized because he used a small sample of select children but he drew generalized conclusions from his observations (Gray & MacBlain, 2012). A further critique of Piaget from a Vygotskian perspective came when advocates of the social cultural approach became interested in the effects in the social context of individuals' cognitive developments (Tudge & Rogoff, 1989). Piaget's theory neglects the social nature of development and no consideration of context. Piaget's stages have also been highlighted for not explaining why development from one stage to the next occurs, and for overlooking or even ignoring individual differences in cognitive development (Larivee, Normandeau, & Parent, 2000). Despite the criticism of Piaget's work his theories have had a lasting impact on our understanding of child development.

2.3.4.4 Erikson's Personality (Psychosocial) Theory

Similarly, Erikson's personality theory proposed that there are stages of development, which start in infancy but unlike Piaget's work accounted for the period of adolescence through to old age. He explored the cultural and social aspects of development that influence a person's actions and interactions (Erikson, 1950; Erikson, 1994; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Erikson explained that each stage of development had a unique personal and social task, also referred to as conflicts that needed to be solved. Erikson highlighted the importance of cultural influences that were dependent on how caregivers and significant others respond to the needs at that stage. If there were problems at any of the stages then this would result in a crisis that would have an impact later in life. To sum up the work of Erikson, the impact of early experience on

later behaviour, the role of family in socialisation and thus impact of culture on children's development is central to the theory of personality development.

Piaget's theory of development has similarities to Erikson's theory in that they both see development as a process of going through fixed stages. And like Piaget, Erikson's theory has attracted criticism, whereby the child's development is not seen as being influenced by norms, values and power relationships (Hedegaard, 2009). An additional shortcoming is that it lacks the view of the child who is not only able to adapt but also constructs and produces the conditions of their own situation (Hedegaard, 2009) or co-constructors of their own development (Wartofsky, 1983). This view of development is exemplified in the early years practice in Denmark. Whilst Erikson's work is felt to have been difficult to integrate into the mainstream its importance is considered to be mainly of historical influence, particularly the increased emphasis on the effects of social experience, which was relatively ignored in favour of instinctive and biological forces. That being said, the work of Vygotsky relates to the importance of the social context to learning.

2.3.4.5 Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory

According to Vygotsky (1978), social interaction is crucial to cognitive development. He proposed that play is the vehicle through which children learn and internalise the social rules which supports development of self-regulation and relationships with others. Vygotsky later went further and highlighted the role of language in cognitive development and the transmission of culture. Vygotsky (1978) argued that together

they provide the structure through which we experience, communicate and understand reality.

Vygotsky suggests that learning takes place through the interactions the child has with their peers, teachers and other experts. Thus, the role of the teacher is to create an environment that encourages learning and takes full advantage of the learner's ability to interact with others through discussion, collaboration and feedback. For Vygotsky, learning took place through a cultural lens by means of interacting with others and following rules, skills and abilities shaped by culture.

2.3.4.5.1 Zone of proximal development

Vygotsky described the zone of proximal development (ZPD), as a critical point in learning. It is the difference between what the learner can do independently and what they cannot do. Vygotsky believed that the role of education is to provide children with experiences, which are in their ZPD, thereby encouraging and advancing their individual learning. The concept of 'scaffolding' closely relates to the ZPD.

2.3.4.5.2 Vygotsky and play

Vygotsky saw play as fundamental in that it provides the opportunity for children to interpret, from their own perspective, events that are real life in a safe setting from which they are able to learn. It is initially reliant on social interaction which can be achieved via support from an adult or peer and thereafter makes it possible for the child to go beyond their attainment and in doing so realise a higher potential in comparison to what they could attain alone. Furthermore, Vygotsky believed that the

ability to adhere to rules as central for the development of play and preparedness for school, where a greater level of cognitive, social and verbal functioning is required.

There have also been criticisms of Vygotsky's work, the main one being the assumption that it is not relevant to or seem to apply to all social and cultural groups (Lui & Matthews, 2005). For example, Rogoff (1990) argued that Vygotsky's ideas are not all culturally universal, pointing to the concept of scaffolding which may not be equally useful in all cultures for all types of learning because it is heavily dependent on verbal instructions. Rogoff stated that in some instances, observations and practice might be a more effective way of learning certain skills. Further support was provided by Matusov and Hayes (2000); who described Vygotsky's approach to development as ethnocentric, in that other cultures are judged according to the standards and customs of one's own culture. Additional difficulties found in Vygotsky's theory, particularly the ZPD was imprecision and that it offered little description of contexts for children of various ages (Chaiklin, 2003) and does not explain the process of development or how it occurs. Saifer (2010) countered Vygotsky's belief of the central role play had and argued that imaginative play is more complex and needed deeper thought than rule based play games.

The work of Froebel and Dewey has been influential in supporting our understanding of the principles in early years education. Whilst Piaget, Erikson and Vygotsky's theories of child development have been significant in their influence on the development of early childhood educational practice. Attachment and Ecological

Systems theory differ in that they have added particular perspectives to practice that also may have relevance.

2.3.4.6 Attachment Theory

Attachment theory outlines the need for a young child to have an adult who is special to them and a close bond can be formed. Bowlby (1973) when looking at maternal deprivation first explored the concept of attachment. Bowlby recognised the necessity of an early attachment to the mother and proposed that this specific relationship can have a long lasting effect on a child's temperament. In turn, this would foster the child's successful social and emotional development and in doing so they would learn to effectively regulate their feelings.

The work of Ainsworth in the 60s and 70s in numerous observations of young children left in a room with a stranger, "strange situation" studies further expanded Bowlby's theory of attachment. Based on the research carried out, Ainsworth's findings highlighted that children have different patterns of attachment that are dependent on the environment and how their early care was provided by the primary caregiver. Ainsworth proposed that the basis of the early patterns of attachment would in turn shape, but not determine later relationships.

In the recent past much of Bowlby's research and Attachment Theory in general has been criticised on the grounds that they are based on a narrow section of society and focus only on the mother as the main carer (Goldberg, 2000). An additional shortcoming proposed by Diamond and Kotov (2003) is that it is deterministic and

suggests that forces can dominate us beyond our control. Guldberg (2013) challenges the notion of determinism arguing that given positive input and emotional support it is likely that children are able to overcome adversity, adapt and make gains.

Geddes (2006) noted the benefits for children who are securely attached include the development of greater resilience, they are more likely to try things out and develop greater independence. This agrees with the views of Greenberg, Cicchetti and Cummings (1990) who suggest that the biological function of attachment is to offer protection for children which continues to play an important role during the period before starting school and early school age years. Throughout the UK this has led to the development of the role of the key person within both early years and broader educational settings.

Although the next sub section provides an overview of the Key Person Approach (KPA), it is important to note that unlike the others mentioned so far, it is considered to be more of a strategy than a theory. It uses the principles of attachment theory to inform practice. That being said, the works of Geddes (2006) and Bombèr (2007) have translated it into educational practice.

2.3.4.7 Key Person Approach (KPA)

In line with Bowlby and Ainsworth young children do well when they have secure relationships. Whilst a parent usually provides this, a Key Person can also provide it once the child starts to attend a setting on a regular basis. The KPA as described by Elfer, Goldschmeid, and Selleck (2003) places an emphasis on facilitating, “close

attachments between individual children and individual nursery staff” (p. 18). As set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage (2017) guidance, each setting needs to provide the child with a familiar person who is on hand to support the physical needs as well as being the point of contact for parents. The role of the key person is to respond with sensitivity to children’s feelings, meet their emotional needs and support their wellbeing. In providing continuity of care for each child Nutbrown and Page (2008) suggest lessens the anxiety and separation from their parents. Mickelburgh (2011) concluded that the current understanding of attachment has evolved from Bowlby and Ainsworth’s original theories.

The KPA can be considered as the impact that the theory of attachment has had on practice. Formerly, this has been translated into educational practice by the work of Geddes (2006) and more recently Commodari (2013), where the research has sought to link attachment to not only school readiness but also school success. The authors argue that in situations where the child is dependent on others for protection allows for the development of experiences and skills that helps in the management of frustrations, the development of self-confidence and pro-social relationships. These are features that can be considered necessary in the promotion of positive engagement with learning. (Commodari, 2013; Geddes, 2006). Geddes draws attention to the attachment relationships, which have a direct bearing on children’s capacity to succeed in school or conversely the usefulness of Attachment Theory as a tool for understanding learning difficulties.

In support of Geddes and Commodari, the work of Bombèr (2007), offers a range of

practical strategies that can be utilised in schools including having an additional attachment figure in class; creating home school partnerships, considering transitions throughout the school day and opportunities to regulate arousal levels.

Lastly, ecological systems theory is situated in this research because it offers a framework for thinking about the various processes and layers for early years settings. A brief introduction is provided here and then in the later section headed 'Parents and play'; there will be a more detailed discussion in how it relates to the research.

2.3.4.8 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

Bronfenbrenner (1979) maintains that the perceptions individuals hold of their environment impacts on their cognitive, social and emotional development. Subsequently, in 1992 Bronfenbrenner suggests 'ecological niches' (p. 194) exists, which are influenced by the characteristics of various systems at different levels.

Evans and Fuller (1999) used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory in their study as a framework to explore the social contextual nature of parents' perceptions of nursery education. Figure 1 outlines the model where perceptions at the microsystem level (family) are considered and seen to interact with mesosystem (home, early years setting), exosystem (influences the individual through the microsystem) and macrosystem (social ideologies and cultural group).

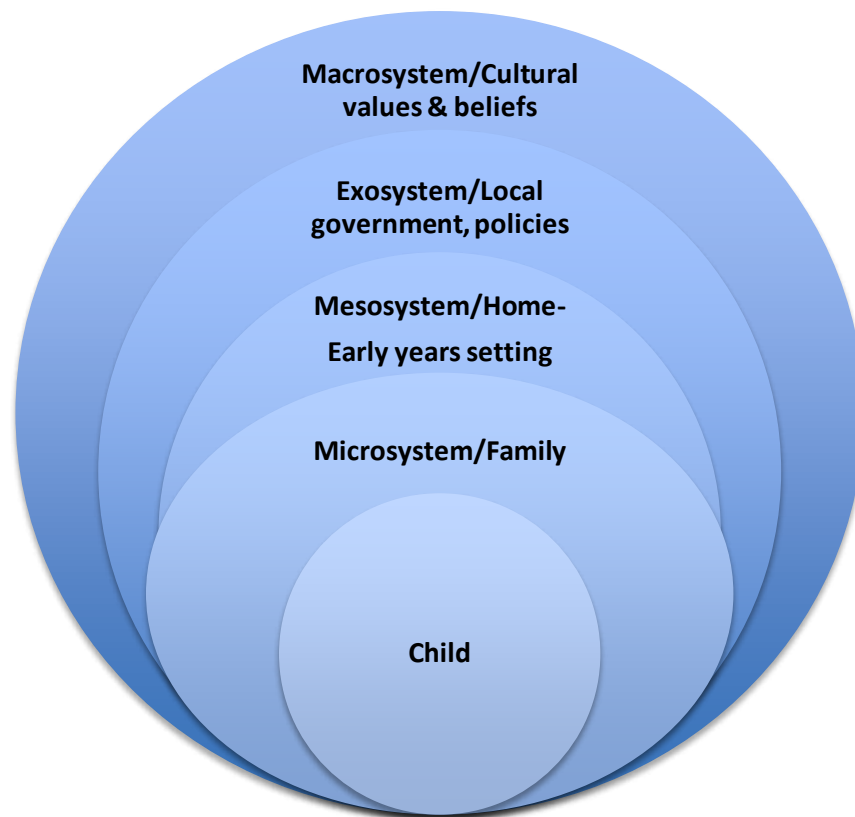


Figure 1. Representation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1992) Ecological Systems Model (author's own depiction)

Froebel and Dewey were the proponents of child-centred view of education but it was Dewey who advocated 'learning through play'. By the same token, the psychological theories of Piaget, Erikson and Vygotsky underpin child development thinking and understanding and explain how children make sense of their world. Attachment theory highlights the long lasting benefits of having secure attachments and the Key Person Approach is an example of how the principles of attachment can be used to inform practice. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory provides a framework to look at parents' perceptions in context. It has been argued that

collectively these have all had an important influence on the development of current thinking and practice in the early years.

2.4 Educational influences

It could be argued that curriculum practices and pedagogy used in early years educational systems are to some extent based on one or more models of early child development and underpinned by at least one or a combination of psychological theories. Debate remains over the “correct” curriculum approach (OECD, 2015) for the youngest children. In England, the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky are integral to the curriculum and pedagogical beliefs (OECD, 2015).

2.4.1 Pedagogical practices

In looking at the area of play and learning there needs to be a focus on the content of what is taught, the way it is taught and the techniques for socialising children to function successfully in society. All of these can be considered under the umbrella term pedagogy. Theories of pedagogic practice have drawn on many different curricula.

2.4.1.1 Montessori

Evans (1971) summarised the Early Years curriculum in Montessori programme as consisting of three broad phases: exercises for practical life, sensory education and language activities. The approach promoted children’s active, independent observation along with observation of concrete materials to develop skills

(Montessori, 1965). Montessori maintained that children learn best by doing, with the goal of education being to allow the child's optimal development to unfold.

Two important aspects of the Montessori method identified by Marshall (2017): learning materials are made up from practical life and the self-directed nature of children's engagement with those materials. Whilst the learning materials are considered important (Lillard, 2008) they need to be engaged with in a particular way and they are designed so that the child is able to focus on one concept at a time. The Montessori method sought to support children by creating an environment with self-correcting materials. The adult's role would be to guide children who are finding it difficult in deciding what to select, disrupting others or to introduce new materials for children who are ready for a new challenge (Marshall, 2017).

Although widely regarded, the Montessori approach has been criticised on a number of levels, firstly for not offering enough opportunity for group activities for social development and interactions. Faryadi (2007) argues that the method allows children too much freedom with insufficient supervision. A further weakness is that there is too greater emphasis on cognitive thinking and sacrifices creativity. Related to this is the "didactic apparatus" used (Kilpatrick, 1914) is too formal and offers little variety.

2.4.1.2 Reggio Emilia

A key assumption of the Reggio Emilia approach is that schools are founded on a social constructivist framework, Gandini (1993), where an emergent curriculum requires the teacher to listen to children's ideas and adapt planned learning goals to those of the

children. It is a co-constructivist view of education where child and adult participate in a mutual voyage of discovery. Where this approach is used, Rinaldi (2006) explains that it is important for the focus to be on *how* rather than *what* is learnt.

The child is central in an environment that allows them to be a producer of culture and knowledge. Similarly, Weiss, DeFalco, and Weiss, (2005) suggest that children benefit from active learning experiences of immediate interest and personal involvement. A few examples include providing stimulating textures and materials which children freely explore, having a range of musical instruments for experimentation and play or craft projects that involve making instruments. Other activities involve transforming an area into a pizza shop or a doctor's surgery, which provides opportunities for the children to dress up and become involved in role play. It also expands on principles of attachment theory so that the child's relationships with non-familial adults are mediated by those with whom they have had an initial attachment (Bove, 1999).

It has been argued that much of what the Reggio Emilia approach offers are the foundations upon which Western early childhood education has been built (New, 1994). In regards to what is taught the approach does not adhere to a framework or formalised policy (Soler & Miller, 2003). Furthermore, in the absence of a written curriculum results in a lack of accountability.

2.4.1.3 High/Scope

The High Scope curriculum in the USA founded in the 70s was developed with the idea

that early education could prevent school failure in the later years (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 1999) for children growing up in disadvantaged areas. Its foundations and approach to teaching has its roots within constructivist beliefs. It does not focus on what the child cannot do; instead an emphasis is placed on social, cognitive and physical abilities. It is based on learning through action (Kishimoto, Santos, & Basilio, 2007) where the role of the adult is to develop tasks, which served to promote the appropriate learning for each developmental stage.

For young children “key experiences” were designed which included creative representation, social relation, seriation and classification along with the more traditional subject areas. Daily routines are organised by the adult based on a plan-do-review cycle (Formosinho, 1996; Hohmann, Banet, & Weikart 1979). In addition, they encourage children to make choices, problem solve and engage in activities. The approach emphasised reflective and open-ended questions asked by teachers (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993) instead of providing lessons.

The HighScope approach is a compensatory approach which aims to make up for educational inequalities or poverty and as such has been criticised for not being aimed at all children (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008).

2.4.1.4 Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

The trend towards a “push down” curriculum became prominent and controversial in the 1980s. In response to concerns that young children were being exposed to formal learning at a very early age resulted in guidelines for quality teaching practices in early

childhood education programmes being drawn up by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the form of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp, 1987). They have been strongly influenced by developmental and educational theories in the same vein as the curriculum models previously discussed. There is an emphasis on direct experience, concrete materials, child initiated activity, social interaction and adult involvement (Walsh, Sproule, McGuinness, Trew, & Ingram, 2010). In translating the framework into practice it was noted that the interactive role of the adult was determined to be a key factor. According to Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, successful delivery by the best practitioners used a mixture of approaches, which include not only scaffolding, discussing, extending and monitoring but also direct instruction.

2.4.1.5 Adult Instruction

For many years the dominant approach in the educational system for all ages has been delivered via direct adult instruction (Toub, Rajan, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2016). At the time in the UK, Woodhead (1999) advocated that adults needed to use a formal approach with direct teaching for young children in the same way that it is delivered for children who were much older. In contrast to Woodhead and in line with Ball, Drury, Miller, and Campbell, (2000), Anning (1998) felt that the focus should be on a curriculum that was developmentally appropriate. Where the alternative to direct instruction encouraged the child's sense of discovery through play and the focus for the young child is placed on the appropriate teaching methods and whole-child learning.

2.4.1.6 Binary learning versus play

In looking at practice, Powell (1987) identified the polar dimensions, which have characterised and dominated curriculum development in the early years. A distinction could be drawn between early years adopted approaches that tended to be play-based and informal compared to the more formal, subject based approach to learning which was predominantly teacher led with an emphasis on learning through repetition and practice to achieve mastery dominated the primary school curriculum (Wood & Bennett, 1999). The terms included child versus adult centred, structured versus unstructured, didactic versus non-didactic and play versus instruction.

2.4.1.7 Guided play

The ongoing debate between self-directed play and direct instruction (Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Singer, & Berk, 2010; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2011) arguably could be replaced by 'guided play' which was an approach that combined both pedagogical styles. Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff (2013), described guided play as children exploring within an environment that has been prepared by adults with play materials that encourage a certain kind of exploration or ask open-ended questions that help shape children's choices or get them to think about what they are doing. Where children still have the choices and agency; but the adult in order to achieve the learning goal framed the choices.

Alfieri, Brooks, Aldrich, and Tenenbaum (2011) meta-analysis of 56 studies found that greater learning took place through approaches that involved guided play in comparison to either free play or direct instruction. Toub et al. (2016) concluded that

guided play offered a preferred middle ground between free play and direct instruction. The context of an adult's developmentally appropriate, contingent, scaffolded and goal-directed support, Weisberg et al. (2013) concluded that guided play naturally uses mechanisms that foster strong learning.

Furthermore, the arguments in favour of guided play were reinforced by Sylva, Roy, and Painter, (1980) who found that children's play became more complex when practitioners participated. Similarly, sustained shared thinking (SST) a concept defined by Siraj-Blatchford (2009) who described it as "what adults do to support and engage children's learning" (p. 86). Given that a number of researchers have developed terms that focus on the adult-child interaction adds to the repertoire of approaches that resonate with Vygotsky's (1978) 'zone of proximal development' where the educator supports children's learning within the zone. Other terms to describe the interactions also include 'distributed cognitions' (Salomon, 1993), 'guided participation' (Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü, Mosier, Chavajay, & Brice Heath, 1993) and 'scaffolding' (Wood Bruner, & Ross, 1976).

Samuelsson and Johansson (2006) concluded that the paradigmatic shift within research in better understanding of play and learning have resulted in the move from seeing it as two separate elements towards a more integrated understanding. Views of the nature of learning held by Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989), suggested that similar to physical and social skills, intellectual skills are best learned when they occur in a meaningful situation.

The principle of 'learning through play' is now enshrined in the curriculum guidance of all parts of the UK. This has come about as a result of psychological theory, research and government legislation. The teacher's responsibility for play and learning was further clarified in the new curricula (Department of Education, 1998). The chronology of key legislation in EYE is set out in a timeline along with Table 4 documenting relevant policies.

2.5 The influence of the Government on policy and practice in England

Noden and West (2016) charted a historical view of public funding for education in the early years and found that there were few regulations or requirements for delivering early years in any formal sense before 1990s. However, there was a shift in emphasis after the introduction of the 1989 Children Act with the focus on improving educational outcomes for children.

Timeline of government policies in the early years

Involves the United Kingdom until Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish devolution of 1998 and then England only.

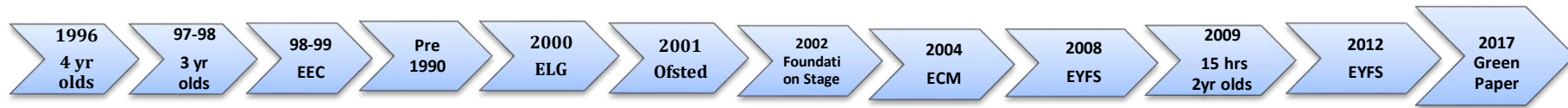


Figure 2. Timeline of Government initiatives and policy from 1990 – 2017

Table 4

Government Policies with an Early Years Focus

Significant date	Initiative/Policy
Pre 1990	The Children Act (1989) signalled an increase in political involvement in an attempt to reduce child poverty by improving children’s educational outcomes and enabling mothers to return to work (Heckman, 2006; Lewis, 2009).

Table 4

Government Policies with an Early Years Focus (continued)

Significant date	Initiative/Policy
1996	Introduction of the Voucher Scheme for every four-year-old child to receive part time education in any type of preschool setting up to three terms prior to reaching statutory school age was introduced. It was paid directly only to providers who demonstrated that they were moving children towards the Desirable Outcomes as determined by the School Curriculum Assessment Authority (SCAA, 1996).
1997 – 1998	Entitlement to free early education was extended to all three year olds over time.
1998 – 1999	Funding for Private Voluntary and Independent (PVI) providers was distributed to local authorities via the Nursery Education Grant (NEG). Early Excellence Centres (EEC) in 1998 introduced free education for four year olds. They were considered to be settings that demonstrated ‘best practice’ and so were profiled as examples for others to follow. The Sure Start programmes were piloted in 1999, an early intervention established to target families and children who were felt to be the most disadvantaged and at risk of underachievement.

Table 4

Government Policies with an Early Years Focus (continued)

Significant date	Initiative/Policy
2000	The introduction of the Foundation Stage together with its curriculum guidance. To be eligible the settings had to undergo inspection and meet the government's requirement using the Desirable Outcomes framework, revised later to become Early Learning Goals (ELG) (QCA, 2000).
2001	The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) took over the responsibility for the regulation of day care for children under eight.
2002	The introduction of the Foundation Stage Profile was a national assessment scheme introduced in England. Six areas of learning identified that included personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; mathematical development; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development and creative development. It captured the early learning goals.
2004	Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda was launched in 2003, based on three government papers contributing to the Children Act 2004. It brought a number of changes and outcomes for children across services including health, social care and education. The aims were that every child regardless of background or circumstance should have support to stay safe, be healthy, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing (DfES, 2003). It involved services

Table 4

Government Policies with an Early Years Focus (continued)

Significant date	Initiative/Policy
	working together with families and communities in order to protect children and ensure that they achieve their potential. The impact that the Act had on early years resulted in whole system change and landmark reform for child social services. With the focus on wellbeing, a structured process for collecting information in the form of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and integrating service delivery towards the five outcomes.
2008	EPPE (Sylva et al., 1997 – 2004) and REPEY (Siraj-Blatchford, 2002) research was completed and both were used to inform the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) which was founded on Birth to Three Matters, Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage and Full Day Care National Standards for Day Care and Child minding (DfES, 2008). With its introduction, the emphasis was placed on an approach to learning that was play-based and accounted for children’s interests and needs (DfES, 2008).
2009	Offer of 10 – 15 hours to the most disadvantaged two-year olds.
2012	The view was that all children deserve the best possible start in life. The EYFS statutory framework set the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure children learn and develop (DfE, 2012).

Table 4

Government Policies with an Early Years Focus (continued)

Significant date	Initiative/Policy
2017	The Green Paper (2017) set out to emphasise the role of education in the promotion and protection of children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing. Findings indicated that mental health disorders varied not only by age and gender but was also dependant on ethnicity. Given the prevalence of mental health needs being established before the age of 14, early identification and school’s role in this was considered to be of great importance. Whilst the Green Paper was widely received and included aspects that had implications for EYE, for some it did not go far enough in addressing the role of the families and parenting, an indication that this aspect is yet to be addressed.

Although, as outlined above, theories have been a major influence on pedagogical practice in the UK so have these varying initiatives from the government. Many of which were as a result of key British research-based educational intervention and evaluation studies such as the longitudinal EPPE study. Collectively, they have had a significant impact on early years pedagogy and curriculum development (Faulkner & Coates, 2013).

2.6 Parents and Early Years Education

A large body of evidence (Marcon, 1999; Denton, 2001; Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, & Waldfogel, 2011) suggests that parents who are involved and support their child's early education contribute to their developmental and academic progress, which in turn has an impact on school readiness. For example, Bronfenbrenner's work with the United States government was influential in the formation and direction of the Head Start programme in 1965. The emphasis was placed on parent engagement and family support particularly in EYE (Henrich, 2010). Similarly, in the UK, the evidence points to the positive effects of supporting parents in order for them to be engaged with their children's learning at home (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2007). This was backed up by the EPPE (2004) research found that parents had the biggest influence on children's development. A key element in the study was that a good quality early years setting could redress the imbalance for those children who did not have a supportive learning environment at home (Evangelou, Sylva, & Kyriacou, 2009).

2.6.1 Parental involvement in early years

A review of the first implementation of the EYFS found that there were considerable

benefits where practitioners and parents work collaboratively on planning and assessment (QCDA, 2010). Parents and practitioners working together is an underlying thread that runs throughout the EYFS. Settings used parental involvement in their child's learning. Strategies included discussing progress and getting feedback from parents on learning journeys and journals and valuing their input (Hunt, Virgo, Klett-Davies, Page, & Apps, 2011).

However, the focus of much of the documented research has tended to be based on what parents can do at home to support their children in order to achieve the best outcomes as opposed to involving parents in the critical discussions about what constitutes learning and the role of play in EYE. There has been very little research looking at the views of parents and what they value about early learning (Doucet, 2011; Garnier, 2010; Lawson, 2003). The OECD review in 2015 highlighted the need for involvement from a range of stakeholders in developing and refining the curriculum in an attempt to balance diverse expectations. Grimes (1995, 1997) maintained that the voice of working class parents and minority ethnic parents needed to be prioritised. Evans and Fuller (1999) achieved this through the use of Bronfenbrenner's framework to consider parents' perceptions within the context of interacting systems at various levels, with the intention that it allowed for a range of parents having a voice.

Using qualitative research, DeMulder and Stribling (2012) attempted to address the gap by interviewing parents about their perceptions of involvement in an early years programme and the impact on their child's development. Overall, the parents

reported increases in self-confidence, skill development and greater opportunities to practice skills. They indicated that the positive influence was not only for their children but the parents themselves benefitted and contributed favourably to the families' wellbeing. The parents found that working collaboratively with the setting not only empowered them but also gave them a voice (Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Halpern, 2000; McCurdy & Daro, 2001). However, the small sample size and the fact that data was drawn only from parent interviews are shortcomings that need to be considered when looking at the findings from this particular study.

2.6.1.1 Measuring parents' views and devising scales

In setting out to explore perceptions and attitudes, questionnaires have been deemed by Wilson and McLean (1994) to be an efficient way for a number of reasons. These include ease of administration, standardisation of questions where the use of Likert scales allows for opinions to be measured objectively and the possibility of including open-ended questions. Presumably it is given this type of rationale, that many studies have incorporated questionnaires in data collection. It was Parmar, Harkness, and Super (2004) who proposed the significance of cultural beliefs about play in children's development and how it varies widely. Thus, the researchers developed the Preschool Play & Learning Questionnaire (PPLQ) to measure parents' beliefs about the importance of play, learning and the adult's role in early development.

For the purpose of research the validity and reliability of measures are key to ensuring accuracy and consistency. It was Fogle and Mendez (2006) who sought to develop and validate a measure of play beliefs specifically for African American parents. This in

acknowledgment of the view that accessibility and appropriateness for the target population also needs to be considered when devising a questionnaire.

In specifically using parents from the Head Start programme, together with experts knowledgeable about child development, Fogle and Mendez (2006) aimed to address the content validity and cultural relevance of the items included on the questionnaire. With this intention, the Parent Play Belief Scale (PPBS) was devised. Similarly, Petrogiannis, Papadopoulou, and Papoudi (2013) measure of Greek mothers' views argued that the cultural homogeneity of the sample was considered essential given the cultural sensitivity of parental beliefs.

2.6.1.2 Parental beliefs research

The Early Years Foundation Stage (2012) was updated to include seven areas of learning and arranged into two areas: prime and specific. The former category includes Personal Social Emotional Development (PESD), Physical Development and Communication and Language, whilst the latter includes, Literacy, Numeracy, Expressive Art & Design and Understanding the World. Research looking at parental beliefs about play and early learning can be categorised using the headings from the EYFS.

Table 5

Research of Parental Beliefs About Play

Areas of learning	Research
PESD	Mothers wanting their children to learn social skills through play (Cooney, 2004; Haight, Parke & Black, 1997; Lane, Stanton-Chapman, Jamison, & Phillips, 2007; Needham & Jackson, 2012). Degotardi, Sweller, and Pearson, 2013; Lane, Givner, and Pierson, (2004) found that whilst mothers valued learning social skills they did not expect practitioners to guide children’s play towards social skills. Cooperation during play was found to be the second most mentioned social learning by parents whilst learning social rules was the first (Colliver, 2016).
Physical Development	When looking at parent’s perception of preschool activities, specifically outdoor play, Jarasuriya, Williams, Edwards and, Tandon (2016) found that parents placed an importance on learning academic skills, however they also valued and wanted more outdoor time for their children. Parmar, Harkness, and Super (2004) study found parents valued play and saw it as beneficial to physical development.
Language and Communication	Studies document that when children start school with strong language skills, they demonstrate better future reading ability and academic success (Roulstone, Law, Rush, Clegg, & Peters,2011; Snowling, Hulme, Bailey, Stothard, & Lindsay, 2011). Gonzalez, Bengochea, Justice, Yeomans-Maldonado, and McCormick (2019) found that parents articulated the importance of developing their child’s language and literacy based skills.
Literacy & Numeracy	Many studies found that parents valued play for its educational and cognitive benefits (Farver & Howes, 1993; Farver & Wimbarti, 1995). In examining the views held by parents about preschool activities, Haight et al. (1997) contend that book reading was deemed to be more significant to their child’s development than pretend play and rough and tumble play. Similarly, O’Gorman and Ailwood (2012) found that play was valued by parents as long as it focused on “worthwhile school-based learning especially literacy and numeracy.” (p. 270).
Expressive Art & Design	Haight et al. (1997) reported that parents viewed play as a significant contributor to their child’s creativity.

Table 5

Research of Parental Beliefs About Play (continued)

Areas of learning	Research
Understanding the World	Colliver (2016), referenced parents who welcomed children’s independent learning where they organised their ideas and tried to work out and understand materials. Mothers valued this type of play because they felt it helped their child’s ability to better understand the world.

Given the claims made by the studies included in Table 5 there have been additional studies that have looked at the findings and noted limitations when considering the findings. Degotardi et al. (2013) and Colliver (2016) studies had relatively few respondents and therefore the transferability of the claims to others cannot be justified. Arguments that have been put forward are that some of the studies above fall into the trap of perpetuating the view that parents need training to raise their children (Vandenbroeck, 2007; Vandenbroeck, Coussée, & Bradt, 2010). Parmar et al. (2004) used a particular subscale that focused on a limited range of behaviours that were culturally defined and therefore may not have been sensitive to cultural diversity. This weakness could also be levelled at a number of other studies such as those in the Head Start programme. Meisels and Atkins-Burnett (2004) found that one of the tests used in the monitoring reviews failed to include different cultural and ethnic groups.

2.6.2 Cultural influences on play beliefs

The implicit beliefs parents hold about child rearing, child development and early

learning is fostered not only by the individual, but also by culture and society. If parents are to be considered an intrinsic part of nursery education and children's first educators (Ball, 1994) it is important that the voices of all parents are heard. It could be argued that research should seek to establish views from diverse populations and more specifically in this instance, parents from diverse populations.

Brooker (2003) and Gregory and Biarnes (1994) concluded that the consensual principle of 'learning through play' may sit uncomfortably alongside cultural beliefs about the nature of children's learning and may contribute to parents as well as children's discomfort on starting school. For example, studies initially carried out with families from Bangladeshi and Chinese backgrounds noted differences in opinion between parent and practitioner resulted in strained relationships between home and school; and make fulfilling the basic educational needs of the child more difficult (Schlak, 1994). Other studies that have focused on culture to compare differences (Farver, Kim, & Lee, 1995) found that Korean American parents believed academics to be more important than play. Similarly, Chinese American parents taught their preschool children in more formal ways (Huntsinger, Jose, Liaw, & Ching, 1997). Both studies highlight the contrast in beliefs when compared to Euro American parents (majority group) who valued play and saw it as essential for early development (Parmar et al. 2004).

This has led to Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, and Gryfe (2008) suggestion that to fully understand what constitutes play, we must go beyond experts to parents' implicit

beliefs about play and how these beliefs are fostered not only by the individual, but also by culture and society.

2.6.2.1 Social cultural perspective

Social cultural perspective underlines that what and how people think are interdependent and sculpted by the daily activities, discursive practices, participation structures, and interactional processes in activity that shape development over the life course (Greeno, 2011).

From this perspective, culture, learning, and development are seen as dynamic, variably distributed and transformed within and across groups (Cole, 1998; Rogoff, 2002, 2003). Culture in this sense, is both historically constituted and dynamically changing through participation in social practices and making sense of life. Rogoff (2012, 2014) has been at the forefront of research that uncovers differences across historically defined cultural communities in an attempt to explain the possible scope of human variation.

2.6.2.2 Acculturation

Berry (2005) proposed a model looking at differences in how people go about acculturation where it is defined as the process through which a person or group from one culture comes to adopt the practices and values of another culture, whilst still retaining their own distinct culture.

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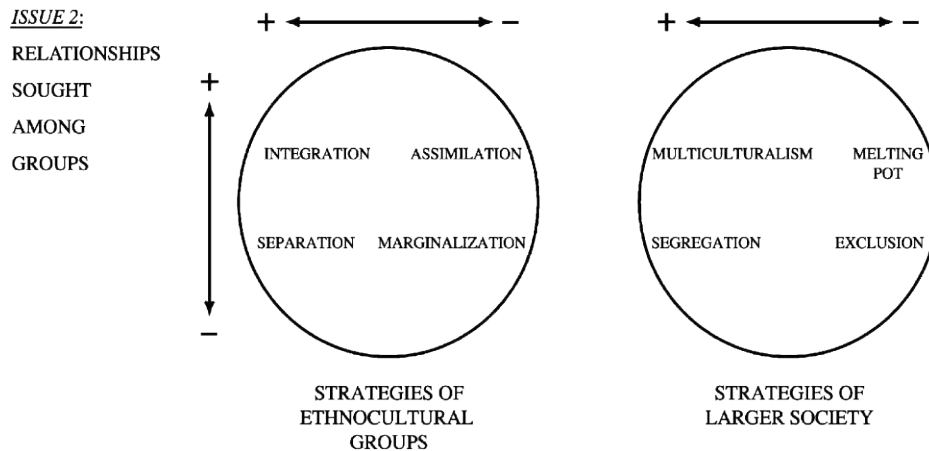


Figure 3. Berry's acculturation model (2005)

Berry suggests that there are two main concerns which acculturating people decide on, whether to maintain one's heritage and culture or to participate in the larger society alongside other ethnocultural groups. In so doing Berry went on to identify four strategies of acculturation that can be plotted on a matrix to include; Integration, Assimilation, Separation and Marginalisation.

From the viewpoint of the non-dominant group who do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures then the assimilation strategy is defined. There is therefore the possibility that in this case their view of early learning and what is considered to be important may change during acculturation. They then become absorbed into the dominant culture in terms of views and beliefs held. Berry (2005) argues that this is based on the premise that such groups and their individual members have the freedom to choose how they want to acculturate. Conversely, Rudmin and Ahmadzadeh (2001) offer a critique of the model in that there

is little evidence of the four ways of acculturating or that integration is the preferred way to acculturate.

Acculturation and assimilation may affect parents' beliefs (Chao & Tseng, 2002) about learning. In the instances where families have immigrated it is likely that views may be influenced by two cultures (Jiang & Han, 2015). An important factor argued by Jiang and Han is the length of immigration since it is felt to be a predictor of acculturation and cultural values to do with child rearing, which in turn has an impact on play beliefs.

2.6.2.3 Perspectives from diverse families

“Some of the challenges of play stem from the fact that ‘teaching’ is perceived by parents, policy makers and practitioners to be a formal activity and has been for a century” (Moyle, 2010, p. 3).

Whilst theory and research positively support play and play-based learning (Montessori, 1965; Bruner, 1972; EYFS, 2017), there has been research, which has critiqued both the efficacy of many forms of traditional nursery play (Smith, 2006) and the justifications for viewing play as a universal pedagogic practice (Cannella & Viruru, 1997). It has been highlighted by Fromberg (1998) that there are some parents who are uncomfortable with the term ‘play’ because it connotes aimless activities without the benefits of any learning. Siegel and McGillicuddy-DeLisi (2002) stated that the beliefs of parents about a child's learning process are impacted by personal experiences unique to their culture.

Play has its roots in peer, class and ethnic cultures, all of which may have very different underlying rules and goals from those in practitioners' minds (Göncü, Jain, & Tuermer, 2006). Brooker (2011) maintains the need for research to be more responsive to issues of diversity. Adding that listening to parents' views on this matter is another relatively untouched research area. Brooker (2002) highlights that the cultural norms of learning may be profoundly different from 'educational' versions particularly when children enter an early years setting. For Brooker, it is crucial that parents' participation in decision-making does not become marginalised.

2.6.2.4 Head Start Initiative

During the period of the late 70s and 80s, there had been a number of new initiatives involving the Early Years curriculum and considerable debate about which education programmes were appropriate and beneficial to children later on in life. One such programme Head Start, as above, was a summer school catch-up programme specifically for children from low-income families. The focus was placed on addressing the gaps in what children needed to know before they started school. Head Start is the largest federally funded programme for promoting school readiness. Linked to this was the Early Head Start programme, which took on board research evidence that stressed the importance of the first three years of a child's life to long-term outcomes. There was a push for early academic training as opposed to offering opportunities for children to explore and initiate their own learning (Elkind, 1987).

2.7 Play beliefs

2.7.1 African American Play Beliefs

There have been a number of studies involving African American parents' views about early learning and play that have been carried out in the United States, such as Head Start. Much of the research that has been documented in a range of longitudinal studies highlight the benefits of such a programme. However, parental views and attitudes about early learning and how children should be taught was felt to be important and understanding around this was increasingly being sought. Stipek, Milburn, Clements, and Daniels (1992) elicited parental beliefs about the appropriateness of teacher-directed learning for 4- and 5- year olds. The study, using questionnaires, found that parents who were in favour of the early introduction of basic skills also believed in teacher-directed approach. They themselves used didactic and more formal methods at home and were not in agreement with child-centred practices. The researchers commented that the results from the study were in line with previous studies namely McGillicuddy-De Lisi (1985) and Skinner (1985), where associations between parents' beliefs about cognitive development and their actual practice at home were confirmed. Whilst the researchers outlined demographical information about the participants, they failed to ascertain the ethnicity of those included in the study. The researchers clarified this by saying that the children were ethnically diverse as ethnicity of the parents was indirectly collected by way of the children who attended the setting but it was only assumed.

By way of contrast to the above study, Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, and Eggers-Pierola (1995) made use of semi-structured interviews lasting one to two hours. Whilst the

focus was on how mothers expected early years care to prepare their children for school, the researchers were able to clarify meanings and interpretations about the nature of learning and what they felt to be important. Nevertheless, similar to the participants in Stipek et al. (1992) study, the mothers placed an emphasis on didactic approaches in preparation for school. Holloway et al. found that the mothers wanted their young children to learn basic literacy and numeracy skills above all else. As well as the sample of the study only including mothers who had at least one child between the ages of 2 – 4, an additional drawback is that it would be difficult to make any generalisations given that it was also very small sample of $n = 14$.

In an unpublished thesis, Anderson-Clark (1996) as a response to African American parents' complaints that the children spent too much time playing at a child-care centre, completed a further exploration of parents' views about the curriculum on offer. The study involved parents who had Caribbean and Bahamian heritage attending one particular early years setting. Unlike the previously mentioned studies, Anderson-Clark included staff members in the research. A questionnaire was administered initially and then a series of workshops were delivered separately to parents and then to staff designed to highlight the importance of role-play and social skills development. Findings suggested that parents equated early acquisition of academic skills with long-term educational successes. Only a minority of the participants' attitudes had changed post-test in week 10 and the majority of participants felt that the best method of instruction was teacher directed despite being involved in these workshops. From this Anderson-Clark went on to conclude

that expectations continued to be rooted in the historical and cultural experiences of the people.

Given that many of the studies completed, including those outlined above, looked at a population that in the main was felt to be understudied, Mendez, Fantuzzo, and Cicchetti (2002) maintained that this group in particular, African American, were often targeted for preventative and responsive interventions due to economic disadvantage in the United States. They proposed that using a within group research design would not only uncover heterogeneity in beliefs about the role of play in learning, but also provide additional and much needed information given the likelihood that the views of this particular group did not always match the existing beliefs held by the dominant group as a whole.

In response to this, Fogle and Mendez (2006) completed an influential study, which could be viewed as having two purposes. Firstly, to examine parent play beliefs of African American origin and secondly to develop a useful measure of parent play beliefs specifically for African American parents. Fogle and Mendez held focus groups involving 136 mothers who had children ranging in ages 38 – 67 months. The themes of the discussions included an explanation of the role of play in the preschool curriculum and positive developmental outcomes associated with play. Using the newly created Parental Play Belief Scale (PPBS) the researchers sought to assess parents' beliefs about their children's play, the role of play in learning and their involvement in their child's play. They reported that the scale demonstrated adequate

reliability. With the focus on cultural variables this particular group of mothers held positive views about play and its significance for child development.

Significantly, whilst the Fogle and Mendez study could be regarded as providing a unique contribution to this area of study and puts the focus on the play beliefs of African American parents, a possible limitation is that because the sample was drawn from specific preschools which delivered the Head Start programme it is likely that it does not reflect the views of parents from the general population whose children attend a non-Head Start preschool. Of equal importance is that the reliability and validity of the PPBS in the first instance has provided promising results it is only preliminary and similar results need to be replicated in further studies. An additional counter argument is that the scale does not provide adequate assessment of beliefs giving both strands of pre academics and play experiences equal importance.

According to ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) the cultural aspects of play beliefs including race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status are important. Arguments put forward welcoming further studies involving African American families to explore parents views regarding the value of play and play experiences in the early years on development resulted in the work of Muhammad (2009) unpublished thesis. Qualitative data was collected from 12 semi-structured interviews of mothers whose children were attending a Head Start programme. Three key themes emerged from the data as follows: Play's value, family influence and the environment. This particular group of parents were found to have an underlying knowledge about play's value in terms of their child's early years development and viewed it as an essential feature.

Although this may be the finding, other conclusions are possible as a feature of the research that could be considered problematic is that the data analysis was solely based on the researcher's perspective and there was no member checking of the initial data. In addition to the inclusion of only Head Start participants and the narrowness of the focus population.

A group of 57 parent couples in the United States who were originally from Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago; were involved in the study by Roopnarine and Jin (2012). The authors had surmised that little was known about this particular group of parents and that there was a gap in the literature about paternal beliefs about play and cognitive development. This study used interviews to find out how both sets of parents viewed play as it relates to learning and early years development and went on to compare the views of mothers with fathers. A high percentage of mothers (96% with 93% of fathers) considered play as important for childhood development. When the researcher asked the parents to explain their reasons for this they mentioned five key areas: social, emotional, cognitive learning, physical development and recreational. Roopnarine and Jin highlighted further differences between the genders, in that 32% of fathers mentioned the physical benefits of play whilst only 11% of mothers. By the same token, there were 19% of fathers who mentioned the cognitive benefit of play in comparison to 30% of mothers.

Concern at the time highlighted how the inequality found in society was also seen and being perpetuated in schools. In an attempt to have a better understanding of parents' educational goals for their young children from the non-dominant culture, (Gillanders,

McKinney, & Ritchie, 2012) held focus groups involving Latina and African American parents. The Gillanders et al. 2012 study utilised the “getting parents involved” argument put forward by (Souto-Manning, 2010) that there would be an improvement in educational outcomes for children from minority backgrounds when the school community and developers of school programmes pursue, value and integrate such beliefs into daily in practice.

The reasoning behind using focus groups in this particular study was due to the ineffectiveness of surveys, which they attributed to low returns and the possibility in misunderstanding the nature of the questions. One African American parent saw the teacher’s role as reinforcing what the children learnt at home whilst a number of mothers wanted help in instilling confidence in their children. Whereas the above-mentioned studies reported the findings, drew conclusions and in some instances made recommendations for further investigation, the Gillanders et al. (2012) study envisioned using the data to provide the professionals with a view of their home-school partnerships which could lead to positive ongoing dialogue between home and school and ultimately reform. Although an interesting piece of research, this study failed to provide any demographic information about the mothers that participated in the study or even the numbers that were involved.

Families that were participating in Head Start programmes in the United States formed the basis of many studies looking at parent play beliefs. Using the Parent Play Belief Scale (Fogle & Mendez, 2006), Laforette and Mendez (2017) confirmed that low-income parents of whom 68% identified themselves as African American fully

supported the inclusion of play in early learning. More specifically, Laforette and Mendez found that parents who held favourable views about play were consistent with existing definitions of guided play and playful learning. The idea that play serves as a learning context for young children falls in with the beliefs held by the population as a whole. The argument put forward by Copple and Bredekamp (2009) is that parents having noted that their children have been exposed to an infusion of guided play, adult led and play-based approaches has resulted in the combination of the two being the new goal.

2.7.2 African Caribbean Play Beliefs

By way of providing an historical frame of reference, the Grantham-McGregor, Landman, and Desai (1983) study looked at child rearing practices and attitudes of 75 families in the suburb of Kingston the Jamaican capital. Mothers who were described as having low income completed a questionnaire where the focus was on looking at child rearing habits and attitudes. The Griffiths Developmental Scale (1970) was used to assess the children's developmental level. During the seventies and eighties there was increasing interest in the development of the children of (West Indian) Jamaican origin (Rutter, Yule, Berger, Yule, Morton, & Bagler; 1974, Rutter, Yule, Morton & Barley, 1975; Yule, Berger, Rutter, & Yule, 1975; Earls & Richman, 1985). At the time Grantham-McGregor et al. (1983) concluded that the pattern emerging for the children was one of a "rich social life and authoritarian discipline, with little conscious encouragement of play or verbal interaction" (p. 69). The authors attributed the child rearing practices to a mix of African heritage, Western urbanisation and poverty.

2.8 Limitations of the existing literature

There has been research involving play and the role it has in learning and development that has impacted on the current understanding and practice in working with children in the early years. However, there has been less exploration of parental views of play. There have been a number of studies involving particular ethnic groups such as African American and Latin American parents' views that have been carried out in the United States, but these have been limited to parents' who are participating in Head Start programmes. Super and Harkness (1997) noted that what parents believe about play and its contributions influences their expectations of the Early Years curriculum.

Within the UK to date there has not been the focus or attention given to specific groups of parents as there has been in the United States. On the contrary, the focus has been in the main on the benefits of parental involvement as opposed to views about the Early Years curriculum. The literature is lacking in terms of an African Caribbean perspective involving play in preschool, its role in learning and preparing children for school. As a diverse society, it is important to understand parents' views about the curriculum from different perspectives and ethnic groups in the UK.

2.9 Summary of literature review

In summary, when considering play as a subject matter it is essential that a definition and constructs of what constitutes play be established and its importance to development highlighted. This review has suggested that there are psychological theories that have underpinned current thinking and understanding about development and early learning, for example, theoretical perspectives from Piaget,

Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Different pedagogies such as those of Montessori, Emilia Reggio and High Scope, have in turn impacted on the development of practice.

Government initiatives since 1996 have taken on board evidence from research highlighting the benefits of play-based approaches, which have led to changes in the delivery of the Early Years curriculum. A significant initiative in the UK was the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum, placing great emphasis in promoting what has been termed as a developmentally appropriate curriculum along with careful consideration of the role the practitioner plays in its delivery. Whilst practitioners in the main have welcomed EYFS there has been some opposition to it. Researchers have tended to focus on seeking the views of early years practitioners. One aspect of the EYFS was the insistence that practitioners worked in collaboration with families.

Since parents have a key role in their child's early development and learning it has to be essential for any work on play to establish their views. Many studies have tried to capture these but very few have considered different possible cultural influences. Despite a range of studies having been carried out in the USA outlining the views of African American parents, this has not been the case in the UK. Yet across the UK there is significant ethnic diversity. This study sets out to try and address the imbalance in the literature by focusing on the African Caribbean parents' perception of the Early Years curriculum and play.

2.10 Implications for Educational Psychologists (EP)

Over the past 10 years there have been a number of government initiatives, which have impacted on the work of an EP. A decrease in government funding as part of the comprehensive review (HM Treasury, 2010) resulted in Local Authorities not being able to guarantee a maintained service to schools. Islam (2013) proposed that this led to a 'traded' model of service delivery. In addition, the Children and Families Act (2014), reviewed the legislation around SEND and together with the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) extended the role of EPs in working with children and young people with special educational needs from birth to 25 years. An emphasis was placed on a more person centred collaborative approach to the statutory assessment process.

With the above in mind, Shannon and Posada (2007) maintains that there has been limited examination of the EP role within the early years. Notably, Smith and Reynolds (1998) argued the need for EPs to provide services that reflect not only the distinctiveness of the early years age group but also the particular context of the early years provision.

EPs working within the local authority of the current study, work at both an individual and strategic level as highlighted by Wolfendale and Robinson's (2001, 2004) study which was key in identifying core activities that widened the contribution of the EP within the early years.

At an individual level the focus of work includes the involvement in Education Health

Care needs assessment process for children who are at home or in an early years setting identified as having complex needs which are likely to require additional support. In addition, an EP is involved in running the EarlyBird parent-training programme for families who have children diagnosed with autism spectrum condition but have not started school. There are also EPs who carry out Video Interactive Guidance (VIG) working with parents and young children in their homes to support development and learning. Furthermore, the EPS runs a weekly parent advice service for all parents who reside in the local authority where they can attend a 30 minute session with an EP. It is run independently of schools. Parents of very young children and early years practitioners can also attend.

Whilst at an organisational level in practice, one or two EPs are involved in presenting at the Early Years SENCo Forum. The focus is on delivering training and looking at how best to support child development. There have also been opportunities to work with practitioners in their settings on awareness of SEND.

With this in mind, the reality is that not all EPs are given many of these opportunities to work at an individual and systemic level within early years as outlined above. It can be argued that much of the work involves assessment for Education Health and Care plans (EHCPs). This results in chances being missed for EPs to contribute to early years strategic planning and curriculum development for all early year's children.

EPs are in a good position to ensure that parent voice is heard and encouraging best practice of working in partnership with parents. This can be achieved through EPs

supporting coproduction and collaboration between the practitioners working in early years settings and parents. Specifically with the focus on wellbeing and achieving positive outcomes for children and young people there was a need for EP services to look carefully at what they could offer to support this.

Franklin (1983) argued that the study of human behaviour must include the sociocultural context as a major consideration in the delivery of psychological services. Psychology cannot therefore avoid the fact that culture is essential in determining the social context in which behaviour develops. As a result EPs are therefore in the best position to consider the psychological consequence to the individual or group from the dilemma of acculturation and assimilation and to ensure that the voice of diverse groups and communities are listened to and understood on a range of subject matter including views about the Early Years curriculum and the role of play in learning.

2.11 Rationale for the current study

There is agreement in Western based research and outlined in government policy that EYE should be play-based (DfES, 2008). This has led to practice that is now enshrined in curriculum guidance of the Early Years Foundation Stage (2017) and delivered by practitioners. Research focusing on how parents support their children at home, in addition to getting parents involved in preschool has been well documented evidencing the benefits of these practices. To further support parents in playing an increasingly key role in their child's development it could be very powerful to find out what they value in terms of early learning and their understanding of the curriculum.

Exploring parents' beliefs and attitudes about a play-based curriculum will lead to a better understanding of factors influencing their views. This is particularly important given that a few studies have highlighted that some parents may be uncomfortable with the term 'play' and not understand how it supports learning (Brooker, 2003; Gregory & Biarnes, 1994). Arguments have been put forward against viewing play in the early years settings as a universal pedagogic practice (Cannella & Viruru, 1997; Fromberg, 1998).

Previous studies in this area have used surveys to ascertain the views of participants whilst others have utilised interviews. However, the current study will adopt a mixed methods approach consisting of an initial quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase. The researcher's intention is that by integrating the data from the questionnaires using descriptive statistics in the form of tables and graphs with the qualitative data from the transcribed semi-structured interviews using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2013), a better understanding of the views held by parents will be provided, in comparison to what would be derived from either method if used independently. This will be explored further in the following chapter detailing the research methodology.

Given that parents have a key role in early learning and child development it is therefore important to hear from parents drawn from different cultural and ethnic groups. Sigel and McGillicuddy-DeLisi (2002) found that the perceptions held by parents about early learning are shaped by personal experiences that are unique to their culture. For this reason it is important that research should seek to establish the

views from diverse populations, and one example being an African Caribbean perspective.

2.12 Aims & research questions of the current study

The focus for this study is to explore the perceptions held by African Caribbean parents of two and three-year olds have of play and learning in preschool. A mixed methods design will be adopted using questionnaires and interviews to ascertain both depth and breadth to understanding what parents' value through the following research questions:

RQ 1. What is the understanding of African Caribbean parents of the role of play in Early Years Education?

RQ 2. What do African Caribbean parents consider should be the role of play in learning?

RQ 3. What is the understanding of African Caribbean parents about the approach to the curriculum in the setting their child attends?

RQ 4. What are the factors that have influenced African Caribbean parents' perceptions of play?

Chapter 3

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Overview

Within this section the theoretical underpinnings of this mixed methods study including the ontological/epistemological assumptions and methodology employed will be outlined. The methods utilised will be considered and rationales for different decisions, will be offered. There will also be details of the processes completed including the seeking of participants and identification of suitable measures. The validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the work, as well as ethical considerations will be discussed.

3.2 Ontological & Epistemological Assumptions of the Research

In conducting research there is a need for a paradigm, Mertens (2005) argues that it is essential for the researcher to understand their chosen paradigm or beliefs, along with the underlying assumptions that are attributed to it. Mertens (2005) contends that the researcher's theoretical position has implications for every decision taken in the research process, including the choice of methods.

Lincoln and Guba (2000) identified three aspects to a paradigm that needed to be determined. Firstly, ontological assumptions of the researcher's view of reality. Secondly, epistemological assumptions that involve thinking about how knowledge is created and addresses the question of what it is possible to know. Finally, deciding how to go about obtaining knowledge and understanding.

Mertens (2005) proposes four agreed theoretical paradigms that currently exist within the world of research: positivism, interpretivism, emancipatory and pragmatism. Lincoln and Guba (2000) adapted the idea of paradigms within the social sciences, to include post positivism, constructivism, transformativism/critical realism and pragmatism. To clarify, Mertens explained that differences in the terms or labels used were dependent on the text being read. For example, the term postpositivism may be used rather than experimental or constructivist as opposed to mixed methods.

Lincoln and Guba (2000) believed that each of the theoretical paradigms give rise to different methodological assumptions and choices in the methods employed. There are three main methodologies identified: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods (Robson, 2011). The methodological approach that is predominant within the post positivist paradigm is objective measurements and statistical analysis of data collected through structured tools such as questionnaires, resulting in data that is quantifiable. This is in contrast to the use of interviews and observations favoured by researchers within the constructivist paradigm. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) definition of mixed methods when “quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language are combined into a single study” (p. 17). The goal Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) maintained is to expand understanding, which could be achieved through one dominant paradigm or not, with both phases (qualitative and quantitative) being conducted either concurrently or sequentially. However, at a minimum it is essential that the findings are integrated during interpretation. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argued that mixed methods research (MMR) was a research paradigm whose ‘time has come’ (p. 24). That being said, there has been ongoing

debate about the incompatibility of cross-paradigmatic methods when referring to combining quantitative and qualitative methods of research. (Patton, 1980; Silverman, 1985; Lincoln & Guba 1985).

Madill, Jordan, and Shirley (2000) go on to suggest that there are a number of epistemological positions within which the qualitative researcher can work and many different methods of analysis. The authors, citing Bunge (1993) p. 231 maintain that critical realism contends that 'the way we perceive facts, particularly in the social realm, depends partly upon our beliefs and expectations'. That being said, arguments have been put forward by Madill et al. (2000) to consider paradigms being located at different points on a continuum. At one end reality, which is dependent on interpretation and knowledge; known as relativism whilst at the other end is realism where reality is independent of humans and can be accessed through research. Sitting centrally between relativism and realism is critical realism a position described by Madill et al. (2000) as reality that exists which has been socially influenced but can only be partially accessed by the researcher.

3.2.1 Researcher's Theoretical position - Critical Realism

In considering the range of possible approaches that would be appropriate whilst planning and developing the current study, the researcher chose to adopt the position of critical realist. As argued by McEvoy and Richards (2006), critical realism presents as an alternative to the paradigms of positivism, constructionism (interpretivism) and pragmatism. Robson (2002) proposed that the belief in the existence of an external reality which operates independently of our awareness, whilst at the same time each

individual's experience of reality is facilitated by a variety of factors including cultural and social contexts. For researchers who adopt a critical realist paradigm, the aim of their research as suggested by McEvoy and Richards (2006) is to widen and deepen the levels of exploration and understanding as opposed to determining generalisable laws. The above is central to the current study as it was designed purely to explore African Caribbean parents' beliefs about play in EYE and more specifically what understanding they had of learning through play.

Whilst all of the participants in the study were of African Caribbean descent, they differed somewhat in terms of their social backgrounds and individual differences in their views and experiences of play in EYE. It therefore made sense to adopt the critical realist paradigm where the belief is that there are a variety of perspectives that are accommodated because there is no possibility of attaining a single "correct" understanding of the world. Putnam (1992) and Maxwell (2012) concur with the idea that there are different valid perspectives of reality.

As a critical realist in relation to this study looking at parents' views and understanding of play and learning in the pre-school curriculum the researcher chose mixed methods. The theoretical position of critical realism accepts the use of mixed methodology where participants' views are sought using qualitative and quantitative methods.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Mixed methods

The mixed methods research design was chosen because aspects of the quantitative phase would be used to inform the qualitative phase and for purposes of triangulation. In choosing this design both would be used to answer research questions in a single study (Mertens, 2005). Mixed methods are also referred to as combined methods or multi methods (Lindsay, 2013) but for clarity and accuracy with regard to this design, the researcher will be using the term mixed methods research (MMR). This study adopted the sequential design proposed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) which the authors believe enables a more complete picture of human behaviour and experience to be achieved.

3.3.1.1 Benefits of using Mixed Methods

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) said that mixed methods permits the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study. Additionally, they suggest it provides a better understanding of the research problem under investigation. In discussing the benefits of the mixed methods approach the concept of triangulation was put forward by Denzin (1978) and Jick (1979). Triangulation is defined as validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources, referring to the application and combination of several research methods in the study of the same phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) define triangulation as “an attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying from more than one standpoint” (p. 254). The rationale for using mixed methods research can be twofold

wherein triangulation allows for the comparison of findings from the qualitative data with the quantitative data. An additional benefit put forward by Migiro and Magangi (2011) includes the complementary relationship between qualitative and quantitative data, where one clarifies the other throughout the study. Migiro and Magangi argued that the above strengthens the effectiveness of the research. Creswell (2009) claimed that the combination of methods provides a better understanding than either the quantitative or qualitative method alone. Thirdly, researchers including Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib, and Rupert (2007) highlighted the ability to explain complex or contradictory survey responses as a benefit of using mixed methods research. Driscoll et al. (2007) go on to say that it can also lead to unexpected or emergent themes and information that if not for mixed methods would not have come to light.

Patton (2002) noted that the use of mixed methods could provide breadth, depth and numerical data that can give a more complete picture of the phenomena under study. Similarly, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, (2004) concurred that multi-methodology is necessary for the exploration of educational research owing to the complexities and challenges that can be encountered within real-life settings such as schools and nurseries. Todd, Nerlich, Mckeown, and Clarke (2004) suggested there is a depth and richness of insight offered when qualitative methods are used with quantitative methods. When used in combination the research methods contextualise, populate, triangulate and validate research studies. Using different methods bring different ways of understanding the data and highlight complementary, contradictory or absent findings within it (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2007).

This approach has been further supported in 2010 by Tashakkori and Teddlie who highlighted the need for a rejection of “either – or” choices at all levels of research. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) maintained that mixed methods research has evolved to the point where it has its own worldview, vocabulary and techniques. That being said, there continues to be a range of views and very little agreement on how the elements of research using both quantitative and qualitative methods are best incorporated (Bryman, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Creswell, 1994; Patton, 1980).

Researchers including Brewer and Hunter (1989) and Morse (2003) advocated for the two approaches to be used in parallel. Others such as Pring (2000), Hardy and Bryman (2004) and Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) have sought to look at the similarities between quantitative and qualitative approaches to determine how best to combine them.

3.3.1.2 Challenges of using mixed methods research

A number of arguments put forward against the use of mixed methods include the time it takes to manipulate the data, combining the two types of data and resources required (Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib, & Rupert, 2007). Further arguments against mixed research suggested by Lieber (2009), relate to questions of data management, processing and analysis. All can require more time and money to facilitate the process being more effective and efficient.

Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) highlight three types of mixed methods

research. They are as follows: quantitatively driven mixed research (QUAN + qual), qualitatively driven mixed research (QUAL + quan) and what is described as 'equal status' research (Quan + Qual) where the goal is to take account of quantitative and qualitative related epistemologies to produce a whole. Elliot (1984) and Parry, Shapiro, and Firth (1986) suggest using both kinds of data in a complementary way in the same study.

Having considered the benefits and challenges highlighted above for the study the decision was made to use both quantitative and qualitative data, in order to provide a rich and complete picture and strengthen the effectiveness of the research. The quantitative data was initially collected and followed up by the collection of the qualitative data.

3.3.2 Quantitative methods

The overarching aim in using quantitative methods was to collect a breadth of data in order to provide an overview of the understanding African Caribbean parents held about play in EYE. It also meant that a larger sample could be reached and anonymity maintained. In doing so the data could be made sense of, used to inform the qualitative data process and ultimately to answer the research questions. For this part of the research an emphasis was placed on using an objective measure in the form of a survey. Mertens (2005) described surveys as beneficial and an effective way of measuring opinions, preferences or perceptions, of a relatively large number of participants quickly. The researcher designed a questionnaire to collect data, which could then be summarised in the form of descriptive statistics – means, standard

deviations and percentages. The researcher chose to also include both closed and open-ended questions in the survey resulting in quantitative and qualitative data being obtained.

3.3.3 Qualitative methods

The aim of this part of the study, was to obtain a more exploratory and possibly in depth understanding of the perceptions held by the participants, about play and learning in the Early Years curriculum. A number of qualitative approaches were considered at the initial stages of planning for the current study including Grounded Theory (GT) and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). These will be considered in the following section.

3.3.3.1 Grounded Theory (GT)

As a critical response to researchers seeking theories deemed to be irrelevant to the everyday lives of people being studied, Glaser and Strauss (1965) developed the term Grounded Theory (GT). A number of researchers have devised their own version which includes Pidgeon and Henwood's (1997) more contextualist (constructivist) in theoretical orientation and Charmaz (2006) approach, which is more of a symbolic interactionist tradition. For Charmaz, the researcher is seen as part of what is being explored. Charmaz and Henwood (2008) describe GT as not just a method of analysis but also an approach concerned with constructing data.

The advantages and drawbacks of GT were explored and the following features were highlighted by a number of authors. Braun and Clarke (2013) identified a strength

of this approach as its versatility in that there are a number of versions that can be utilised when using different theoretical and epistemological frameworks. Secondly, Charmaz (2006) contended that it is useful when research is focused on social and social psychological processes within particular social settings.

Equally, many of the factors outlined as an asset can be framed as being potential weaknesses of the theory. Birks and Mills (2011) contended that completing a full GT is demanding and time consuming and that it is almost impossible to complete a full GT in a small study. Further criticisms include some of the procedures can have the appearance of being too prescriptive and ideas too purist possibly resulting in problems and the likelihood of 'failure' if the steps are not followed as detailed.

So, it was concluded that although GT has a number of strengths, there are also some limitations identified that need to be recognised. Therefore, in relation to this research it was concluded that the weaknesses of the approach far outweigh any of the advantages. Most importantly was the need to consider the 'right tool for the right purpose' and as the purpose of the study was to explore views and deepen understanding rather than to arrive at a construction of a theoretical position.

3.3.3.2 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was also considered. IPA is a qualitative methodology, interpretive in approach, which focuses on subjective lived experiences that are deemed to be significant and often have implications for our identities (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Unlike GT or Thematic Analysis (TA) it provides an in-depth analysis

from the participant's own perspective. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) suggested that studies using IPA as a methodology seek to not only focus on the experience which is of particular significance to the individual but it also encourages reflection and possible change.

IPA focuses on how the participant and researcher make sense of an experience, Larkin, Watts, and Clifton, (2006) go on to explain that these accounts have been co-constructed and shaped by the interaction between researcher and participant. In making sense of the participant's world the researcher uses their own interpretive resources, described as hermeneutics of empathy.

Evaluations of IPA have identified a number of limitations; Braun and Clarke (2013) argued that there is a lack of concrete guidance about a higher-level analysis resulting in it being simply a description of participants' concerns. A further constraint is that it can lack the "in depth richness of narrative analysis and the substance of TA and GT" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 183).

IPA and GT seek patterns in the data but are both bounded by theory. The decision to select TA instead of GT or IPA was therefore made in light of this and discussed in the following section.

3.3.4 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) became recognised as a method when Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed a systematic, six-phase process to report patterns or themes across a data

set within the social sciences, particularly psychology. However, unlike other analytical methods, TA does not specify the methods of data collection, theoretical positions or ontological frameworks. It is more purely a method for data analysis.

Braun and Clarke (2013) identified the aims of TA as an analysis of the data from the bottom up. This was termed as Inductive TA where the analysis is not guided by existing theory (Frith & Gleeson, 2004). It is a method for identifying themes and patterns across a data set in relation to the research question. Conversely, Deductive TA involves the data being used to explore particular theoretical ideas and is determined prior to data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Although currently one of the most widely used qualitative method of data analysis (Howitt, 2010; Stainton Rogers, 2011) TA was not recognised as a specific method until Braun and Clarke reported on their thinking in 2006.

3.3.4.1 Strengths & limitations of Thematic Analysis for this study

TA is deemed to be relatively unique in that it does not advocate data collection methods, research questions or theoretical frameworks but does provide a method for data analysis; this flexibility is thus considered to be a strength (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A further strength relates to its accessibility in cases where researchers have either little or no experience. In comparison to GT, which is considered to require more intensive effort (Braun & Clarke, 2013), TA is relatively easy and quick to learn.

There are a number of critiques citing TA as having limited interpretative powers if it

is not used within an existing theoretical framework. Some qualitative researchers perceive TA as lacking the substance of other 'branded' and theoretically driven approaches such as GT (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, reliability remains a concern due to the wide variety of interpretations that arrive from the themes (Guest, 2012), although reliability along with validity are not deemed to be appropriate criteria for judging qualitative work. Please refer to section 3.8 in Chapter 3 outlining what makes good qualitative research, particularly with regard to this study.

There continues to be some contention raised by (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Boyatzis, 1998; Tuckett, 2005) about what is involved specifically and how to go about it. The research carried out by Attride-Stirling (2001) attempted to address the gap by proposing the use of thematic networks. Thematic networks aim to illustrate the data; they are web-like in structure serving as a visual representation of the themes.

The researcher decided to use thematic analysis for this study, given the arguments for and against, it was felt that the identified strengths far outweighed the limitations, particularly with regard to the research questions being explored and the aims of this work. The identified themes were presented visually using thematic maps.

3.3.5 Data collection strategy

As noted above, a sequential design was intended for this study. However, as the data collection phase progressed there was a point where it transpired that the number of questionnaires returned were not in line with the prospective number and further distribution and reminders were needed. This resulted in quantitative and qualitative

data being collected simultaneously. This design positions the quantitative data collected as complementary to the qualitative data. It is at the analysis and interpretation stage where the data is integrated for the purposes of confirmation, corroboration or cross validation. See Figure 4.

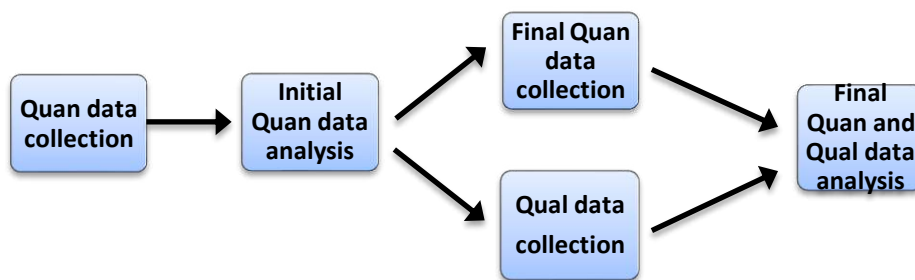


Figure 4. The data collection and analysis process

3.4 Measures

Given that the decision had been made to use two forms of data collection: quantitative and qualitative, two measures were required and so questionnaires and interviews were selected.

3.4.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are seen to be an efficient way of obtaining attitudes and perceptions from a large number of participants. Wilson and McLean (1994) suggested that they can be administered without the presence of the researcher and tend to be relatively

easy to analyse. The questions can be standardised so that all participants are asked exactly the same questions in the same order. A disadvantage that has been cited is that using closed questions results in responses that are fixed and therefore does not allow the participants to respond in the way that reflects their feelings. In the current study, in an attempt to counteract this phenomenon, open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire thus enabling participants to express what they think in their own words. Using both open and closed questions allows for both quantitative and qualitative data to be collected simultaneously.

3.4.1.1 Questionnaire design

The Parent Play and Learning Belief (PPLB) questionnaire (Appendix 3) was designed by the researcher specifically for this study to explore parents' perceptions of play and the role it has in learning. It is based on the Parental Play Belief Scale (PPBS) designed by Fogle and Mendez (2006) for the sole purpose of assessing African-American parents' beliefs about their children's play in early years. The UK Childcare & Early Years survey of parents 2014-15 (2016) was also used to inform the questionnaire. The first draft of the questionnaire was heavily reliant on the PPBS but it was later redrafted after further reading and piloting to consider the UK Childcare & Early Years survey.

Through using two measures that have established validity and reliability (Sapsford, 1999; Oppenheim, 1992) the researcher hoped that the quality and robustness of the PPLB as a new measure would be enhanced. In addition, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2014) statutory framework, which set out the standards for learning,

development and care of children from birth to 5 years old, was referred to. This is a document, which all schools and Ofsted-registered early years providers throughout England must follow. This was used in order to ensure a coherent structure for the questionnaire because it provided guidance on particular areas that would be of relevance.

When designing the questionnaire a number of aspects were considered including the collection of data that measured opinions in an objective manner through the use of Likert Scales. Coupled with the need to analyse and interpret data resulted in balancing the number of open-ended questions included in the questionnaire with the closed questions, in addition to restricting the numbers of answers by limiting responses e.g. to three activities. The influence of social desirability was also considered which resulted in not including a mid-point thereby creating a forced choice. Furthermore, care was taken with the language used when devising the questionnaire and jargon was avoided. Similarly, steps were taken to ensure accessibility by checking the readability level of the questionnaire to ensure that it was appropriate for the target population; along with clear instructions and labelling when deciding the layout and presentation.

3.4.1.2 Likert rating scale

Rating scales have been described as a powerful tool in research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) in that they allow measurement of opinion and behaviour of participants in a quantitative manner. As such, for some questions participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement to a number of statements on the PPLB

questionnaire. Factors considered in developing an effective scale were the numbers of scale points to use and whether or not to include a midpoint. Some studies (Dawes, 2008; Dillman, 2007; Cummins & Gullone, 2000) found that 4- to 7-point scales return the strongest reliability and validity. Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) suggested that reliability increased with more scale points but Lissitz and Green (1975) found that people found it difficult to discriminate more than about seven scale points. Given this, the decision was made to include six scale points.

Baka, Figgou, and Triga (2012) identified two groups of participants when it came to choosing the midpoint, non-attitude participants and undecided participants. Baka et al. (2012) also found that participants could be interpreting the midpoint in ways not intended when designing the questionnaire. Worcester and Burns (1975) found that the use of a four point scale with no mid-point had the ability to push participants towards the positive end of the scale.

Social desirability highlighted by Crowne and Marlow (1960), refers to the tendency to either consciously, or unconsciously answer in a socially acceptable way. A small-scale study carried out by Garland (1991) provided evidence that a mid-point or neutral option on a scale is chosen by participants because of their desire to please and not want to give a socially unacceptable answer. Garland went on to say that the presence or absence of a mid-point is likely to produce distortions in the results particularly on an importance scale. Studies examining the effects of having no mid-point or neutral option have been inconsistent in terms of their findings (Garland,

1991). The researcher decided to use an even number, thereby removing the mid-point or neutral option and to create a forced choice.

3.4.1.3 Including open-ended questions

A qualitative element was incorporated where participants were asked to name activities that they have seen set up by adults at their child's early years setting; that their child likes to choose and they valued, and that their child gains most from doing. A final component included the rating of five aims of EYE in order of the most important to the least valuable. There was also an option for them to provide three views of what they felt was most important.

3.4.1.4 Terminology

Throughout the construction of the questionnaire, care was taken to ensure that every day language was employed, avoiding use of any jargon or terminology and ensuring clarity. The researcher endeavoured to remain neutral and not lead the participant by influencing their answers. This was achieved by the omission of questions with built in assumptions or use words or phrases that could be considered 'loaded'.

3.4.1.5 Reading ease and literacy levels

The readability level of the questionnaire was checked using the Flesch Reading Ease Readability Formula (1981) and found to be 72.4. This can be interpreted using the Flesch-Kincaid (1975) grade level as falling in the 'easily understood' by students who are 13 to 15 year olds (in the eighth grade). Therefore the questionnaire could be considered appropriate for the target population and not too difficult given the

uncertainty about the literacy levels of the participants. In addition, any open-ended written responses were kept to a minimum in terms of the space allowed to account for the writing abilities of potential participants.

3.4.1.6 Presentation

The aim was to make the process of completing the questionnaire as engaging as possible. Zhang, Smith, Lam, Brimer, and Rodriguez (2002) and Chambers and Craig (1998) advocate the use of pictures in place of text in situations where reading ability might create barriers. The strategy of labelling the points of the scale in words and numbers, referred to as 'anchoring' was employed when devising the PPLB questionnaire scale. Easy to determine smiley faces showing 'happy' and 'unhappy' faces were included by the researcher to make the questionnaire appear less daunting and strategically placed at either ends of the scales to aid understanding and serve as an ever-present reminder.

3.4.1.7 Questionnaire Distribution

Paper based survey

Research suggests that there is little or no difference in accurate reporting of information from online surveys as compared with paper-based surveys (Daley, McDermott, McCormack-Brown, & Kittleson, 2003). But as a data collection option, online or web-based surveys have been viewed as advantageous for reasons including saving time and limited costs (Clayton & Werking, 1998; Dillman, 2007). However, a number of studies have identified many challenges to online systems. A further argument against computer-based surveys was response rate. Shih and Fan (2009)

meta-analysis noted that email surveys generally had considerably lower response rates of around 20% than paper-based surveys, but as noted below, use of technology has significantly advanced in the last ten years and thus this may no longer be the case. Similarly, Sax, Gilmartin, and Bryant (2003) concluded that online surveys could be considered as a methodological alternative to paper-based questionnaires but not necessarily a more fruitful one.

A study looking at distribution Underwood, Kim and Matier (2000) identified lack of access to and familiarity with the Internet could undermine the participation of underrepresented minority groups in online survey research. This was also reiterated in the meta-analysis carried out by Shih and Fan (2009) that different populations may react to email surveys differently, depending on their exposure to and comfort level with information technology. However, this is now out dated given the growth of technology and use of smart phones.

In light of all the above evidence, the researcher chose to distribute paper-based survey. Additionally, uncertainty about participant access to information technology and the need to go through several gatekeepers to provide email addresses for a specific sample of participants supported this option. Both factors, which could be a potential barrier to carrying out the data collection that paper-based surveys, might avoid.

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

The purpose of interviews is to gather data similar to questionnaires but as Lincoln

and Guba (1985) emphasised, interviews also allow the researcher to find out about feelings and concerns and to verify and extend data previously collected, particularly in those studies that are Quan + Qual.

A number of researchers have highlighted strengths as outlined by Kerlinger (1970), who maintained that interviews could be used to validate other methods or to delve into reasons why participants gave particular responses. Robson (2002) viewed interviews as a flexible and adaptable method of enquiry. Interviews provide the researcher with opportunities to find out information that that would be difficult to determine using other methods, (Backett, 1990).

Patton (2002) advocated that there are many forms of qualitative interviews, the most common being the semi-structured interview. Cohen et al. (2000) proposed that the move towards the semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions enables participants to put forward their understanding of the subject matter. Given the element of flexibility that can be built into an interview participants can introduce aspects that initially might not have been thought about by the researcher (Denzin, 1970; Silverman, 1993).

3.4.2.1 Advantages of using open-ended questions

The researcher made use of open-ended questions that had been worked out in advanced. In asking predetermined questions the researcher used their judgement to decide on which order and wording was most appropriate for each interview (Robson, 2002). There were a number of advantages linked to the use of open-ended questions

that were identified by Cohen et al. (2007). These included providing the researcher with the opportunity to offer explanations and clear up any misunderstandings that the participant might have of the question. It also allowed the researcher to make a more accurate assessment of what the participant really believes or understands. Charmaz, (2002) suggested that the interview schedules should be considered indicative, as the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee is fluid and to be determined during the interview process and as such this was the strategy employed.

3.4.2.2 Semi-structured interview schedule design

An analysis of the data from the questionnaires was used to inform parts of the semi-structured interview and a schedule was prepared. An interview schedule can be useful in framing particular questions and include instructions for both the interviewer and participant (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 4) utilised was developed by the researcher. The Parental Play Belief Scale (PPBS) designed by Fogle and Mendez (2006) and the UK Childcare Early Years Survey of Parents 2014-2015 (2016) were used to inform the indicative questions chosen. In addition, current topics in the literature about play, learning and curriculum delivery that were considered to be important were also included.

There were 20 questions that started off very simply with the purpose of getting the participants to discuss the different types of play on offer at their child's preschool setting. The focus was on exploring the participants' views and understanding of play in the early years.

The questions were grouped into four broad areas

- The types of play activities and possible benefits and drawbacks.
- Thoughts about learning through play and possible skills learnt.
- How play/learning should be structured and the role of the adult.
- Participant's own experience of play in their early years.

Through being open-ended the questions were designed specifically to enable the participants to talk about their own experiences. This was particularly useful when it came to finding out how participants' own preschool experiences reflected in their views on the role of play for their own child.

3.5 Method

3.5.1 Participants

Participants for both the qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were selected from a range of early years settings in one London Borough including 4 nurseries, a school offering provision for two year olds and over, a school nursery, a children's centre and those who sent their children to a childminder. Using purposive sampling, the research was intentionally selecting participants who were of African Caribbean heritage and parent of a 2 – 3 year old child.

3.5.1.1 Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria for all participants in both parts of the research were that they were of African Caribbean heritage and must be a parent of a child who is two or three years old. The researcher was vigilant in ensuring that participants who were included

in the research fully met the inclusion criteria. Robson (1993) concluded that the researcher selects participants fitting specific criteria and is guided by the researcher's judgement.

There were five questionnaires that were discarded because the participants did not meet the inclusion criteria

3.5.1.2 Recruitment

Making contact with the gatekeepers was an important initial step in the recruitment of participants. A letter (Appendix 5) was sent out to potential gatekeepers introducing the researcher and outlining the research and possible involvement needed. Following a number of emails, telephone conversations and meetings with setting gatekeepers it was agreed that a large recruitment poster (Appendix 6) with smaller versions as flyers placed in four private voluntary and independent (PVI) nurseries, two children centres and two schools one of which had facilities for two year olds. The poster invited interested participants to telephone or email the researcher to find out more about taking part in the research study. The gatekeepers were also encouraged to discuss the research with potential participants and draw attention to the research, as they felt appropriate.

Arrangements were made to be on site at the various settings to advertise the research and answer any questions. One setting agreed to highlight the research by putting it into their newsletter, which was due to be distributed. A pack accompanying the questionnaire (Appendix 3) contained a participant information sheet (Appendix

7), a questionnaire consent form (Appendix 8), a form to determine background/demographic information (Appendix 9) and an expression of interest form (Appendix 10) to take part in the interview. Also included were two envelopes into which participants were instructed to place separately their completed questionnaires and expression of interest forms. It was agreed that a small collection box would be placed on site at each setting for the returns. In addition, an informed consent form (Appendix 11) outlining right to withdraw from the study along with information about confidentiality and data protection were included. Each questionnaire pack also contained debriefing information (Appendix 12).

A demographic questionnaire (Appendix 9) was incorporated into the study to collate definitive information on participants' relationship to child at preschool, number of children, country of birth, age, education level and ethnicity. This information was used to determine eligibility for the study in line with the inclusion criteria. There were no restrictions on the number of participants for the questionnaire; the approximate total number of prospective questionnaire participants was set at 40.

25 participants expressed an interest in being selected for interview; the researcher selected eight participants at random by numbering the sheets 1 to 25 and choosing every third one. In the current study, once selected, prospective participants were contacted by a telephone call to find out whether they were still interested to taking part and to briefly explain the process to them. It was made clear to participants that if they no longer wished to participate in the interview when contacted that this would be fine and someone else would be selected. Out of the parents contacted one did

not answer their mobile phone or respond to any of the emails sent, an alternative parent was selected. At this point it was also necessary to arrange a convenient date and time for the interview.

3.5.2 Pilot studies

3.5.2.1 Questionnaire

The researcher sought further validity of the questionnaire by conducting a pilot study to allow for adjustments to be made before carrying out the main study. The researcher was careful to pilot the questionnaire with respondents who met the inclusion criteria.

For Oppenheim (1992) the need to conduct a pilot of the questionnaire is paramount in that it serves several functions, which include increasing the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. In the current study the questionnaire was initially given to a Portage Manager who is also an Area SENCo and a mother who was in the building for a different purpose. In line with Oppenheim(1992), Morrison (1993) and Wilson and McLean (1994) feedback obtained following completion included views on clarity of the instructions; layout and the wording used. Both felt that the questionnaire was reasonable and a suggestion was made about including a question about iPads and television. The final question was described as difficult to rate because all of the items were felt to be important.

The time it took to complete the questionnaire was noted which was around 15 minutes. Minor changes were made with regards to the layout and providing very

specific instructions for each part of the questionnaire. The data from the pilot was discarded and not used.

3.5.2.2 Semi-structured interview

A pilot of the semi-structured interview was conducted with a parent whose child attended a private voluntary independent nursery. Care was taken by the researcher to treat the pilot as though it was the actual research. The procedures outlined including introductions, asking whether they were happy for recording to take place and talking through the participant consent form for interview (Appendix 11) and getting the signature were followed. The debrief form (Appendix 12) was also shared at the end of the interview. The researcher sought feedback from the participant about the process and the questions asked. There were no concerns about the whole process or the questions asked. The data from the pilot was included in the current study.

3.6 Data collection

As a result of the above process, 157 questionnaires were distributed in total, of those distributed 54 were returned. There were six returns that could not be used and were discarded because they did not fit the inclusion criteria and one questionnaire where ethnicity was not stated. This resulted in 48 questionnaires included in the study. 25 participants expressed an interest and were willing to be contacted to take part in the interview section of the study. Appendix 13 provides details on the demographics of the participants who participated in the interviews.

3.6.1 Interview times and locations

Interviews were arranged at a convenient time for each of the eight participants. All interviews took place at the settings. A quiet room was set-aside for the purposes of conducting the interviews. This was at a time when their children were in preschool and the participants who worked were either on their way to work or returning from work. For the parents who stayed at home it was agreed that the most suitable time for interviews would be after they dropped their children off at preschool in the morning. At least two interviews felt rushed, one parent was at her place of work and had to conduct the interview prior to starting work and the other had arranged an appointment at the dentist following the interview. One interview had to be rearranged because the parent who usually accompanied her preschool child at school had to stay at home because the baby was ill. Despite the difficulties encountered all the scheduled interviews took place.

3.6.2 Role of researcher in the interview

The role of the researcher during the interview is a key factor in the process of carrying out research. It has been suggested (Paterson, 1997) that the researcher can play a role in influencing the interview interaction in a facilitative way using Roger's Humanistic Psychology (1951). It involves the interviewer being genuine, respectful and empathic. Regardless of the research stance taken, Paterson (1997) argued that the success of the interview rests on the interpersonal skills of the interviewer. The interview has been described as a social interpersonal encounter (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and should not be seen as just a means to collecting data. The onus is therefore placed on the interviewer to make the participant feel at ease and willing to freely

talk. This is achieved through the interviewer having an empathic understanding in order that the interview is conducted sensitively (Kvale, 1996). The interviewer needs to demonstrate respect by valuing what the participants have to say without being judgemental. In addition, the need for the interviewer to enjoy the process was emphasised by Patton (1987) alongside showing interest in what the participants had to say. This was achieved through the use of nonverbal communication; the researcher made eye contact, smiled and nodded during the interview.

3.6.2.1 Avoid leading questions

Goodman and Dooley, 1976 outlined several techniques that could be used to gather information and aid listening when interviewing. They identified three groups of responses, which they referred to as response modes. Essential response relies on active listening responses used during client-centred therapy. Probing questions were used to support participants to fully express their perceptions of the preschool curriculum. The current study made use of the following including, “can you tell me more about...”, “why do you think that?”, “Okay” and “mmhuh” by way of following up the responses given by the participants. Follow up probes were used in order to seek further information, for the participant to elaborate or provide more detail or for clarification.

Whilst ensuring that the techniques for establishing rapport (Briggs, 1986) were implemented; pausing and allowing time for thinking, reflection and elaboration were utilised throughout the duration of the interview process.

3.6.2.2 Other factors

In line with Denzin (1989) the presentation of the researcher in terms of dress and manner go a long way in securing the participants' trust and putting them at ease thus overcoming the potential for any bias. With this in mind prior to conducting the interviews the researcher carefully considered what clothes to wear, how to set up the room and where to sit.

3.7 Data analysis

3.7.1 Transcription

The researcher initially listened to the audio-recordings of each of the interviews. Careful and repeated listening to the audio allowed for familiarity with the data is considered to be an important first step in data analysis (Bailey, 2008). The transcription style used was orthographic or verbatim with the focus on what was said. In order to transcribe the recordings the researcher used OTranscribe online software that had a slowdown and play back feature which meant what was said could be deciphered more easily and avoided anything being omitted. Braun and Clarke (2013) describes the transcript of audio data as a 'representation'. Sandelowski (1994) went further, referring to it as a 'selective arrangement' created for the purpose of analysis. Using the notation system (Appendix 14) devised by Braun and Clarke (2013) the researcher transcribed the eight individual interviews. Pseudonyms were used for each participant and any names mentioned during the interviews were omitted and referred to by an initial letter. Once the data had been transcribed the next step was the analysis.

3.7.2 Quantitative data analysis

3.7.2.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics was used to describe the basic features of the data in the study by describing what the data showed. Unlike inferential statistics, which focuses on drawing conclusions and make generalisations about the population that the sample is thought to represent, descriptive statistics is used to describe the population under study.

Although a noted weakness when using descriptive statistics is that it runs the risk of distorting original data or losing important information, it does provide a powerful summary and allows for large amounts of data to be presented in a meaningful way such as charts, graphs and tables. Field (2009) outlined the most common way of describing data, by looking at the distribution or estimates of central tendency of which there are three – mean, median and mode. How values are spread around the central tendency refers to their dispersion. The two most common measures of dispersion used involved the range (highest value minus the lowest value) and the standard deviation, which is the measure of how well the mean represents the data. It is also felt to be a more accurate estimate of dispersion.

The data from 47 questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics. This involved the use of Qualtrics, a computer based survey tool. As explained the survey was distributed using paper versions. However, for the purposes of analysis the Qualtrics database was used to enter all of the responses from the questionnaires

supported in the analysis using descriptive statistics, tables and charts that are presented in chapter four. The full database can be found in Appendix 15.

The open-ended questions responses were combined and analysed as part of the qualitative data gathered alongside the semi-structured interviews.

3.7.3 Qualitative data analysis

As discussed previously Braun and Clarke’s Thematic Analysis was chosen as the method of analysis. In their overview of what is involved in the process of analysis and deciding what counts as a theme, Braun and Clarke (2013) explained that there are five decisions that the researcher needs to consider and he or she always need to ensure that they are stated explicitly. The emphasis is that there needs to be ongoing reflexive dialogue by the researcher throughout the process of analysis in Table 6.

Table 6

Process to Decide Themes

Decision	Decision making process
“Prevalence” or “Keyness”	The prevalence of a theme relates to how often it was present in the data. Given that it is qualitative analysis there is no set amount that suggests prevalence. It is therefore the researcher who determines the theme. Keyness of the theme put simply is whether it captures something important in relation to the research question.
“Rich description” or “Detailed account of one particular aspect”	In the case of this study, the participant’s views about play and learning are not known and therefore a rich description of all of the data was needed.

Table 6

Process to Decide Themes (continued)

Decision	Decision making process
“Inductive” or “Theoretical” analysis	An inductive approach underlined the analysis; the data was primarily used to identify themes about play and its relation to learning. Throughout the process of coding the researcher did not refer to the research questions so as not to influence the analytical process or adhere to a pre-existing framework.
“Semantic” (explicit) level Or “Latent” (interpretive) level	In identifying themes, the researcher made use of the semantic level, which involved mirroring participants’ language; what they have said and concepts they use.
Epistemology: “Realist” or Constructionist”	The data was analysed within a realist approach. Potter & Wetherell (1987); Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) suggest language reflects and enables us to articulate meaning and experience. The researcher used the participants’ words to determine their motivations and understanding.

Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006) article

3.7.3.1 Phases of data analysis

Prior to producing the final report Braun and Clarke identified the 6 phases involved in analysis:

Table 7

Six Phases of Data Analysis

Phase	Focus	Meaning	This study
1	Familiarising oneself with the data	In the initial phases of thinking about the data and what it means, involved the researcher reading actively, analytically and critically. It is casual and should be observational.	For this study the researcher read and reread each transcript and noted initial comments including anything that was felt to be unusual or stood out, “catchy” phrases, particular terms or as described by Braun and Clarke, “items of potential interest” (2013, p. 202) along with any assumptions that were made.

Table 7

Six Phases of Data Analysis (continued)

Phase	Focus	Meaning	This study
2	Generating initial codes	The next step in the analysis was to identify anything and everything of interest or relevant to the research questions. Braun & Clarke term this as 'complete' coding as opposed to 'selective' coding where the researcher is only interested in certain data type that relates to the research questions.	Using complete coding the researcher looked for instances where particular words and phrases were frequently repeated across the data set. Highlighters and post-it notes were used. A different colour post-it was assigned to each participant.
3	Searching for initial themes	During this phase of the analysis the researcher is actively engaged in examining the codes in order to identify themes. In line with Braun and Clarke summary, it is not the frequency within each data set but whether it is meaningful in answering the research question.	The researcher in looking to refine the data looked for examples where there was overlap or similarity between codes and collated them. The post-it notes were arranged into various groupings and then revised and refined. In an attempt to replicate what Braun and Clarke suggested as a key factor in qualitative research, the researcher looked for the best 'fit' of analysis to answer the research question.
4	Reviewing themes	Braun and Clarke proposed that being able to let go of coded material that did not fit into the overall analysis is an important part of qualitative research.	The researcher reviewed the themes to check whether they were valid and that they made sense. The codes previously identified that were in the 'not sure yet group' were reviewed to see whether they could be included. They were also shared with a colleague who looked at the codes generated in relation to the themes to check for overlap and whether anything looked misplaced or did not make sense.

Table 7

Six Phases of Data Analysis (continued)

Phase	Focus	Meaning	This study
5	Defining and naming the themes	Braun and Clarke suggest that what you call a theme is important as it can signal both the content of and analytic 'take' on the data.	In defining themes, the researcher was able to say what was unique about each one leading to theme definitions and description. This resulted in each theme providing a clear picture of the patterns from the data that answer the research questions.
6	Producing the report	The final phase involves the analysis and what Braun and Clarke refer to as "telling the story" of the data.	The researcher used the worked-out themes to tell the story with the inclusion of data extracts. This formed the basis of the written report and used to make an argument in relation to the research questions.

The data from the interviews following transcription were analysed using thematic analysis as outlined in Table 7.

Phase 1 – Familiarisation with the data

Having read and reread the transcripts the researcher annotated each transcribed interview and made an initial list of ideas – looking for “catchy” phrases (Appendix 16).

Phase 2 – Generating initial codes

The researcher looked for instances where particular words or phrases were frequently repeated and listed them. Each was recorded on to post it notes. An example is provided in Table 8.

Table 8

Generating Initial Codes

Words and phrases	Initial codes
Finding out, Having fun, A natural thing	A natural thing
Differences in child rearing, Society Socialisation, Learning rules Individual differences, Gender differences	Socialisation & Culture Differences
Readiness for school A good start – critical period	Readiness, Basic skills
Delivery of curriculum, “Formal normal methods” “Not too much, not too little” Organisation of curriculum Adult’s role	Play is learning Delivery & organisation
Having choices “Freedom of expression” Following interests, Child initiated Play is learning, Areas of learning	Having choices
Differences then & now, Technology “Give them what I didn’t have” “Times have changed”	
Confidence “Building character” Independence	Parents’ views

Phase 3 – Searching for initial themes

The next step involved the researcher collating the extracts and thinking about patterns and possible groupings. See example in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Searching for initial themes

Phase 4 – Reviewing themes

Rework previously identified themes into groups, check for overlap and whether the themes made sense and were valid with the data as a whole. As a result, a thematic map began to emerge in terms of themes and subthemes. See Figure 6.

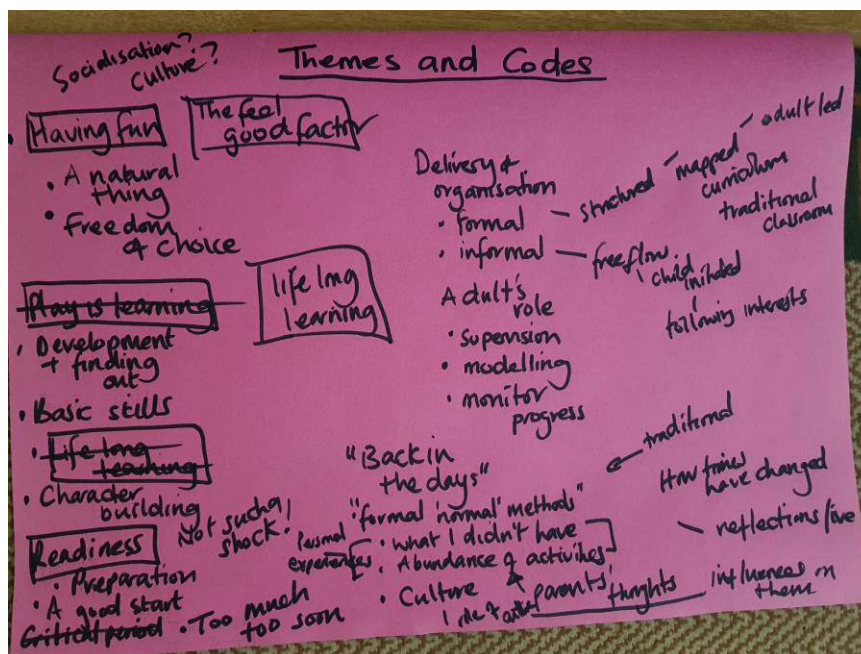


Figure 6. Reviewing initial themes

Phase 5 – Defining and naming themes

This involved the researcher thinking about the definition of themes and suitable names for themes and subthemes. In line with the decisions taken the thematic map was altered and refined.

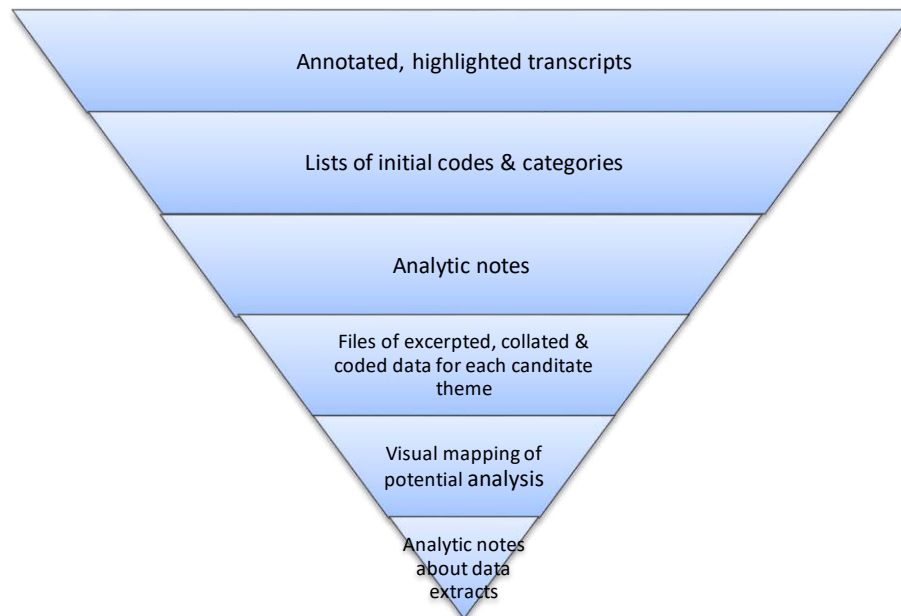


Figure 7. Process of Coding and Analysis

Phase 6 – Producing the report

The researcher used the data from the thematic map to explain the data embedded within an analytic narrative. It was used to discuss and highlight key factors linked to the research question and form the basis of the final report.

3.8 Validity, Reliability & Reflexivity

3.8.1 Validity

Cohen et al. (2007) argued that there are many of forms of validity and suggested that validity is a requirement for both quantitative and qualitative research. In quantitative

research validity is achieved through careful sampling, use of appropriate instruments and statistical treatment of the data. There is recognition that qualitative methods, with its basis in subjective and cultural perspectives make it difficult to establish objective appraisal of some external reality. This results in difficulty when qualitative studies are evaluated using quantitative concepts such as validity.

Maxwell (1992) advised that qualitative researchers needed to be cautious and not attempt to work within the framework of the positivists in arguing for studies to demonstrate different kinds of validity. Maxwell goes on to argue that 'understanding' is a more suitable term than validity in qualitative research. Validity should be viewed as a matter of degree rather than as an absolute state (Gronlund, 1981).

Cohen et al. (2007) state that it is possible to address validity in qualitative research through the richness and scope of the data collected, the extent of triangulation and the objectivity of the researcher. This is reflected in the work completed by Yardley initially in 2000 who identified a set of principles that the qualitative researcher could use to ensure validity was achieved.

Yardley (2000) proposed that when carrying out qualitative analysis it is essential for researchers to agree on key objectives, assumptions and a unitary method. Yardley considers the question of appropriate criteria for assessing the validity of qualitative analysis. Yardley (2000, 2008) identified four essential qualities of good research, which are considered to be theoretically neutral validity principles. A fifth, where the

researcher considered the qualities and applied them to the current study. See Table 9.

Table 9
Qualities of Good Research

Qualities	Principles
Sensitivity to context of existing research	The researcher conducted a review of the literature in order to determine what was already known about the subject area. Given the researcher's own background, practice and experience in the field also meant that she was aware of the context of the work and ensured that the research was embedded within this. This helped to identify and locate whether there was a potential gap in the literature.
Sensitivity to participants' perspectives and sociocultural perspectives	The inclusion of open-ended questions in the questionnaire served to not limit the answers provided or pre determine the answers. The semi-structured interview was open-ended and allowed the participants to answer based on their own experiences as parents and reflections back to their childhood.
Commitment and rigour	Commitment was demonstrated by the researcher having an interest in the area of research through longer-term involvement as an EP working with early years settings. Also, through care taken to consult research text for methodology and adherence to guidelines. Rigour is shown in the amount of data collected, number of participants involved and inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative data. The researcher worked towards data analysis that is thorough and methodologically sound and attention to reliability.

Table 9

Qualities of Good Research (continued)

Qualities	Principles
Transparency & coherence	<p>Was demonstrated by the researcher through the description and interpretation of the data. Data extracts are provided to support assumptions and interpretations made. In addition, care was taken to ensure that there was a good fit between the research questions, the theoretical framework and methods used to collect and analyse the data.</p> <p>A clear account of the data collection and analysis was provided.</p> <p>The researcher considers reflexivity by providing an account of their role in shaping the research.</p>
Impact & importance	<p>The current study provides this particular group of participants opportunities for their views to be heard, considered and perhaps contribute to any changes made in thinking about curriculum delivery in relation to play and learning in the early years.</p> <p>The researcher will need to consider the best way to present the findings to target audiences, those with a responsibility for planning and coordinating preschool education as well as to parents.</p>
Dissemination	<p>It is an ethical obligation of researchers to distribute research findings. The researcher will determine the target audience and an appropriate form of communication that could include the following: a presentation to the EPS and colleagues based in education, a brief summary of the findings for the managers of the participating settings and early years practitioners. Finally devising a poster presentation for parents and general public.</p>

3.8.2 Reliability

Reliability in research has been defined by Cohen et al. (2007) as consistency and replicability over time, across instruments and with a different group of participants. It is the extent to which results generated could be generated again at another time by different researchers with different groups (Yardley, 2008). Within the positivist paradigm the assumptions that underlie reliability are that measurement tools used, data collected and results should be controlled for and predictable.

Again, many researchers including Yardley have claimed that the criteria for evaluating quantitative research cannot be applied to qualitative studies. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) have argued that the standards of reliability needed for quantitative research are deemed to be unworkable for qualitative research. Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2013) proposed that reliability is not an appropriate measure for judging qualitative work. For the authors the generation of measures to ensure reliability is a view they find problematic.

For this reason, the idea of reliability being construed as 'dependability' was put forward by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In the same way McLeod (2001) attempted to overcome the problems of reliability in qualitative research by suggesting that if reliability is considered in broader terms to include 'trustworthiness' defined as the soundness or 'dependability'. It includes member checking, debriefing by peers, triangulation and use of reflexive journals. It also comprises of looking at how data was collected and analysed, in so doing, then a form of reliability can be applied to qualitative work.

Hughes (1989) suggested that as a result of the interaction between participant and researcher it is inevitable that this will have an impact on the participant and ultimately the data and so reduce reliability. Lee (1993) and Scheurich (1995) agreed noting interviewer effects such as race, gender, status, age and social class as potential sources of bias.

In the current study reliability was promoted by using mixed methods research. The researcher conducted research that involved collecting and analysing both quantitative and qualitative methods. Thus triangulation ensured that the strength of both approaches was incorporated into the study. In addition, the researcher sought to ensure reliability by establishing credibility and quality of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) during regular supervision. This also involved member checking where together with the research supervisor, research materials including the questionnaire and semi-structured interview schedule were discussed and modified. In piloting them on a similar population as the research participants in order to consider accessibility, the clarity of instructions and length as appropriate for the sample being targeted, the researcher supported validity and reliability. In an attempt to avoid asking leading questions during the interview phase the researcher instead made use of probing questions. The researcher ensured that all the participants were in receipt of the same information during the data collection phase. Reliability was achieved by ensuring that the semi-structured interview schedule used was the same for each of the participants as suggested by Silverman (1993). A debrief letter was included in the questionnaire pack and all participants were debriefed after each interview. Throughout the

researcher set-aside time to reflect on her role and its impact in shaping the research process as a whole, alongside having regular supervision and keeping a research log supported reflexivity and reliability.

3.8.3 Reflexivity

As a researcher it is important to reflect on and consider the process of conducting the research and ultimately the role played by the researcher, as summarised in the following quote, “One cannot ignore the role of the person in the research process and this is equally true of the researcher as it is of the participant” (Darlaston-Jones, 2007, p. 25).

Braun and Clarke (2013) describe reflexivity as being essential in all qualitative research and refer to it as being part of ‘quality control’. An important aspect of research is being able to reflect on the researcher’s various positions and the ways these might have shaped the collection and analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In the course of being reflexive, many including (Yardley, 2000; MacNaughton, Rolfe, & Siraj-Blatchford 2001; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) have argued the need for transparency and describes reflexivity as an important aspect of transparency in the research process. This was achieved in the current study by the researcher keeping a research log, a sample of which has been included in Appendix 17, and being involved in regular supervision.

Willig (2013) described two types of reflexivity, epistemological and personal. Epistemological reflexivity involves the researcher asking questions that relate to

research design and the process of analysis. To think about which methods of enquiry best meet the objectives of the study (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). This is of utmost importance in the current research where a mixed methodology approach was used and the qualitative nature of the interviews. Darlaston-Jones (2007) describes personal reflexivity as an essential phase in research. It will be important to explain how the values held by the researcher might interact with the research process, to look at what motivates that interest as well as which methods of enquiry best meet the objectives of the study.

3.8.3.1 Epistemological reflexivity

Transcribing the interviews soon after recording also helped with reflexivity because during transcription I was able to review the types of follow up questions asked and the probes used during each interview. The information gathered could then be employed in the next set of interviews. See Appendix 18 for brief summary of reflections.

I reflected on the fact that being new to thematic analysis required careful thought, which meant there was a lot of consideration about the stages that were involved. This was achieved through ongoing reflection and problem solving. Confidence in the actions taken was gained by discussions with colleagues who were also using the same method of analysis in their own research; and continually referring to the text (Braun & Clarke, 2013) to ensure adherence to the methodology.

Darlaston-Jones (2007) stressed the importance of reflecting on the extent to which the researcher's personal views might affect the interpretation of the data. In using thematic analysis where the researcher creates their understanding and interpretation of the narratives it was important for the researcher to be reflexive. Analysing data is difficult in terms of deciding what is and is not relevant and therefore calls for an element of subjectivity on the part of the researcher. That being said, I tried to be impartial throughout the whole process.

3.8.3.2 Personal reflexivity

I have acknowledged having 'insider' status, in that my family also migrated from the Caribbean to the UK in the 1960s. Whilst the term Black Caribbean is more commonly used to describe the ethnicity of the group in the current study, I as a member of the group identify as African Caribbean and felt more comfortable with this term. In this regard, acknowledging that the majority of people in the Caribbean are descendants with African heritage as a result of slavery was important.

A motivator in conducting the research stemmed from my personal interest in the early years and my belief in the likelihood of having a positive start makes for a good foundation in learning and future outcomes. During a four year secondment I had the opportunity to take part in a research project that involved delivering a range of parenting programmes including Incredible Years – Webster-Stratton, SPOKES (Supporting Parents on Kids Education in Schools) and Strengthening Families 10 – 14 UK. Many of the parents, some of African Caribbean origin expressed surprise when we had discussions about play and its importance in early learning and the need to

make learning fun. This led to play and learning becoming an area that I wanted to look into much further and perhaps find out whether the views outlined above were exceptional for this particular ethnic group of parents.

Gallais (2008) described having 'insider' status when we share some group identity with our participants and 'outsider' status when we do not. In the case of this study, I am of similar ethnic origin and background to the participants taking part in the research. In having a reflexive approach to research, it is important that being a member of the group being researched was declared. One of the features involved in reflexivity described is being able to 'step outside your cultural membership, to become a cultural commentator' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 9). In order to achieve this, I identified my assumptions about play and learning in the preschool curriculum alongside any personal values and set them to one side. The process is known as 'bracketing' (Husserl, 1931; Gearing, 2004). For the purposes of carrying out the research all participants were informed that I am an educational psychologist.

In addition, my past experience as a teacher and current role as an educational psychologist could potentially impact on views held and conduct in the research. I have an interest in developing a specialism in early years and parent involvement. I am currently involved in a great deal of work in the early years where the focus specifically targets parents in the early years. An example is delivering EarlyBird groups to parents of children who have received a diagnosis of autism. During these sessions more often than not discussions about the Early Years curriculum and parental expectations are raised. As the weeks proceed parents feel comfortable talking about

the child who has an autism diagnosis and how it relates to their learning but they also talk about their other children and issues that they have with school. In some instances, this has provided some insight into parents' views about school and what they are thinking about the curriculum.

To counter any bias in the current study I kept a research log (see Appendix 17 and 18), had informal discussions with colleagues and was involved in regular supervision.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was granted for the study by Cardiff University, Ethics Committee in November 2016 approval number EC.16.09.13.4572. The research project began in November 2016 following receipt of ethical approval and finished in July 2017.

Table 10

Ethical Considerations

Consideration	Response
Do no harm	Participants were informed that by taking part in the study they would not be involved in any situation in which they might be harmed. However, it was possible that questioning the role of play might cause anxiety for some participants and that they would be offered the opportunity to talk with the researcher, or another member of staff after the interview if they wished.
Confidentiality & Anonymity	<u>Questionnaires</u> Participants were informed that any information given to the researcher would be treated in a confidential manner and would not be shared with anyone else. To ensure complete anonymity names were not requested on the questionnaires.

Table 10

Ethical Considerations (continued)

Consideration	Response
Confidentiality & Anonymity	<p>The system of sealed envelopes was used where each setting had a sealed box on site into which the participants were asked to post the questionnaire together with background/demographic information sheet. The researcher made certain that once the questionnaires were completed and received that they would be kept securely. Parents were instructed to return the accompanying expression of interest form for the interviews in a separate sealed envelope.</p> <p><u>Semi-structured Interviews</u></p> <p>Participants were randomly selected to take part in the interviews and informed that they would be recorded. The electronic audio-recordings from the interviews were stored confidentially, only accessible to the researcher and deleted after transcription.</p> <p><u>Use of pseudonyms</u></p> <p>At the start of the interviews, participants were notified of the protocol and guidance that would be followed regarding data collection and storage including anonymising and the use of pseudonyms in the transcription and write up of the Thesis. After the data had been transcribed, it was anonymised and the researcher deleted the original electronic recording. All other data will be kept by Cardiff University indefinitely, in an anonymous format.</p>
Informed consent	<p><u>Questionnaires</u></p> <p>Consent for participating in the questionnaire (Appendix 3) section of the study was sought and required a signature from the participants. Information about the purpose of the research and an outline of the type of questions likely to be asked and what they would have to do in order to take part was included. In addition, participants were advised that they could choose whether or not to participate and should they wish to withdraw from the study that they would not be penalised in any way for doing so.</p>

Table 10

Ethical Considerations (continued)

Consideration	Response
	<p>Participants were made aware that they were free to refrain from answering any questions when completing the questionnaire or omitting any data if they chose to do so. Detail about who would have access to the data once it was collected, participants rights for data to be deleted before being anonymised along with how it would be stored was also highlighted.</p> <p><u>Semi-structured Interviews</u></p> <p>Informed consent to participate in the semi-structured interviews was ensured by the researcher presenting and talking through the consent form for interview (Appendix 11) with the participants, checking their understanding and asking whether they still wanted to continue with their involvement in the study before being asked to sign. The researcher kept a signed copy of the consent form. Ethical guidelines are co-constructed (Rosenblaat, 1999) during the interview phase and as the interview progressed, participants were reminded that they were free to refrain from answering any questions during the interview should they choose to do so. They were also within their rights to withdraw from the research at any given point without adverse consequences or be asked to provide a reason. This was only possible up to the point of anonymising the data since after this it would not be possible to identify their data.</p> <p>Consent was sought prior to the interview starting and then consent was re-affirmed at a later stage. During the interviews the researcher used their judgment and checked out with the participants whether it was appropriate to talk further about the subject matter.</p>

Table 10

Ethical Considerations (continued)

Consideration	Response
Rapport & friendship	The researcher took care to ensure that the environment and atmosphere during interview was one that was friendly and trustworthy. Oppenheim (1992) pointed out that use of interactive opportunities serve to break down any barriers between the researcher and participants and help to maintain rapport. The researcher acted in a friendly though neutral way. The researcher was bound by the Code of Conduct to treat the participants taking part in the study with respect.
Intrusiveness	The conduct of the researcher was not to be excessively intrusive, where intrusiveness means intruding on participant's time, space and on their personal lives. None of the interviews lasted longer than an hour.
Debriefing	Included in the questionnaire pack was a Debrief Form (Appendix 12), which all participants who took part in the interview were given. Once the study is completed, all participants who have requested it will be sent an overview of the research findings.

3.10 Summary

To summarise, this chapter outlined the steps involved in conducting the current study. It was necessary to discuss the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions in order to determine the theoretical position and ultimately the design of the study. The researcher's worldview as a critical realist justified the use of mixed methods. In doing so, quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection were employed and a description of both was provided. The strengths and limitations for each were also highlighted. Furthermore, the recruitment and involvement of participants was explained. An explanation of the data analysis adopted, which

involved the use of descriptive statistics alongside thematic analysis was stated. In addition, the qualities that need to be considered when conducting research including aspects of reliability and validity were presented. In relation to the study, attention was given to issues of reflexivity and the role of the researcher. That being said, the chapter concluded with the importance of ethical considerations and participant welfare in line with the university guidelines and the British Psychological Society.

The following chapter will report the findings from the research. Given the collection of two types of data, for this reason data analysis is twofold. The quantitative data will be examined using descriptive statistics in the form of standard deviations, percentages and graphs. Whilst qualitative data analysis will involve working through the phases of thematic analysis and the generation of overarching themes together with related themes and subthemes. Notably, supporting quotations from the participants will be used to emphasise the themes and subthemes identified and in doing so their perceptions regarding play and learning in the curriculum.

Chapter 4

4.0 Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the findings from the current study, which aimed to explore parents' understanding and views about play and learning in the early years.

An analysis of the quantitative data collected from the questionnaires is presented using descriptive statistics in the form of tables and graphs. Qualitative data gathered is collated into a table, supplemented by the use of word clouds. The second part of the chapter moves to the thematic analysis of the qualitative data gathered from the transcribed semi-structured interviews. Overarching themes, themes and subthemes are shown in the form of thematic maps, each is then explained and supported using short quotes from the interviews.

4.2 Quantitative data results

The questionnaire as presented to participants is given in Appendix 3. The initial part of the analysis process was to examine the raw data collated from the questionnaires. In Table 11, the descriptive statistics that were specifically related to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the seven areas of learning are provided. The researcher attributed values to each statement where 1 = strongly disagree and 6 = strongly agree. So, the higher the mean the more the participants identified play as contributory to the area of learning.

Table 11

Participants' Overall Mean Ratings of the Seven Areas of Learning

Area of learning	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Communication & language			
Verbal & non-verbal	46	5.50	0.65
Acquire new vocabulary	48	5.31	0.77
Physical development			
Opportunity to release energy	48	5.44	0.67
Improve coordination & movement	48	5.58	0.57
Personal social emotional development			
The give & take of relationships	48	5.17	0.85
Express & cope with feelings	47	5.15	0.90
Literacy & numeracy			
Recognise letters & numbers	48	4.42	1.26
Taught to read & write systematically	46	4.87	1.08
Understanding of the world			
Learns best through exploration	48	4.94	0.92
Make sense of the world	48	5.02	1.03
Expressive art & design			
Develop imagination & creativity	48	5.48	0.58
Exploring with different materials	48	5.58	0.57

The ratings for the statements in the first section of the questionnaire (Communication & Language) were consistently close to the mean rating as was Expressive art & design, and as such the mean is an accurate representation of the data. Overall, play was seen as being most important for supporting a child's communication, language and physical development along with skills in expressive art and design but had much less of a role in promoting literacy, numeracy and understanding of the world. The latter (Literacy & Numeracy) were also the areas where there was the greatest spread of views.

There are seven areas of learning in the EYFS with two questionnaire statements specifically linked to each area (literacy and numeracy are combined). Their relevance in addressing specific research questions will be highlighted in the discussion. Data from the questionnaire are presented in the form of a graph, which shows the breakdown of responses given by participants in percentages in relation to the statements about the seven areas of learning. In addition, each graph is accompanied with a list of activities that children choose and participants' value (question 20) and activities that participants feel children gain most from doing (question 21) for an area of learning, presented in table format.

The graph below shows the breakdown of responses in relation to questions one and two where respondents were asked to rate their views about the role of language in learning through play.

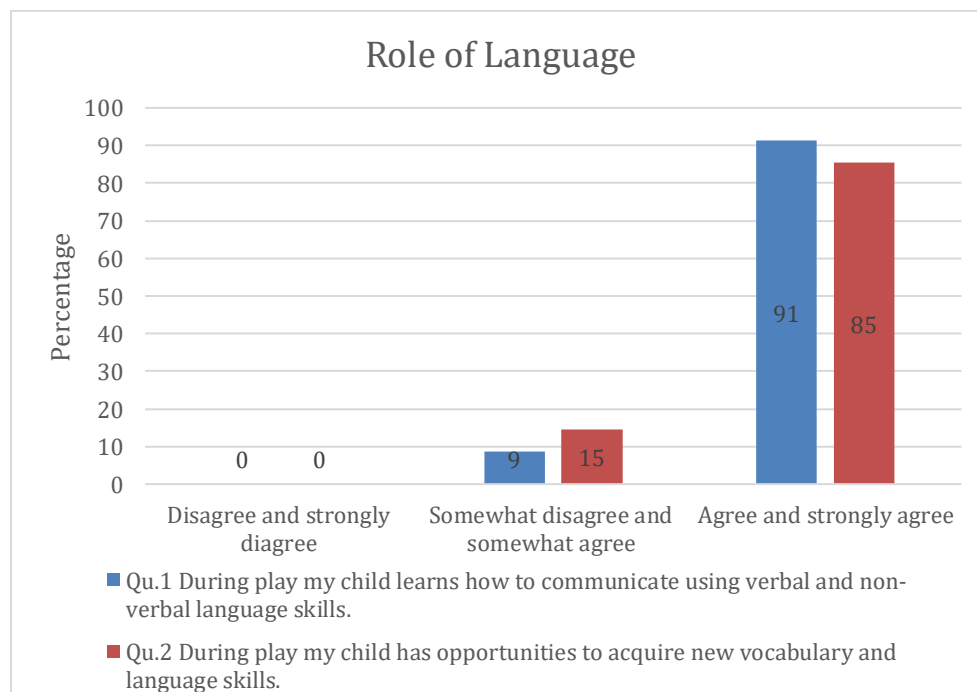


Figure 8. Participants' views of the role of language in learning through play

Figure 8 emphasises how much parents feel play is critical to language development with 91% ($n=42$) feeling it helps with both verbal and non-verbal skill development. This was also an area where there were no outliers. Table 12 shows the language-based activities children choose and participants value along with activities they think children gained most from doing.

Table 12

Activities that Involve Aspects of Communication and Language

Activities children choose and parents value	Activities parents feel children gained most from doing
Story time	Looking through picture books
Circle time	Having discussions
	Learning the days of the week.

Figure 9 shows participants' responses to questions three and four that asked to rate their views about the role of physical skills in learning through play. When looking at the value of being physically active and how it helps to improve coordination and movement skills, participants' ratings demonstrated an understanding of its role in supporting children's development.

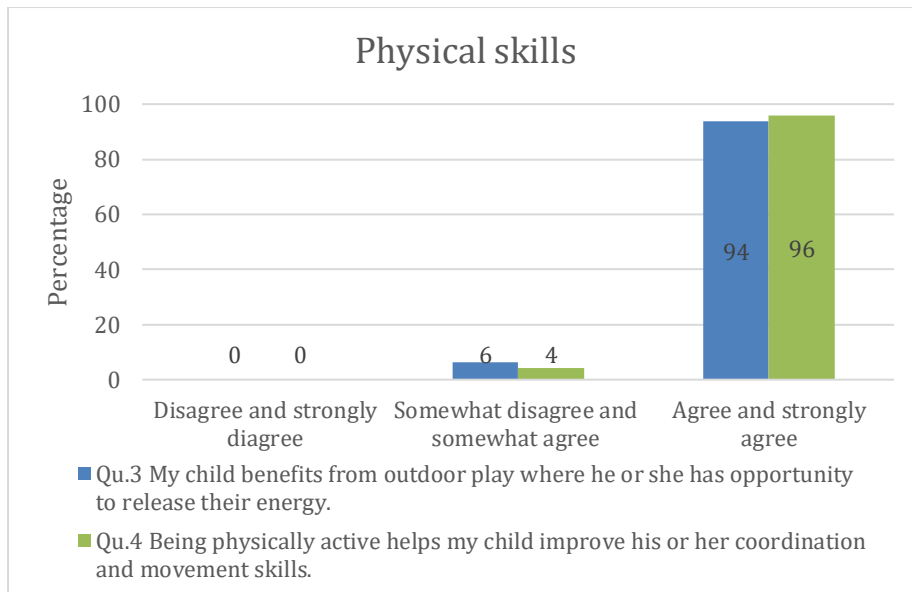


Figure 9. Participants' views of the role of physical development in learning through play

The play activities that participants valued and felt children gained most from doing are presented in Table 13.

Table 13

Activities that Involve Aspects of Physical Development

Activities children choose and parents value	Activities parents feel children gained most from doing
Construction	Lacing
Jigsaw puzzles	Dressing up/dressing themselves
Outdoor play	

Data from questions five and six looks at participants' ratings of the role that play has in social and emotional development. However, there was much less agreement about the value of play for personal social emotional development (Figure 10) with an outlier of 1 participant ($n=1$), who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements. This

is in contrast to the equal numbers of participants 81% ($n=38$), who agreed or strongly agreed to both the statements in question 5 and 6.

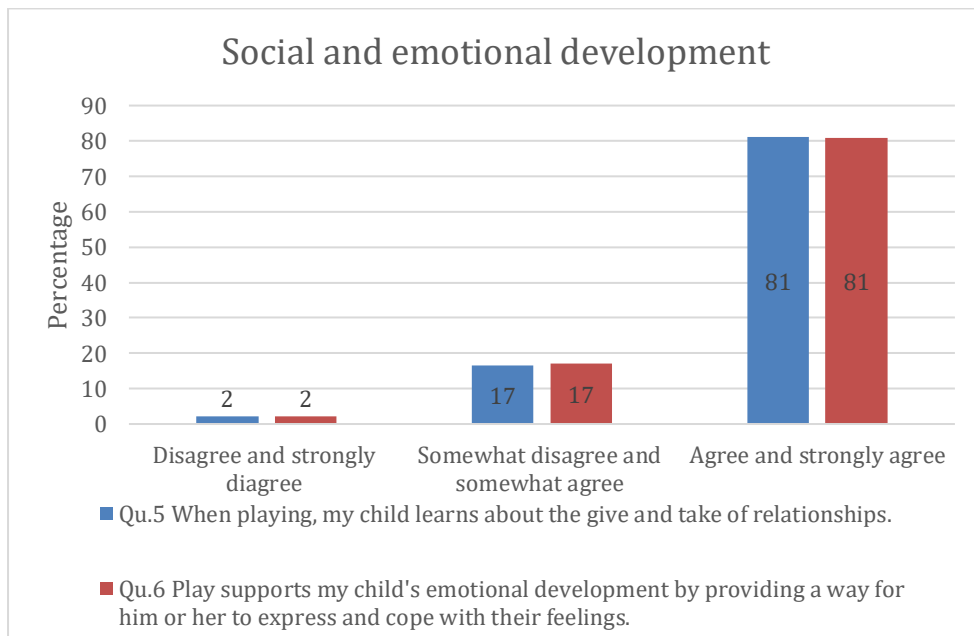


Figure 10. Participants' views of the role of social and emotional development in learning through play

The activities listed in (Table 14) highlight what children choose and parents value and stated that their children gained most from doing.

Table 14

Activities that Involve Aspects of Social and Emotional Development

Activities children choose and parents value	Activities parents feel children gained most from doing
Sitting together	Encouraging social skills e.g. turn taking
Having lunch	
Playing with children of different ages	

Further exploration of the above data relating to play activities that participants highlighted as involving aspects of personal emotional social development (PESD) were identified, all of which they felt helped their child prepare for school (Table 14), including being able to work and play in a large group and socialising with staff and children.

Questions 7 and 8 had a combined focus on early literacy and numeracy skills. Participants were asked to rate their views about literacy and numeracy based activities (Figure 11). There was an equal number of participants, 46%, who somewhat disagreed and somewhat agreed or agreed and strongly agreed with the statement ‘Learning to recognise letters and numbers is an important activity for my child to be involved in and best done in a classroom setting’. The majority of participants 72% (n=33) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘My child learns more when being taught to read and count in a structured and systematic way’.

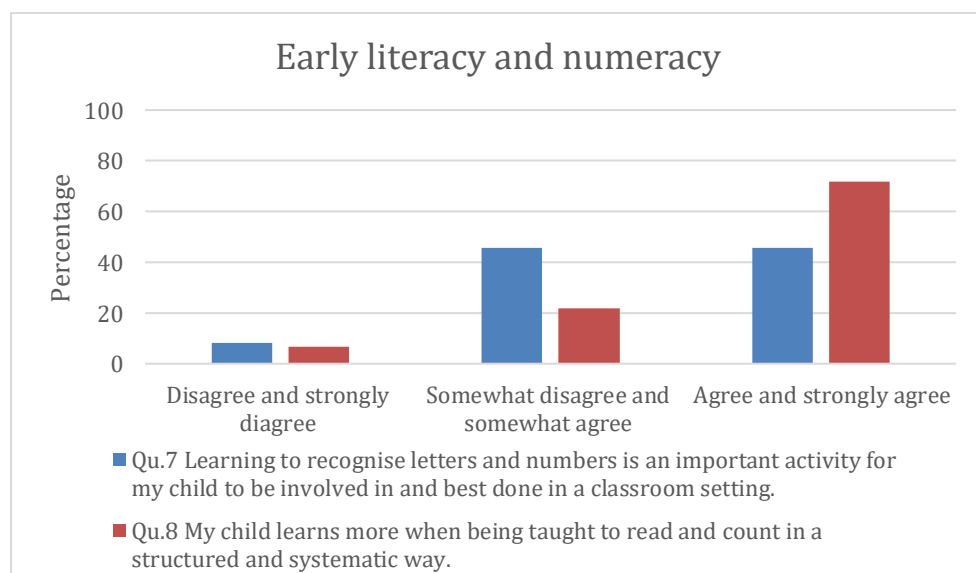


Figure 11. Participant’s views of the role of early literacy and numeracy skills in learning

The participants listed various literacy and numeracy based activities that their children like to choose and that parents valued and felt that their child gained most from doing (Table 15).

Table 15

Activities that involve aspects of Literacy and Numeracy

Activities children choose and parents value	Activities parents feel children gained most from doing
Singing 'ABC' song	Tracing
Story time – reading	Learning letter sounds
Number games	Learning numbers
Jigsaw puzzles	Putting blocks in order

Those activities participants listed as helping their child get ready for school included: trying to write; learning to spell; writing their name; recognition of letters and numbers (Table 24).

Questions 9 and 10 asked respondents to rate their views about the role of play in exploring and making sense of the world (Figure 12). With regard to this 2% ($n=1$) strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement, 'Play is a time when my child can make sense of the world'. This was in contrast with 75% ($n=36$) who gave it a high rating and therefore felt that it was an important factor. In the same way, there was strong agreement amongst participants with the statement that their 'child learns best through free exploration and play in their environment' and no

participants giving it a low rating.



Figure 12. Participants’ views of the role of understanding the world in learning through play

There were a number of activities which children like to choose and that parents valued and felt that their children gained most from doing which are presented in Table 16.

Table 16

Activities that Involve Aspects of Understanding the World

Activities children like to choose and parents value	Activities parents feel children gained most from doing
Off site visits in the community	Circle time
An ‘interest’ table	Tidying up
Outdoor activities	

Furthermore, participants listed learning nursery routines, listening, looking, concentrating, awareness of their surroundings and the development of problem solving skills as those that were beneficial in helping children to be prepared for school (Table 24).

Questions 11 and 12 explored attitudes to expressive arts and design. Equal numbers of participants 96% ($n=46$) strongly agreed/agreed with both statements. Interestingly, none of the participants gave this a low rating thus, highlighting a strong consensus in views about the importance of expression and creativity as displayed in Figure 13.

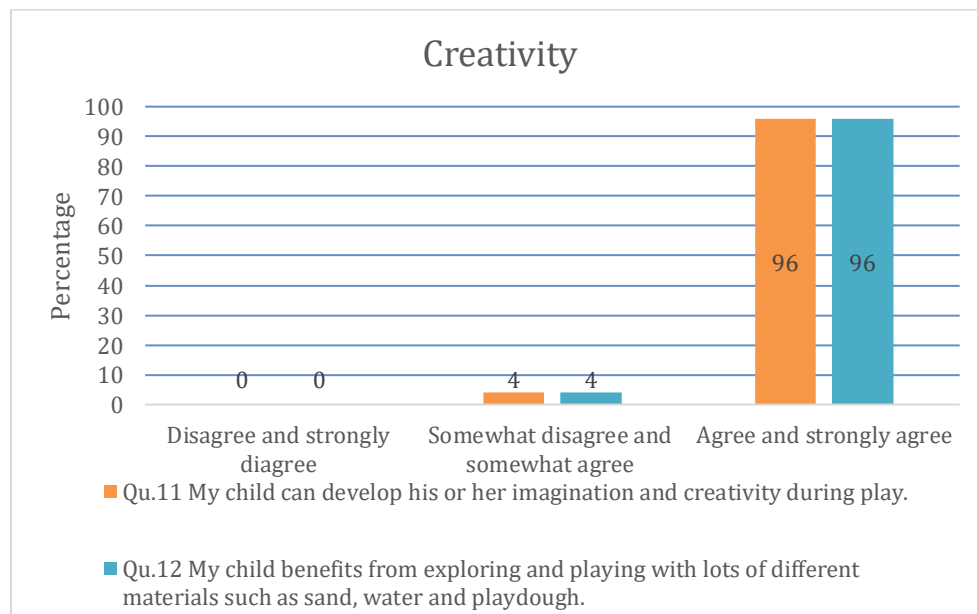


Figure 13. Participants' views of the role of creativity and expression in learning through play

Participants listed a number of activities (Table 17) that children like to choose and parents valued involving aspects of creativity and expression along with related activities that they felt their child gained most from doing.

Table 17

Activities that Involve Aspects of Creativity and Expression

Activities children like to choose and parents value	Activities parents feel children gained most from doing
Playing drums	Colour mixing
Singing	Singing
Dressing up	Drawing

Participants listed 'playing dress up', singing and recognising colours as activities that helped their child prepare for school (Table 24).

Outcomes for statements 13, 14, 15 and 16 are presented in Table 18. On analysis it was possible to establish how this group of participants viewed certain aspects pertaining to play and its role in the curriculum.

Table 18

Participants' Attitudes to Play and the Role it has in Children's Learning

Statement	N	M	SD	% strongly agree/agree
<i>Have fun at pre-school</i>	48	5.48	0.74	85.00
<i>Should be spontaneous, imaginative</i>	47	4.81	0.87	60.00
<i>Play should not be part of the curriculum</i>	47	2.06	1.17	6.00
<i>There are other ways of learning</i>	47	4.79	0.92	70.00

The graph (Figure 14) shows the responses participants gave to question 13. The majority of the participants 85% ($n=41$) agreed or strongly agreed with the

statement, 'It is important for my child to have fun at pre-school'.

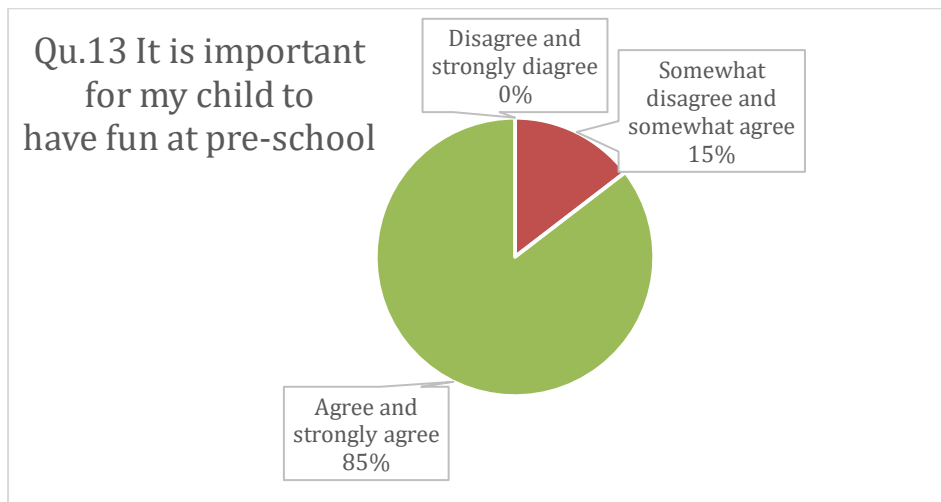


Figure 14. Participants' views of the importance of fun in learning

The responses given to question 14 indicate that no respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, 'Play should be spontaneous, imaginative and directed by children' and 60% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (Figure 15).

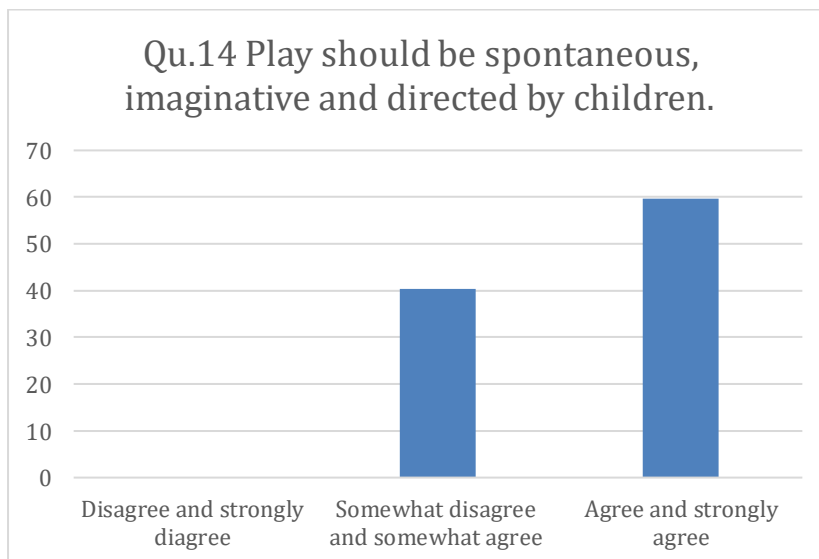


Figure 15. Participants' views of play that is spontaneous, imaginative and child-directed

Data from questions 15 and 16 asked respondents to rate their views about the role of play in the curriculum (Figure 16). There was a strong consensus of the importance of play for learning. 72% ($n=34$) of participants felt that it should be part of the curriculum.

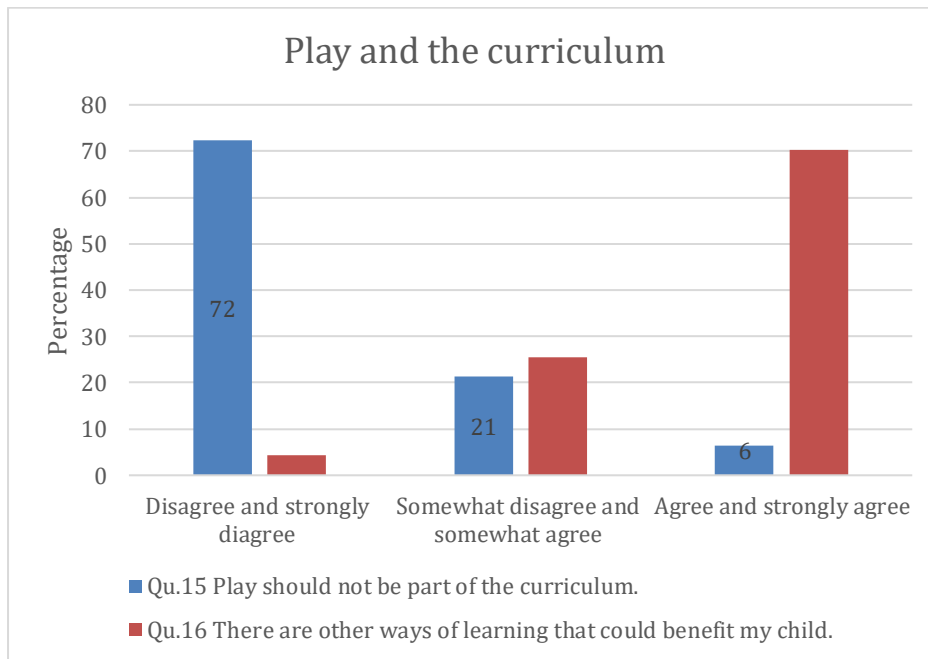


Figure 16. Participants' views of the role of play in the curriculum

Although, 70% ($n=33$) felt that there were other ways of learning that could benefit their child. In considering an alternative to play participants mentioned going off site and visiting particular venues. Table 19 lists the activities that the participants who were interviewed felt their children benefitted from but because of the nature of the activity inevitably had implications for adults.

Table 19

Participants' Views About Other Ways of Learning that Benefit Children

Non play-based activities	Implication for adults
Going to the museum e.g. Transport	Find out where the child's strengths were
Visits to the theatre	Getting the right balance between teaching and playing
Nature walks	Adults talking to the child to help them understand what they see or hear
Travel, going on a bus or train journey	Setting rules to follow
Being with family and friends	
Being set homework	

Whilst the role of the adult is highlighted in Table 19, questions 17 and 19 focused specifically on the amount of structure and direction that adults should provide as presented in (Table 20).

Table 20

Participants' Overall Mean Ratings About the Approach to the Pre-school Curriculum

Statement	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	% strongly agree/agree
It is best when adults set up structured learning activities	48	4.40	1.27	50.00
Children should be free to choose any activity of their choice	48	3.65	1.36	21.00

The responses to question 17 are presented in Figure 17. Overall, there appeared to be some disagreement as indicated in the high standard deviations about whether or not adults have a role to play in structuring children's learning activities with 50% ($n=$

24) of participants agreed / strongly agreed whilst 42% ($n=20$) somewhat agreed / disagreed.

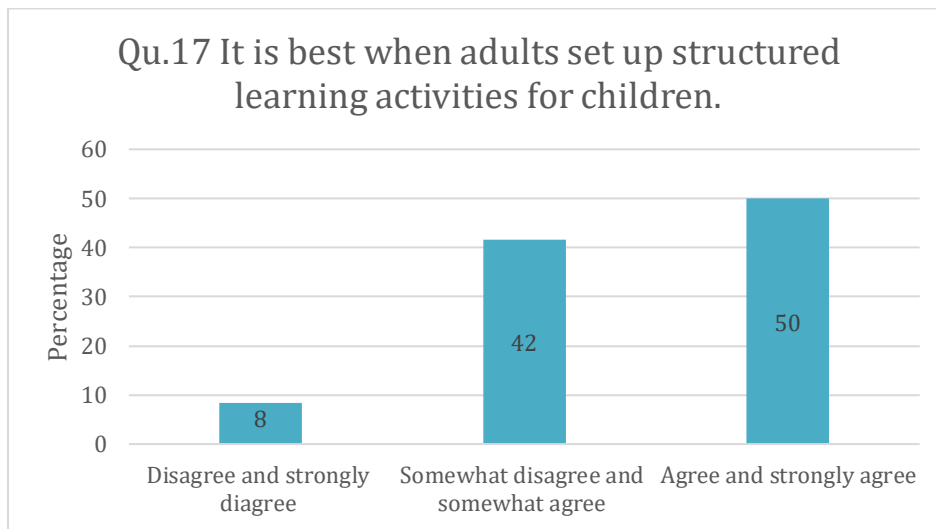


Figure 17. Participants' views on the role of structured activities in learning

Similarly, when asked if 'Children should be free to choose any activity of their choice', there was a spread across the scale as highlighted in Figure 18.

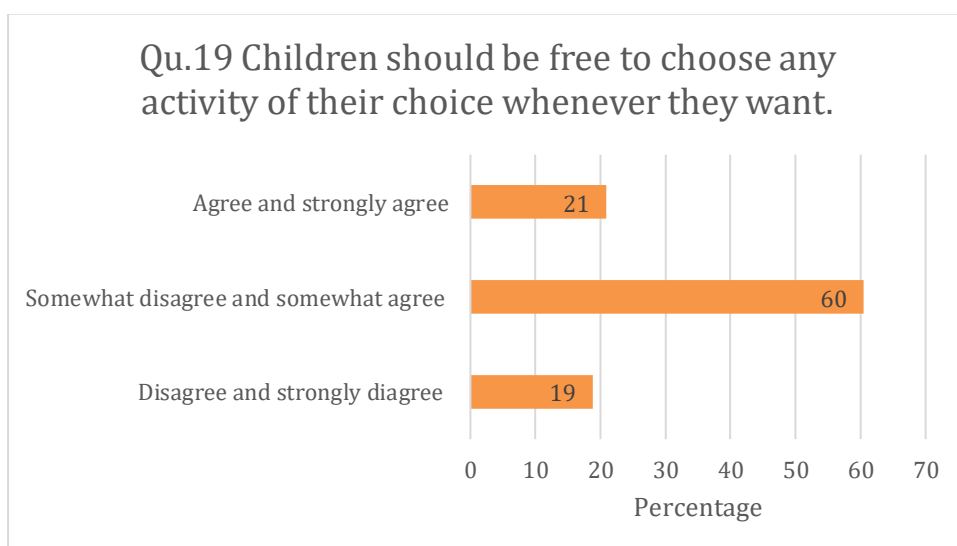


Figure 18. Participants' views on whether children should be free to choose any activity

The graph (Figure 19) highlighted the strong agreement with the statement 'Playing at preschool helps my child get ready for school' 72% ($n=33$) agreed or strongly agreed with only 4% ($n=2$) of participants strongly disagreeing/ disagreeing.

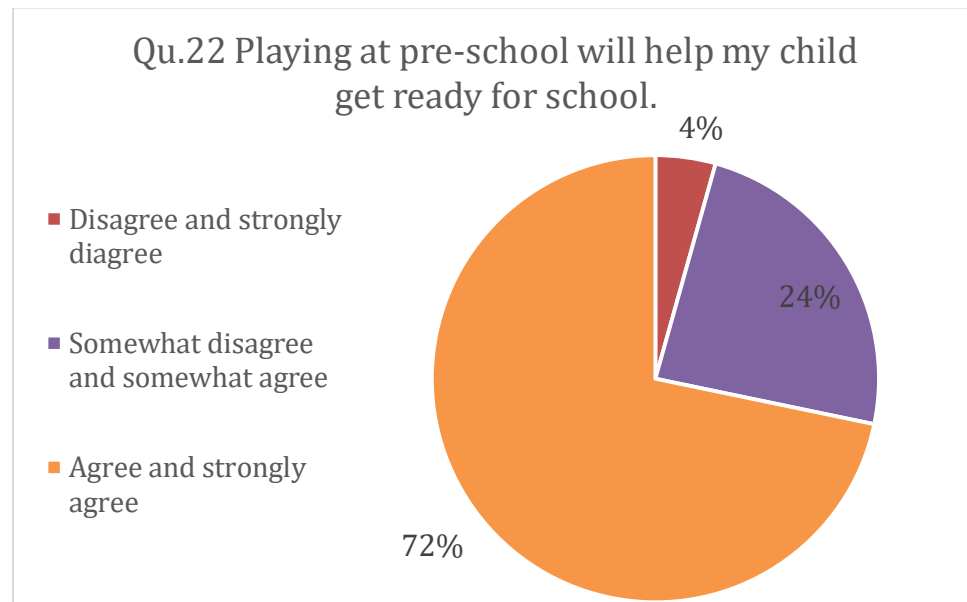


Figure 19. Participants' understanding of the role of play at preschool in preparing for school

4.3 Qualitative data results from questionnaires

Finally, the questionnaire included open-ended questions, question 20 asked participants to identify activities that their child liked to choose and that they as parents valued. The responses given are listed in Table 21 and 22 in relation to the EYFS seven areas of learning.

Table 21

Activities Parents Felt Children Would Choose

Areas of learning and development	Activities
PESD	Sand play, water play
Physical development	Construction, blocks, Lego, Duplo Bicycles, scooters Dolls & pushchairs Mark making, Puzzles, Dancing
Communication & Language	Home corner Singing
Literacy	Looking at picture books, Mark making
Mathematics	Counting, number games
Understanding the world	Role-play Dressing up Cooking
Expressive art	Painting, drawing, messy play, cutting

Table 22

Activities Parents Valued

Areas of learning and development	Activities
Personal Emotional Social Development	Interacting with peers using sand and water play Role-play
Physical development	Outdoor activities, jigsaw puzzles, construction
Communication & Language	One-to-one with an adult during story and circle time
Literacy	Reading and writing, mark making, singing alphabet songs, nursery rhymes
Mathematics	Singing number songs, counting
Understanding the world	Off site visits inb the community, interest table, nature play, gardening Exploring and using their initiative
Expressive art & design	Dancing, singing, playing with musical instruments

There were no activities recorded by the respondents that were felt to specifically help to manage feelings however, personal social and emotional development, could be encouraged through activities that their children liked to choose such as sand and water play.

The word cloud (Figure 20) highlights the activities that were most frequently referenced by the participants in response to question 20. Construction, dancing and singing were activities valued by the respondents in particular and therefore considered to be of greater importance.

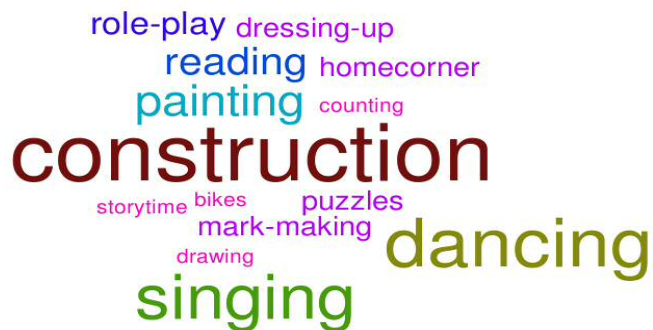


Figure 20. Activities that participants valued as most important

The participants generated the following list of activities in question 21, which they felt their child gained most from doing at preschool (Table 23). The seven areas of learning were used as a framework to collate the responses from the open-ended question.

Table 23

Activities that Participants felt their Children Gained Most from Doing

Areas of learning and development	Activities
Personal Social and Emotional Development (PESD)	Playing with children of different ages Sitting together and eating lunch Socialising Playing with other children Tidying up
Physical Development	Building blocks Lacing
Communication and Language	Picture books and discussion Learning the days of the week French classes Learning the colours
Literacy	Drawing Learning letter sounds Tracing letters Reading Writing Learning the alphabet
Mathematics	Knowing numbers Learning numbers Blocks – putting things in order Sand play
Understanding the World	Circle time Tidying up Carpet time
Expressive Arts & Design	Painting Colour mixing Making stuff – art and craft Singing Drawing Dance class Role play Home corner play

Participants felt that their child gained most from being involved in activities such as playing with other children, role play, singing and dancing. Literacy based activities such as learning letter sounds and tracing letters were also listed in Table 23. The range of activities were included in a word cloud, see Figure 21.



Figure 21. Activities children gained most from doing

The following showed the activities identified as helping children prepare for formal schooling, framed on the seven areas of learning Table 24.

Table 24

Participants’ Views of the Ways in which Play Helps Children Prepare for School

Areas of learning and development	Aspects	Activities
Personal Social and Emotional Development (PESD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making relationships 	Mixing with other children Work with others Learn how to interact with others Learn how to share

Table 24

Participants' Views of the Ways in which Play Helps Children Prepare for School (continued)

Areas of learning and development	Aspects	Activities
Personal Social and Emotional Development (PESD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making relationships • Self-confidence and self awareness • Managing feelings and behaviour 	<p>To be able to work and play in a large group Have better social skills Social skills e.g. turn taking Interaction with peers Getting along with others Allows him to strengthen relationship with peers Socialising with staff and children To settle and be independent Become aware of different personalities and attitudes Confidence Self-esteem Be kind to others</p>
Physical Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving and handling • Health and self-care 	<p>Physical exercise Playing with bikes Helps to relieve stress, tension – expel energy etc. Explore and learn how to dress themselves</p>
Communication and Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening and attention • Understanding • Speaking 	<p>Understand questions and reply logically and correctly Understanding</p>
Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Writing 	<p>Trying to write Learning to spell and write his name Recognise letters</p>
Mathematics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers • Shape, space and measure 	<p>Recognise numbers</p>
Understanding the World	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People and communities • The world • Technology 	<p>Helps my child to listen, look, concentrate and to become aware of their surroundings/environment and people Prepare children to engage with their environment (world around them) Learn nursery routine Aids children in problem solving Teaches him Problem solving through play Gain knowledge</p>

Table 24

Participants' Views of the Ways in which Play Helps Children Prepare for School (continued)

Areas of learning and development	Aspects	Activities
Expressive Arts & Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring and using media and materials • Being imaginative 	<p>To copy and learn in different environments Helps with thinking Understand questions and reply logically and correctly Understanding Organisation and problem solving Can bring out her creativity Make him creative Builds the imagination Promotes creative thinking Singing activities Recognise colours Expression Playing dress up</p>

All of the participants who completed the questionnaire made a comment about social skills including turn taking and learning to share. They viewed them as being key skills learnt through play that they felt would help their child get ready for school. In addition to building their confidence, self-esteem, being settled and becoming independent during play activities were also highlighted.

Question 24 in the survey sought to find out what the respondents thought were the aims of pre-school in an attempt to determine which participants felt to be the most important. The sum of rank was obtained for each aim by assigning a rank of 5 for 'very important' to a rank of 1 for 'least important'. These were multiplied by the number of times it was chosen and then added together, subsequently the higher the total the better the rank. The ratings (Figure 22) suggest that these were of almost

equal importance, however, 'Teaches enjoyment of learning' for this particular group of parents was considered to be of most importance.

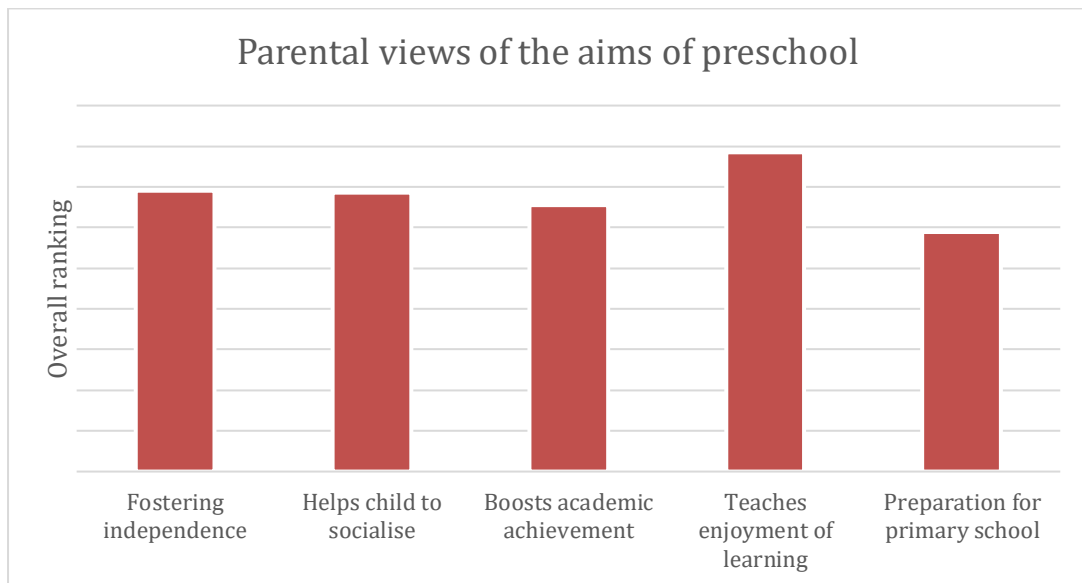


Figure 22. Aims of pre-school

The data thus far suggests that participants have a positive view of play in the early years. Overall, parents saw the value of activities that were play-based particularly if they felt it promoted skills in preparation for EYE. A high percentage felt that it was important for their child to have fun in EYE and that play should be part of the curriculum. Parents felt strongly about the activities, which supported creativity and expression. The majority of parents felt that play was critical to the development of both verbal and non-verbal skills. Similarly, parents felt strongly about the importance of play in the development of physical skills. Parents also understood how their children could be supported in the area of social skills development and emotional regulation via a range of play-based activities. However, there was less agreement

about the role of play in the development of early literacy and numeracy skills and parents were uncertain about how these could be supported through play.

4.4 Qualitative data from interviews

An analysis of the parents' perceptions of play and learning is presented, based on themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. To ensure that any interpretation of the data is directly linked to what has been said, the researcher used excerpts in the form of quotes. An inductive approach to analysis was used.

4.4.1 Overview of overarching themes

Two overarching themes emerged from views offered by parents: the 'Value of play for children' and 'Adults and play'. From these, six themes have been extracted with related subthemes. The themes were derived from across the data sets and reflect the views of the participants. The details of each theme and subtheme are reported and supported by excerpts that are those of the words of the participants. In order to capture the authenticity and voice of the participants the researcher made no attempt to alter the grammar or language used. Please refer to Appendix 19 for fuller and detailed examples of the relevant quotations from the participants alongside overarching themes, themes and subthemes.

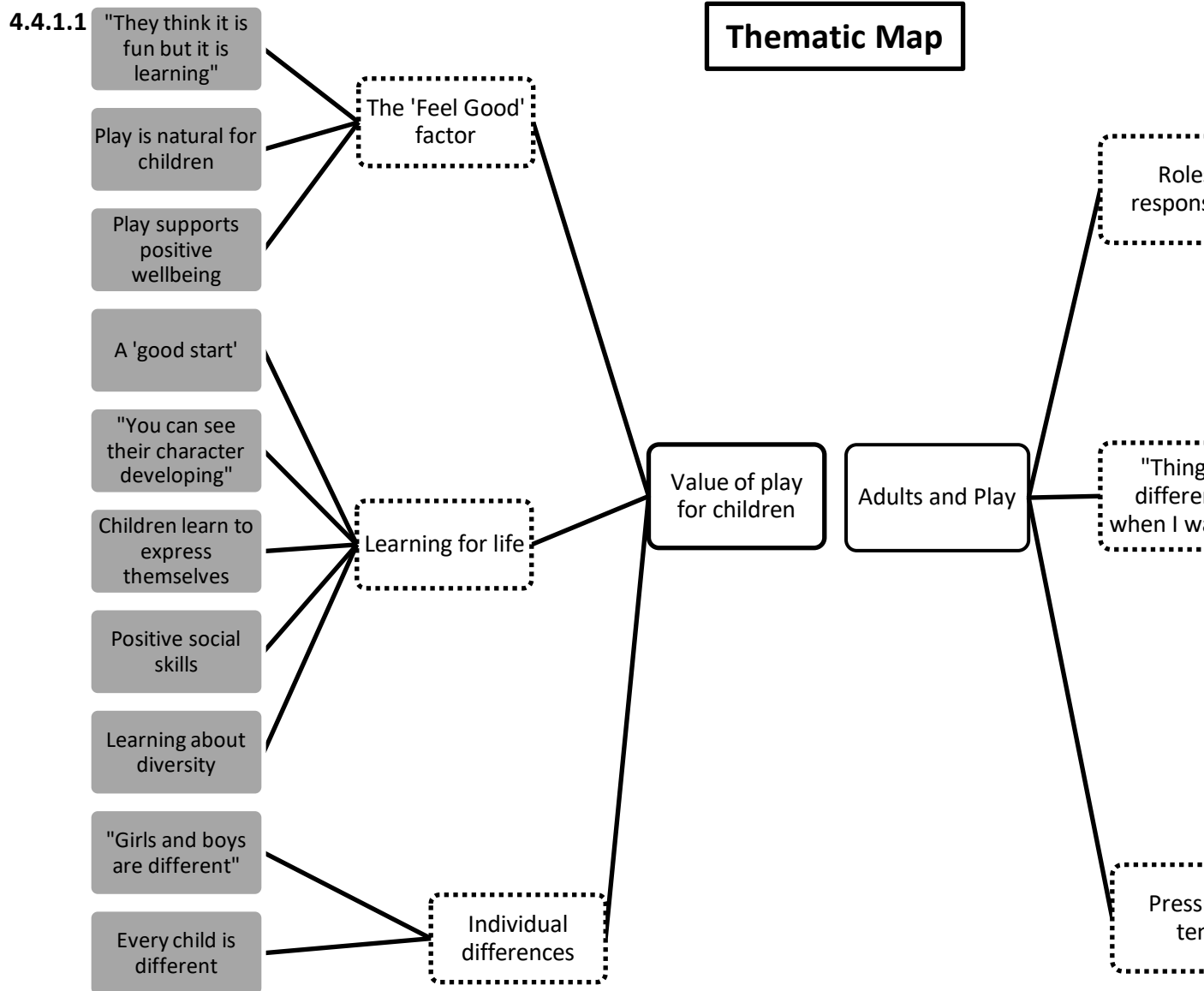


Figure 23. Thematic map of overarching themes, themes and subtheme

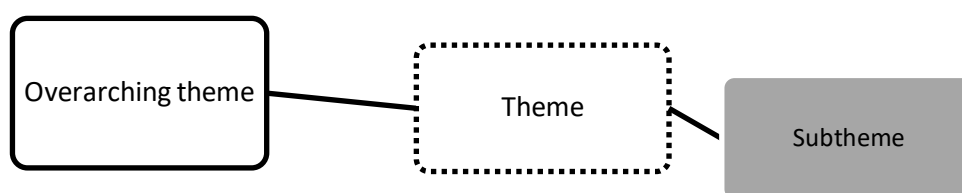


Figure 24. Key to the thematic map

4.4.1.2 Table of overarching themes, themes and subthemes

Table 25

Overarching themes, themes and subthemes

Overarching theme	Theme	Subtheme
1. The value of play for children	(1.1) The 'Feel Good' factor	(1.1.1) "They think it is fun but it is learning" (1.1.2) Play is natural for children (1.1.3) Play supports positive wellbeing
	(1.2) Learning for life	(1.2.1) A 'good start' (1.2.2) "You can see their character developing" (1.2.3) Children learn to express themselves (1.2.4) Positive social skills (1.2.5) Learning about diversity
	(1.3) Individual differences	(1.3.1) "Girls and boys are different" (1.3.2) Every child is different
2. Adults and play	(2.1) Roles and responsibilities	(2.1.1) Parents in partnership (2.1.2) The practitioner
	(2.2) "Things are different from when I was a child"	(2.2.1) "iPad culture children" (2.2.2) Acceptance of change (2.2.3) Some things were better!
	(2.3) Pressures and tensions	(2.3.1) A need for a balance (2.3.2) Child led versus adult directed

4.5. Overarching theme: The value of play for children

The participants universally viewed play in terms of its value for children and how they felt children benefitted from being involved in play-based activities. To some extent,

all expressed a wish for their child to have a good start to their pre-school phase and wanted their children to be happy.

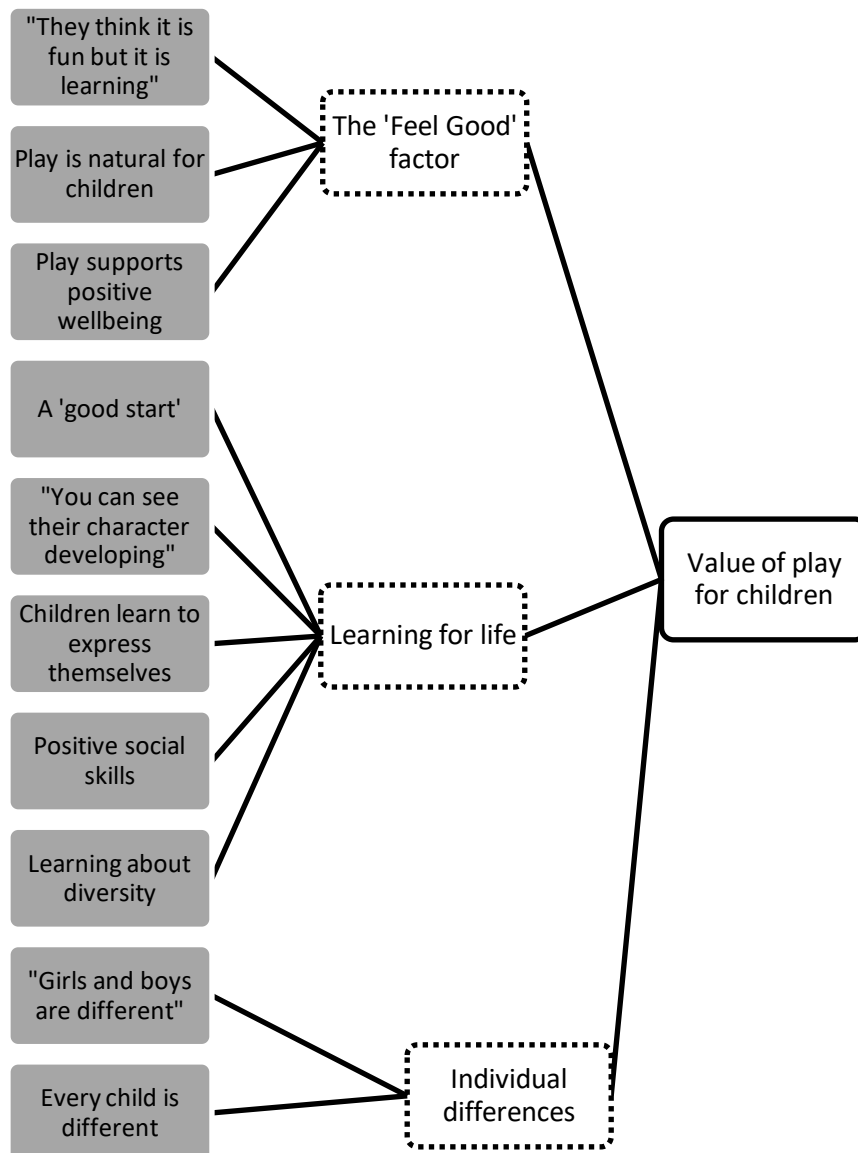


Figure 25. Thematic map of overarching theme 1: The value of play for children

4.5.1 Theme: The 'feel good' factor

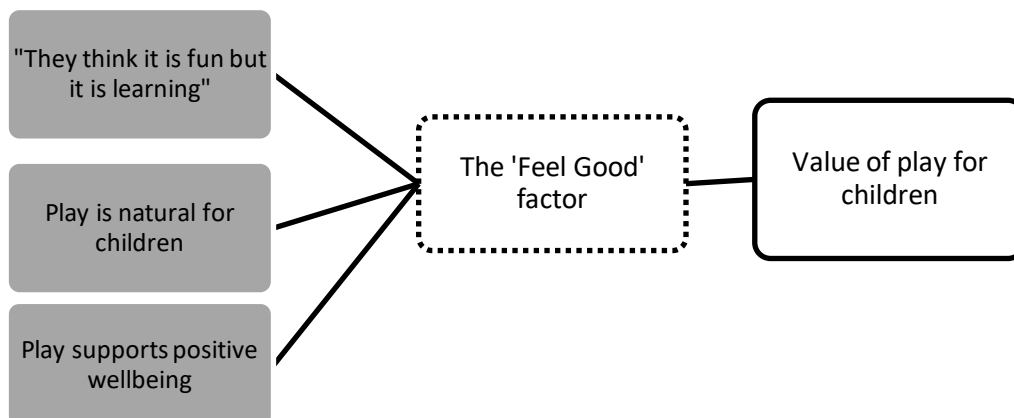


Figure 26. Theme 1.1 The 'Feel good' factor

The focus of this theme was the view that children could never have too many play opportunities and that it is invaluable. Play comes naturally to children; it is what they do spontaneously which result in particular benefits including the positive influence on mood. Three subthemes were identified: the idea that children do not realise they are learning, the natural nature of play and its importance for wellbeing.

4.5.1.1 Subtheme: "They think it is fun but it is learning"

This encapsulates that for the majority, play should be pleasurable and enjoyable. The quote from Thandie exemplifies this, and so it was used as the label for the subtheme.

Thandie:...they learn through play they think that it's fun but they're actually learning... (page 1 lines 31 – 32)

Similarly, Leah and Kayla echoed these views.

Leah: I think that children at preschool do learn through play I think that it's a fundamental principle of the preschool learning through play that learning is fun (page 6 lines 176 – 179)

Kayla: ...obviously they're gonna enjoy playing and they're not knowing that they are learning through play... (page 5 lines 148 – 150)

4.5.1.2 Subtheme: Play is natural for children

This subtheme was expressed by participants who strongly felt that it is seen as what children do naturally, involving active engagement on the part of the child which is spontaneous and voluntary. The following extracts from both Alison and Denise sum up the views held by a number of participants.

Alison: If you let what comes natural to children playing in no matter where you are, you could be in the doctor's surgery or you could be with other children the children start playing... (page 13 lines 311 – 314)

Denise: ...sometimes we get lost and our children get sort of lost I just want her to be to have like just be able to do things with and experience different, different things and it will and let it naturally her natural development rather than it be sort of forced upon her and she's like ah I don't like this and then just shuts down (Page 13 lines 421 – 428)

4.5.1.3 Subtheme: Play supports positive wellbeing

This captures the views of participants about the positive contribution play makes to children's wellbeing, with a variety of ways in which this happens being highlighted. For example, whilst Shauna outlined a number of benefits of playing including learning, and making friends, she also felt that it provided opportunities for the expression of emotion.

Shauna: The benefits of playing its can be learning, making friends
erm expressing themselves physically, emotionally erm
sometimes kids don't always know how to express but
sometimes they find it easier to express it through play
(page 2 lines 33 – 37)

For Denise being allowed to play, helped her child to be well grounded.

Denise: I think like now lets just be a child and just experience and
explore and get her hands dirty and I think she'll come, she'll
be more well-grounded (page 13 lines 413 – 416)

Janine mentioned that whilst her son learnt through play, she noticed that when he was upset drawing calmed him down and helped him relax, so play supported him to regulate his emotions.

Janine: ...drawing I think he learns, I think it relaxes him so I've
notice if he's upset, if I tell him to okay calm down lets get
some paper out and lets do some drawing it kind of calms
him down gets time when he's drawing he'll talk about how

he's feeling (page 2 lines 58 – 63)

Similarly, Dean felt that play allowed for expression and to alleviate feelings of frustration or anxiety.

Dean: ...maybe they found out doing research it's probably better for them to gain more knowledge from playing ... expressing themselves ...now through play rather than actually sitting down and making them get into books and it sorts of puts too much pressure on them...it's more of a way of expressing themselves without them getting...frustrated or feeling kind of anxious...
(page 15 lines 480 – 489)

4.5.2 Theme: Learning for life

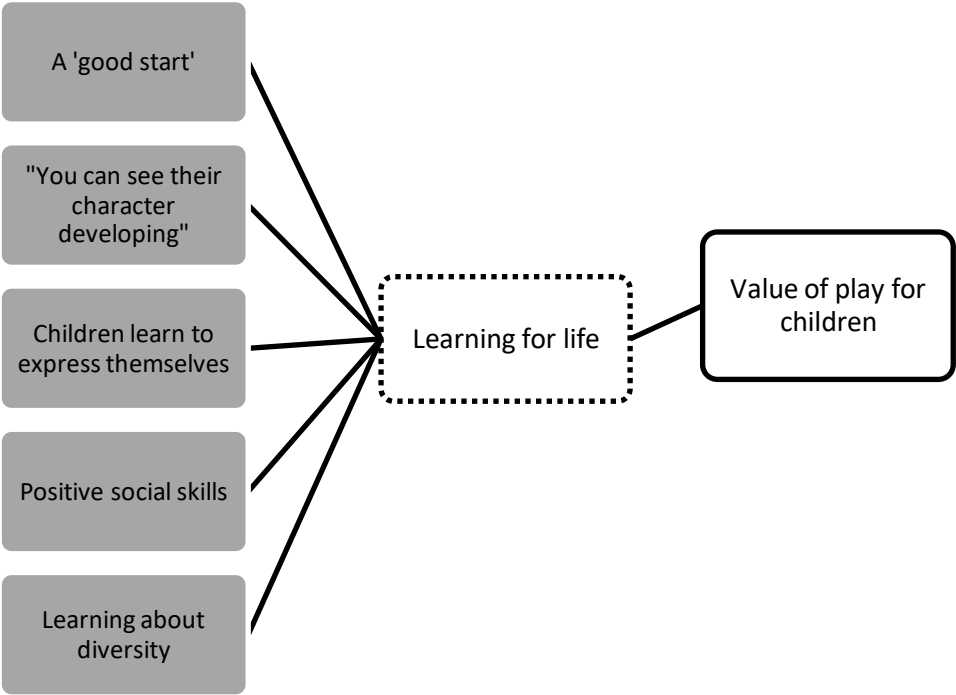


Figure 27. Theme 1.2 Learning for life

This theme captured the many ways that participants felt play contributed to children's overall development and learning, in terms of social development, formation of their identity, expressing themselves and a broader understanding of the world. All of which are lifelong skills.

4.5.2.1 Subtheme: A 'good start'

The role of early years education and play opportunities in terms of introducing basic skills with an emphasis placed on preparation for the next step (readiness for Reception) and the need to "get it right" was the subject of this subtheme. A number of those interviewed felt strongly that it was important for the children in terms of supporting the development of basic skills.

Alison: I sit down and write his name with his and like stuff that by I expect that to be done here as well so that he is not thrown in the deep end when he gets to the nursery... I just think gives them the best head start
(page 9 lines 211 – 216)

Shauna: My child erm the most important for my child is to read ...to write, can write before he before he sets off to primary reception read, write, count... (Page 8 lines 261 – 268)

Leah: ...because these are the basic things I think that they should know mmh that will help them for reception
(page 9 lines 277 – 278)

Dean: ... probably numbers colours things like that erm basically key skills that I feel would be advantage an advantage for when they move on would obviously be something like numbers, colours... (page 9 lines 303 – 307)

There were a minority of participants who somewhat disagreed with the ‘good start’ view and felt that it should be left until children started school or they would end up getting lost as highlighted by the quotes from Alison and Denise.

Alison: I think we’re too busy trying to teach our children curriculum and stuff like that I think when they get to primary school and stuff they can I have to do all that that’s when you start get serious... (page 9 lines 222 – 225)

Denise: ...the next level is after the pre-school is and they're starting school and everyone trying to get this best sort of the best school and sometimes we get lost and our children get sort of lost... (page 13 lines 418 – 422)

4.5.2.2 Subtheme: “You can see their character developing”

The development of central traits including finding their own personality, gaining greater independence along with pursuing activities of personal interests were described as character building. The following comments highlighted a range of qualities and characteristics parents felt their children were able to acquire through play.

Alison: I think it just builds their character as well (page 1 line 21)

Denise: ...I suppose really build up independence, confidence,
(page 1 lines 22 – 23)

Denise: I suppose social integration with all the other children and for the child to develop their own confidence and capability
(page 1 lines 31 – 33)

Janine: ...it builds character in a child cause they get to develop different areas erm such as their physical development, creativity erm emotional ... (page 1 lines 32 – 35)

Dean: ...they become more sort of erm err confident (page 3 line 71)

In contrast to the others, one parent specifically mentioned moral development and the ability for children to learn through play what was right and what was wrong.

Thandie: ...so they learn erm how to care for each other what's right and they learn what's right and wrong (page 3 lines 73 – 74)

4.5.2.3 Subtheme: Children learn to express themselves

The ability to use and understand language was mentioned by all of the participants; language was therefore considered to be an essential feature of play and learning. The development of communication skills was integral to the comments made.

Denise: ...able to communicate and have at least a good range vocabulary (page 8 lines 244 – 246)

Janine: ...learn how to communicate with children his own age (page 5 lines 166 – 167)

Kayla: ...just little words we'd start with and then from then she'd just learn to put the sentences together... (page 12 lines 408 – 409)

The extracts above were further emphasised by Leah who also stressed the importance of language.

Leah: ...Communication language that's one of the keys...
(page 2 lines 43 – 44)

She felt that through play children would learn how to describe things and went on to describe how enhancing a child's language skills could be achieved.

Leah: ...all types of malleable play because that will increase their language of describing things (page 8 lines 272 – 274)

4.5.2.4 Subtheme: Positive social skills

The participants felt that learning how to be around others was of importance.

Shauna: The benefits of playing its can be learning, making friends (page 2 lines 33 – 40)

Leah: Well the benefits erm I would say for my child it's she's been able to learn about all cooperative play how to share and take turns... in the classroom she's learnt skills even in the classroom when you have to play where you have to take turns in all the activities...(page 2 lines 67 – 71)

In addition, two participants who had only one child, each commented that mixing with children of their own age was important for them.

Janine: ... I think there's a lot of opportunities to develop skills such as turn taking, sharing, learning to make friends, understanding others... (page 1 lines 24 – 26)

Denise: ...being able to mix with other children who are older and also younger than herself (page 2 lines 48 – 49)

4.5.2.5 Subtheme: Learning about diversity

For all participants it was deemed as an opportunity to learn about the diversity of cultures and particular traditions through play. It could be through celebrating festivals and special days from different parts of the world and learning about other cultures and religions.

Alison: ...everything is welcome, it could be all like learn about Chinese New Year they do with the and they dress up and they make dragons... (page 10 lines 232 – 234)

Janine: ...foods you eat can also be about religion maybe one religion doesn't eat certain food, one culture eats this type of foods so he can understand people around him a bit more to maybe help him build relationships and understand be respectful (page 6 lines 199 – 205)

One parent specifically mentioned that being introduced to a range of diverse cultures should be the focus of the curriculum. It was interesting to note that for Dean this was an important factor because he mentioned that his children have parents from two different ethnic backgrounds.

Dean: I just feel that it would be an advantage to their background sort of because not every child has the same background... if you open up two different different cultures and let them understand it then their understanding for other people would be a lot better... (page 10 lines 336 – 343)

4.5.3 Theme: Individual differences

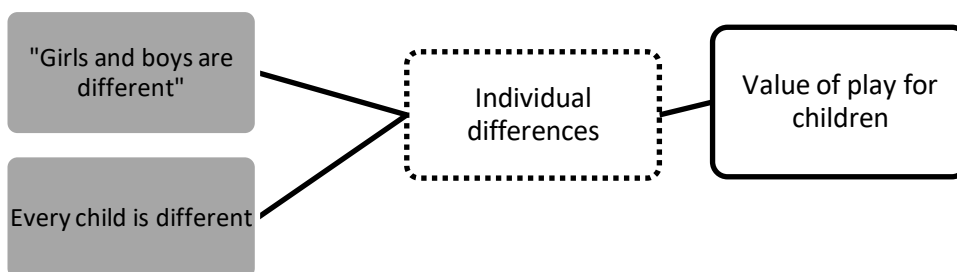


Figure 28. Theme 1.3 Individual differences

The overarching message of this theme was how children differ from each other, not only rates of development and learning but interests, abilities, self-regulation and personality. In addition, gender and the process by which children learn to behave in a way that is acceptable to society was also included.

4.5.3.1 Subtheme: “Girls and boys are different”

The impressions and understandings gained from participants were about the choices children make and possible reasons for boys and girls differing in these. There were instances where the participants, in thinking about gender, showed some awareness of stereotypical views.

Thandie: ...they are playing and my son can say I try my son is different to my daughter erm if I say to her to do something she will do it but with him he is is different so I have to *really* use play for him (page 5 lines 166 – 169)

Kayla: ... I don't know well girls and boys are different I find girls will more use their imagination with things and boys just kind of more into like throwing things kind of and play fighting and stuff like that you know what I mean so it could be like too much play and them not wanting to do work such as writing your numbers or erm painting for example these are the kind of things that girls will more do in my opinion (page 2 lines 43 – 51)

Kayla mentioned the possibility of gender stereotypes and wanting to expose her son to activities including those that were based in the kitchen in an attempt to challenge such views.

Kayla: ...maybe even find their talent through that erm cooking you know just baking little cupcakes or something erm with boys as well because you know erm ... like a woman is really supposed to be in the kitchen supposed to be in the kitchen but yeah exposing them to it at a young age you know it might

enjoy it might find their talent as well (page 7 lines 226 – 233)

4.5.3.2 Subtheme: Every child is different

Whilst Janine commented on how her son became easily bored so this was a factor that needed to be considered when thinking about his learning, Thandie and Kayla mentioned how children differed in their rate of skill acquisition and interest.

Janine: ...I think he likes something that challenges him he gets quite bored very quickly... (page 2 lines 50 – 54)

Thandie: ...the child is learning what you want them to learn but they're learning it at their pace at their level their enjoyment (page 7 lines 230 – 232)

Kayla: ...some children are quicker to learn than others (page 10 line 307)

4.6 Overarching theme: Adults and play

The second overarching theme was in line with how participants viewed play in terms of their attitudes, the roles that adults play and aspects that could result in challenges for adults.

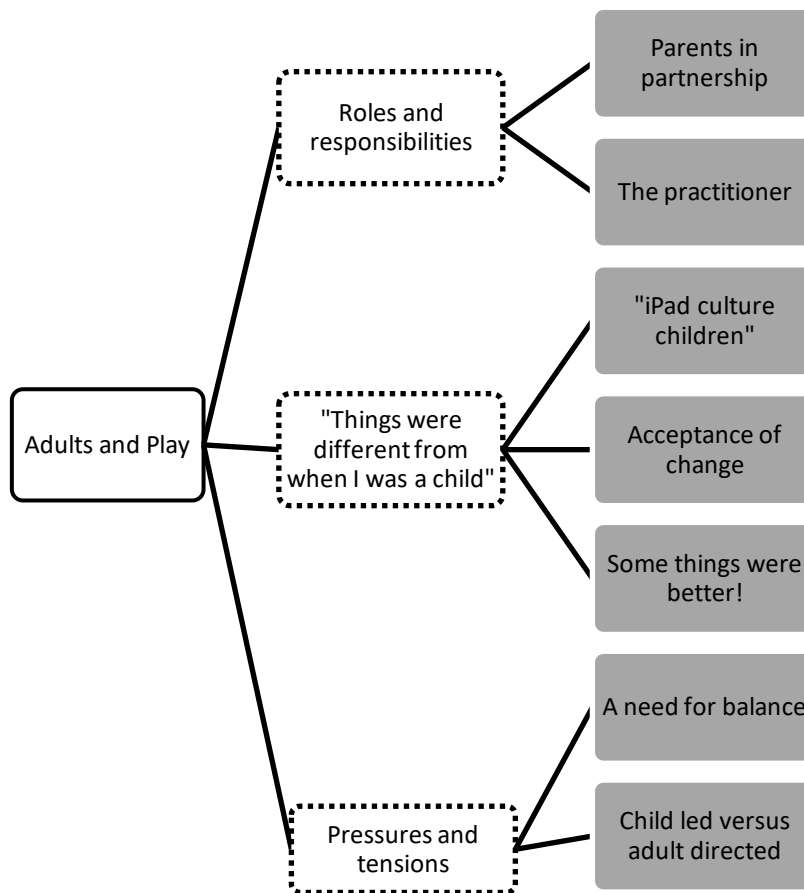


Figure 29. Adults and play

4.6.1 Theme: Roles and responsibilities

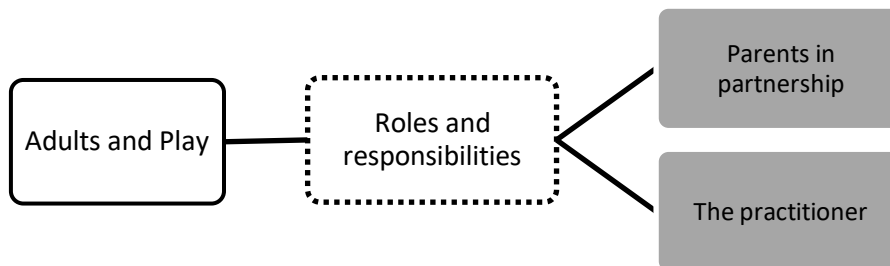


Figure 30. Theme 2.1 Roles and responsibilities

This theme is based on who does what and an emphasis on the need for good communication between home and setting. This was felt to be essential for responding quickly to support individual children's learning and development. In doing so an effective relationship is built up between the adults to ensure the best outcomes for children are reached.

4.6.1.1 Subtheme: Parents in partnership

Working collaboratively was identified as a key component for success. For at least two participants it was important that the involvement was a two way process.

Alison: I don't believe that it's down to the nursery, but I think it's also by the parents as well, so I try to do a lot of things at home. (page 10 lines 206 – 208)

Janine: I expect him to learn with obviously help from home I don't depend on the nursery (page 5 lines 158 – 160)

In addition, Alison's comments suggest that whilst she took the initiative in starting potty training her child she also sought help from the nursery. Thus emphasising the need for working together.

Alison: I start potty trainingand I interacted with the nursery (page 10 lines 229 – 230)

For many of the participants the families would build on what was covered in the setting and vice versa. Janine, Leah and Kayla felt it was important to carry out similar activities at home for it to seem as though it is a continuous process.

Janine: ...we do a lot at home similar led activities

(page 7 lines 236 – 237)

Leah: ... the way the things that she learns in nursery ... she can bring them back at home ... like if I'm reading her book... she asked me to get her nursery rhyme books out so she wanted to read them so what she has been hearing at nursery she now wants to read (page 4 lines 126 – 132)

Kayla: ... my house at the moment looks like a nursery

(page 4 lines 115 – 116)

One participant mentioned that she felt that there was too much reliance on the nursery as outlined in the extract below.

Janine: ...I just feel like a lot of parents rely too heavily on nurseries (page 8 lines 239 – 240)

The extract below explains how Thandie who felt that it was important for parents to start teaching certain key things to their children before they start at nursery and is in contrast to Janine's views above.

Thandie: ...in school they learn to share but some of these things are things you would teach them at home... I taught them all that before they went out anyways... it for them to know what they learnt at home for them to express it in school
(page 9 lines 284 – 287)

Whilst Denise explained that even though her child spent a great deal of her time at nursery whilst she was at work, it was important to continue what the nursery were doing.

Denise: I'm a full-time worker so it's only when we get in most of her time is here so you know I suppose for me it...helps me to be able to implement and carry on what ... she's being taught ... at the nursery (page 2 lines 65 – 70)

4.6.1.2 Subtheme: The practitioner

Participants felt happy with how their children were being treated and were trusting of the practitioners. The role of the key person was seen as a point of contact for parents, ensuring an effective relationship, sharing of information and awareness of needs.

For one participant, the practitioner was seen as being the 'expert', in that

they had received training and were therefore best placed to support children in their learning.

Alison: However the nursery sees fit. I can't obviously they're they are the professionals... get a sense of how they structure it
(page 7 lines 158 – 159)

For other participants, it was important that the adults targeted children's individual needs and monitored their progress.

Denise: ...identify what the child's weaknesses and what their strengths is so there so they maybe try to turn their weaknesses into strengths and then also their strengths try and enhance it (page 7 lines 214 – 218)

Some participants expressed the view that the role of the practitioner was to provide a range of activities and give the children choices whilst allowing them to take the lead in deciding what they would do and how they would like to do it.

Janine: ... lay it out different options for them and then let them decide where they're going to go with it
(page 5 lines 135 – 137)

Leah: ... giving the children in the...power to try and take control of

their own play (page 10 lines 326 – 328)

Kayla: ... should just stand back and view kind of...encourage and erm
well correct if needs be (page 6 lines 196 – 197)

4.6.2 Theme: “Things are different from when I was a child”

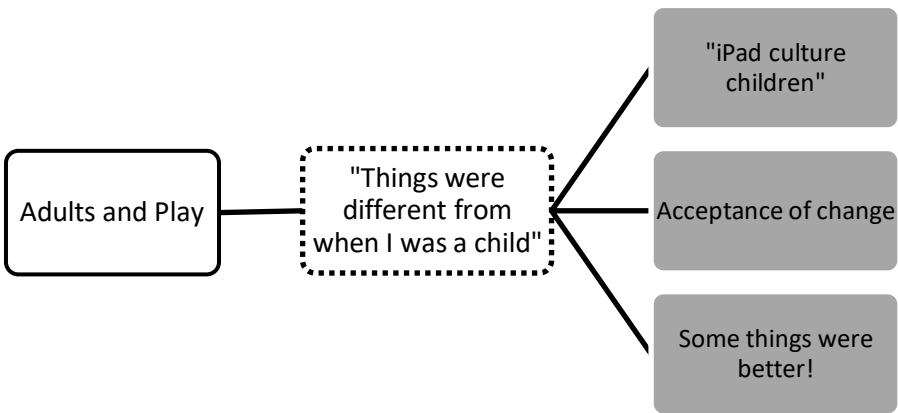


Figure 31. Theme 2.2 “Things are different from when I was a child”

This theme is defined by attitudes towards children’s play today in relation to each person’s personal experiences and memories. Participants being reminiscent and reflective in order to make sense of their own early years. The theme also encapsulates ideas about how things have now changed. For some, there were instances describing the positive impact that having access to less technology and being involved in traditional activities and outdoor games had on their later life whereas others were more enthusiastic about technology and saw it as an investment for a successful future.

4.6.2.1 Subtheme: “iPad culture children”

A number of participants commented on the increased use of technology by young children but there was some uncertainty whether it was developmentally appropriate in that it could get in the way of other areas of development. This was strongly voiced by Alison as the comments below illustrate.

Alison: ...mums that I know have this iPad culture children...they don't allow them to do other things (page 5 lines 114 – 115)

Alison: ... now you got people that they're not drawing because they're on the iPad or they doing something else... (pg 14 lines 339 – 342)

Not everyone agreed with Alison and many felt that the introduction and use of information technology such as computers, tablets and television had an important place in early childhood.

Shauna: ... sometimes it's through the computer they learn how to use certain things on the computer like doing maths it's more makes it more enjoyable for them than just pen and paper... (page 5 lines 154 – 157)

Kayla: ...even little programmes like there's this channel called erm Baby TV ... all the bright colours and stuff like its you know babies like to look at it and stuff...but they are learning at the same time through looking at it like they can pick up little things like up and down as I said (pg 11 lines 369 – 386)

4.6.2.2 Subtheme: Acceptance of change

All but one participant felt that adapting to changing times with regards to delivering the curriculum was a good thing for children in the early years. When comparing it to memories of their own early years they welcomed the changes that are now in place. This also included the introduction of technology as covered in subtheme 4.6.2.1 “iPad culture children”. Thandie highlights the range of activities that were not on offer when she was younger.

Thandie: ...the only difference is that here from my days when I first went to school it was years and years ago erm we didn't have water play we didn't have to go outside and ride bicycles that was what you do (page 11 lines 343 – 347)

Whilst the following extracts provide examples of the views about the effectiveness of change in the early years and being able to learn through play.

Dean: ...but I feel that now things are better rather than the way they were before but it's hard to say to be honest
(Page 15 lines 506 – 508)

Thandie: ... in my early years experience I didn't have the advantages that they have I didn't have erm the amenities that they have now that is available now (page 12 lines 376 – 378)

Kayla: ...well when comparing the two I'd I'd rather her have the stuff she has now than things I never had because she's learning through the play as I said and erm [pause] erm [pause] even little programmes like there's this channel called erm Baby TV (page 11 lines 366 – 371)

For Shauna the limitless access to information technology was not available to her during her early years and the comments made suggest that ultimately she managed to make progress without it. However, Denise describes how in the past learning would not have been through play.

Shauna: ... pre-school years erm we didn't use computers as young small children and tablets and internet you know but now there's a vast world wide with social media...we still got there in the end with pen and paper

(page 12 lines 395 – 398)

Denise: I mean they would sit down and do the reading and writing but we wouldn't of done it through a play

(page 12 lines 383 – 385)

Denise went on to explain that her parents' generation were not aware of the concept of learning through play.

Denise: ...I suppose more time my mum and dad were working and it was my granny and then I was with my two cousins who we always used to play so I don't think for them they really ...I don't think they knew about play being educational but then I suppose the era that they was they were raised

(page 11 lines 367 – 375)

4.6.2.3 Subtheme: Some things were better!

In thinking back to their own early years, a number of participants made favourable

comments about their experiences. They were of the opinion that some things in the past were better. For Dean it was how the adults treated him.

Dean: ...the teachers in my day they would give you a little hug and stuff like that you look at them sort of like that was your mother (page 13 lines 442 – 444)

Leah's comments focused on how not having access to so many toys had the effect of bringing out a more creative and adventurous side. For Leah this is something she feels is less likely to happen with an abundance of toys.

Leah: ...we didn't have toys we were more creative so you had a more side of creative and language the more chance to be adventurous (page 10 lines 336 – 338)

4.6.3 Theme: Pressures and tensions

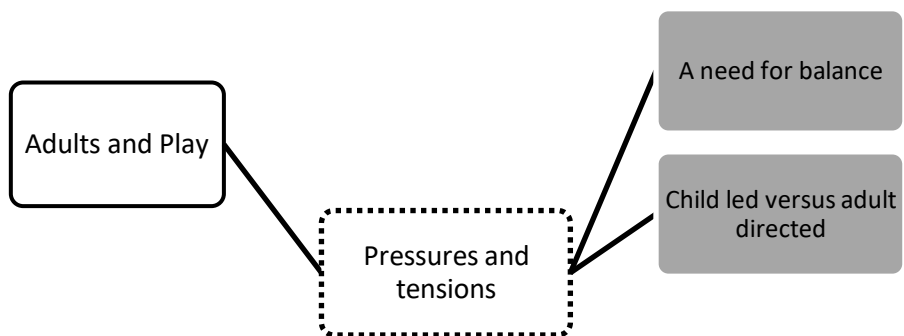


Figure 32. Theme 2.3 Pressures and tensions

This theme is based on feelings of conflict and dissonance in different areas and how this is best managed. For example, one parent, Thandie admitted to initially being sceptical about the concept of learning through play. Other parents mentioned having to work fulltime so there were a number of things they did not get a chance to do at home. Whilst participants had strong views about the types of activities that were on offer, for some a lack of understanding or misunderstanding about the balance of activities and the adult's role led to feelings of conflict and in some cases guilt due to lack of time.

4.6.3.1 Subtheme: A need for a balance

Whether play and learning should be treated as the same thing or as separate entities was considered by a few of the participants. It was interesting to note that instead of thinking about play versus learning the participants viewed it in terms of play and learning.

Alison: ...it just depends because you need to have a balance...

(page 7 lines 170 – 174)

Janine: I think the nursery are doing well with their balance of teaching and playing and being set homework

(page 4 lines 113 – 115)

Thandie: ... its play but its like structured play in that it's their learning behind the play so if there's no learning and

it's just playing then that's the drawback (page 2 lines 44 – 46)

4.6.3.2 Subtheme: Child led versus adult directed

In the Early Years Foundation Stage children are introduced to new ideas through adult led activities. Many feel that it is important for children to explore their own ideas, use their imagination and creativity. Self initiated play and learning is felt to be essential 'the serious business of play' (Welsh Government, 2015). Also, many felt that there needed to be a balance between play that is free, where the children are able to choose for themselves what they want to do and play that is structured such that the adult is involved or even intervening in the play.

Denise: ... you know they choose what activity rather than the nursery saying well this is what we're going to do so yeah a bit of a little bit a mixture (page 6 lines 201 – 204)

Leah: ...aahm at some point of time when they go to reception class and some bits will be structured so they have to understand there is a time for structured play and time for unstructured play and it's a gradual progress (process) until they reach to year one [pause] (page 8 lines 258 – 262)

Kayla: ...play is supposed to be child led isn't it so erm adults should just stand back and view kind of erm encourage and erm well correct if needs be so that they can learn erm I think that the play should be child led and the adults should kinda stand back and not take over and you know.. and say no it's meant to be this way correct them in the right way as needs be and erm so they can learn from their mistakes if they are making any (page 6 lines 195 – 203)

4.7 Summary

This chapter has drawn attention to the data collected through the mixed methods

designed employed in this work. Analysis of the quantitative data from the surveys has been presented using descriptive statistics in the form of tables and graphs. In addition, the qualitative data obtained from the survey was used to supplement the quantitative findings and provide specific examples of play activities. Qualitative data gathered from the semi-structured interviews was analysed using Thematic Analysis. There were two overarching themes that emerged and from these six themes were identified along with related subthemes. A thematic map was produced highlighting the relation between the overarching themes, themes and subthemes.

Overall, what emerged from the data was that parents had positive views about play in early years education. What parents valued most was the development of expression and creativity in addition to viewing play as critical to the development of language and physical skills. They fully appreciated the importance of play for the development of social skills alongside knowledge and understanding of the world. They saw play as invaluable and something that children did naturally. Additional benefits of play that parents welcomed include how it contributed positively to children's wellbeing in helping to regulate emotions. All parents emphasised how play prepared children for the transition to school where the need to introduce the learning of basic skills such as letters, numbers and colours were of great importance. Although some participants were concerned that academic skills should not be introduced too early. Given individual differences between children, participants felt that it was more important for their child to gain independence and to pursue activities of personal interest acquired through play. In doing so would help to build character but also developed and learnt at their own rate. Participants considered the

role that adults have in play highlighting the importance of good communication and collaboration between home and the settings. Participants held contrasting views about the over reliance on settings, some believed that there are key skills that should be taught at home even before the children started early years education whilst others felt that it was important to continue what early years education had started. In thinking about the role of play in early years education participants reminisced about the differences in how things are now and contrasted it with their own early years experience, with the introduction of technology and an abundance in the range of resources which they felt in the main to be a good thing. Finally, in thinking about play and its role in learning participants felt that there should be a balance between play and learning. That being said, many participants did not necessarily consider them to be separate entities. Although the majority felt that children should be free to choose for themselves but adults should be involved in structuring activities and involved in children's play.

Parents had some clear views about the importance of play in learning for their children, with comprehensive appreciation of its many benefits as well as some differing views about the role of the home and the adults in their engagement in children's play. In the proceeding chapter the findings from the current study will be discussed in more depth.

Chapter 5

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The findings from the previous chapter will be considered in light of the research questions and more specifically how they support previous research presented in Chapter 2. Furthermore, outcomes that maybe were more unusual, unexpected or not in line with previous research will be highlighted and explored further.

The focus of the current study has been on establishing views of parents and exploring their understanding of play and learning in the Early Years curriculum. Whilst there have been a number of studies looking at African American parental views (Stipek, Milburn, Clements, & Daniels 1992; McGillicuddy-De Lisi 1985; Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, & Eggers-Pierola 1995) there are very few in the UK that set out to solely focus on the perspective of African Caribbean parents and more specifically those who have a child aged 2 – 3 years attending an early years setting.

The researcher's epistemological position was that of a critical realist which led to amixed methods design being adopted in order to ascertain parents' views about the curriculum. Quantitative data was obtained through the use of a survey followed by semi-structured interviews to provide more narrative to the findings. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) in order to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions held by the parents who took part. The data generated two overarching themes from which six themes and related subthemes were identified.

The overall strengths and limitations of the research will be highlighted. Aspects of the methodology will be considered and critiqued in relation to the design of the study, data collection and analysis. The role of the researcher will also be discussed given that it will have been a significant influence on both how the research was conducted and the possible impact on the research itself. Of equal importance will be the consideration of the findings in relation to the role of the educational psychologist and the direction for future research that emerged from this study.

5.2 Key findings of the research

The aim of this was to find out how African Caribbean parents of 2 – 3 years old in a London borough viewed play and learning in the early years. Literature and research evidence along with research questions were identified and these will now be considered and addressed both in light of outcomes of the study and with reference to the existing research literature.

5.2.1 Research question 1

What is the understanding of African Caribbean parents of the role of play in Early Years Education?

In completing the Parent Play Learning Belief (PPLB) scale which explore parents' views about play and its role in learning and development, overall the parents in the current study feel that play in the early years is important for children. 72% of participants indicated that play should be included in the Early Years curriculum. During the interviews, parents reported that there were a number of positive benefits to play, leading to the theme **The 'Feel Good' factor** with subthemes *'They think it's*

fun but it is learning and *Play is natural for children* drawn from the views presented. 85% of parents agreed with the statement, 'It is important for my child to have fun at preschool' (see Figure 14) and that play should be spontaneous and imaginative as evidenced in Table 18.

In the same way that Dewey (1897) proposed that there should be no separation between activities considered to be 'work' and 'play' that activities should be 'hands on' becomes an underlying thread voiced by all of the parents in the current study. One participant's understanding of play, capturing clearly what several parents articulated was expressed by Thandie, "they think that it's fun but they are actually learning". The premise that children learn best when learning occurs in a meaningful situation such as play-based learning is the foundation on which Western EYE is based.

Participants' understanding of play as a normal element of a child's life was evidenced through a second subtheme *Play is natural for children*. The extracts from both Alison "If you let what comes natural to children playing" and Denise "...experience different thingsher natural development rather than it be sort of forced upon her..." emphasised this theme very well. These outcomes are similar to the child-centred approaches of Froebel (1887) and findings from Dahlberg and Lenz Taguchi (1994) based on the beliefs that children have in built characteristics which must be allowed to develop and that play is seen as children's natural way of acting in their surrounding world. A more recent study by Warash Root and Devito Doris (2017) also highlight that play in its many forms represents a natural, age appropriate method for children to explore and learn.

This particular group of African Caribbean parents appreciated the fun and amusement value of play but equally were clear it was important to learning and that there were educational benefits for their children.

In contrast the research literature found that there were differences in the value placed on play-based activities and the role it has on learning by parents from across ethnic groups. Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, and Eggers-Pierola (1995) and Stipek, Milburn, Clements, and Daniels (1992) research involving parents from ethnic minority backgrounds found that great value was placed on education and they were in favour of didactic and more formal methods. That being said, in considering the extant literature it is important to note that it is dated and the findings could be different now.

‘Learning for life’ was a key theme, which emerged highlighting parents’ understanding of play and how it contributed in preparing children for transition to school and beyond. *‘A good start’* subtheme acknowledged the importance of learning basic skills was further supported with data highlighted in Figure 19 (p. 143) ‘Playing at pre-school will help my child get ready for school’ with 72% agreeing with the statement. These views are consistent with the literature, that EYE prepares children for learning fundamental academic skills that are needed for later success in school (Parmar, Harkness, Super, & Johnson, 2001).

There was a concern that too much emphasis could be placed on the educational benefits, both Alison and Denise who felt that there should be “no hurry” in pre-

teaching the Early Years curriculum because the best time to do so would be when their child started school. Alison, stated that when her child started school would be the time to “become more serious”, whilst Denise’s concern was that in starting too soon her child would get lost. The views held by both parents conform to the theorists Montessori (1965) and Piaget (1952) where the emphasis is placed on direct experiences and concrete materials in favour of one that is developmentally appropriate. Other researchers have noted this also including the work of Laforette and Mendez (2017) and Fogel and Mendez (2006).

The subtheme *“You can see their character developing”*, was taken directly from comments made by Alison in the current study, “...I think it just builds their character as well” when asked about the role of play in learning. Parents demonstrated an awareness that play allowed their child to pursue activities independently, to develop their personality and a range of personal characteristics. In the same way that Colliver (2016) found that the mothers frequently commented on ‘internal skills and dispositions that were personally significant for each child’ (2016, p. 7). These included feelings of curiosity and wonder, personality development and independence, coded by Colliver as ‘intrapersonal learning’ achieved through play.

A third subtheme *‘Play supports positive wellbeing’* was identified under the **Learning for Life** theme establishing play as a vehicle for supporting positive wellbeing. Parents stressed that their child’s ability to learn how to manage feelings and behaviour was important and that this could successfully be achieved through play. Although it was deemed to be an area of importance to parents, it was noteworthy that not one parent

listed any activities that their child liked to choose but that they also valued in relation to personal social and emotional development. This will be discussed further in the section highlighting social and emotional development.

The above demonstrates that parents understand play to be an important part of the Early Years curriculum, they value it as being fun, see it as a natural part of a young child's life and that it helps them to develop their individuality.

5.2.2 Research Question 2

What do African Caribbean parents believe could be the benefits of play for their child's learning and development?

The data highlighted what parents believed were the benefits of play to their child's learning and development. Overall, the parents in the current study viewed play as being central to their child's development and were able to attribute this to the different areas of learning and development in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2017).

The role of language in play

How children develop and learn and the relationship between language and cognition is key. For learning to take place children need a range of experiences and opportunities (Piaget, 1952) and social interaction which is crucial for cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Curriculum models including Montessori and Reggio Emilia emphasised language activities. Researchers have found that through language children develop thinking and reasoning skills. Strong language skills are thought to be

predictors of future reading ability and academic success (Roulstone et al., 2011; Snowling et al., 2011).

The current study looked at parents' beliefs with regards to how play supports language development (Figure 8). 91% of parents agreed strongly with the statement 'During play my child learns how to communicate using verbal and non-verbal language skills'. This particular group of African Caribbean parents felt that play was critical for language development in line with the evidence.

Consistent with the research is the **Learning for life** theme where the majority of parents supported the 'Children learn to express themselves' subtheme. Leah spoke about the importance of language "...communication language that's one of the keys" and she went on to describe how this could be achieved through play. The language-based activities that the parents valued included story time, circle time and one-to-one play or learning with an adult. This underscored the models proposed by Vygotsky where learning takes place through the interactions the child has with adults and forms the basis of guided play where the adult scaffolds the play akin to guided play and playful learning (LaForette & Mendez, 2017).

Physical skills

Support was found for the opportunities that play provided in the development of physical skills. Parents in the current study noted the links between being physically active and improving their child's movement and coordination skills. Figure 9 (p. 132) showed the strength in the belief, 94% agreed with the statement, 'My child benefits

from outdoor play where he or she has opportunity to release their energy' and 96% agreed that 'Being physically active helps my child improve his or her coordination and movement skills'. This was reflected by Janice who commented that through play, "Children get to develop different areas such as their physical development". Parents particularly liked activities that involved both fine and gross motor skills with the focus on moving and handling such as lacing, playdough, construction and outdoor play.

The Western tradition of early learning including Montessori, Reggio Emilia and High Scope places an emphasis on being physically and mentally active and engaging with the environment. The current study supports the view that has emerged from previous research that physical engagement is deemed as an essential part of all learning (Greenfield, 1997). Both quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate that this group of parents are in support of the thinking that play reinforces physical development.

Social emotional development

For the current study, parents rated learning social skills through play highly as seen in Figure 10 (p. 133). Both **The 'Feel good' factor** theme, which incorporates the '*Play supports positive wellbeing*' subtheme and **Learning for life** theme, which includes the '*Positive social skills*' subtheme, support the views held.

This study supports previous research in the area (Degotardi, Sweller & Pearson, 2013; Lane, Givner & Pierson, 2004), the expectations parents have for their children is to learn social skills through play. Of the participants in the current study, 81% agreed

that ‘during play children learn about the give and take of relationships’ and felt that their child gained most from the encouragement of social skills such as turn taking and saw it as the role of the practitioner to support this area of development. It is also likely that parents were in favour of this because it supported school readiness as reported by studies (Degotardi et al., 2013; Lane et al., 2004).

The value of pre-academic learning which involve developing prosocial behaviour through play was emphasised by Janine who commented that, “...I think there’s lots of opportunities to develop skills such as turn taking, sharing, learning to make friends, understanding others...”. Given that the majority of early research in this area focused on school readiness (Holloway et al., 1995; Stipek et al., 1992), the current study highlighted wellbeing attributes that parents thought could be learned through play. Table 24 included the following: self-esteem, confidence, being able to settle and be independent, all were seen as being as important and supporting school readiness.

Overall the findings of the current study suggested that parents had strong beliefs about play and its role in the development of social skills and emotional wellbeing. Given the launch of the Green Paper (2017) in promoting and protecting children young people’s mental health and wellbeing, early intervention and prevention are therefore key particularly in the 0 – 5 age range.

Early literacy and numeracy skills

Under the **Learning for life** theme and ‘*A good start*’ subtheme, overall, when looking

at play and early learning the majority of studies placed an emphasis on finding out what value parents gave to play in regards to its educational and cognitive benefits.

In the main, parents of preschool children perceive basic literacy and numeracy skills as important aspects of school readiness (Farver & Howes, 1993; Farver & Wimbari 1995), despite valuing play, (O’Gorman & Ailwood, 2012). Peterson, Portier, and Murray (2017) survey of parents found they believed that through play children develop conceptual understandings learning how to ‘count’ and the name of colours. Warash et al. (2017) found that parents valued play and did not prioritise academic learning. However, for this group of parents the age of their child was a key factor and they valued play less as their child became older.

The questionnaire found that 72% of parents agreed with the statement that their child ‘learns more when taught to read and count in a structured way’. Activities highlighted included singing ABC, story time – reading, number games and jigsaw puzzles. Parents equated early acquisition of academic skills with long term educational success (Anderson-Clark, 1996), in the same way the parents in the current study gave partial support to academic skills when they were asked about the activities that helped their child get ready for school: e.g. trying to write, learning to spell and write their name, recognise letters and numbers. The position of African Caribbean parents in this study highlighted partial support for the role of play in literacy and numeracy development, Figure 11 (p. 134).

Understanding the world

Learning for life theme including '*Learning about diversity*' subtheme were important to parents when thinking about children's understanding of the world and attempting to make sense of it, an aspect which Piaget (1952) and Vygotsky (1978) suggest is achieved through play. Previous studies have found that parents attributed children's ability to understand the world when they independently searched for answers; it was something that they valued and saw that it could be achieved through play (Colliver 2016).

The questionnaires highlighted that 67% agreed with the statement 'My child learns best through free exploration and play in their environment'. Similarly, 75% felt that play was a time when their child could make sense of the world. Activities highlighted included circle time; off site visits in the community; having an interest table; learning nursery routines and becoming aware of their surroundings. Parents discussed how children made sense of the cultural diversity in their worlds through being introduced to a range of diverse cultures and traditions and celebrations of special days and festivals.

In line with studies that have concluded that play offers children chances to discover and interact with the world around them this group of parents believed that play should be part of EYE and that children were able to learn about their world through play.

Creativity

In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), Expressive Arts & Design is considered to be of importance. The evidence from the Haight, Parke, and Black (1997) research that parents viewed play as contributing significantly to their child's creativity lends support consistent with this. The quantitative data in this study also showed a strong consensus in parents' views about the importance of the role of play in the development of creativity, with 96% agreeing with the statement, 'My child can develop his or her imagination and creativity during play' (Figure 13) and feeling this was achieved through elements such as singing, dancing, role-play, dress up and painting. The parents in this study noted that play provided the children with an opportunity to use their imagination.

Girls and boys are different

Fogle and Mendez (2006) found that play beliefs were unrelated to child age or gender and that African American parents held matching play beliefs for both boys and girls as well as for younger and older children. There are very few studies from the general literature that have examined differences in mothers' and fathers' perceptions of the value of play, other than one study by Warash et al. (2017) which found no significant associations between child age and valuing play or academic focus for boys. However, mothers of daughters in particular stressed the importance of academics, as girls got older.

In this study, the participants noted the different ways that girls and boys played and therefore differences in how they learnt. Thandie commented that, "...I can say my

son is different to my daughter ... he is different so I have to really use play for him...” p. 5 lines 166 – 169. This view summarised by Kayla, “...girls will more use their imagination with things and boys just kind of more like to throw things... and play fighting.” (p. 2 lines 43 – 51). There is also evidence that parents’ views of their child’s pretend play should be considered in the context of gender. Support for pretend play appeared to differ for sons and daughters. Warash et al. (2017) explain that mothers viewed their sons as less mature and therefore not ready for non play-based learning, which is in line with what the parents here appeared to believe.

Every child is different

The EYFS (2014) highlighted four guiding principles, which should shape practice in early years settings, one being that ‘children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates’ (p. 6). The parents that participated here also referred to how through play their child learned in a particular way that could be individual. Kayla mentioned that “...some children are quicker to learn than others” (p. 10) whilst in a similar vein Alison talked about differences in learning style.

5.2.3 Research question 3

What is the understanding of African Caribbean parents about the approach to the curriculum in the setting their child attends?

The qualitative data in particular served to assist in answering this question. The overarching theme of **Adults and play** had two themes that directly relate to the adult’s role and the pedagogy of settings. They were **Roles and responsibilities** and

Pressures and tensions. They incorporate the subthemes '*Parents in partnership*' and '*The practitioner*', '*A need for a balance*' and '*Child led versus adult directed*'.

Parents in partnership

Previous studies have focused on parental involvement (Brooker, 2011; DeMulder & Stribling, 2012), advocating for the importance of parents and settings working collaboratively. Brooker (2011) proposed that there is a need for inquiry into children's cultural capital, which is the essential knowledge that children need to be educated citizens (Ofsted, 2019) through 'bidirectional' dialogue between home and school. Likewise, the parents in Gillanders et al.(2012) felt strongly that they should be receiving information about their children's progress from the setting and welcomed open communication. This is an underlying principle within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) whereby practitioners and parents work collaboratively.

The parents within this study seemed to take this further highlighting that information sharing and good communication between home and setting were necessary, regarded highly and for some a two way process.

Again, the findings here adds to the literature as the parents understand the importance of supporting their children at home but the concern is that perhaps the practitioners in the settings do not always appreciate what they do. For example, this was noted in the comments made by Thandie (p. 3) who felt that it was important for her to teach her children right from wrong even before they started at nursery. Civil and democratic learning along with good manners were of importance to the parents

in the present study. For Thandie it was important that the practitioners reinforced what she was teaching her children at home. In the same way Gillanders et al. (2012) found that parents believed that it was the practitioner's role to reinforce what the parents were instilling in their children at home. It is likely that only through two way conversations and having a shared understanding can home and settings work in a truly collaborative way.

The practitioner (Key adult)

The parents in this study talked about how they understood the role of the adult or practitioner. For some, the practitioner was the key person who worked with their child. Someone who they not only trusted but had built up a relationship with and their child had a strong attachment to and also trusted. The work around attachment which has emanated from the original theories of Bowlby (1973) and Ainsworth, Bell and Stayton (1971); Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall, (1978) underscores the views held that children need to have continuity of care to help lessen the anxiety a child feels being separated from their parents (Nutbrown & Page, 2008; Mickelburgh 2011). This was also enshrined in the Early Years Foundation Stage (2017) guidance and translated into educational practice by the work of Geddes, 2006 and Commodari, 2013.

Structured or free choice

There is argument that children learn best by doing (Montessori, 1965) and that they should have opportunities to freely explore their environment. The play-based

approach to learning and development that takes children's views, interests and needs into account was at the heart of the EYFS doctrine (DfES, 2007).

In considering the role of the adult in the early years and whether activities should be structured and formal or play-based and informal has been strongly debated. The term 'guided play' was the approach identified by Weisberg et al. (2013) where a combination of both pedagogical styles could be used. Guided play is similar to the approach advocated by Montessori along with approaches including scaffolding, (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976) and 'guided participation' (Rogoff et al., 1993). They are a repertoire of approaches that fit in Vygotsky's (1978) 'zone of proximal development'.

Data from the quantitative analysis (Figure 17) in the current study showed what parents believe to be the role of the practitioner. 50% of participants agreed with the statement 'It is best when adults set up structured learning activities for children', although 42% did not feel this. Similarly, parents were less clear about the value they placed on children having more freedom of choice with only 21% giving agreement on the topic. Alison who put it succinctly, "However the nursery sees fit....they are the professionals ... get a sense of how they structure it" (p. 7 lines 158 – 159).

'Child-led versus adult directed'

The qualitative data emphasised parents' understanding of the approach being used. Some such as Kayla were insistent that play should be child-led, "...play is supposed to be child-led isn't it ...adults should just stand back". The views of some of the

parents in the current study, who were in favour of the child-led approach reflects the views of parents in studies carried out previously (Muhammad, 2009; Laforette & Mendez, 2017). In contrast, Shauna was of the opinion that the adult-directed approach was being used and there was a clear divide between learning and play. It was also important for Thandie who explained that play needed to be structured to ensure that children were learning. In the same way, the O’Gorman and Ailwood (2012) study found that parents took a more formal, adult-directed view of play, which they felt was more supportive of learning.

‘A need for a balance’

There is on-going debate about learning and how skills are best taught, through either formal didactic instructions as advocated by Woodhead (1999) or more informal play-based approaches. Many childhood educators’ philosophical positioning endorse the concept that play is the best way for children to learn. Earlier studies revealed that many parents when thinking about learning, view it to be incompatible with play. More specifically Stipek et al., (1992) found that parents were not in agreement with child-centred practices and more in favour of the introduction of early basic skills through didactic and formal methods. Similarly, the parents in the Anderson-Clark unpublished thesis (1996) study felt that the best method of instruction was teacher directed.

The current research when looking at the data did not fully concur with the findings from the above research. As can be seen when looking at the quantitative data, where there was not a strong agreement either way (Figure 17 and Figure 18). However, the

qualitative data was more unifying and parents viewed it in terms of 'play and learning' rather than 'play versus learning'. The comments made by parents supported the view that there needed to be a balance between the two. This was clearly set out in the comments made by Leah, "some bits will be structured so they have to understand there is a time for structured play and time for unstructured play" (p. 8 lines 258 – 262). Leah saw it as preparation for school and going to the Reception class. A number of studies highlighted how the views held by parents were associated to school readiness and preparation for school.

In a similar vein, (Holloway et al., 1995) data highlighted that parents were looking for a balance. Support comes from Laforette and Mendez (2017) where the parents' views about play were consistent with existing definitions of guided play which combines self-directed play and direct instruction (Fisher et al., 2010; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2011).

The understanding that parents in the current study have about the approach to the curriculum is that there should be a balance between child-led play that is free and adult-directed play also described as guided play. However they were less confident in their views around the approach that should be used in literacy and numeracy learning and split in their views around structured activities for this particular age group, 2 – 3 years old in relation to literacy and numeracy.

5.2.4 Research question 4

What are the factors that have influenced African Caribbean parents' perceptions of play?

A number of factors have been viewed to have influenced how this particular group of parents perceive play and its role in development and learning. These include their culture and own early years experiences in addition to the introduction of technology.

Parents were asked to reflect on the past and memories of their own early years education. The data from the semi-structured interviews was helpful here in particular. The theme **“Things are different from when I was a child”** was with its three subthemes *‘iPad culture children’*, *‘Acceptance of change’* and *‘Some things were better!’*.

“iPad culture children”

Research found that there has been an increase in the range and type of technology being used by young children (Yelland, 1999), with on-going debate (Plowman, McPake, & Stephen, 2010), around the role that technology should play in the lives of young children. In looking at parent’s views about technology, Plowman et al. (2010) found that they were aware of the potential threats that technology could pose to very young children.

Some parents did not think that technology was a positive thing because they felt that it took over from the traditional ways of learning, in addition to not being developmentally appropriate. This was clearly expressed by Alison, who felt that there

was what she termed as an “iPad culture” from the parents that she knew, restricting opportunities for more traditional types of play including being creative, involvement in imaginative play and outdoor play. Others have also highlighted this point, that childhood was in some way being eroded by the introduction of technology (Palaiologou, 2016; Postman, 1994; Palmer, 2006).

Contrary to the above, but similar to other studies in this area, some parents were in favour of technology, with the view that computers, tablets and television had an important role in childhood education and learning. Both Shauna and Kayla commented on how their children were able to learn through the use of the computer and television. They explained that it was an enjoyable means of learning and that their children learnt a lot through watching television and then playing with their toys. For example Shauna (p. 5) and Kayla (p. 12). This is in line with the (Plowman et al., 2010), findings where parents welcomed and encouraged their children’s engagement with technology.

However, in looking at the activities that parents valued in the open-ended section of the questionnaire, there was no mention of technological gadgets or the use of iPads or computers. It was the more traditional activities such as painting and singing that parents considered.

Acceptance of change

Parents in the current study reflected on their own EYE comparing it with how things are for their children. The introduction of technology along with the concept of

learning through play was seen as significant and advantageous for the majority of parents.

An additional example of change was highlighted by the comment made by Denise (p. 12) who recognised the differences in how she was taught through direct instruction as advocated by Woodhead (1999) in comparison to how her child experiences the Early Years curriculum which involves learning through play (Froebel, 1887; Montessori, 1964; Piaget, 1952). Participants compared their understanding of play with their parents. Denise was able to clearly reflect, “I don’t think they knew about play being educational but then I suppose the era that they was they were raised” (p. 11 lines 367 – 375).

The current Early Years curriculum no longer has an emphasis on rote learning and repetition (Wood & Bennett, 1999) but instead identifies a number of principles as essential (Bertram & Pascal, 2002) such as being child centred, working in partnership with parents along with the importance of play and active exploratory learning. These principles appear to be in line with the belief of the parents here who valued activities such as construction, outdoor activities and role-play (Table 22).

Overall, the parents appear to have welcomed activities they deemed to be developmentally appropriate, which is what is enshrined in the curriculum guidance for all parts of the UK, where a greater emphasis is now placed on an approach to learning that is play-based (DCSF, 2008).

5.3 Summary of the discussion of the results

This study has highlighted the range of beliefs held by this group of African Caribbean parents which in part contradicted early previous literature, but also supported and further developed understanding. This group of parents, perceived play as being an important element of the Early Years curriculum, central to their child's development. They believed that language development, social skills and emotional regulation were fundamental elements delivered through a play-based curriculum. Also, the parents felt that the development of motor skills, opportunities for expression and creativity together with understanding the world was well supported. Critically, although most parents wanted academic input, there was less consensus about the role of play in the development of literacy and numeracy skills and how this could be best achieved.

A key factor for this group of parents was that learning should be fun to the point where the children would not even realise that they were learning. Although parents held similar play beliefs for both boys and girls, it was important for the parents in the current study that play would be used to challenge gender stereotypes. Through play, there was recognition that there were differences between girls and boys in activity choices and how they played, and perhaps boys needed more play-based activities than girls for learning to take place. The parents articulated how children differed in terms of their rate of development, learning styles and interests. It would therefore be important to them that early years practitioners carefully considered the types of activities and play opportunities they presented to children.

Most parents appeared to appreciate the approaches to the curriculum being used in their child's early years setting. Many stressed that there should be a balance between child-led and adult-directed structured activities. The role of the practitioner was felt to be key, alongside collaboration between home and the setting. It was established that some parents felt that what they do at home was not always credited or acknowledged by the early years practitioners in the settings.

The findings suggest that this particular group of African Caribbean parents' understanding and beliefs about play in the early years are very positive.

There appears to be complete assimilation (Berry, 2005) in that this particular group of parents have similar attitudes and beliefs as the UK population as a whole when it comes to perceptions of play beliefs and the role of play in early learning. Rogoff's (2002, 2003) social cultural perspective can also be used to explain the nature of this group of parents' perception of the Early Years curriculum. They see opportunities for learning and development through engagement and play activities that are guided, collaborative and independent. In their reflections they draw attention to the broader social system in light of the historical contexts combined with the bridge between home and the early years setting and what their children bring to the learning situation.

5.4 Critique of the present study

A critique will be presented highlighting the limitations in the design of the study and the methodology used. In a similar vein, the strengths will also be considered.

A mixed methods design in a single study as proposed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) allows for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data and in so doing provides a better understanding of the research problem. The data derived from the mixed methods used in this study was analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Arguments for and against using these, as well as all aspects around methodology, measures and procedures have been made in the methodology section Chapter 3.

The study benefitted from a pilot of the questionnaire being conducted. This allowed the researcher to check out the clarity of the wording, simplicity of instructions and the layout. Likewise, the semi-structured interview was piloted in order to ensure that there was a logical structure to the questions, which made sense. Additionally the pilot allowed the researcher to become familiar with the procedures, practice the necessary techniques and refine interview skills. A supplementary strength in the interview process involved the researcher carefully considering the role played in facilitating the interview. Great care was taken to build rapport with the participants by putting them at their ease so that they felt comfortable and therefore free to talk and with the emphasis on the use of prompts as a technique the researcher ensured that leading questions were not asked. A final strength identified was that the researcher was able to bring forth great deal from the quantitative data to inform the study. That being said, consideration needs to be given to the design of the study and the methodology used.

5.4.1 Sample population and generalisability of findings (transferability)

Using purposive sampling the researcher intentionally selected participants who were of African Caribbean heritage and also a parent of a child who is two or three years old. Participants in the final sample were recruited from early years settings in a London based local authority. Under such circumstances it is not possible to generalise the findings to the general African Caribbean population in the UK. Yardley (2008) stated that reliability is the extent to which results generated could be generated again at another time by different researcher with different groups. Although reliability is not felt to be an appropriate measure for judging qualitative work (Braun & Clarke, 2013), but it could be argued that for African Caribbean parents within this borough the results do apply.

In the absence of parents who send their children to childminders, their experiences remain unarticulated. It is likely that this particular group of parents might have had an alternative perception of play and learning.

5.4.2. Data collection using surveys (quantitative)

The Parent Play & Learning Belief (PPLB) scale was specifically adapted. However, the reliability of the PPLB scale can be challenged, as further trials are needed to ascertain whether it measures what it set out to measure.

A further confounding factor in the quantitative phase is the evidence, which suggests that participants tend to consciously, or unconsciously answer in a socially acceptable way (Crowne & Marlow, 1960). This can be considered as a potential shortcoming, in

spite of this the researcher decided to remove the option of a midpoint or neutral option in an attempt create a forced choice. However, previous research (Worcester & Burns, 1975) found that having no mid-point on a four-point scale had the effect of leading participants towards the positive ends of the scale. It is likely that the six-point scale used in this study produced a similar outcome. In a few cases, but not all the researcher was present at the time the questionnaire was being completed by participants. It is likely that this could have led to the researcher unwittingly influencing the responses given.

Given that the researcher not only designed the study, carried out the data collection and later analysis of the data independent of any other researcher suggests that there may be a potential for bias. However, the researcher kept a reflective log during particular phases of the research to not only allow for transparency in the design and analysis but also reflecting on and reducing sources of bias acting as Braun and Clark (2013) termed as part of 'quality control'. It also helped to have informal discussions with colleagues and involvement in regular supervision.

5.4.3 Data collection using semi-structured interviews (qualitative)

In looking at the qualitative phase of the research involving the use of an interview schedule, the degree to which the researcher influenced the responses needs to be considered. As an inexperienced researcher and interviewer it is likely that there were missed opportunities to seek clarification and use a range of probes and prompts particularly during the first few interviews that were conducted. Although rapport was established during the interviews and participants were made to feel at ease, it was

perhaps not until the fifth interview that the researcher felt confident and familiar with the process of interviewing and asking follow up questions and probes.

One suggestion has been that the semi-structured interview schedule should be considered as indicative, as the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee is to be determined during the interview process and therefore fluid (Charmaz, 2002). In this particular instance the researcher kept faithfully to the questions and tended not to veer too far off from the schedule. In so doing, this left very little opportunity to go along with the interviewee's train of thought or ideas. As emphasised by Braun and Clarke (2013), the interview should be seen as a social interpersonal encounter and not as just a means to collecting data. This was certainly the case during the first few interviews that were conducted. At the end of each interview the researcher ensured that the participants were given the opportunity to add to what they said if they felt it was not covered during the interview.

Consideration needs to be given to the likelihood of the interviewer in the dual role of researcher being of the same ethnic heritage as the participants may have resulted in some bias. However, the researcher took steps to eliminate the potential for bias by keeping a research log and reflecting on the role played, alongside discussions with her supervisor. An aspect explored further in section 5.9.

5.4.3.1 Thematic analysis (TA)

In line with the epistemology of critical realism the current study can be viewed as a way through which parents' perceptions of play and learning can be ascertained.

Thematic analysis is relatively new and was not recognised as a method until Braun and Clarke proposed it in 2006. It does not have the reputation for being distinct and robust methodology in the same way that other approaches may have (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Whilst it does not specify the method of data collection it does provide a method for data analysis that is relatively easy and quick to learn. A drawback of Thematic Analysis is that it is reliant on the researcher interpreting verbal data and then text which is deemed to be a subjective process. To counteract this data extracts were provided to support assumptions and interpretations made. In addition to ensuring that an on- going reflexive dialogue was had and a log kept.

In the case of Thematic Analysis, it is the researcher who determines the themes, however in keeping with the critical realist approach the researcher ensured that the participant's own language was used where possible when identifying and naming themes. Thus allowing for participants understanding to be determined through the words they chose to use to aid analysis.

Issues with data analysis were encountered particularly since the research involved the use of mixed methodology research design where both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in a single study. Having generated a considerable amount of data, the researcher needed to make decisions about what to keep and highlight and what to omit. To overcome this dilemma, discussion with colleagues and during supervision helped when considering how best to combine the data to the point where they were complementary, provide a better understanding and strengthen the research when brought together. In addition, following the process as

set out by Braun and Clark (2013) aided the decision-making when analysing and interpreting patterns across the data.

5.5 Modifications and improvements

In thinking about how the research could be further improved the researcher thought that three questions that were included in the survey needed revision. Firstly, question numbers seven and eight were combined and it is likely that this perhaps weakened the impact in how the participants viewed them. The fact that literacy and numeracy are discrete areas in the Early Years Foundation Stage should therefore warrant them being treated separately. Secondly, question 15, 'Play should not be part of the curriculum' is a double negative statement and on reflection should have been reworded and framed in a similar vein to the other questions. This would allow the participants to answer truthfully and not be pulled to one side or the other. In hindsight the wording should have been non-neutral and thus eliminate the leading bias. Thirdly, to ensure that the questions were clear and easily understood, it is likely that the layout of question 24 appeared to confuse some of the participants. They were asked to rate in order of importance the aims of early years. Many of the participants felt that the aims listed were of equal importance and gave each of them a rating of 1. This question could have been reformulated in a matrix where it was made clear that each number 1 – 5 could only be used once.

On reflection, it would have been beneficial to the research if a question was included in the survey that asked about participants' own early years play experiences before starting school and what impact they felt that it had on their learning. Having data on

this area from a larger group of participants would have been interesting and further complement the data gathered from the interviews.

An area of the research that could have been improved was the recruitment of African Caribbean parents who send their child to a childminder. This meant that there was very little opportunity to gather data from this particular group of parents. Given that they were a very specific population, more thought needed to be given in making contact. Having to work through several gatekeepers including the manager for the childminder coordinators, the coordinators and then the childminders in order to get to this particular group resulted in difficulty accessing parents and therefore a significant barrier to the research. One option was to put the questionnaire online but because of homogeneity and wanting to keep recruitment the same for all of the participants, this was not considered a viable option.

5.6 Dissemination of findings

In looking at the importance of dissemination, there is a suggestion that research is incomplete until it has been shared for public scrutiny and therefore should be built into the process and design of the research. Brownson, Eyles, Harris, Moore, and Tabak (2017) argue that effective dissemination is the key factor in addressing the gap between research and practice. As previously commented on in the methodology section Table 9 outlining the qualities of good research, the researcher is ethically obliged to distribute his or her research findings. The findings will need to be shared in order for the research to have an impact. How this will be achieved will be outlined in the following section.

The settings who participated in the research will be sent a summary detailing the findings of the study along with any participants who have requested it will be sent an overview of the research findings. A presentation will be delivered to the educational psychology service in addition to sharing the findings with those who attend the Early Years SENCo Forum. The researcher will write a paper for publication and so accessible to EPs across the UK highlighting the key points and implications for EP working at a systems level and individual level. The researcher will need to consider the best way to present the findings to not only target audiences but also those with a responsibility for planning and coordinating EYE as well as to parents.

5.7 Implications for EP practice

The results from this study found that overall parents have positive views about play and its impact on learning in the early years. Given that early years is a distinct phase and separate to school age, the data gathered from the questionnaires and interviews highlight that there are a number of implications for EP contribution.

EPs are increasingly open to opportunities where they are able to work at both a systemic and individual level. However, McGuiggan (2017) found that EP work in the early years is primarily statutory assessment work. Smith and Reynolds, (1998) stressed that EPs needed to provide services that demonstrated the distinctiveness of the early years age group and that of the early years settings. EPs have a clear role to play in the early years when it comes to early intervention and preventative work (DfEE, 2000). Examples of this include direct work with families delivering specific interventions including the National Autistic Society (NAS) EarlyBird and Webster

Stratton's Incredible Years Parent Training which are group based training or Video Interactive Guidance (VIG) with parents in their homes. In addition to more informal parent advice sessions and drop-ins. Shannon and Posada (2007) have found that such involvement was beginning to feature much more in the work of EPs. This is no longer felt to be the case; McGuiggan (2017) found that EPs did not view intervention work with families in the early years as part of their role, a likely consequence of the increase in traded services.

Wolfendale and Robinson (2001, 2004) argued that the emphasis should not only be on supporting families but also practitioners in their understanding of early years and child development. The OECD (2015) review highlighted that parental knowledge of the curriculum is important specifically for children with special needs or learning difficulties but also for all children. Play-based learning is a fundamental concept and embedded in early years practice, how parents understand the role of play in relation to learning and more specifically early literacy and numeracy skills are a key factor. However, it is a role that EPs could fill, in order to provide greater clarity for parents and to resolve any confusion they might have. The DfEE (2002) suggests that EPs aim to promote child development and learning through the application of psychology. Given the extensive knowledge that EPs have of child development along with the ability to link theory to practice, provides justification for the EP role in early years.

In relation to above the OECD, 2015 review highlighted the importance of information sharing about 'how' children learn and 'what' they learn, as it can act as a bridge between practitioners and parents. There were instances in the current study where

parents commented that they did not always feel that practitioners listened to them. A further role for EPs in light of the outcomes from the current research is to work at a systemic level in early years settings helping practitioners and parents to see each other's point of view. EPs clearly have a role in bridging the gap between home and early years settings ensuring that there is accessible dialogue flowing two ways.

The Tickell Review (2011) acknowledged the importance of good reflective practice for practitioners and the inclusion of parents and carers in their child's development. In light of this, EPs can take the lead in developing and delivering consultation and training packages for key practitioners in early years settings and also for parents using the psychological theories that underpin educational pedagogy and child development. Examples of this include the influence of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and how using models such as Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory or Attachment Theory to highlight and explain pedagogy and curriculum. Related to this is Wolfendale and Robinson (2001, 2004) recognition that EPs are able to contribute to Early Years curriculum development for all children.

5.8 Implications for early years settings

With regards to the above there are also implications for early years settings and for the practitioners who work within them. They include the following:

- The need for practitioner to work with parents in a collaborative way.
- Importance of practitioners taking the time to listen to what parents have to say given that they know their children best. Information sharing is a two way process.

- Parents need much more information about approaches and practice for the development of early literacy and numeracy skills, resulting in a greater level of shared understanding.
- An explanation about the approaches being used at the setting including 'guided play' and the role of the adult in structuring the activities in support of children's learning and development.

In outlining characteristics of education in the early years, Hay (2014) pointed out the need for nurturing and responsive social environments that promote consistent and reliable attachments to staff, the need to recognise and respond to the individual personalities of children and the promotion of play. In light of the Green Paper (2017) where the focus is on the role of education in promoting and protecting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, there is very little that has been included in relation to children in the early years. Given that schools and colleges need to identify a Designated Senior Lead for Mental Health who will then need to be trained, then so too should early years settings be expected to have a practitioner with a similar role. EPs could possibly provide support for that key person, raise awareness and support early identification, coordinate the delivery of interventions and oversee the outcomes of interventions.

5.9 Recommendations for future research

Recommendations for future research are fourfold. Firstly, it would be interesting to broaden this work to wider ethnic groups for example, those who self-identify as African. It is likely that they will have different cultural values as a result of customs,

beliefs and migration history, the literature is lacking in terms of a perspective from this particular ethnic group. Also, different ethnic groups which are significant in the UK including Indian, Bangladeshi, Chinese and Turkish.

In light of the current study, future research could involve African Caribbean parents who send their children to a childminder. Again, this is a specific group that have not been featured highly in research where the focus has been placed on understanding their views about play and the role it has in early learning. There could also be a nationwide survey of parents who have a child aged 2 – 3 years to understand how they perceive play with a view to developing parents' role and how they can support play nationally. Particularly given the current agendas of raising achievements, mental health challenges and the impact of technology. There could also be an exploration with the focus on the impact of a families' socio economic status (income and occupation) and their perception of play and learning in the early years.

Future research can go one step further and explore how African Caribbean parents' beliefs about play and learning may differ depending on the age of the child. Given that the focus of this research featured children aged two years and three years, comparisons could be made with parents of children who are just about to start school aged four years with those parents who have a child in year one, aged between five and six years old. It would be interesting to ascertain whether African Caribbean parents of children who were older than three years old continued to value play as a medium for learning or whether parental attitudes shift in favour of more academic and formal instruction.

Finally, in reflecting on previous research completed including this present research, the majority of participants tended to be mothers. Further research could extend the focus of this study by conducting research examining African Caribbean fathers' understanding of the role of play in early learning and development. More significantly, whether there is a difference in African Caribbean mothers' and fathers' value of play and the role it has in learning.

Overall, this area would benefit from additional research in order to fully understand the nature of parents' beliefs about play and learning and the consequences of those beliefs with much larger samples; as this could impact on practice and outcomes for children.

5.10 Researcher reflexivity

My personal interest in the African Caribbean population is as a result of being a member of that group. The history of my family having migrated from the Caribbean island of Jamaica is similar to the sample population. Whilst I may have my own perspective of play and its role in early learning and development, there had only been anecdotal reports from family members and acquaintances. This led to me wanting to explore this area in a formal and structured way in order to ascertain a better understanding of the views held.

My own identity and beliefs as a member of the same ethnic group as the participants who featured in the research implies that I have 'insider status'. There were some advantages in sharing the same cultural background and collective identity which I feel

helped to speed up the process of establishing rapport between myself and participants. They were likely to feel more comfortable talking to someone who is broadly similar to them in terms of social characteristics. I had a strong interest in the research and was highly motivated to complete the study, great care was taken to adopting a systematic approach to ensure as much objectivity throughout the research process. As a former teacher and currently working as an educational psychologist, I have not only a personal but also professional opinion about the role of play and how it relates to learning. I also have a strong and positive memory of my own early years experience. However, throughout the research process I set to one side these views and memories in order that any preconceptions held did not interfere with the research process.

In considering my role throughout the research process a number of steps were taken to ensure that any values I held did not influence aspects of data collection or analysis and lessen any potential bias. During the semi-structured interviews in an attempt to ensure that all of the participants had a near similar experience so far as that was possible, led me to what was termed as “a script” which served as an introduction and secure verbal agreement before going through the consent for interview form with each participant. After each interview, I listened to each recording taking note of the questions asked. In not wanting to ask leading questions led to the introduction of asking probing questions that I listed and was able to refer to during the interviews. When reflecting why I did this the explanation was twofold: firstly, I did not want the participants to veer too far from my agenda and secondly because again I wanted them to have a similar experience.

Thematic analysis requires an element of subjectivity on the part of the researcher as it involves creating an understanding and interpretation of what participants have said. In the current study the researcher with the goal of being impartial took steps. During the process of analysing the transcripts from the interviews and working with the whole data set I found myself intentionally removed from the structure imposed by the research questions taking care not to consider them when identifying and working out themes. It was also important that the language used by the participants were reflected in the themes where appropriate.

Keeping a reflective log during certain points of the research process helped me to consider my own position and actions taken in the research and served to lessen the potential of bias. As the researcher efforts were taken to ensure that the reasons for the choices made were justified. The whole process was insightful and led to not only new learning but also the acquisition of new skills. Some of which can be utilised in my role as an educational psychologist.

Chapter 6

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

Play as a construct has been difficult to define, Cohen (2006) described it as a multidimensional construct that had varied meaning across time, culture and contexts. Froebel's definition emphasised play as a natural activity for young children giving not only joy and freedom but also significantly the foundation for later learning. Together with Dewey, this provides us with a child-centred view of education. Theories of child development have helped us to understand how play can be used to enhance learning in the EYs. Piaget and Erikson see it as a process of going through fixed stages whilst Vygotsky proposed that learning takes place through a cultural lens and children make sense of this by means of interacting with others. The principles of attachment theory highlight the benefits of having secure attachments, which help to think about practice, and along with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory provides a framework for looking at parents' perceptions of EYs. In thinking about curriculum content the Montessori programme maintained that children learn best by doing, similarly the Reggio Emilia curriculum where the child is central and the focus is on the 'how' rather than 'what' is learnt.

Psychological theories, research and government legislation recognise the principle of 'learning through play' which enshrines the curriculum guidance in the UK. With the introduction of the EYFS (2017) parents and practitioners working together is an underlying thread throughout. Parents have an important role to play in their children's development. It can be argued that the degree to which parents understand and value play-based learning needs to be considered. Studies in the area have

focused specifically on either appropriateness of particular teaching methods, involvement of parents and views about the curriculum. There has been little research more broadly looking at the views of African Caribbean parents who represent a significant section of the UK population, nationally and in London (1.1% and 7.0%) and thus should be given a voice so that their views and attitudes can be understood by practitioners in EYs. It is an area of research that has had very little representation and therefore this study aimed to fill the gap through focusing on the views of African Caribbean parents in particular.

The current study, used mixed methodology to ascertain the perceptions of African Caribbean parents, of play in early years education and how it relates to learning. Key findings of the research has highlighted that this particular group of African Caribbean parents have clear and agreed views about the importance of play in learning for their children. They recognised that language development, emotional regulation and social skills could be learnt through a play-based curriculum. That being said, parents wanted academic input, however, there was less agreement how the development of literacy and numeracy skills could be achieved through play. Significantly, there was not a clear understanding of why play is used and how activities should be structured. There was strong belief that there should be a balance between child-initiated and adult directed activities. With this in mind, the role of the practitioner was considered to be essential and that there should be collaboration between home and the early years setting. The factors influencing parents' perspectives are likely to be sociocultural and include culture and values alongside context and environment. The findings suggest that for this group of African Caribbean parents there appears to be

complete acculturation in that they have similar beliefs as the UK population as a whole when it comes to play beliefs and the role that play has in learning and development.

The above would suggest that parents understand play and how it relates to early learning but need more support to better understand how literacy and numeracy skills can be achieved through play-based activities. The insight gained by using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to explore parents' perceptions has brought to the fore valuable information generating a range of ideas for future work for practitioners both in EY settings but also with regard to other supporting professionals such as EPs.

These findings have implications for practitioners in the EY. Most compelling is the need to work collaboratively with parents where sharing information is a two-way process. Having discussions about the approaches being used and the way activities are structured, where there should be a shared understanding of the development of early literacy and numeracy skills. Of relevance is the implication for the work of EPs. The research reported here indicates, there is a need for educational psychologists (EPs) to play a key role in bridging the gap between practitioners and parents. This could be achieved by working systemically in EY settings with the focus on developing policies and practice. EPs bring with them a range of psychological knowledge and skills based on their understanding of child development and the Early Years curriculum, which they could use to enhance the work of practitioners and help parents to understand the role of play in development and learning. In light of the Green Paper, promoting and protecting mental health and wellbeing, EPs could

provide support and training for practitioners who take on the mental health lead role in EY settings. EPs are in a good position to carry out work in early years settings either directly or indirectly.

The findings from this study have highlighted where there are further gaps in our understanding. For example ensuring all representative groups are studied such as those who send their children to a child minder exploration of how beliefs about play and learning may differ depending on the age of the child, and to consider the views of parents who self identify as African Caribbean.

To conclude, this study has raised a number of areas of interest in relation to play and learning in the early years and how African Caribbean parents perceive play in particular. There needs to be greater clarity for parents on how best to support literacy and numeracy skills through play-based activities, support for effective two way conversations between parents and practitioners particularly to provide opportunities for parents to share their points of view. Together with the introduction of the Wellbeing agenda and linked to the importance that this group of parents placed on emotional regulation and development of social skills, EPs have a clear role in working within the early years at not only an individual level but also at a systemic level.

In summary a case can be made that this current study has made a unique contribution to psychological knowledge and broadened the research base in this area.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Systematic search outcomes

Systematic search 1	
Search date:	05.08.17
Database searched:	EBSCO Host – British Education Index
Search terms used:	AND/OR African Caribbean*, Black*, African American*, Caribbean*, West Indian*, Black British* Parent*, mother*, father*, carer* Perception*, understanding*, awareness*, conception*, impression*, insight*, knowledge*, opinion*, view*, belief* Preschool*, nursery*, day care*, kindergarten*, playgroup*, crèche*, pre-k*, early years* Curriculum*, education*, learning*, play* pedagogy*
Advanced search inclusion criteria:	Only papers between 0000 – 2017 Only scholarly (peer reviewed) journals Only full text
Papers found	1

Systematic search 2	
Search date:	05.08.17
Database searched:	EBSCO Host – Child Development & Adolescent Studies
Search terms used:	AND/OR African Caribbean*, Black*, African American*, Caribbean*, West Indian*, Black British* Parent*, mother*, father*, carer*

	Perception*, understanding*, awareness*, conception*, impression*, insight*, knowledge*, opinion*, view*, belief* Preschool*, nursery*, day care*, kindergarten*, playgroup*, crèche*, pre-k*, early years* Curriculum*, education*, learning*, play* pedagogy*
Advanced search inclusion criteria:	Only papers between 0000 – 2017 Only scholarly (peer reviewed) journals Only full text
Papers found	43

Systematic search 3	
Search date:	05.08.17
Database searched:	EBSCO Host – ERIC
Search terms used:	AND/OR African Caribbean*, Black*, African American*, Caribbean*, West Indian*, Black British* Parent*, mother*, father*, carer* Perception*, understanding*, awareness*, conception*, impression*, insight*, knowledge*, opinion*, view*, belief* Preschool*, nursery*, day care*, kindergarten*, playgroup*, crèche*, pre-k*, early years* Curriculum*, education*, learning*, play* pedagogy*
Advanced search inclusion criteria:	Only papers between 0000 – 2017 Only scholarly (peer reviewed) journals Only full text
Papers found	457

Systematic search 4	
Search date:	05.08.17
Database searched:	EBSCO Host – Education Abstracts (H.W. Wilson)
Search terms used:	<p>AND/OR</p> <p>African Caribbean*, Black*, African American*, Caribbean*, West Indian*, Black British*</p> <p>Parent*, mother*, father*, carer*</p> <p>Perception*, understanding*, awareness*, conception*, impression*, insight*, knowledge*, opinion*, view*, belief*</p> <p>Preschool*, nursery*, day care*, kindergarten*, playgroup*, crèche*, pre-k*, early years*</p> <p>Curriculum*, education*, learning*, play* pedagogy*</p>
Advanced search inclusion criteria:	<p>Only papers between 0000 – 2017</p> <p>Only scholarly (peer reviewed) journals</p> <p>Only full text</p>
Papers found	55

Appendix 2

Overview of articles selected for literature review

Author/Year	Title	Location of Research	Participant Information	Methodology	Aims of Research	Findings
Stipek, D., Milburn, S., Clements, D. & Daniels, D. (1992)	Parents' Beliefs About Appropriate Education for Young Children	Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology	551 parents of preschool children (4 – 5 years old) described as being ethnically diverse – over 70% black in 7 classrooms, predominantly white in 14 classrooms, predominantly Asian in 2 and Latino in 11. Ethnicity of parents was not asked.	Questionnaire	Parents beliefs about appropriate ways to teach basic skills to young children and on the learning related activities they engaged with their children at home.	Parents varied in terms of a coherent set of beliefs related to teaching basic skills. Early introduction of formal instruction (chose schools compatible with their beliefs) Child centred practices.

<p>Holloway, S., Rambaud, M., Fuller, B., & Eggers-Pierola (1995)</p>	<p>What is “Appropriate Practice” at Home and in Child Care?: Low-income Mother’s Views on Preparing Their Children for School</p>	<p>Early Childhood Research Quarterly</p>	<p>14 low-income single mothers (4 White, 6 Black & 4 Latino)</p>	<p>Longitudinal study 3 semi-structured interviews lasting 1 – 2 hours at 9 month intervals Telephone calls were used to stay in touch between interviews Child care providers were observed and kept diaries.</p>	<p>Explore low-income mothers’ views about children’s socialization and education.</p>	<p>Strongly believed that education was the ticket to social mobility. They thought learning was facilitated through participation in a variety of hands-on activities, as well as exposure to numbers, letters and other decontextualize information.</p>
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Anderson-Clark, J. (1996)	The Development and implementation of a developmentally appropriate curriculum that meets the expectations of African American parents.	Unpublished thesis ERIC	55 African American families who had a Caribbean or Bahamian background.	Workshops, Surveys	Provide an understanding of developmentally appropriate practice for young children. Development of a curriculum.	Increased parents awareness of the importance of play but did not change expectations regarding early acquisition of academic skills.
Fogle, L. & Mendez, J. (2006)	Assessing the play beliefs of African American mothers with preschool children	Early Childhood Research Quarterly	96% of 259 participants were mothers African American 24 African American parents - low-income	Questionnaire – pilot version of PPBS 5-point Likert scale Focus group discussion	To develop a measurement tool for African American parents.	Parent ratings of play support correlated positively with ratings of children’s interactive peer play. Ratings of academic focus were negatively correlated with prosocial peer play ratings and positively correlated with ratings of disruptive play.

Muhammad, Y. J. (2009)	Low income African American Parents' views about the value of play for their preschool age children in Head Start	Unpublished thesis Diginole.fsu.edu	12 African American parents or primary caregivers age range 24 – 59	Semi-structured interviews - including showing video clips of play	African American mother's beliefs about play's relationship with cognitive development.	Held positive views on the value of play. Play may be essential for young children's development in social interactions, creativity, problem solving and other areas that contribute to kindergarten readiness.
Gillanders, C., McKinney, M. & Ritchie, S. (2012)	What Kind of School Would You Like for Your Children? Exploring Minority Mothers' Beliefs to Promote Home-School Partnerships	Early Childhood Education Journal	African American and Latino mothers – low-income levels	Focus groups	Describe an approach that can be used by schools to understand parents' goals for the education of their children.	Design responsive strategies to support the goals – home-school partnership practices that are more responsive to the needs and

						beliefs of minority parents with low income levels.
Roopnarine, J. & Jin, B. (2012)	Indo Caribbean Immigrant Beliefs about Play and Its Impact on Early Academic Performance	American Journal of Play	57 Indo Caribbean (migrated from Guyana, Trinidad, Tobago) immigrant couples	Interviews	Parents beliefs about the amount of time playing and academic performance	Mothers and fathers held discrepant beliefs about the value of play. Maternal beliefs about the cognitive benefits of play affected the relationship between the amount of time children play and their cognitive performance

Laforette & Mendez (2017)	Play beliefs and responsive parenting among low-income mothers of pre-schoolers in the United States	Early Childhood Development & Care	Low-income' parents 231 families 78% were mothers 68% identified as African-American	Parent Play Belief Scale (PPBS), Preschool Parenting Measure (PPM), About Being a Parent Scale (ABPS), Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D)	Examined parents' developmentally appropriate beliefs about children's responsive parenting.	Favourable view of play, it serves as a learning context for young children. Low-income parents endorse the beliefs involving the importance of play for fostering optimal development.
Grantham-McGregor, Landman & Desai (1983)	Child rearing in poor urban Jamaica	Childcare, Health and Development	75 families with 31 – 36 month old children in Kingston, Jamaica	Questionnaire Griffiths Developmental Scales for Young Children	Investigation of child rearing practices and attitudes.	Teaching and preparation for school were highly regarded There was little conscious effort to foster cognitive/ language development through play.

Appendix 3



Parent Play and Learning Belief Questionnaire

Devised by the researcher for the purpose of this research project.

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. The aim is to find out about your views on play and learning at preschool, which are very important to us.



It will take approximately 45 minutes. Please set aside some time to sit down in a quiet place to answer it thoughtfully.

Please complete every question you can, however, you have the right not to answer any particular questions if you do not want. You also have the right to withdraw from completing the questionnaire without being penalised.

Once you return your questionnaire it will be held confidentially and only accessible to the researcher. No information will be shared with others until it has been anonymised..

There are 24 questions in total. The questions will involve selecting your response to a given statement on a rating scale.



Please rate each item according to how you agree with the following statements by using the following scale:

-  1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Somewhat disagree
4 = Somewhat agree
5 = Agree
 6 = Strongly agree



Please circle the statement that most matches your views

Communication and Language

1. During play my child learns how to communicate using verbal and non-verbal language skills.



- | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | |
|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |  |

2. During play my child has opportunities to acquire new vocabulary and language skills.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

Physical development

3. My child benefits from outdoor play where he or she has opportunity to release their energy.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

4. Being physically active helps my child improve his or her coordination and movement skills.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

Personal, social and emotional development

5. When playing, my child learns about the give and take of relationships.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

6. Play supports my child's emotional development by providing a way for him or her to express and cope with their feelings.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

Literacy and numeracy

7. Learning to recognise letters and numbers is an important activity for my child to be involved in and best done in a classroom setting.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

8. My child learns more when being taught to read and count in a structured and systematic way.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

Understanding of the world

9. My child learns best through free exploration and play in their environment.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

10. Play is a time when my child can make sense of their world.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

Expressive arts and design

11. My child can develop his or her imagination and creativity during play.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

12. My child benefits from exploring and playing with a range of media and materials.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

The pre-school day and the curriculum



13. It is important for my child to have fun at pre-school.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	



14. Play should be spontaneous, imaginative and directed by children.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	



15. Play should not be a part of the curriculum.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

16. There are other ways of learning that could benefit my child.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	



17. It is best when adults set up structured learning activities for children.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

18. Please give examples of 3 activities you have seen set up by adults at your child's nursery (or that you set up for your children in your care at home).

- _____
- _____
- _____

19. Children should be free to choose any activity of their choice whenever they want.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	



20. Please give examples of 3 activities that you know your child likes to choose at pre-school that you would value.

- _____
- _____
- _____

21. Please give examples of 3 activities that your child gains most from doing at pre-school.

- _____
- _____
- _____

22. Playing at preschool will help my child get ready for school.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	

23. Please outline 3 ways in which play helps your child get ready for school.

- _____
- _____
- _____

24. On a scale of 1 – 5 (with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least valuable), please order the following aims of pre-school?

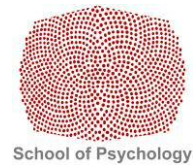
- To foster my child's independence.
- To help my child socialise with other children.
- To boost my child's academic achievement.
- To teach my child to enjoy learning and be a lifelong learner.
- To prepare my child for primary school.

Or provide your own

Thank you for your participation

Please now place the completed form in the envelope provided together with the background/demographic form. Place in the sealed envelope in the post box at the pre-school.

Appendix 4



Schedule for semi-structured interviews with parents

Note: The research questions will not be asked or read during the interview

RQ1. *What understanding do African/Caribbean parents have of play in preschool?*

- Can you give some examples of the different types of play that are on offer at your child's preschool?
- When children play, what opportunities do you think there are for them to develop?Tell me more.
- What do you think are the benefits of play in preschool?
- What do you think are the possible drawbacks of play in preschool?

RQ2. *What role do parents think play should have in learning?*

- What activities does your child get involved in at preschool?
- How do they learn from the activities that you outlined?
- Should children only be offered activities that interest them? What are your reasons for saying this?
- Should play in preschool be encouraged? Why do you think this?
- Have you heard of the concept of learning through play? What do you think about it?
- Do you think that there are other ways of learning that could benefit your child? Please elaborate (tell me more).

RQ3. *What understanding do African/Caribbean parents who have participated in this research have of the approach to preschool curriculum in the nursery their child attend and what do they think of it?*

- How do you think that play should be integrated into your child's day? Give an outline of what their day should look like?
- Should play be structured or should it be free? What are your reasons for saying this?
- What is the adult's role in play at preschool?
- What do you think are the most important skills that your child should learn at preschool?
- What are your reasons for saying this?
- What do you think should be covered in the preschool curriculum?
- How can being introduced to a topic such as 'Foods we eat' or 'People who help us' support your child's learning?

RQ4. *What influences do parents' own experiences of play have on their perspective on the role of play for their own children?*

- What role did play have in your preschool years?
- How much or how little value would you say your family placed on play during your early years?
- Why do you think this was the case?
- Would you want your child to experience the same early years' experience you did? Why or why not?

Is there anything related that I have not asked that you would like to add?

Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions.

Appendix 5



Letter to the Head/Manager of the Setting

Dear Head/Manager

My name is Wendy Harris, I am an Educational Psychologist and postgraduate student in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. I am carrying out a research project to explore African Caribbean parents' perceptions of play and learning in pre-school.

This research investigates parents' views about play in pre-school. Whilst there has been a great deal of research around play from the perspective of professionals and practitioners, which has been widely documented and informed government policy, there has been little emphasis on parents' perceptions and that of African Caribbean parents in particular.

With the introduction of pre-school children into school, this study will help draw attention to African Caribbean parents' views about play or activities in pre-school, find any observable trends and explore how parents' views of play relate to learning.

As part of this research project, parents will be asked to complete a questionnaire that will take approximately 45 minutes. The questionnaire will be completed anonymously. A random selection of willing participants will also be invited to attend an interview with the researcher in order to explore their perceptions and experiences in greater depth. The interview will last for approximately one hour.

Interviews will be completed confidentially and will be fully anonymised in any follow up reports produced and in the published research. Any anonymised data will be held in accordance with the guidelines at Cardiff University.

I would be grateful if you would be willing to give your permission to recruit parents on the premises and to later meet with them. I have attached a poster asking parents if they would be interested in participating in this research. I would also be grateful if you could display the poster in your setting.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this research project. Please let me know if you require any further information.

Kind regards,
Wendy

Wendy Harris, Educational Psychologist, School of Psychology, Tower Building, Park Place,
Cardiff University CF10 3AT Harriswm@cardiff.ac.uk

Andrea Higgins, Research Supervisor, School of Psychology, Tower Building, Park Place,
Cardiff University CF10 3AT Higgins2@cardiff.ac.uk

African Caribbean Parents



What helps your child to learn?

A chance to share your views

What is involved?

- Completing a questionnaire about play and learning
- Some questions use a rating scale
- It will take approximately 45 minutes

It is important to find out views from all parents

For more information please contact

Wendy Harris at Harriswm@cardiff.ac.uk

or 07448419626

You can also contact a member of staff for an information sheet

Appendix 7



Parent Information Sheet

African Caribbean parents of two and three year olds perceptions of play and learning in pre-school.

What is this research and why is it important?

This research investigates parents' views about play in pre-school. Whilst there has been a great deal of research around play looking at the views of professionals and workers in early years, which has been written about in detail and used in government policy, there has been little emphasis on parents' perceptions and that of African Caribbean parents in particular.

With the introduction of pre-school children into school, this study will help draw attention to African Caribbean parents' views about play or activities in pre-school, find any observable trends and explore how parents' views of play relate to learning.

Who is carrying out this research?

The researcher, Wendy Harris is an Educational Psychologist and student on the Top-up Doctorate course at Cardiff University. She is supervised by Andrea Higgins. The project has ethical approval from Cardiff University Department of Psychology Ethics Committee, this means that the committee has carefully considered the risks and benefits of the research.

What will taking part involve?

Everyone is being asked to complete a questionnaire with 24 short questions that ask about your views on play and learning at pre-school.

In addition a small group of parents will be chosen at random to take part in individual interviews, to provide the researcher with more information about parents' understandings, expectations and views about the type of early years curriculum their children are receiving. These sessions will be recorded to aid transcription at a later date. You are able to withdraw from the research should you choose that you no longer want to take part up until the point that the data is anonymised.

What will happen to the information I give you?

The questionnaires are completed anonymously. The researcher will keep them and the information provided will be analysed. It will not be possible to trace the answers that you have provided or link them to the interviews. All the interviews will be recorded with consent and kept confidentially until it has been transcribed and then deleted. Ownership of the audiotaped material will remain with the researcher. Information gathered in this project may form the basis of a report or other form of presentation or publication. A summary of the research findings will be made available at the end of the project and shared with each setting.

What should I do now?

Should you have any questions prior to completing the questionnaire, please contact Wendy Harris at Harriswm@cardiff.ac.uk

Please feel free to contact me, my supervisor or the Ethics Committee at Cardiff University for further information.

Wendy Harris

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Appendix 8



Participant Consent Form (Questionnaire)

Please read the following information carefully before signing the consent form

- I confirm that I have read, understood and agree to all of the information on the participant information sheet.
- My decision to participate is entirely voluntary and I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. In addition, I have the right not to answer any particular questions if I choose.
- I understand that this will require approximately 45 minutes of my time.
- I understand that it will not be possible to withdraw my answers once I have completed and returned the questionnaire because the information is anonymous.
- I understand that by signing below that I am giving my consent to participate in the questionnaire part of the research project.

I, _____ (Name) consent to participate in the study conducted by Wendy Harris, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, with the supervision of Andrea Higgins.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

For further information, queries or complaints you can contact:

Andrea Higgins, Research Supervisor, School of Psychology, Tower Building, Park Place,
Cardiff University CF10 3AT Higginsa2@cardiff.ac.uk

Ethics Committee at The School of Psychology, Cardiff University Tower Building, Park Place, CF10 3A

Appendix 9



Background Information

I would like to ask for the following information:

Your relationship to the child at preschool:

Mother Father Other – please specify: _____

The child currently attending preschool is your 1st 2nd

More children please specify: _____

Have you had other children who attended early year's settings in the UK?

No Yes

Where did you go to school? _____

Where did your parents go to school? _____

Where did you receive your early year's education?

UK Abroad please specify: _____

What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

GCSE or equivalent A levels Trade/Technical/Vocational

Degree/Postgraduate Other please state: _____

Please tick the category which best describes your ethnicity

Caribbean African

White & Black Caribbean White & Black African

Other ethnic background (please specify) _____

Thank you very much for your time

Please now place the completed form in the envelope provided together with the questionnaire. Place the sealed envelope in the post box at the pre-school.

Appendix 10



Expression of interest form

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

You are invited to take part in an interview to discuss your views in more depth. If you are willing to speak to the researcher please indicate below.
If you select 'Yes', you might be contacted, however, you will not be obligated to participate.

- Yes, I am happy for the researcher to contact me about taking part in an interview.
- No, I am not happy for the researcher to contact me about taking part in an interview.

Please provide your name and contact details in the box below (email address, mobile or telephone number).

If you would like any further information please contact the researcher, Wendy Harris

Wendy Harris

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Appendix 11



Participant Consent Form (Interview)

Please read the following information carefully before signing the consent form

- I confirm that I have read, understood and agree to all of the information on the participant information sheet.
- My decision to participate is entirely voluntary and I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. In addition, I have the right not to answer any particular question if I choose.
- I understand that this will require approximately 1 hour minutes of my time.
- I understand that the researcher will be asking me about my experiences of pre-school settings and my views and opinions on this.
- I understand that the interview will be recorded and the data will then be transcribed. Also that this will remain confidential and held securely until it is transcribed at which point it will become anonymous.
- Anonymous transcribed data will be held in accordance with the guidelines at Cardiff University.
- I understand that by signing below that I am giving my consent to participate in the interview portion of the research project.

I, _____ (Name) consent to participate in the study conducted by Wendy Harris, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, with the supervision of Andrea Higgins.

Signed: _____

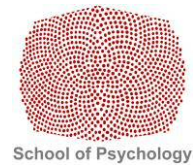
Date: _____

For further information, queries or complaints you can contact:

Andrea Higgins, Research Supervisor, School of Psychology, Tower Building, Park Place,
Cardiff University CF10 3AT Higginsa2@cardiff.ac.uk

Ethics Committee at The School of Psychology, Cardiff University Tower Building, Park Place, CF10 3AT

Appendix 12



African Caribbean parents' perceptions of two and three year old of play and learning in preschool

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the study

Whilst there has been a great deal of research around play looking at the views of professionals and workers in early years, which has been written about in detail and used in government policy, there has been little emphasis on parents' perceptions and that of African Caribbean parents in particular.

This study will help draw attention specifically to African Caribbean parents' views about play or activities in pre-school, find any important patterns and how parents' views of play relate to learning. It is important that we are fully aware of the views and attitudes of all parents.

A small number of participants also took part in an interview with the researcher in order to explore their perceptions of play and learning in pre-school in more depth.

It is hoped that the findings of this research may be useful to those responsible for planning and coordinating education for pre-school children.

If you would like any further information please contact the researcher or research supervisor on the contact details provided below.

Kind regards,

Wendy

If you would like any further information please contact the researcher Wendy Harris.

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Appendix 13

Demographics of participants for interview

	Parents*	Occupation	Number of children	Child in early years	Setting child attends
001	Alison (Pilot)	Bank cashier	1 boy and 1 girl	Boy	PVI**
002	Shauna	Nursery assistant	1 boy and 1 girl	Boy	PVI
003	Denise	Council worker	1 girl	Girl	PVI
004	Janine	Teacher in training	1 boy	Boy	PVI
005	Leah	Nursery Education Officer	2 girls	Girl	School nursery
006	Dean	Withheld	2 boys	Boy	School nursery
007	Thandie	Withheld	1 boy and 1 girl	Boy	School nursery
008	Kayla	Stay at home mum	1 boy and 1 girl	Girl	School nursery

*Anonymised names

**PVI – Private Voluntary Aided

Appendix 14

Transcription notation devised by Braun & Clarke and adapted by the researcher

Notation	Explanation of use
...	A selection of data has been deleted
[laughs], [coughs], [sniffs]	Denotes laughing or coughing or sneezing
[pause]	Denotes a pause of a few seconds or more
?	Uncertainty or unclear
Erm, Mm hm, Er	Non-verbal utterances
Bold text	Signals reported speech or emphasis on particular words

Each speaker is identified by name (a pseudonym) or role (interviewer)

Appendix 15

Database of full results

	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Variance	Total
Qu. 1	2.00	6.00	4.79	0.52	0.85	47
Qu. 2	3.00	6.00	5.31	0.77	0.59	48
Qu. 3	3.00	6.00	5.44	0.67	0.45	48
Qu. 4	4.00	6.00	5.58	0.57	0.33	48
Qu. 5	2.00	6.00	5.17	0.85	0.72	48
Qu. 6	2.00	6.00	5.15	0.90	0.81	47
Qu. 7	1.00	6.00	4.42	1.26	1.58	48
Qu. 8	2.00	6.00	4.87	1.08	1.16	46
Qu. 9	3.00	6.00	4.94	0.92	0.85	48
Qu. 10	1.00	6.00	5.02	1.03	1.06	48
Qu. 11	4.00	6.00	5.48	0.58	0.33	48
Qu. 12	4.00	6.00	5.58	0.57	0.33	48
Qu. 13	4.00	6.00	5.48	0.74	0.54	48
Qu. 14	3.00	6.00	4.81	0.87	0.75	47
Qu. 15	1.00	6.00	2.06	1.17	1.38	47
Qu. 16	2.00	6.00	4.79	0.92	0.85	47
Qu. 17	1.00	6.00	4.40	1.27	1.61	48
Qu. 19	1.00	6.00	3.65	1.36	1.85	48
Qu. 22	2.00	6.00	4.93	1.13	1.28	46

Appendix 16

Janine's interview with emergent themes

Emergent themes	Original transcript I: = Interviewer A: = Janine	Exploratory comments
Delivery & organisation linked to the adult's role – adult led	I: Thank you. Can you give some examples of the different types of play that are on offer at your child's pre-school? J: Erm I know they have free play, they have erm organised play and they have structured learning, structured learning I: Okay, yep and any additional examples can you give me?	Free & organised play Structured learning
Children having choices in activities	J: Erm we have outdoor play so they play outside on the bikes and stuff, they do painting, drawing, playing with the cars building, constructing... I: Okay thank you... J: I think that's it ... go on	Emphasis on a range of activities that are mainly outdoors & physical
Socialisation and learning rules	I: So when children play what opportunities do you think there are for them to develop their skills? J: Erm I think there's a lot of opportunities to develop skills such as turn taking, sharing, learning to make friends, understanding others erm general learning such as obviously their colours, counting erm their fine motor skills, gross motor skills[pause]	Initial focus on the development of social skills Early basic academic skills Physical development
Play is learning		
Character building, Life long learning	I: Okay erm what do you think are the benefits of play in pre-school? J: Erm I think it builds character in a child cause they get to develop different areas erm such as their physical development, creativity erm emotional ... [pause] I: Anything else? J: [shook head to indicate no]	Helps with the development of character, personality Emotional regulation and curb impulsive behaviour
Readiness and preparation for the next phase in learning	I: What do you think are the possible drawbacks of play in pre-school? J: Erm, I think maybe it lacks structure so when they go to school it's it's a bit more of a shock to the system that all of a sudden they have to sit at the table and do work and be expected to stay [laughs] sitting at the table and do work when they've just come from an environment where they've been playing all day.	It needs to be structured Readiness for school and its formality Learning = sitting at tables in contrast to playing all day
Having fun Being challenged	I: Erm what activities does your child get involved in at pre-school? J: Erm he's actually really enjoys drawing, erm puzzles erm yeah anything that takes a bit of thinking I think he likes something that challenges him he gets quite bored very quickly... [pause]	Interest in activities that are challenging Need for a stimulating environment, active engagement

<p>Individual differences in how children learn</p> <p>Learning style</p> <p>Freedom of expression</p>	<p>I: Okay How do you feel your child learns from the activities you have outlined you mentioned drawings, puzzles....</p> <p>J: Okay erm drawing I think he learns, I think it relaxes him so I've notice if he's upset, if I tell him to okay calm down lets get some paper out and lets do some drawing it kind of calms him down gets time when he's drawing he'll talk about how he's feeling it also helps his concentration cause he able to sit for long periods of time do his writing or his drawing or whatever he's doing and it helps him</p> <p>I: Hmm hmm</p> <p>J: Erm As for the cars and things I think that helps with his imagination cause I can hear him as he's playing he's pretending to be different characters or he's pretending he's playing with an imaginary friend ???</p>	<p>Helps with emotional regulation and contributes to wellbeing, an opportunity to talk about feelings</p> <p>Helps with the development of focus and being able to concentrate</p> <p>Opportunities to be creative Involvement in make believe play</p>
<p>Following interests Child initiated or adult-led</p>	<p>I: Okay thank you, should children only be offered activities that interest them?</p> <p>J: No</p> <p>I: And what are your reasons for saying no</p> <p>J: I feel like [its too safe] children they haven't experienced thing yet they need the chance to to have it be offered first before they figure out what they like and what they do like because at the moment they don't know.</p>	<p>Adult's role is to offer a wide variety of activities so that children can experience a range of things</p>
<p>Play is how the young learn</p> <p>Readiness for school</p>	<p>I: Should play in pre-school be encouraged?</p> <p>J: Yeah</p> <p>I: Why do you think this?</p> <p>J: Erm I think it it's a nice way to learn I think they're still young before they get to that school environment and they have to sit down but I think it needs to be a balance like I still think they should have a set time where they do sit down and do work so when they get to school it's not such a oh my goodness [laughs]</p>	<p>Play equates to a 'fun' way of learning unlike school which is formal and children are inactive</p> <p>A balance between formal and informal is needed Readiness/preparation so that school is not such a shock</p>
<p>Not too much, not too little</p> <p>Foundation skills and learning the basics</p>	<p>I: Yep. Have you heard of the concept of learning through play?</p> <p>J: Yeah</p> <p>I: And what do you think about it?</p> <p>J: I think like I said it's good to an extent but I don't think it should be over used</p> <p>I: Can you tell me a bit more about that?</p> <p>J: erm well I think it's good as I said to develop skills such as turn taking emotional but I think in terms or learning and hitting targets when you get to SATs and points in their life like that I don't think it's as effective as sitting down having a formal lesson and being taught something</p>	<p>Need a balance</p> <p>Play has a role in supporting the development of social and emotional skills but less effective in the learning of academic skills</p>
<p>There needs to be a balance between play and "Formal normal methods"</p>	<p>I: Okay and what about in pre-school, learning through play in pre-school?</p> <p>J: Erm pre-school I think it's okay yep</p>	

Getting the right balance	<p>I: Do you think that there are other ways of learning that could benefit your child? J: In pre-school? I: Yes J: Erm not as yet I think the nursery are doing well with their balance of teaching and playing and being set homework and being given certain rules to follow but not too many that they feel restricted</p>	<p>Learning to follow rules in preparation for school and life A certain amount of freedom is important</p>
Where is the learning?	<p>I: Okay How do you think that play should be integrated in your child's day? J: Erm I feel like the mornings when they're ready to concentrate best maybe that's the time to do lessons and play in the afternoon erm yeah a set amount as long as its... I like the idea of the free flow play so they go and choose they lay out a number of activities and then choose what they to as long as it's within the boundaries and it's safe and they can see them.</p>	<p>A clear separation between learning and play Children can pursue activities of interest and welcomes them having choices</p>
Practitioner role	<p>I: Okay ... J: Yes</p>	
Adult-led or child-initiated?	<p>I: Should play be structured or should it be free? J: I prefer the free play I: And what's your reason for saying this? J: I just feel like they should have choice like lay it out different options for them and then let them decide where they're going to go with it because if they don't enjoy they probably not gonna learn from it</p>	<p>Freedom to explore their environment/finding out Unless play is enjoyable and pleasurable it will not promote learning</p>
Freedom of choice		
Learning should be fun		
Engaging children	<p>I: And what is the adult's role in play at pre-school? J: I feel like you should get to their [laughs] level and play with them I think children learn they interact better if the teachers are playing with them not so much saying that you play like this you do it this way you do it that way like let the child kind of lead and you flow with it.... [pause]</p>	<p>Adult's role is to join in model and support children's interactions Adult's role is to follow children's lead</p>
Adult involvement		
Going with the flow/following the child's lead		
A good start and development of basic academic skills	<p>I: Okay what do you think are the most important skills that your child should learn at pre-school? J: Erm making friends, I think having that independence like away from parents so you, you won't get that anxiety on the first day of school that he's leaving mum and dad and he's going away for the whole day erm obviously basic skills such as counting to ten, his colours, I expect him to learn with obviously help from home I don't depend on the nursery ... erm.</p>	<p>Promote independence and emotional regulation in preparation for starting school Learning basic skills of counting and colour names Not an over reliance on the nursery</p>
Parents in working partnership with the setting	<p>I: And what are your reasons for saying this, so the making friends, the having independence? J: Erm because at home he's an only child anyway [laughs] so I think that's a big thing that he needs to learn to share learn how to communicate with children his own age, the independence like I said</p>	<p>The development of social skills is important Nursery helps in developing independence, learning the basics and preparing</p>
Social integration		

<p>Readiness – “school ready”</p>	<p>for when he goes to school I don't want him to be have anxiety being away for the whole day. And I want him to get to school ready so knowing the basics...[pause]</p>	<p>for school – “school ready”</p>
<p>7 areas of learning</p>	<p>I: Thank you what do you think should be covered in the pre-school curriculum? J: Erm I know at the moment they have their... the six areas ??? development, creative development I: Seven J: Seven is it seven now? Erm yeah I think they're all pretty much cover what I thought, I can't think of anything I'd want that's not on there, I think maybe a bit more messy play I feel like that's important to explore</p>	<p>Welcomes messy play and more opportunities for exploring</p>
<p>Finding out/Exploring</p>	<p>I: Along with what else, any other things that you told me ...</p>	<p>Happy with the range of activities that are on offer</p>
<p>Learning by doing</p>	<p>J: Erm along with obviously the play outside they have their sports day, their theme days erm their art activities he often makes things or cooking erm languages, dance, I feel like they're really rounded here like there's a array of activities that he can take part in to know what he likes...</p>	<p>A “really rounded” curriculum allows for the development many different skills, abilities and knowledge</p>
<p>Respecting different cultures</p>	<p>I: Erm how can being introduce to a topic such as foods we eat or people who help us support your child's learning? J: Erm foods we eat can help him understand a bit more about what he's putting in his body as well as what other people about other people around him cause foods you eat can also be about religion maybe one religion doesn't eat certain food, one culture eats this type of foods so he can understand people around him a bit more to maybe help him build relationships and understand be respectful erm what was the other topic sorry, I: Er people who help us</p>	<p>Opportunities to learn about cultural differences and have a better understanding of others</p>
<p>Finding out about the world</p>	<p>J: Yeah people who help us will help him when he goes out in the real world eventually erm to know who to go to, what everybody does, what their role is how they can help him</p>	<p>Knowledge and understanding of the world</p>
<p>To experience what I had/ or what I didn't have</p>	<p>I: Okay what role did play have in your pre-school years? J: Erm [laughs] ... [pause] I assume it had a [laughs] a good effect yeah... I: Okay so... J: I have a, I have good memories of being in nursery</p>	<p>Happy memories and a positive early years experience, similar to what her child is receiving</p>
<p>Importance of having a good start</p>	<p>I: Hmm hmm can you just tell me about that a little J: Erm I remember there being a lot of singing involved all the nursery rhymes like I still remember them to this day all the books that I read, I remember I</p>	<p>Has an influence on role as a parent now</p>

<p>Differences then and now</p> <p>Parents in partnership</p> <p>Roles and responsibilities</p>	<p>remember those a lot as well erm yeah I guess it has influenced me cause I still can read and I enjoy music so</p> <p>I: And how much or how little value would you say your family placed on play during your early years? J: Erm my mum was a nursery nurse so it was highly influenced like at home we did a lot of activities that you probably do at nursery so it kind of led on continuously yeah...</p> <p>I: What... sorry, would you want your child to experience the same early years experience you did? J: Yeah definitely, like I try to like even outside of the nursery we, we do a lot at home similar led activities</p> <p>I: Why? J: I just feel it's important I just feel like a lot of parents rely too heavily on nurseries and schools to educate their child and I feel like it's not enough I feel like it needs to continue at home in order for them to do well and succeed</p> <p>I: Thank you that was the last question is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think you want to get down like the learning through playing J: I think another activity they do a lot is reading cause my son loves books I: Mmmhuh J: So I can see that he comes home and he's excited to tell me about a book they've read at nursery so often I get it and then read it at home together.... I: Well Thank you.</p>	<p>Continuity between the home and early years setting Concerned that too many parents are reliant on the setting to educate their child Need for consistency and consolidation</p> <p>It is essential to work in collaboration as it helps to develop and sustain interest in key activities such as reading books</p>
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Appendix 17

Excerpts from Reflective log – Reading articles

Breakthrough! Over the course of 2 (25 and 26 Aug 2016) days today for the first time I looked at journal articles with new insight. The idea of empirical paper/reviews was initially confusing. I asked what should I be reading and how should I be reading it? I tried to find online articles about conducting a literature review and how to read when conducting a literature review.

I looked for phrases such as the following:

“This paper argues that ...”

“In this paper we explore ...”

“The main question is ...”

I looked out for verbs including ‘shown, proven, suggest, question, query, challenge’ as well as words that modify arguments such as ‘may, might, possibly’

I looked at several volumes of journals that I subscribe to British Journal of Educational Psychology and Educational Psychology in Practice. I looked specifically at the methodology used. Those that used Thematic Analysis and looked briefly at those using IPA. It led me to think about the differences and similarities between the two.

Action:

Draw up a list of the differences and similarities between TA and IPA to aid my understanding and to determine or help me to better explain why I am using TA and not IPA.

I am using mixed methodology (quantitative and qualitative data) Why? How do I justify why?

Define methods and methodology again (write on wall) it will help to clarify my reading.

11.09.16

Realising the need to read not only around and with regards to the importance of play but also to read studies that have a similar design – mixed methodology and studies who whilst having similar design and employ different methodology

- The arguments for doing what I did
- The arguments against doing what I did

Started to read a few articles that are not related to my study but employ a similar design (about a different subject matter)

Awareness of needing to keep on reading and at the same time think how it relates to what I am doing or differs to what I am doing. In the hope that this would help me in being able to discuss/defend and explain and give reasons for my course of action – in discussion.

I found studies that are looking at participants' perceptions they use the following methods

- Case study
- Semi-structured interviews
- Questionnaires (surveys)

and employ IPA, statistical analysis for data analysis (methodology)

Methods – a research tool or technique

Qualitative methods – interview, survey, focus group, observation

Methodology (the study of methods)

The justification for using a particular research method

The study of how research is done

The principles that guide our research practices

Explains why we are using certain methods or tools in our research

Excerpts from Reflective Log – Engaging participants

Difficulty engaging parents who send their children to a childminder

I initially met with the Manager of the childminder coordinators (there are 3 coordinators in the borough) to discuss my research and to determine how best to engage this particular group of participants. I also met with the coordinators and explained the research and went through the questionnaire pack.

They took questionnaire packs, which they would share with the childminders who would then give to the parents. It was agreed that the coordinators would collect the completed questionnaires that were placed in envelopes from the childminders and they would put them in my in tray back at the office. Only two returns were received in this way.

Agreed to go to a Drop in session at a Children Centre to meet with the childminders and to explain my research to them. I felt that I could help them to better understand the research and also answer any questions. Further questionnaire packs were handed out at the drop in session.

Discussed with supervisor how to engage with this particular group of parents with the added barrier of having to work via a third (Coordinators) and fourth (child minders) party.

To overcome the above I attempted to attend further Drop Ins at alternative Children Centres to meet with other childminders. Consideration was given to seeking out a website for childminders (similar to Mumsnet) local or national. In doing so I would be able to introduce the research and myself and find out whether I could send the survey online out to a larger group of childminders. After consideration I decided against this for reasons of heterogeneity and wanting to keep the engagement process the same

or very similar for all of the participants. It would change how I made contact and ultimately received the completed questionnaires.

It was challenging coming across such a major barrier during data collection. On reflection, I did not fully consider the engagement of this particular group of parents. I did not envisage the difficulties encountered. The complexities were not thought about in advance. I did not foresee that this would be a hard to reach group – they are working usually later hours, they are juggling the care of their children and having to work through a number of gatekeepers.

There is a need to review any research in the area of parents who send their children to childminders in order to see how the participants were engaged and whether any difficulties were encountered and how they overcame them.

Need to reconsider when sending out emails to gatekeepers near to the start of holidays or half-term. Not a good idea! Left questionnaires with gatekeepers just before the Christmas break and I feel that this led to large number of questionnaires not being returned. Parents had perhaps forgotten or thrown the questionnaire packs away.

Excerpts from Reflective log – Data Analysis

I remember reading that when looking at your whole data set and working out the themes that you should not look at or consider the research question. I found myself having definitely removed from the structure imposed by the four questions (out of sight out of mind!)

Having discussed thematic analysis with the Trainee EPs in the service I realised that I did not find it daunting and was happy to fully embrace the process. Not having carried out thematic analysis before I worked through the phases as outlined by Braun & Clarke.

Visual mapping is useful – Post-it notes were helpful.

Having transcribed the interviews, I was very familiar with the words and manner that things were said. I annotated each transcript. I used interview 1 as the basis for initial codes and identified common words and phrases that were being used. I did the same for all of the interviews.

I listed particular words, phrases and thoughts, which featured in the majority of the interviews. "Back in the day", "Its what we do", "Times have changed" Braun and Clarke recommend that the language used by the participants should be reflected where possible in the themes.

Appendix 18

Excerpts from Reflective log – Interviewing participants

Interview 1

This parent spoke very quickly and did not need much prompting. I found myself at the start wanting to write what she was saying but I resisted the temptation at the time. I remember thinking how useful would it be when I was already recording what she was saying on audiotape.

Halfway through the interview I remember that I started to take note of my body language and reminding myself to make eye contact, nod appropriately and smile. I wanted to record (written form) what the parent was doing but felt that I could not do both. Funny! Because it is something that I do during consultation meetings as an EP so I know that I can do it. Why should this be any different? I will try to do this during the second interview.

The microphone I feel appeared to make very little difference to the participant or to me. It was very soon forgotten once the interview was underway.

I noted that she spoke very quickly and smiled a great deal particularly when reminiscing about her early years and play. I felt that this participant came across very confidently although some feeling that she should be doing more but due to work was unable to.

I made a conscious effort to be very casual in my dress – leggings, boots, and jumper, similar in style to what many of the parents wear.

I remember thinking, when should I actually start recording the interview? At introductions? I have not mentioned the recording. But it was on the parent information sheet, but that was shared over two months previously and the likelihood is that they have not remembered!

After this interview I went home and wrote out a script to be used at the start of each interview. This will allow me to introduce myself, explain the process, ask about recording, going through the interview consent form and getting them to sign.

The script

Hello my name is Wendy Harris and I am an Educational Psychologist working for a London Borough. I am carrying out research looking at African Caribbean parents' perceptions of play and learning in the early years.

Thank you for completing the questionnaire and for agreeing to be interviewed. The interview will last no more than an hour.

I would like to record the interview, if that's ok with you (pause). Please be assured that the tape is only accessible to me and it will be stored confidentially.

Please feel free to ask me questions if you are unsure about anything. You can also say if you do not wish to answer a particular question. And please feel free to ask me any questions during the interview.

You might see me occasionally writing, these are notes and reminders for myself.

There are no right or wrong answers because I am interested in your views and what you think.

Go through consent for interview form with parent and get them to sign.

Interview 2

She slipped between practitioner and parent role. During interview I frequently had to emphasise “your child” as a reminder to her.

The structure of the day question was unclear to parent and she had difficulty separating home from nursery and she kept on referring to home. (What could I have said to make it clearer? How could I ask the same question differently?). I did ask a number of follow up questions without realising it (only recollected after transcribing).

I found that doing interviews back to back was tiring and confusing. Noted that I should have asked a follow up question at one point but did not. At one point during the interview I was not sure whether the question was answered and I had difficulty keeping track of the question I asked.

Parent had a pattern of answering the question by always starting her answer by repeating the first part of the question. She made a clear distinction between play and work (learning).

I noted that I occasionally made links from one question to the next or from what the parent said and linked it to the next question. This was something that I did not do during the first interview and perhaps in the interview I was just focused on asking questions and perhaps a little robotic and stilted.

Interview 3

Thought how to arrange the seating in the room to create a non-threatening space.

I slowed the pace of the questions and repeated parts of the questions or all of it to support the participants’ thinking and I also left longer pauses before asking the next question. I tried to make much more eye contact and engaged in active listening by nodding, smiling and leaning in towards participant.

Used more probes – “Can you tell me more about that?” “Why do you think that?” I tried to be more engaging, it was not difficult with the first interviewee, she described herself as being sociable and I had to do very little to engage her. She also talked a great deal and I remember thinking at the time ‘... a wall of words’

During the interview I tried to clarify what had been said (by the participant) using the strategy or repeating what had been said. I feel it had the effect of getting the participant to rethink and add to what they had said. It made things clearer and therefore served as a prompt.

I tried to not sound too much like a robot in asking questions by waiting for the answer before asking the next. I noted that I was not always able to maintain focus as I was distracted by the noises from outside. A successful strategy was to take notes of a little of what was being said, it helped me to decide when I needed to ask parent to elaborate and aided my memory. I was therefore listening keenly to what was being said in order to record.

Interview 4

This parent had a dental appointment so the interview felt a bit rushed because I was conscious that she needed to get away.

When in the moment, I found it difficult to know whether the responses given answered the question asked fully and in turn whether they spoke to the research questions at all.

I did not want to appear to be leading the parents so basically did not always want to ask for additional information. To overcome this I should use probing questions

“Tell me more about that?”

“What are your reasons for saying this?”

“Why do you think that?”

Whilst I have had an aide memoire of useful probes during the interviews, in the next set of interviews it might help if I have the probes displayed more prominently and try out ones that I have not already used.

I feel that I was a little too formal at the start and perhaps this set the tone of the interview, I need to be less formal.

Interview 5

Took place at the start of the day and parent was in a hurry and did not want to be late for work. Parent was 10 minutes late!

I feel that because we were pushed for time there was less opportunity for me to unpick what was being said. I was unable to probe or get her to elaborate because I did not want to inconvenience her and was thankful that she was able to give up her time.

Interview 6

I made use of pauses, not directly jumping in therefore giving parent time to think but also to indicate that they have time to say more. The probes used were for clarity and specificity “Can you tell me more about...?” and “Can you give me an example of ...?” I also followed up with the phrase “Anything else?”

In response to participants' response I asked, "Is there anything else?" to which he replied, "not at the moment." I noted at the time that he appeared to be thinking hard but the ideas were not flowing, as he would like. Perhaps provide opportunity to review this question with him, ask again later as other things may jog his memory.

This participant frequently used the phrase 'like I said' could it be that he feels that the questions are repetitive as it suggests that he feels that he has already stated/answered the question. Or is it just the way he phrases his responses!

At one point parent shared that he used to play for a youth football team. Perhaps I should have interjected and asked about it. On reflection, I did not as parent would have gone off topic and I feel that rapport had already been established.

Interview 7

During transcription I felt that there was a clear change in my interaction with this parent. I appeared to be more confident, able to interject with more probing questions and able to feed back to her what she had said by way of clarifying and confirming for myself but also as a reminder to her. It came across as more of a two-way conversation and less asking questions like a robot. The questions asked were not misleading and remained open-ended.

It was notable that I used "ok" and "right" a great deal but feel these are verbal prompts I use in a form of a question. I note that my voice goes up at the end of 'ok' and 'right'.

This parent spoke passionately, could hear in her voice how she felt about the subject matter of play and learning in relation to her children. At one point she spoke like her child and used a 'baby' voice, I need to think how I can capture this during transcription. Use of capitals or italics!

This parent became upset when asked about the value her family placed on play during her early years. She asked for me to pause the recording, which I did.

The recording was stopped and the parent explained that she did not want her response to be recorded because she explained that she did not have good memories about her family's involvement. Her parents worked and did not get involved in her play. She recalled that she was left with a helper at home whilst her parents went out to work. She went on to say that it was not a happy time for her and nothing like how she is with her children now. She added that her parents were always very busy and did not consider that they needed to spend time with her when she played. I read the next question to her first and asked whether she would be happy for the audio recording to continue. She said yes it was fine.

The interview was coming to an end and this was one of the last questions to be asked. I did not probe too much and run the risk of upsetting her.

Interview 8

Noted that it was a slow start and parent took time to get in the stride of answering the questions. At one point I said “that’s fine” as I could see that she appeared to be struggling and I did not want her to feel uncomfortable.

Literacy, numeracy and language input seem to be very important to her. There was a clear distinction between learning and play for this parent. She had difficulty recalling her early years and perhaps I should think up a range of questions to scaffold recall of early years.

Overall, I stuck to the script, as I did not want the participants to veer off topic too much. I also wanted the parents to experience the same questions.

Overall reflection

During the interviews when meeting with parents it is in a different capacity as a researcher to that as an EP. But still in the role of asking questions, different types of questions!

In reading Braun & Clarke they suggest that a useful part of asking participants is to ask whether they have anymore that they would like to add at the end of the interview or session as this can sometimes bring forth interesting or key ideas that were captured by the questions asked during the interview. This is clearly an example of participant driven data. In one set of interviews I left the audio running as I would previously turn it off when they said no, despite them continuing to talk (Thandie) did this.

Appendix 19

Overarching themes, themes, subthemes and illustrative quotes

Overarching theme	Themes	Subthemes	Illustrative quotes
Value of play for children	The 'Feel Good' factor	"They think it is fun but it is learning"	<p>Alison: ...they are gonna making playful and I know that they sing a lot of songs, dancing aham little activities they they they amm do me a line loads of things to make it like when they're playing is just like learning (pg 1 lines 10 – 14)</p> <p>Alison: ...helped them learn they make it playful (pg 1 lines 15 – 16)</p> <p>Alison: you can see that while he plays while he is developing and he is playing his sister he is literally I don't know they would laugh joke... (pg 2 lines 37 – 39)</p> <p>Alison: he sings a lot of songs and he will do things like he would see, think and relate it back to learning (pg 4 lines 95 – 96)</p> <p>Alison: I think that even if your teaching someone like times table whatever and you're gonna make a game or like they will learn more... (pg 6 lines 137 – 139)</p> <p>Alison:...that age they will as long as it's fun they will do it. (pg 6 lines 142 – 143)</p> <p>Alison: I think it is to make things mystical and fun. (pg 8 line 182)</p> <p>Alison:...the adults role is just to make it mystical and fun because what I do with my children at home. (pg 8 lines 187 – 191)</p>

			<p>Alison:...it could be all like learn about Chinese New Year they do with the and they dress up and they make dragons or what ever is long as they're being informed of something and it's fun and they are allowed to be children (pg 10 lines 232–236)</p> <p>Shauna:...learning through play they learn how to for instance cook cos you have pretend apparatus to cook on pots, pans you know home corner erm sometimes it's through the computer they learn how to use certain things on the computer like doing maths it's more makes it more enjoyable for them than just pen and paper...(pg 5 lines 150 – 157)</p> <p>Denise:...encourage yeah play is important and it's also a fun way for kids to learn, it's not a question of they having to sit down or, they can learn by dancing around or singing erm so yeah play is important (pg 4 lines 103 – 107)</p> <p>Janine:...I think it it's a nice way to learn I think they're still young... (Pg 3 lines 85 – 86)</p> <p>Leah: I think that children at preschool do learn through play I think that it's a fundamental erm principle of the preschool learning through play that learning is fun (pg 6 lines 176 – 179)</p> <p>Thandie:...they learn through play they think that it's fun but they're actually learning... (pg 1 lines 31 – 32)</p> <p>Thandie: ...the child is learning what you want them to learn but</p>
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		<p>Play is natural for children</p>	<p>they're learning it at their pace at their level their enjoyment (pg 7 lines 230 – 232)</p> <p>Kayla:...obviously they're gonna enjoy playing and they're not knowing that they are learning through play... (pg 5 lines 148 – 150)</p> <p>Alison:...I think when they are playing it just gives the that sense of release... (pg 3 lines 60 – 61)</p> <p>Alison:...not gonna have this time to be free thought to be inquisitive because I think play builds up their is inquisitiveness... (pg 3 lines 69 – 71)</p> <p>Alison: If you let what comes natural to children playing in no matter where you are, you could be in the doctor's surgery or you could be with other children the children start playing... (pg 13 lines 311 – 314)</p> <p>Denise: ...rather than we get bogged down of them being able to do or say all of the a, bs and cs I think they're will come but I think like now lets just be a child and just experience and explore and get her hands dirty and I think she'll come, she'll be more well grounded (pg 13 lines 410 – 416)</p> <p>Denise: ...sometimes we get lost and our children get sort of lost I</p>
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		<p>Play supports positive wellbeing</p>	<p>just want her to be to have like just be able to do things with and experience different, different things and it will and let it naturally her natural development rather than it be sort of forced upon her and she's like ah I don't like this and then just shuts down (Pg 13 lines 421 – 428)</p> <p>Dean: ...somebody once said to me let the child express themselves don't be afraid to let the child... (Pg 8 lines 242 – 244)</p> <p>Dean:...expressing themselves now through play rather than actually sitting down and making them get into books and it sort of puts too much pressure on them... (pg 15 lines 483 – 486)</p> <p>Kayla: I think it's good to expose them to new things because if they just stick to one thing you know that they might not be able to find their talent... (pg 3 lines 94 – 96)</p> <p>Alison: ...it helps them to learn and be creative also it teaches them that they can be relaxed... (pg 2 lines 48 – 49)</p> <p>Alison: I have heard of the concept and I think it's great because as I said it builds their character build socialising skills builds loads of things like and it makes them relaxed, you get a lot more done if they find something enjoyed if they enjoy what they do... (pg 6 lines 131 – 135)</p>
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			<p>Shauna: The benefits of playing its can be learning, making friends erm expressing themselves physically, emotionally erm sometimes kids don't always know how to express but sometimes they find it easier to express it through play (pg 2 lines 33 – 37)</p> <p>Shauna:...some children don't know how to express their feelings and stuff and they might come to nursery where they might not be able to do it at home but they have their key person... (pg 3 lines 66 – 70)</p> <p>Shauna: ...it should be encourage okay for learning purpose you know soc for social activities to help play with the other children and things like that cos some children maybe they don't get to play much parents maybe working all the time so they don't have that time to play and bond with the other children... (pg 5 lines 137 – 143)</p> <p>Shauna: ...be self-aware of his emotions (pg 9 lines 274)</p> <p>Shauna:...before reception and to be self-aware of emotions... (pg 9 lines 296 – 297)</p> <p>Denise: I think it there's no harm I'm not too sure if it is the Scandinavia countries is it Austria and I think is it Australia their kids don't start school 'til they're seven so and they are doing just as well but our children start too early I think</p>
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			<p>they're too focussed on, I think the kids definitely need more play (pg 4 lines 127 – 133)</p> <p>Denise: I think like now lets just be a child and just experience and explore and get her hands dirty and I think she'll come, she'll be more well grounded (pg 13 lines 413 – 416)</p> <p>Janine: ...drawing I think he learns, I think it relaxes him so I've notice if he's upset, if I tell him to okay calm down lets get some paper out and lets do some drawing it kind of calms him down gets time when he's drawing he'll talk about how he's feeling (pg 2 lines 58 – 63)</p> <p>Janine: ...lay it out different options for them and then let them decide where they're going to go with it because if they don't enjoy they probably not gonna learn from it (pg 5 lines 135 – 139)</p> <p>Janine: ...making friends, I think having that independence like away from parents so you, you won't get that anxiety on the first day of school that he's leaving mum and dad and he's going away for the whole day (pg 5 lines 152 – 156)</p> <p>Dean: ...he'svery outgoing anyway so he tends to sort of put himself in a situation and sort of work it out for himself whether he likes it or not or whether he's comfortable or not (pg 3 lines 100 – 103)</p>
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			<p>Dean: ...maybe they found out doing research it's probably it's better for them to they gain more knowledge from playing now and more erm skills key skills from being expressing themselves now through play rather than actually sitting down and making them get into books and it sort of puts too much pressure on them so I think now it's more of a way of expressing themselves without them getting erm what's the word for it frustrated or feeling kind of anxious... (Pg 15 lines 480 – 489)</p>
	<p>Learning for life</p>	<p>A good start</p>	<p>Alison: ...I believe that in preschool they learn things like how to spell their name like be prepared for ahmm reception class (pg 8 lines 195 – 197)</p> <p>Alison: I sit down and write his name with his and like stuff that by I expect that to be done here as well so that he is not thrown in the deep end when he gets to the nursery... I just think gives them the best head start (pg 9 lines 211 – 216)</p> <p>Alison: I think we're too busy trying to teach our children curriculum and stuff like that I think when they get to primary school and stuff they can I have to do all that that's when you start get serious... (pg 9 lines 222 – 225)</p> <p>Alison: for instance children at their age or when I get bigger I want</p>

			<p>to do this, somewhat to do that, so they aspire to certain things. (pg 10 lines 251 – 253)</p> <p>Shauna: My child erm the most important for my child is to read ...to write, can write before he before he sets off to primary reception read, write, count... (Pg 8 lines 261 – 268)</p> <p>Shauna: ...when he sets off to reception school reception primary school reception these are the things that he needs to start him off (pg 9 lines lines 304 – 306)</p> <p>Denise: ...the next level is after the pre-school is and they're starting school and everyone trying to get this best sort of the best school and sometimes we get lost and our children get sort of lost... (pg 13 lines 418 – 422)</p> <p>Janine: ...maybe it lacks structure so when they go to school it's it's a bit more of a shock to the system that all of a sudden they have to sit a the table and do work and be expected to stay [laughs] sitting at the table and do work when they've just come from an environment where they've been playing all day. (pg 2 lines 40 – 47)</p> <p>Janine: ...they should have a set time where they do sit down and do work so when they get to school it's not such a oh my goodness [laughs] (pg 3 lines 89 – 91)</p> <p>Leah: ... they learn from play because colours can be introduced</p>
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			<p>numbers can be introduced visual signs can be introduced this is all where it prepares them for when they get into reception... (pg 3 lines 74 – 77)</p> <p>Leah: ...at some point of time when they go to reception class and some bits will be structured so they have to understand there is a time for structured play and time for unstructured play... (pg 8 lines 258 – 261)</p> <p>Leah: ... malleable play because that will increase their language of describing things I would say some understanding of maybe shapes and colour [pause] yep</p> <p>Interviewer: And why, why this list?</p> <p>Leah: ...because these are the basic things I think that they should know mmh that will help them for reception (pg 9 lines 277 – 278)</p> <p>Dean: ... probably numbers colours things like that erm basically key skills that I feel would be advantage an advantage for when they move on would obviously be something like numbers, colours... (pg 9 lines 303 – 307)</p> <p>Thandie: It's play but they're learning something cause they need to learn to go to school cause when they go to school and they don't know anything there'll be some children who would be far advance (pg 6 lines 201 – 204)</p>
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		<p>“You can see their character developing”</p>	<p>Kayla: ...the skills like learn how to count erm learning sounds I think its really important for them to learn their sounds quite early... (pg 7 lines 207 – 209)</p> <p>Kayla: ...literacy and numeracy erm are kind of like the most important things and erm so like counting and stuff and phonics... (pg 5 lines 159 – 161)</p> <p>Kayla: ...she asked me to buy her like a doctors kit so she is learning like the role of the doctor...she uses like the stethoscope and the...injector and... we role play at home... (pg 8 lines 250 – 254)</p> <p>Kayla: ...they have got like dressing up stuff like erm police and erm lollipop lady...when children were driving the cars around she put on the lollipop lady outfit and... say stop so they are learning...the roles of people in society through playing... (pg 8 lines 256 – 263)</p> <p>Alison: I think it just builds their character as well (pg 1 line 21)</p> <p>Alison: ...them joking, laughing and they they find little things slightly or it’s like their personality comes into it and you will see and sometimes you will look at them and smile because maybe they are finding something funny or they are being creative</p>
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			<p>(pg 2 lines 27 – 32)</p> <p>Alison: ...you can see them just developing their character a little bit more if that makes any sense. (pg 2 lines 44 – 45)</p> <p>Alison: ...I think when he plays ... for the activities that he does obviously helps him as I said to develop his character and learning little things that are , I wouldn't have time to normally teach him. (pg 5 104 – 107)</p> <p>Alison: ... said it builds their character build socialising skills builds loads of things like and it makes them relaxed, (pg 6 132-133)</p> <p>Alison: ...what I can remember playing on the sandpit and being like creative and stuff like that like it it really find your strengths (pg 11 lines 275 – 277)</p> <p>Denise: ...I suppose really build up independence, confidence, (pg 1 lines 22 – 23)</p> <p>Denise: ...to be able to work in a team (pg 1 line 23)</p> <p>Denise: I suppose social integration with all the other children and for the child to develop their own confidence and capability (pg 1 lines 31 – 33)</p> <p>Denise: ...being able to mix with other children who are older and also younger than herself (pg 2 lines 48 – 49)</p> <p>Denise: maybe I don't know something like maybe self self-awareness (pg 8 lines 266 – 267)</p>
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		<p>Children learn to express themselves</p>	<p>Janine: ...it builds character in a child cause they get to develop different areas erm such as their physical development, creativity erm emotional ... (Pg 1 lines 32 – 35)</p> <p>Janine: I think having that independence like away from parents... (Pg 5 lines 152 – 156)</p> <p>Janine: ...the independence like I said for when he goes to school (pg 5 lines 167 – 169)</p> <p>Dean: ...they become more sort of erm err confident (pg 3 line 71)</p> <p>Thandie: ...so they learn erm how to care for each other what's right and they learn what's right and wrong (pg 3 lines 73 – 74)</p> <p>Denise: ...their verbal communication skills (pg 1 lines 24 – 25)</p> <p>Denise: ...stringing on sentences (Pg 2 lines 63 – 64)</p> <p>Denise: ...able to communicate and have at least a good range vocabulary (pg 8 lines 244 – 246)</p> <p>Denise: starting them from when they're young and language, languages erm I think should be introduced (pg 8 lines 263 – 265)</p> <p>Janine: ...learn how to communicate with children his own age (pg 5 lines 166 – 167)</p> <p>Leah: ...so with the objects they see they have to name them ...they will communicate with their peers (pg 1 lines 34 – 36)</p>
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		<p>Positive social skills</p>	<p>Leah: ...Communication language that's one of the keys... (pg 2 lines 43 – 44)</p> <p>Leah: ...introducing language [pause] rhythm and rhyme and nursery rhymes slowly introduce a pattern [pause] of thought and language [pause] and I think that has helped her she's got a vast vocabulary of language ... now it's even been increased being in preschool... (pg 4 lines 132 – 138)</p> <p>Leah: ...all types of malleable play because that will increase their language of describing things (pg 8 lines 272 – 274)</p> <p>Thandie: ...he expresses himself whereas before he wouldn't now he tells me no it looks like this or it looks like that so he's telling me what he thinks it looks like (pg 2 lines 60 – 62)</p> <p>Kayla: ...as they are playing you are talking to them and they're learning new words (pg 4 lines 134 – 135)</p> <p>Kayla: ...just little words we'd start with and then from then she'd just learn to put the sentences together... (pg 12 lines 408 – 409)</p> <p>Alison: ...build socialising skills (pg 6 line 132)</p> <p>Alison: ...able to interact with other children like eat a meal with other children (Pg 8 lines 198 – 199)</p> <p>Alison: ...being able to play without being having to be supervised</p>
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			<p>(pg 8 lines 200 – 201)</p> <p>Shauna: The benefits of playing its can be learning, making friends (pg 2 lines 33 – 40)</p> <p>Shauna: ...most children when they come some are ...you know a bit scared but they learn to make friends they sit next to each other erm some children may ask another child what's your name erm some don't ask questions what's your name some would just bring them a toy and that's how they learn to make friends and they stem from there.</p> <p>(Pg 2 lines 55 – 62)</p> <p>Denise: ...to be able to work in a team... (pg 1 line 23)</p> <p>Denise: I suppose social integration with all the other children (Pg 1 lines 31 – 32)</p> <p>Denise: ...being able to mix with other children who are older and also younger than herself (pg 2 lines 48 – 49)</p> <p>Janine: ... I think there's a lot of opportunities to develop skills such as turn taking, sharing, learning to make friends, understanding others... (pg 1 lines 24 – 26)</p> <p>Janine: ...well I think it's good as I said to develop skills such as turn taking (pg 3 lines 99 – 100)</p> <p>Janine: so I think that's a big thing that he needs to learn to share learn how to communicate with children his own age</p>
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		<p>Learning about diversity</p>	<p>(pg 5 lines 165 – 167)</p> <p>Leah: ...Communication language that's one of the keys... (pg 2 lines 43 – 44)</p> <p>Leah: Well the benefits erm I would say for my child it's she's been able to learn about all cooperative play how to share and take turns... in the classroom she's learnt skills even in the classroom when you have to play where you have to take turns in all the activities...(pg 2 lines 67 – 71)</p> <p>Dean: ... a lot of the play allows them to open up to other kids... (pg 2 lines 67 – 68)</p> <p>Thandie: ...he's telling me that he is confident playing with that child ...they learn how to care for each other (pg 2 lines 66 – 69)</p> <p>Thandie: ...he socialises a lot in the with the other children where they like to play 'baby' ... (pg 2 lines 50 – 52)</p> <p>Thandie: ...socialising they need to learn they need to learn how to socialise because if its the one child I think if it's the one child at home they wouldn't know how to socialise with other children (pg 8 lines 241 – 244)</p> <p>Alison: ...everything is welcome, it could be all like learn about Chinese New Year they do with the and they dress up and they make dragons... (pg 10 lines 232 – 234)</p>
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			<p>Alison: ...makes them aware of other foods like so people when you say people you meet your talking about other people from different other... so countries... (pg 10 lines 241 – 244)</p> <p>Shauna: we have world day different types of dates like we have St Patricks you have this day you have that day we go through them all here... we do all the celebrations and we actually cook food and bring from those cultures so the kids can get eat and taste it...(pg 11 lines 344 – 351)</p> <p>Shauna: ...they may not they know there's other cultures but maybe their never tasted they've never been around other environments so they will learn cos we actually sit down and talk about other cultures (pg 11 lines 360 – 365)</p> <p>Denise: I suppose when I was at school it wasn't very diverse I think I was the only black child in the year see it was kind of different then and how you were reared compared to your white counterparts (pg 11 lines 343 – 347)</p> <p>Janine: ...foods you eat can also be about religion maybe one religion doesn't eat certain food, one culture eats this type of foods so he can understand people around him a bit more to maybe help him build relationships and understand be respectful (pg 6 lines 199 – 205)</p> <p>Leah: ...play had the opportunity for me to understand that</p>
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			<p>there're people of different cultures different backgrounds and having the freedom and opportunity to play the children with different cultures different backgrounds (pg 10 lines 310 – 314)</p> <p>Dean: ...cultures and stuff like that as well I feel that it would be very advantage because my son like cause I have to tell them a lot of the time about their backgrounds (pg 10 lines 307 – 311)</p> <p>Dean: I just feel that it would be an advantage to their background sort of because not every child has the same background... if you open up two different different cultures and let them understand it then their understanding for other people would be a lot better... (pg 10 lines 336 – 343)</p> <p>Thandie: ...it's a part of their learning it's a part of them understanding that there are different things erm I'm from the Caribbean so I have my way of bringing things my husband is African even though he was born here he he has his African background and in the school there is Chinese children Vietnamese children children who were born in the UK we were all grown up differently different food (pg 3 lines 100 – 107)</p> <p>Thandie: ...when they are in school setting there are children from different backgrounds (pg 8 lines 247 – 248)</p> <p>Thandie: A child will only know what they have in their own house</p>
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			<p>and when they go outside they'll be introduced to different things like erm I didn't have a Chinese friend before we've come in school (pg 9 lines 298 – 301)</p> <p>Thandie: ...in school there is a Vietnamese there is a Chinese so they learn spring rolls come from that particular part of the country (pg 9 lines 301 – 303)</p>
	<p>Individual differences</p>	<p>Girls and boys are different</p>	<p>Thandie: ...they are playing and my son can say I try my son is different to my daughter erm if I say to her to do something she will do it but with him he is is different so I have to <i>really</i> use play for him (pg 5 lines 166 – 169)</p> <p>Kayla: ... I don't know well girls and boys are different I find girls will more use their imagination with things and boys just kind of more into like throwing things kind of and play fighting and stuff like that you know what I mean so it could be like too much play and them not wanting to do work such as writing your numbers or erm painting for example these are the kind of things that girls will more do in my opinion (pg 2 lines 43 – 51)</p> <p>Kayla: ...with my daughter A... she is open to trying new things and stuff and as I said like boys they may not be interested in like sitting down and writing and things like that so there has to be a balance (pg 5 lines 154 – 159)</p>

		<p>Every child is different</p>	<p>Kayla: ...maybe even find their talent through that erm cooking you know just baking little cup cakes or something erm with boys as well because you know erm ... like a woman is really supposed to be in the kitchen supposed to be in the kitchen but yeah exposing them to it at a young age you know it might enjoy it might find their talent as well (Pg 7 lines 226 – 233)</p> <p>Alison: I'm looking at him playing his Lego he is being creative you can see that little things that how he what...he is actually making its like something that he would watch on TV (pg 2 lines 32 – 36)</p> <p>Alison: I believe every learning technique could benefit a child I I don't think you would realise what technique is definitely for your child to they get a lot older like for me I'm a practical learner I realise that like when I was in my teenage years... However, you have to do theory but every child is different and you won't know what style is best in your child until they go through a little bit of their life... (pg 6 lines 146 – 153)</p> <p>Denise: ...lets just be a child and just experience and explore and get her hands dirty and I think she'll come, she'll be more well-grounded (pg 13 lines 413 – 416)</p> <p>Janine: ...I think he likes something that challenges him he gets quite</p>
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			<p>bored very quickly... (pg 2 lines 50 – 54)</p> <p>Dean: ...he'svery outgoing anyway so he tends to sort of put himself in a situation and sort of work it out for himself whether he likes it or not or whether he's comfortable or not (pg 3 lines 100 – 103)</p> <p>Dean: ...he likes playing karate like judo so he's very sort of like erm active (Pg 4 lines 114 – 115)</p> <p>Dean: ...more watching to be honest like observing I'd feel he he sort of latches onto because when I talk to him and try and explain something...he doesn't really listen as much he likes to sort of get involved in it and be able to do it (pg 4 lines 124 – 130)</p> <p>Dean: ... I'm happy with the way they go about it but also I believe that it does depend on the child as well (pg 15 lines 498 – 500)</p> <p>Thandie: ...the child is learning what you want them to learn but they're learning it at their pace at their level their enjoyment (pg 7 lines 230 – 232)</p> <p>Kayla: ...some children are quicker to learn than others (pg 10 line 307)</p>
Adults and play	Roles and responsibilities	Parents in partnership	<p>Alison: ...the adult's role is just to make it mystical and fun because what I do with my children at home. (Pg 8 lines 186 – 188)</p> <p>Alison: I don't believe that it's down to the nursery, but I think it's</p>

			<p>also by the parents as well, so I try to do a lot of things at home. (pg 10 lines 206 – 208)</p> <p>Alison: I start potty trainingand I interacted with the nursery (pg 10 lines 229 – 230)</p> <p>Alison: If there was a problem I would have to interject, but I don't however they're doing it now. I don't have a problem with it (pg 7 lines 164 – 166)</p> <p>Shauna: ...we interact with them some well I can talk for myself I sit and play with them [ringing telephone]I play with the toys while I'm there with them so if we have Legos um they're building stuff, they're building stuff sometimes they come and take your pieces you take their pieces yeah and different stuff yeah or sometime you play with animals vice versa they wanna swap with the animals yeah (pg 7 lines 234 – 242)</p> <p>Denise: I'm a full-time worker so it's only when we get in most of her time is here so you know I suppose for me it...helps me to be able to implement and carry on what ... she's being taught ... at the nursery (pg 2 lines 65 – 70)</p> <p>Denise: I think it's important for parents to make them you've got to try (pg 3 line 77)</p> <p>Denise: ...she does learn better if we both set out a playful activity</p>
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			<p>(pg 5 lines 138 – 139)</p> <p>Denise: Well I suppose erm for us to well for us to get involved...</p> <p>(pg 7 lines 207 – 208)</p> <p>Denise: ... maybe us also thinking outside of our outside the box in terms of play (pg 7 lines 218 – 220)</p> <p>Janine: I expect him to learn with obviously help from home I don't depend on the nursery (pg 5 lines 158 – 160)</p> <p>Janine: ...we do a lot at home similar led activities (pg 7 lines 236 – 237)</p> <p>Janine: ...I just feel like a lot of parents rely too heavily on nurseries (pg 8 lines 239 – 240)</p> <p>Janine: ... I feel like it needs to continue at home in order for them to do well and succeed (pg 8 lines 242 – 244)</p> <p>Janine: ... he's excited to tell me about a book they've read at nursery so often I get it and then read it at home together... (pg 8 lines 253 – 256)</p> <p>Leah: ... the way the things that she learns in nursery ... she can bring them back at home ... like if I'm reading her book... she asked me to get her nursery rhyme books out so she wanted to read them so what she has been hearing at nursery she now wants to read (pg 4 lines 126 – 132)</p> <p>Leah: ... you show an interest that their participation is valid</p>
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			<p>(pg 5 lines 155 – 156)</p> <p>Leah: ... I think just to be engaged and show that you're interested in the play (pg 8 lines 264 – 265)</p> <p>Dean: ... guide them in the right direction (pg 8 line 275)</p> <p>Dean: so he will come home and tell me daddy this is what I want this is what I know...and sometimes I get him tot sort of repeat it (pg 9 lines 293 – 297)</p> <p>Dean: ... I have to tell them a lot of the time about their backgrounds and stuff like that (pg 10 lines 310 – 311)</p> <p>Thandie: ... I'm thinking <i>what are they learning!</i> Then when you listen when you question him...you start hearing oh they were playing with that and it was because they chose this colour ...or I picked that number (pg 4 lines 121 – 127)</p> <p>Thandie: I only know what I know and I've learned from the school... I think so far what we know it's been working (pg 5 lines 137 – 139)</p> <p>Thandie: ...can you do this I don't know how to do that show me how to do this and he will say no mummy it is this way and I would do it in a silly way and he would correct me (pg 6 lines 171 – 174)</p>
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			<p>Thandie: so he's playing but he's showing me how to make the H for his name (pg 6 lines 176 – 177)</p> <p>Thandie: I let my children have their own playtime by themselves... where I'm not doing anything with them (pg 6 lines 188 – 190)</p> <p>Thandie: ... there'll be some children who would be far advance than they are cause parents are teaching their children at home (pg 6 lines 204 – 206)</p> <p>Thandie: through their free play I can see what they've learnt from what I've taught them and I can see them doing other other things too that I didn't teach them (pg 7 lines 211 – 213)</p> <p>Thandie: You want your child to learn this you want them to know that and you are ticking the boxes as you go (pg 7 lines 226 – 227)</p> <p>Thandie: ...in school they learn to share but some of these things are things you would teach them at home... I taught them all that before they went out anyways... it for them to know what they learnt at home for them to express it in school (pg 9 lines 284 – 287)</p> <p>Thandie: I can structure them in a way that I would have wanted to have (pg 12 lines 382 – 383)</p>
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		<p>The practitioner</p>	<p>Thandie: ...some parents weren't born here is English is not their first language and they haven't a clue...it's difficult and they struggled a little bit... I've said to them...this is what the teacher meant don't worry (pg 12 lines 393 – 397)</p> <p>Kayla: ...she likes to write her name and write numbers that's something we're concentrating on at home at the moment (pg 2 lines 57 -60)</p> <p>Kayla: ... my house at the moment looks like a nursery (pg 4 lines 115 – 116)</p> <p>Kayla:... Kayla: erm or when she is playing and stuff I'd get involved and just encourage her (pg 12 lines 401 – 402)</p> <p>Alison: However the nursery sees fit. I can't obviously they're they are the professionals... get a sense of how they structure it (pg 7 lines 158 – 159)</p> <p>Alison: I think it is to make things mystical and fun I think it is also to supervise (pg 8 lines 182 – 183)</p> <p>Shauna: ...we ask them, they may ask us questions we ask them about what type of if your playing with Lego what colours do you need what shape Legos do you need, what is it that your building and obviously (pg 8 lines 247 – 250)</p> <p>Shauna: ... certain things that the kids are not good at we do sit down</p>
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			<p>and have one to one with them (pg 10 lines 322 – 324)</p> <p>Shauna: ... sit there and go through their names spellings and counting with them (pg 10 lines 333 – 336)</p> <p>Denise: ...the person organising it would be doing it would be surrounded with play (pg 4 lines 119 – 120)</p> <p>Denise: ...identify what the child's weaknesses and what their strengths is so there so they maybe try to turn their weaknesses into strengths and then also their strengths try and enhance it (pg 7 lines 214 – 218)</p> <p>Janine: ... set homework and being given certain rules to follow but not too many that they feel restricted (pg 4 lines 113 – 114)</p> <p>Janine: ... lay it out different options for them and then let them decide where they're going to go with it (pg 5 lines 135 – 137)</p> <p>Janine: ...children learn they interact better if the teachers are playing with them (pg 5 lines 143 – 145)</p> <p>Janine: ... let the child kind of lead and you flow with it... (pg 5 lines 147 – 148)</p> <p>Janine: ... there's a array of activities that he can take part in (pg 6 lines 189 – 191)</p> <p>Janine: ...like at home we did a lot of activities that you probably do at nursery so it kind of led on continuously...</p>
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			<p>(pg 7 lines 230 – 232)</p> <p>Janine: I just feel like a lot of parents rely too heavily on nurseries and schools to educate their child and I feel like it's not enough I feel like it needs to continue at home in order for them to do well and succeed (pg 8 lines 240 – 245)</p> <p>Leah: ...in my daughter's preschool usually like to reflect what's inside and outside (pg 2 lines 51 – 52)</p> <p>Leah: ... the classroom assistant is setting up I have seen that what's been set up for mathematical has been set up outside as well (pg 2 lines 55 – 57)</p> <p>Leah: ... I think just to be engaged and show that you're interested in the play (pg 8 lines 264 – 265)</p> <p>Leah: ... introduce words that they may find difficult or they don't have the vocabulary (pg 8 lines 267 – 268)</p> <p>Leah: ... giving the children in the...power to try and take control of their own play (pg 10 lines 326 – 328)</p> <p>Dean: ... sit down and observe and watch to see what they like (pg 7 lines 218 – 219)</p> <p>Dean: ...I was really really close with them they were quite sort of warming...the teachers in my day they would give you a little hug (pg 13 lines 439 – 443)</p> <p>Dean: ... it's more like a friendship (pg 14 lines 448 – 449)</p>
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			<p>Dean: I'm happy with the way they go about it (pg 15 line 498)</p> <p>Thandie: I don't allow my children to do some things I don't go certain places I don't say certain words in my house I don't let them watch certain TV shows I don't buy certain products in my house but when they go in school all that is in the mix... (pg 8 lines 248 – 252)</p> <p>Kayla: ... should just stand back and view kind of...encourage and erm well correct if needs be (pg 6 lines 196 – 197)</p> <p>Kayla: ..the play should be child led and the adults should kinda stand back and not take over... and say no it's meant to be this way correct them in the right way as needs be and erm so they can learn from their mistakes if they are making any (pg 6 lines 198 – 203)</p>
	<p>“Things are different from when I was a child”</p>	<p>“iPad culture children”</p>	<p>Alison: mums that I know have this iPad culture children...they don't allow them to do other things (pg 5 lines 114 – 115)</p> <p>Alison: ...if you went to a party, everybody would be playing but nowadays like one child with an iPad or phone and everybody's crowding around that person and I think, but I was growing up and I was younger we just literally had fun (pg 13 lines 326 – 330)</p> <p>Alison: we didn't have anything electronic devices to help and</p>

			<p>occupy us (pg 14 lines 334 – 336)</p> <p>Alison: ... now you got people that they're not drawing because they're on the iPad or they doing something else... (pg 14 lines 339 – 342)</p> <p>Alison: I was creative about it instead of literally been stuck on devices and technology. (pg 14 lines 343 – 345)</p> <p>Shauna: ... sometimes it's through the computer they learn how to use certain things on the computer like doing maths it's more makes it more enjoyable for them than just pen and paper... (pg 5 lines 154 – 157)</p> <p>Shauna: ... pre-school years erm we didn't use computers as young small children and tablets and internet you know but now there's a vast world wide with social media...we still got there in the end with pen and paper when it was her (pg 12 lines 395 – 398)</p> <p>Shauna: ...my child has better cos as I said before it's a wide vast of internet social media there's all sorts of things out there for children to do than before (pg 14 lines 473 – 476)</p> <p>Denise: ... the children of today the youngsters they're in to social media but don't know the implications you know like taking the selfies (pg 8 lines 272 – 274)</p> <p>Kayla: ...there's this show called Doc McStuffin which my daughter</p>
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		<p>Acceptance of change</p>	<p>watches and erm it's like an erm a little girl who is like a doctor and when no one is around her her toys come to life and she looks after the toys so my daughter she's loved that show from about 2 years old so erm birthday she asked me to buy her like a doctors kit so she is learning like the role of the doctor through that... (pg 8 lines 244 – 252)</p> <p>Kayla: ...even little programmes like there's this channel called erm Baby TV ... all the bright colours and stuff like its you know babies like to look at it and stuff...but they are learning at the same time through looking at it like they can pick up little things like up and down as I said (pg 11 lines 369 – 386)</p> <p>Kayla: ...so she learnt a lot at home through like watching that channel and playing with her toys...(pg 12 lines 385 – 386)</p> <p>Denise: ...I suppose more time my mum and dad were working and it was my granny and then I was with my two cousins who we always used to play so I don't think for them they really ...I don't think they knew about play being educational but then I suppose the era that they was they were raised (pg 11 lines 367 – 375)</p> <p>Denise: I mean they would sit down and do the reading and writing</p>
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			<p>but we wouldn't of done it through a play (pg 12 lines 383 – 385)</p> <p>Dean: ...but I feel that now things are better rather than the way they were before but it's hard to say to be honest (Pg 15 lines 506 – 508)</p> <p>Dean: ... honest with you things are a lot better now I agree with the actual play in playtime expression of playing erm I feel that it does open up a lot of doors (pg 16 lines 512 – 515)</p> <p>Thandie: ...the only difference is that here from my days when I first went to school it was years and years ago erm we didn't have water play we didn't have to go outside and ride bicycles that was what you do (pg 11 lines 343 – 347)</p> <p>Thandie: ... in my early years experience I didn't have the advantages that they have I didn't have erm the amenities that they have now that is available now (pg 12 lines 376 – 378)</p> <p>Kayla: I don't remember like having as much toys and stuff as what my daughter has got today (Pg 10 lines 308 – 309)</p> <p>Kayla: ...yeah I'm not sure that I played as much as A... (pg 10 lines 311 – 312)</p> <p>Kayla: ... answers and stuff like that but erm [pause] I don't remember like role playing or anything... (pg 10 lines 318 – 320)</p>
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		<p>Some things were better!</p>	<p>Kayla: ...well when comparing the two I'd I'd rather her have the stuff she has now than things I never had because she's learning through the play as I said and erm [pause] erm [pause] even little programmes like there's this channel called erm Baby TV (pg 11 lines 366 – 371)</p> <p>Denise: I'd want her to have something better than what I had (pg 12 lines 404 – 405)</p> <p>Leah: ...we didn't have toys we were more creative so you had a more side of creative and language the more chance to be adventurous (pg 10 lines 336 – 338)</p> <p>Janine: ...it's a nice way to learn I think they're still young before they get to that school environment and they have to sit down but I think it needs to be a balance like I still think they should have a set time where they do sit down and do work so when they get to school it's not such a oh my goodness (pg 3 lines 85 – 91)</p> <p>Janine: ... it's good as I said to develop skills such as turn taking emotional but I think in terms of learning and hitting targets when you get to SATs and points in their life like that I don't think it's as effective as sitting down having a formal lesson and being taught something (pg 3 lines 99 – 105)</p>
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			<p>Dean: ...the teachers in my day they would give you a little hug and stuff like that you look at them sort of like that was your mother (pg 13 lines 442 – 444)</p>
	<p>Pressures and tensions</p>	<p>A need for a balance</p>	<p>Alison: ...it just depends because you need to have a balance... (pg 7 lines 170 – 174)</p> <p>Alison: ...the pressure on the child at the moment is so hard so I think in preschool. However, those sees fit as long as they're learning the basics I don't think there should be a strict curriculum (pg 10 lines 228 – 231)</p> <p>Denise: ...is it Australia their kids don't start school 'til they're seven so and they are doing just as well but our children start too early I think they're too focussed on, I think the kids definitely need more play (pg 4 lines 129 – 133)</p> <p>Kayla: ...exposed to all these toys like a play house for example erm flash cards just things like these I like used to teach A... at home so erm even when she started the teachers would say she is really advanced for her age... (pg 4 lines 121 – 125)</p> <p>Dean: ...maybe they found out doing research it's probably it's better for them to they gain more knowledge from playing now and more erm skills key skills (pg 15 lines 480 – 483)</p> <p>Thandie: ... its play but its like structured play in that it's their learning behind the play so if there's no learning and</p>

		<p>Child led versus adult directed</p>	<p>it's just playing then that's the drawback(Pg 2 lines 44 – 46)</p> <p>Thandie: I thought <i>play well</i> how are they going to learn cause when my son... he is not telling me his letters he's not telling me anything I'm thinking <i>what are they learning!</i> (pg 120 – 124)</p> <p>Shauna: As a structure time setting... I think it should be, once they've come in whether they're on early or afternoon that they've come in they should obviously have their snacks then do their work as in reading computer so forth whatever it is that they're doing outside activities and then they can play once they've done their work (pg 7 lines 207 – 213)</p> <p>Shauna: Because when you structure, structure things sometimes like you take out different activities they don't always wanna play with the activities that you set out they end up going elsewhere and taking out other stuff (pg 7 lines 224 – 228)</p> <p>Denise: ... it needs to be both a bit of both so I think can it must be some aspect of their timetable yes should be structured and other time it should be you know maybe having various different activities and the child chooses what they want to do so if it's like painting or going in the sandpit or going</p>
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			<p>outside... (pg 6 lines 188 – 195)</p> <p>Denise: ... you know they choose what activity rather than the nursery saying well this is what we're going to do so yeah a bit of a little bit a mixture (pg 6 lines 201 – 204)</p> <p>Janine: ...a bit more of a shock to the system that all of a sudden they have to sit a the table and do work (pg 2 lines 41 – 43)</p> <p>Janine: I think the nursery are doing well with their balance of teaching and playing and being set homework (pg 4 lines 113 – 115)</p> <p>Janine: ...the free flow play so they go and choose they lay out a number of activities and the choose what they do as long as it's within the boundaries and it's safe and they can see them. (pg 4 lines 123 – 128)</p> <p>Janine: ...they should have choice like lay it out different options for them and then let them decide where they're going to go with it because if they don't enjoy they probably not gonna learn from it (pg 5 lines 135 – 139)</p> <p>Leah: ...they should have structured time times where they read a book or the teacher might read a book to them times where they would sit down and do a group activity and these will be structured times where is maximum 20 minutes so if</p>
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			<p>they had 20 minutes in the morning or 20 minutes of this in the evening then the rest will be learning to play some would be adult led and some would be child led [pause]</p> <p>(pg 7 lines 206 – 214)</p> <p>Leah: ...some should be structured since you can have in four weeks of the month you you could split your children up into four groups and you could do a structured activity at least with all those children for the month so as to develop as to see how their development is doing erm so that could be structured [pause] (pg 8 lines 242 – 247)</p> <p>Leah: ...aahm at some point of time when they go to reception class and some bits will be structured so they have to understand there is a time for structured play and time for unstructured play and it's a gradual progress (process) until they reach to year one [pause] (pg 8 lines 258 – 262)</p> <p>Leah: ... a balance...to have nature reserve walks and the freedom freedom to learn through structured and unstructured play (pg 11 lines 343 – 344)</p> <p>Dean: ...without structure there is no there's no erm no guidance it wouldn't be ... sort of if it's free don't get me wrong they're they're very its it's a lot of it gives them room to be creative but then at the same time if it's not structured then you won't</p>
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			<p>understand it they're just being creative just doing their own thing basically so I feel that it would need to be structured in a way that you can understand what they like and what they don't like (pg 7 lines 230 – 239)</p> <p>Thandie: ... its play but its like structured play in that it's their learning behind the play so if there's no learning and it's just playing then that's the drawback(Pg 2 lines 44 – 46)</p> <p>Kayla: ...it should be free to give them a chance to use their imagination because erm because children are funny because sometimes the things that they come out with is so unexpected so they're learning through the play and ... erm and as I've said they can come out with anything (pg 6 lines 179 – 192)</p> <p>Kayla: ...because if it's structured then they are told what they have to do you know and if it's free then they can make up their own ideas and maybe create stories and stuff and characters and roles and just do it by themselves and think for themselves (pg 6 lines 188 – 192)</p> <p>Kayla: ...play is supposed to be child led isn't it so erm adults should just stand back and view kind of erm encourage and erm well correct if needs be so that they can learn erm I think that the play should be child led and the adults should kinda stand</p>
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			<p>back and not take over and you know.. and say no it's meant to be this way correct them in the right way as needs be and erm so they can learn from their mistakes if they are making any (pg 6 lines 195 – 203)</p> <p>Kayla: ...she asked me to buy her like a doctors kit...she uses like the stethoscope and the...injector and... we role play at home... (pg 8 lines 250 – 254)</p>
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