The 'Quality' of Nursery Provision:

An Exploration of the Relationship between Inspection and the Development of Education and Care

By

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Abstract

There has been a significant increase in interest in the development of childhood education and care in England in recent years and this has been supported by a plethora of initiatives and policy reforms. During this period of change there has also been a debate concerning the nature of 'quality' in Early Years provision. However, little research has focussed upon the quality standards and systems that are part of this evolution of Early Years Education and, in particular, the area of Early Years inspection has been given only limited consideration. This study explores stakeholder notions of 'quality' in Early Years Education and their perceptions of the new integrated approach to Early Years inspection using a qualitative multi-level embedded case study approach involving five distinct types of nursery provision in the state and private sector in the West Midlands. These nurseries have provided me with access to a range of stakeholders including parents, teachers, nursery nurses, teaching assistants, nursery owners, managers and headteachers; in addition Early Years inspectors and advisers were included in the sample. Semi-structured interviews were used to secure perceptions of inspection from educational leaders, practitioners and inspectors, including their considerations of quality factors and evaluation. A questionnaire was also utilised to capture parental opinion of inspection and to gauge whether Ofsted reporting informs parental nursery choice. All the fieldwork was carried out in a two year period between September 2008 and September 2010.

The findings suggest that stakeholders recognise the need for an external body to validate practice and ensure a consistent standard of education and care for nursery children. However, their explanations also suggest that the composition and characteristics of the inspectorate are more complex issues. Moreover, concerns regarding the lack of sector knowledge and insufficient understanding of child

development within the inspection process dominated the responses across the nursery-based stakeholders. Yet, the exploration of quality factors within nursery provision revealed that there were commonalities between the official vision of 'quality' enshrined in Ofsted documentation and the stakeholder descriptions.

This study captures insights which could inform the future research agenda in Early Years education and care, in particular the findings connected to the parental questionnaire highlight the need for an informed and documented dialogue between stakeholders. The challenge is to capitalise on the established informal reflective processes within nursery settings and to develop them into a sector approach to support inspection. By doing so, the regulatory framework could become part of the nursery's 'real world' and enhance care and education rather than being seen as additional administrative system. This work concludes by suggesting strategies including the establishment of evaluative partnerships between state and private settings, encouraging and developing collegiate critical reflection on practice whilst fostering the collaborative culture.

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Glossary of Abbreviations

BERA	British Education Research Association
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CWDC	Children's Workforce and Development Council
DCE	Diploma in Childcare and Education
DCSF	Department for Children, Families and Schools
DFEE	Department for Education and Employment
DoE	Department of Education
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ECERS	Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale
EEL	Effective Early Learning
ELEYS	Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector
EPPE	Effective Pre-School Education Project
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYQISP	Early Years Quality Support Programme
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education
HMT	Her Majesty's Treasury
LA	Local Authority
NoS	National Office of Statistics
NNEB	Nursery Nursing Examination Board
NPQICL	National Professional Leadership in integrated Centre Leadership
NCL	National College for Leadership
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

SEF	Self Evaluation Form
SIP	School Improvement Partner
UK	United Kingdom

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Chapter One

Locating the Study

1.1 Introduction

The focus of this study is on nursery provision in England. It is primarily concerned

with the introduction of a new integrated inspection approach (DfES, 2004, and see

Appendix 1, OFSTED, 2009a), and examines its implementation in a range of

nursery settings. The increasing value placed on quality nursery education and care

for the very young is evident in the reform of services by the previous Labour

government for children and their families (Williams, 2004; Roche and Tucker, 2007;

Alexander, 2010). This was signalled by the advent of the *Every Child Matters*

agenda (DfES, 2003a) and supported by a range of corresponding statutes,

strategies and regulatory frameworks.

 Against the backdrop of these reforms and the hegemony of quality standards that

accompanied their evolution, an international debate regarding the very nature of

Early Years provision had developed amongst academics, practitioners and other

stakeholders. At the time of this research, 'quality', and its accompanying concepts

within early childhood, was 'problematised' by Dahlberg *et al* (2000, 2007) and others

(Alexander, 2010; Sheridan, 2001, 2007; Tanner *et al,* 2006; Tobin, 2005). The

various perspectives of different stakeholders regarding what constitutes 'quality' are

likely to be influential to the development of the sector. Alongside the consideration of

the inspection framework, this study then focuses upon stakeholder perceptions of

'quality'; this will be discussed further in the next section.

1.2 Aims

 The previously mentioned '*Every Child Matters'* (DfES, 2003a) agenda, the

government's ten year strategy (HMT, 2004) and literature sources (Abbot and

Rodger, 1995; Bertram and Pascal, 2000; Sylva *et al, 2004; Osgood, 2006; Clark

and Waller, 2007; Alexander, 2010) have highlighted 'quality' and the maintenance of standards as important to the development of the Early Years sector. Prior to 2005 Early Years provision was inspected by a range of bodies and this is the first period of an integrated approach implemented by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). Thus at this significant time, this study aims to explore stakeholders' notions of 'quality' and consider the implementation of the new inspection framework in a range of five distinct settings representative of the main forms of nursery provision within England. The sample for this study is composed of: a private day 'home' nursery, a state nursery school, a state nursery unit attached to a primary school, a nursery within a children's centre and a private nursery which is part of a 'chain' of nurseries. These settings have provided me with access to a range of stakeholders including parents, teachers, nursery nurses, teaching assistants, nursery owners, managers, and headteachers. This thesis is concerned with the response to the new Ofsted framework from the private and state providers and the subsequent changes to practice that have been generated by its introduction. Based on these key issues the research questions are as follows:-

- Does the inspection framework support the development of care and education across the nursery sector?

- Do inspectors/headteachers/managers share the same perceptions of quality factors within nursery education as practitioners?

- Do headteachers/managers/practitioners consider Ofsted to be a 'change agent'?

- Is parental choice influenced by Ofsted reporting?

To address these research questions, I have used a mixed methods approach to collect data using the five settings as a qualitative multi-level embedded case study. In order to gain a perspective of parental opinion concerning inspection, two focus groups of six and ten parents were held to aid development of a questionnaire which

was distributed to all the parents in the five nurseries involved in this study. To determine collective opinions of workers across the sector, 30 interviews have been held with the nurseries practitioners, managers and headteachers; these provided an insight into how inspection influences the development of care and education of three to four year olds. In addition two Early Years inspectors and two local authority advisers have been interviewed to obtain an 'outsider' (Stephen and Brown, 2004) view of quality matters. Moreover, documentary sources such as Ofsted annual reports and external audit approaches such as ECERS (Early Childhood Environmental Ratings Scale, Harms *et al,* 1998) have been considered.

The initial literature review undertaken for my research proposal revealed a dearth of sources concerning nursery inspection. There is a wealth of literature debating the nature of Early Years education, and this can be connected to contestations regarding the conceptual and philosophical nature of 'quality'. However, perspectives from stakeholders regarding inspection and its relationship with early education and care remain largely unexplored, furthermore recent Daycare trust research (2010c) stated there was no empirical research concerning parental views of Ofsted. Moreover, although there has been some exploration of sector perceptions of 'quality' (Tanner *et al,* 2006), there has been no consideration of the inspectorate's vision of 'quality'. Yet it could be argued that this study's aim of examining stakeholders' notions of 'quality' is essential to inform future practice and to secure the growth of the sector, indeed Ribbins and Gunter (2002) contest that this type of research enables improvement to practice. The discussion concerning the nature of high quality nursery provision has been evolving since the work of Froebel in the 19th century (Nutbrown *et al,* 2000). Inspection is an overlooked part of this discussion, yet the notion of providing high quality provision arguably cannot be separated from its measure. This thesis aims to examine this apparent symbiotic relationship.

1.3 Rationale

Through my involvement in establishing Early Years partnerships in the late 1990's and developing the foundation degree for practitioners, it has been possible to contribute to professional dialogue concerning the development of care and education in the sector. More recently participation in a project connected to leadership in nurseries and primary schools (Rhodes and Greenway, 2010) has provided the opportunity to visit a range of nursery schools and analyse their practice. Alongside this my previous experience training nursery nurses and current role as course leader in Early Years initial teacher education has taken me into nurseries across the sector on a regular basis.

The professional concern which arose from this range of experiences was related to the differing range of staff and resources which are evident in nursery schools. At one extreme you may have a purpose built state funded setting with good outside provision, qualified teachers with allocated time for continuing professional development and support from the advisory team. In comparison another setting may be in a conservatory attached to somebody's home, funded by parental fees, staffed by nursery nurses without time or funding to access professional updating courses. In a sector where a National Childcare strategy was introduced in 1998, followed by *Every Child Matters* in 2003 and The Ten Year Childcare Strategy in 2004, nursery provision across England still remains fragmented and the vision for ensuring quality unachieved (Clark and Waller, 2007).

Indeed Nutbrown *et al* (2008) caution that the rapid and ambitious policy transformations over the past ten years have led to more variety in provision and raised concerns about the quality of provision. Included in these was the introduction of an integrated inspection process, as introduced by *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003a). The original central concern focused upon the development of education and

care within the newly created regulatory framework. In addition to this concern about the diverse nature of the sector there evolved a further curiosity on my part in the early stages of the research for this study. This was related to the shift to self evaluation in the inspection framework as proposed by the Education and Inspections Bill 2006 (DCSF, 2007) and the opportunity for all stakeholders to become engaged in the process. This led to a change in emphasis in my focus to extend it beyond the consideration of the inspection process to include the exploration of the notion of 'quality' in the sector from a range of involved perspectives.

Significant research projects have been carried out which delineate the parameters of quality Early Years provision. During the 1980's researchers attempted to define quality in categorical and instrumental terms (Osborn and Milbank, 1987), using as a foundation a healthcare sector quality model developed in the 1960's which advocated structure, process and outcome (Donabedian, 1988). More recently the Effective Pre-School Provision Education (EPPE) project (Sylva *et al,* 2004, 2010) employed direct observations combined with analysis of structural dimensions as a means of discerning elements of quality, thereby permitting quality to be understood as a set of measurable characteristics. Using a similar approach Sheridan (2007) constructs four dimensions of pedagogical quality, society, the child, the teacher and the learning context. In her meta-analysis Sheridan proposes that quality can be evaluated using these four dimensions providing that the cultural context is taken into consideration. However, despite these reflections upon quality in early childhood education and care, consideration of the effects of inspection remains largely unexplored. The relatively recent emergence of an integrated approach to policy and inspection produced an area that merited greater investigation, hence the necessity for this study.

1.4 The role of theory

The inspection process presents an objectively measurable view of quality; which contrasts with the position of Dahlberg and her colleagues (2007), and the cross-cultural anthropological comparisons made by Tobin (2005). These authors challenge the assumption that quality can be universally defined and question whether quality can be universally defined. Instead Dahlberg *et al* (2000, 2007) advocate a move away from the accepted concept of quality, with its emphasis on certainty and control, and move towards a new discourse of 'meaning making' (p6). This new discourse, which adopts a post-modernist perspective, calls for:

> Explicitly ethical and philosophical choices, judgements of value, made in relation to the wider questions of what we want for our children here and now and in the future (Dahlberg *et al*, 2007, p107).

This discourse, with its dynamic approach influenced my own theoretical stance, as merely to investigate the five nursery settings illuminating the quality procedures within them would not have been sufficient for the purpose of this study. It may have helped in answering the first and third research question about how inspection develops education and care and contributes to change in practice. Yet, examinations of systems and observations of activities would not have captured the perceptions of all the stakeholders involved in a nursery setting and the dimensions of 'quality' would remain undefined.

The work of Bertram and Pascal (2000, 2004), Sylva *et al,* (2004, 2010) and Tanner *et al* (2006) have been utilised in this study to provide a sector perspective of 'quality' and have been useful for providing an understanding of what was happening across the stakeholder groups. Moreover and more critically, the work of Dahlberg *et al* (2000, 2007) has influenced this research and their discourse of 'meaning making' (p6) has provided a focus on the meanings expressed by individual practitioners and the generation of understanding from the community of the workplace. Dahlberg *et al*

(2007, p141) place the stakeholders at the heart of their research, acknowledging that the participants of their projects are 'in a process of collaborative co-construction'. This builds on the interpretative position outlined by Ribbins and Gunter's (2002) humanistic knowledge domain and aims to avoid imposing the researcher's understanding of reality onto the practitioners. Dahlberg *et al* (2007, p142) aver:

> A deep theoretical perspective combined with experience from practice opens up beneficial possibilities for dialogue and confrontation.

This concept of shared professional dialogue has been most helpful in generating the 'explanations' of Early Years inspection and how the perceptions of stakeholders shape the notion of 'quality' within the nursery sector.

1.5 The researcher's place in the study

> Locating oneself as a researcher immediately disturbs a taken-for-granted security of 'knowing who I am in relation to others'. Suddenly, 'I' as well as 'others' are in question.
> Schostak (2002, p50)

The engagement of the researcher in a study of this nature is integral to its mission. Stake (1995, p3), in his work on case study suggests researchers make their selection because:

> The case is given. We are interested in it, not because studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem but because we need to learn about that case. We have an intrinsic interest in that case.

For my own part I have developed an interest in the field of Early Years education and care for over twenty years. In the first instance work as a nursery and reception teacher during the late 1980's to early 1990's included both class based involvement and extensive liaison work with parents and external agencies. In a second phase I became a lecturer in further education responsible for training nursery nurses and developing a degree level course for Early Years practitioners. This work involved working in partnership with nursery providers in both the private and state sector.

Alongside this role I worked as a part time nursery teacher and studied for my Masters degree.

Whilst working in further education I became involved in two projects connected to quality assurance and inspection. The first was an extension of my Early Years experience as combined with my lecturing role; I became the college representative on the newly established Early Years partnerships. This led to work as an external daycare registration officer, responsible for inspecting provision using the regulatory framework and standards. Subsequently, I became involved in a project which aimed to develop the learning environment of further education by encouraging reflective practice. This position required an understanding of the quality framework for further education and building on skills acquired in my Early Years roles I undertook initial inspector training with the Learning and Skills Council. Both of these roles involved extensive work with practitioners and the focus was upon the development rather than the auditing of practice.

My current role is within higher education and one of my prime roles is the education of Early Years teachers and subsequently supporting them post qualification to achieve a Masters degree. Over a five year period I have been responsible for developing a nursery partnership and this has resulted in visiting many settings across a wide urban and rural area. In addition to this, I have managed the whole initial teacher education programme, and co-ordinated the Ofsted inspection process. Another element of my work in higher education has been as a member of a University wide quality group, responsible for ensuring internal policy is maintained and the student experience optimised.

1.6 Carrying out the study

As previously stated five sites were selected as the focus of this study. My selection was based upon five distinct types of nursery provision across the West Midlands. *Whitehouse Nursery* (pseudonyms have been used) is a small, popular nursery school in the state sector; it is located in an inner city location within a deprived area with around three quarters of children with English as an additional language (OFSTED reporting, 2006, 2009). *Cherry Trees Nursery* is part of a newly formed children's centre within the state sector, it is situated in an outer city urban location within an area with some deprivation (OFSTED reporting, 2006, 2009). *Greenleaf* is a nursery unit attached to a state sector primary school located in an affluent residential area in a market town (OFSTED reporting, 2007). *Umbrella Day Nursery* is a private home setting serving the local and surrounding areas situated in an area of mixed housing. The remaining nursery *Tophat* is part of a chain of nurseries across the West Midlands, with branches in Worcestershire, Shropshire, Warwickshire and the Birmingham area. In addition to these five sites *Tall Trees* private nursery was used as a pilot study. These choices alongside external evidence from documentary sources, such as Ofsted and SureStart, offered a different range of staff roles and qualification, and reflected a range of socioeconomic contexts.

For these embedded case studies I wished to draw upon the experience of established settings and have used, as Stake (1995) suggests, my professional knowledge to shape my selection. All the settings had been involved in Early Years partnership schemes, where teacher, nursery nurse and teaching assistant training took place, however none of the settings had a personal connection with me. After a brief discussion with all the settings, it became evident that they were responding to the integrated inspection system in a variety of ways. Although there was an awareness of the various evaluation systems on my part this was fragmentary, and

there was whole new set of knowledge regarding the relationship of inspection to the development of education and care to be gained in carrying out this study in the five locations.

The study was a small scale qualitative study of policy and stakeholder perceptions. In the first instance a pilot study was carried out to determine the level of knowledge of the inspection framework and develop potential interview questions. This involved an individual interview with a manager, a focus group with practitioners, a focus group of parents, and the trialling of a questionnaire. Following this there was an initial briefing interview with the leader of each setting and a questionnaire was distributed to all parents (in this study the term parent is used to describe the role of main carer). Subsequently, key people were identified in consultation with the nursery leaders reflecting a range of experience and level of qualification, these included teachers, nursery nurses, teaching assistants, and they in turn, as well as the owners and managers were interviewed individually. All the focus groups and interviews were tape recorded and field notes were used to capture the non- verbal responses of the participant and a description of the setting.

A further round of consultation undertaken in order to provide an 'outsider' (Stephen and Brown, 2004) stakeholder view of 'quality' and inspection, took place beyond the immediate school sites using diverse sources of information. These included interviews of Early Years advisers, inspectors and reference to pertinent websites. The decisions about which source of information was chosen related to the availability and accessibility of these third parties. For example, as part of their contractual agreement Ofsted inspectors are not allowed to express opinions about the quality of nursery provision beyond the remit of reporting. Therefore agency inspectors participated in this research, their contributions were supported by the nursery's current and previous Ofsted report and the views expressed in Ofsted's

annual summary of the Early Years sector. All the settings provided supporting documentation, such as their prospectus, which acted as an additional source of enquiry.

1.7 Structure

This introduction forms the first chapter of the study, outlining the aims, rationale, the role of theory, the researcher's place in the study and the way in which it was carried out. In chapters two and three I consider the literature connected to inspection, the development of care and education and the notion of 'quality' from a range of perspectives. To form a foundation for the research questions, chapter two considers the historical perspective of both inspection and Early Years provision. It looks at the way in which the current policy has evolved and the key characteristics which are embedded within it.

In chapter three the contemporary perspective is examined by looking at the current policy and inspection regime of the nursery sector. The notion of 'quality' is considered, in particular the work of Dahlberg *et al* (2000, 2007) is discussed and cited examples of excellence are explored. Other possibilities of evaluating provision are presented and the relationship between inspection and school improvement is outlined. In the sections which follow the important viewpoints of practitioners, leaders and parents are gathered in order to form a reflective evaluative consideration of the regulatory process.

In the following chapter, entitled Research Design and Methodology, the wider picture of educational research is explored, followed by a discussion of epistemological and methodological issues. The choice of case study is then discussed followed by a section on site access and selection. The conduct and

analysis of the research are then outlined, and the chapter concludes with the consideration of ethical issues.

Rather than presenting the findings case study by case study, the following two chapters on data presentation and data analysis use a framework of the research questions and generated stakeholder themes, and focus on the explanations and meanings expressed by individuals to generate shared understanding of each research question. Although the research resonates with the complexity and diversity of the settings, the aim is to provide a range of stakeholder perspectives. The data gathered is full of dynamic accounts of practice and beliefs and I wanted to present it in a manner allowing these explanations to be fully portrayed and explored. The first chapter presents the findings and the second provides an analysis of each research question and presents a possible model to enhance the current inspection process. In the final chapter, chapter seven, conclusions are drawn which reflect on the research questions and discusses the contribution to knowledge. This final section is a reflection on the process of executing the study, both in terms of the methodological stance, the methods chosen, and the conceptual framework which was used. It also suggests further research work which could be done in this area.

Chapter Two

A Historic Perspective: The Evolution of Inspection and Nursery Provision

2.1 Introduction

The literature connected to school improvement and inspection is largely concerned with the compulsory school sector rather than nursery education. Therefore in this chapter, it is proposed to put this research into context and systematically review this wider field; which has contributed to the understanding of the inspection framework and quality matters within pre-school provision. As stated in the opening sentence, there is an under representation of studies linked to the inspection process within Early Years settings. To ensure a firm foundation for this review and to provide contextual information for the first research question: Does the inspection framework support the development of care and education across the nursery sector? Literature has been used from other sectors, in particular school inspection, as more extensive studies are available. Academic and empirically based publications will be utilised alongside practitioner sources; providing a diverse yet balanced viewpoint.

This first section of the review will focus on mainly UK based authors, although literature from North America and the rest of Europe will be used in the discussion regarding the nature of early childhood education, as it is important to consider varying cultural constructs in this area. An earlier study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2001) noted that in the early and informal stages of education the regulatory system in England represented one extreme of a continuum. Therefore in the second chapter of the review, literature from other European countries, North America, Hong Kong and New Zealand will be used to gain a broader perspective of nursery education and inspection.

All sections of the review will consider government reports and literature from relevant agencies such as the Department of Education (DoE), the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), and the Children's Workforce and Development Council (CWDC).

In order to establish which agencies and authors were pertinent to this area of study, an extensive literature search was carried out. As a starting point, key words surrounding the topic of Early Years inspection were put into journal and internet databases to identify the range of literature. The next stage Hart (2002) considers crucial to the success of a research project, the 'progressive narrowing' (p13) of a topic through the literature review generates a strong research framework. Hence a second strand of investigation and subsequent refining of material began to develop the outline of my thesis, and provided the impetus for the selection of the themes for this first section of my literature review. In my review of websites and using the British Education Index it could be identified that nursery education has been subject to a number of different inspection regimes and the quality of provision within the sector remains a pertinent research issue. The culmination of these searches identified several key themes, the historical perspectives of both school inspection and nursery education and the corresponding issue of workforce reform. Hart (2002) suggests that by becoming familiar with the history of the research the researcher is made aware of contemporary issues and debate.

Therefore this review will begin with an examination of literature providing an account of the evolution of both the inspection service and early childhood education. As Nutbrown *et al* (2008) state:

> Learning from the past is one way of trying to ensure that new policies and investment do not repeat the mistakes of previous generations (p17).

This historical perspective will provide the necessary contextual information for the aim of this thesis and its associated questions; in particular this first section highlights the themes associated with research question one regarding the nature of inspection.

2.2 The origins of school inspection

The current need for state accountability and scrutiny of public spending has placed the issue of inspection and school improvement under appraisal. Examining initially the historical perspective of school inspection, Dunford (1998) reviews the first hundred years of inspection from 1839-1939, he considers 'few bodies founded over 150 years ago owe as much as Her Majesty's inspectorate (H.M.I) to their original principles and early history' (p1). The origins of the British education system and the need for accountability are intertwined. However, unlike the quality of teaching and learning that are considered by their contemporaries, the early inspectors were appointed to ensure that money was spent wisely by the National Society, which was responsible for a large number of schools in the nineteenth century. Parallels were drawn with the system of factory inspection, but the voluntary nature of educational provision meant that there were no national regulations to enforce. In 1839 the first two men were appointed as Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, as a result of the establishment of a Committee of the Privy Council of Education, with a set of instructions to inspectors (Lawton and Gordon, 1987). The sources discussed thus far acknowledge that the early annual reports reveal interesting social comment and recommended good educational practices. This supports Dunford's (1998) view that the values instilled at the beginning of the inspection system are reflected in today's approach. Cullingford (1999) reinforces this viewpoint as he reiterates that the issues of public accountability and evidence have always been prevalent in state education.

The origins of inspection are not without controversies as Dunford (1998) further suggests that inspection was linked to payment–by-results in the 3R's and inspection day became the most significant day in the school year, as the government grant was largely dependent on the pupil's abilities to answer the inspector's examination questions. Rapple (1994) further emphasizes this economic market- driven culture as he argues that 'this was a narrow, restrictive system of educational accountability' (p1).Yet, despite criticisms from many including the H.M.I. Matthew Arnold who felt the system would lead to the inevitable decline in the education of the people (Black, 1987; Lawton and Gordon, 1987; Rapple, 1994; Wilcox and Gray, 1996; Dunford, 1998) payment- by-results continued for three decades. Although over the years, the worst features of the code were removed, the principles were perceived as negative features by teachers long afterwards. Rapple (1994) suggests that teachers were often nervous on the day of inspection, as so much their salary was reliant upon a good result. This recognition of the stress placed upon teachers as a result of the current inspection process is acknowledged and explored by contemporary authors (Earley, 1998; Jeffrey and Woods, 1998; Richards, 2001; Stephen and Brown, 2004) and will be discussed at a later stage. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that this was considered a significant issue in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty first centuries.

When the HMI moved away from the Revised Code of Practice, the emerging systems of inspection adapted to changing circumstances. Dunford (1998) suggests 'that the period of 1895-1939 was one of reorganisation and consolidation' (p17). This view is endorsed by Wilcox and Gray (1996), who recognise that inspection processes have gradually evolved since their origins as single inspectors testing elementary school children, and the changes in system correspond with political decisions and the introduction of different Education Acts. From 1944 onwards with the introduction of The Butler Act advocating education for all, Wilcox and Gray

(1996) give the impression of 'educational consensus' (p26) and HMI follow this trend providing a more advisory role. In 1946 Louis Schiller was appointed as the first Staff Inspector for Primary Education. Schiller was an HMI who promoted child-centred teaching; moreover, he was a strong advocate of art and creativity in the Early Years. His views influenced many primary and nursery teachers who developed an active child led approach (Nutbrown *et al,* 2008). Schiller saw inspection as an advisory rather than a testing process, he was a member of the committee for the Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council, 1967), and its influence on less formal education will be discussed later in this chapter.

The next era of developments to the inspection framework and its remit, corresponds to a phase of educational change in the 1970's (Dunford, 1998; Lee and Fitz, 1997; Sandbrook, 1996; Wilcox and Gray 1996). Lee and Fitz (1997) discuss the 'evolution or revolution in school inspection' (p39) and suggest that the mid seventies heralded a new interest in the system's standards and outputs. This could be seen as an indicator of the future of inspection, as the concern was not just for the maintenance of standards and appropriate funding but also the improvement of curriculum and pedagogy were becoming increasingly important.

 HMI conducted two major surveys of schools (DES, 1978; DES, 1979) which according to Lee and Fitz (1997) became reference documents and generated policy concerning curriculum, quality and standards. *Primary Education In England: A Survey by HMI* (DES, 1978) and *Aspects of Secondary Education in England: A Survey by HMI (*DES, 1979) are seen by many as setting out guidelines for what would become a national curriculum (Dunford, 1998; Lee and Fitz, 1997; Sandbrook, 1996; Standaert, 2001; Wilcox and Gray 1996).Throughout the next ten years the Inspectorate advocated a national curriculum framework around which teachers could use their professional judgement and could produce the curriculum for the

school (Dunford, 1988). In this era there were two modes of inspection which encompassed both former approaches. The national framework was still controlled by HMI and was committed to assessing standards; the local education authority (LEA) also had the remit to assess standards but did so by supporting and developing teachers in the context of local services. This dual method was leading to variability between provision and region (Wilcox and Gray, 1996), and the trend was to work as individual subject advisers rather than an inspection team. From a teacher's perspective this could be seen to be a preferred approach, as you could build up a relationship with your adviser and discuss pedagogical matters with a subject specialist.

The discussion which is emerging from this review centres upon the changing role of the inspectorate, and whether their interests should be policy or pedagogically based. In the period before the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1989 and Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, referred to as Ofsted throughout this thesis) in 1992, the government sought to bring greater influence over the curriculum (Sandbrook, 1996). HMI published a series of booklets entitled *Curriculum Matters* (DES 1985-1989) and a power struggle concerning classroom practice between the interested parties of DES, LEA's and HMI was shaping the future of inspection and the curriculum. Cullingford (1999) asserts 'Inspection is a tool of Government and management and its nature is affected by the policies that it is meant to advance and reinforce' (p10). With the introduction of the Education Reform act in 1988 the 'stage was set for a legislative bonanza' (Sandbrook, 1996 p10). Accountability to the new standards was a priority, and as at the inception of the inspectorate there was a need to monitor public funds and increase quality assurance. HMI continued to inspect schools as before; however there was a stronger focus on classroom practice as the newly introduced National Curriculum had to be correctly implemented. The previously mentioned parties were all involved in the movement towards greater

public accountability; but ultimately as Cullingford (1999) argued the inspection process is in the control of the government. The 1992 Education Act reflected the politics of the time, the Citizens Charter (Cabinet Office, 1991) set out what every citizen could expect from the public services, education was no exception and Ofsted was established as a new government department.

The issue of power is one that has interested researchers connected with Ofsted since its introduction. Does greater accountability empower government, schools and teachers or parents and children? The language associated with explorations of the first few years of Ofsted is emotive, Lee and Fitz (1997) suggest it offers 'authoritative advice' (p39), Case *et al* (2001) aver 'Ofsted is stage managed public accountability' (p605), Davis and White (2001) state the view that 'An organisation such as Ofsted acts as society's servant' (p676). These words reflect the controversy surrounding the newly formed Government body. The formation of inspection teams moved away from the LEA advisory roles and their pedagogical expertise and moved towards independence and objectivity. The inspectorate would have lay members; all teams would invite the views of the public and parents and reports would be standardised and universal (Wilcox and Gray, 1996). The literature written after the first four year cycle appraises its practice and further examines the issue of power (Cullingford, 1999; Earley, 1998; Jeffrey and Woods, 2001; Ouston *et al,* 1996).

2.3 Early views of Ofsted

> Ofsted is concerned to ensure that inspection processes are consistent, reliable and intelligible. But in the drive towards these goals it is important that the less measurable or more creative aspects of education are not unwittingly filtered out (Davis, 1996, p5).

This quotation encapsulates the concerns of the teaching profession, in this era, that accountability and control would curb creativity in pedagogy. The earlier publication

of the 'three wise men' report (Alexander *et al,* 1992), perhaps justifies this view. This report heralded a more blunt and public approach to directing teaching methods and styles. It argued that the primary sector's adherence to a child centred, thematic approach resulted in poor teaching (Fitz and Lee, 1996). Rose, Director of inspection at Ofsted in 1995, in particular, claimed that the focus of policy should now be on pedagogy as:

> ...First in some lessons the pupils received very little direct teaching...Second the assessment of pupils' capabilities left much to be desired...Third, the teachers' subject knowledge was not sufficient to match the developing abilities of the pupils (Rose, 1995 in Fitz and Lee, 1996, p20).

These are strong statements and it is unsurprising that much of the literature connected to inspection in this period reflects the stress perceived by the practitioner and the power held by Ofsted (Maw, 1996; Sandbrook, 1996; Wilcox and Gray, 1996; Jeffrey and Woods, 1998).

Indeed, parallels were drawn between the model of inspection presented in the *Handbook for the Inspection of Schools* (OFSTED, 1994) and Foucault's description of 'technology of power' (Foucault, 1979 in Maw, 1996). The framework contained the characteristics of detachment and hierarchy, and employed 'hidden' observations to make the judgement of a school's qualities. Maw (1996) suggests that this approach emphasised control and that it presented teachers as passive objects in the inspection process rather than participants. The lack of accountability of the inspection team to those inspected presents an image of constraint and restriction, Foucault (1979), employs similar language: '...observers remain invisible...judgements are made by reference to a norm...examination produces the truth about the individual' (p170-94). If the word inspection is substituted for examination and school for individual, and inclusion of the observations of the school which are not recorded, the association with Foucault is apparent. The characteristics of the regulators of 'disciplines' or 'technologies of power'; share commonalities with

the phrases used by the handbook and potentially could be said to add to the argument that increased adherence to standards could lead to an increase in uniform pedagogy. A remarkable outcome for a framework aiming to improve children's education by focusing on classroom practices.

This focus on the craft of teaching was not perceived as positive by the profession, concerns regarding the confidence levels of staff are a common theme in sources at this time. Brimblecombe *et al* (1996) surveyed teachers in the run-up to inspection and during it. They, unsurprisingly, found that teachers were more wary than unconcerned. Teachers perceived the period prior to inspection as more stressful than the time when an inspector was actually in the classroom. Staff confidence levels during inspection related to seniority. Leaders were less worried than ordinary classroom teachers. This could be an issue relating to control, referring back to Foucault, the teachers are more passive in the process feeling inspection is ...'being done to them' (Brimblecombe *et al,* 1996, p129). Whereas, the senior staff tended to be more involved from the start; giving them more ownership in the process and a stronger sense of security in their role.

These findings were also echoed in studies by Wilcox and Gray (1996) and Sandbrook (1996), they both suggest that headteachers and their deputies accepted the prospect of inspection with equanimity. Again, the teachers were anxious about the process, much of the stress was associated with the observation of lessons. This also relates back to Foucault and the withholding of information by the observer as an agent of power, feedback could be brief and staff felt concerned by omission (Wilcox and Gray, 1996).The shift from the previously discussed friendly subject adviser to the more distant inspectoral role is more akin to the early role of the inspectorate and carries with it similar concerns. The balance of accountability to

policy and corresponding pedagogy is problematic, as teachers could be teaching to meet Ofsted regulations rather than the needs of their particular cohort.

At this stage Ofsted did not inspect all nursery provision, its remit only covered state nurseries attached to primary schools, and there is some literature which focuses solely on that sector, however, there are only passing references to nurseries. Abbot and Rodgers (1995) mention developing a framework for inspecting nurseries but clearly see it as separate to the Ofsted process. Nonetheless, there are emerging themes in this section that underpin this study. The literature emphasises the relationship between policy and classroom performance, and reveals how quality assurance has impacted upon the curriculum. To provide a contextual backdrop to these emergent issues, the historical perspective of nursery education will be examined in the next section and the discussion regarding pedagogy and accountability will continue.

2.4 The growth and nature of nursery education

There is an inevitable overlapping of the historical timeframe, as with the inspection system, nursery education has its beginnings in the nineteenth century.

> Nursery Education in Britain, more than any other kind of service to young children, has been the subject of intense discussion, debate and theorising for more than a century (Moss and Penn, 2003, p19).

The approach to this sector of education has been shaped by needs of young children and the nature of childhood. Indeed the literature associated with early childhood education is preoccupied by what form best meets the needs of young children. Furthermore, until recently sources have focussed mainly upon this philosophical discussion and the origins of this sector have been 'hidden from history' (Brehony, 2006, p167).

A common thread in the literature is well described by Walsh (2005), as he reflects the underpinning theories of Froebel and Pestalozzi, he avers that a central theme in this field's history is that as young children differ developmentally, it necessarily follows that they learn differently from older children and adults, thus there are different conceptions of 'quality'. Froebel (1782-1852) is arguably the most influential amongst historical early childhood educators (Ailwood, 2008). His vision for nursery schooling was based upon the ideology of the mother and child relationship. Froebel believed that young children needed occupations and felt there was a need to fill the gap between home and school. He carefully observed, classified and collected the practices from the daily lives of mothers and their young children, similar to his predecessor Pestalozzi (Steedman, 1985). Froebel believed that the education of young children should follow 'the natural unfolding of human life, from infancy, through childhood, to adulthood' (Ailwood, 2008, p158). Steedman (1985) asserts that Froebel set the standards for generations of Early Years practitioners, the vision of a 'mother made conscious' (p149), his views, although arguably similar, became more popular than Pestalozzi's'. He emphasised that young women should be trained to educate young children and have a '...girlish love of childhood...a serene and joyful view of life in general...a love of play and occupation, a love and capacity for singing' (Wiebe, 1896, p43). This link with the role of motherhood, the female capacity for caring continues to dominate the sector and will be discussed frequently during this study. Although Froebel was considered a 'mad old man' by his contemporaries (Wiebe, 1896) for his interest in children, he embedded himself in the tightly connected discourses of motherhood and pedagogue, and arguably legitimised the place of women in the education of pre-school children. This has been heralded by some (Ailwood, 2008; Behony, 2006; Taylor Allen, 1982) as a positive movement in the education of young women. Yet, in reality Froebel could be said to be following the developing theme across European nations of the wealthy woman providing care for the less fortunate child. The idea of 'social mothers' was common

in German society and upper-class women aimed to share the burden of caring for children by providing education and support to working class mothers (Taylor Allen, 1982). This is an example of Early Years education developing because of social and economic need.

The example of upper class mothers using intellectual curiosity and exercising educational attainment could be applied to a British movement in the same era. When Bertha Maria von Marenholtz-Buelow publicised Froebel's German Kindergarten system for an audience in 1855, she spoke persuasively about a women's role to support 'helpless humanity' (Steedman, 1985). His vision of a child being in contact with nature in 'bright airy school rooms' (Williams, 1979, p9); inspired the McMillan sisters to establish their own garden schools in deprived areas. Their own experience of starting school was disconcerting, Margaret Mcmillan in 1927 described her first classroom as large with a desk that looked like a pulpit, the teacher held a leather strap. In contrast to this in staffing their schools, the McMillan sisters used the same criteria as Froebel, arguing that a more privileged girl would be in a position '... to learn, to serve, to find herself, could be fulfilled' (McMillan, 1923). The children could enjoy 'light, air and all that is good' (McMillan, 1917, cited in Nutbrown *et al,* 2008, p44). However, the McMillans could be said to be responsible for Early Years teachers role developing as 'mothers- made-conscious' in Britain (Steedman, 1985, p156), their exhortation of 'treat each child as if he were your own' continues Froebel's feminine imagery (McMillan 1927 cited in Steedman, 1985, p156).

Another historical illustration of the relationship between young women and the role of the Early Years teacher is provided by Maria Montessori (1870-1952). Although later than Froebel, associated literature suggests the prevailing social need to establish nursery education remained the same (Montessori, 1946; Cunningham,

2000; Ailwood, 2008). Montessori's ideas were based on her own scientific research, she was the first Italian woman to graduate with a medical degree, this is important to her public success as her views were seen as scientific and academic rather than those of a supportive female (Brehony, 1994). The 'Montessori Method' is based on a philosophy which incorporates a range of interconnecting perspectives such as the age grouping of children according to development not age, human tendencies, the process of children's learning, the prepared environment, work centres, areas of study, learning styles and character education (Nutbrown *et al,* 2008*)*. She, like Frobel felt that learners needed to be independent in their learning, and began to question the nature of education. Her views of children being able to make decisions about the 'work' they should do, became more prevalent in the latter half of the century (Brehony, 1994; Nutbrown *et al,* 2008).

Nevertheless, literature connected to her earlier work reinforces Froebel's romantic notions of motherhood and used the image of a beautiful, loving mother as an essential basis for her educational theories (Brehony, 2006; Ailwood, 2008). Montessori (1946, p87) is even more prescriptive in her requirements, she suggests that the ideal Early Years teacher '...should be attractive...young...happy. She should study her movements; making them as gentle as possible...a child should think her as beautiful as his mother'. However, the date of this quotation should be noted as this was written after World War two and allies with trends across Europe and the rest of the world, of women returning to the home. This maternal discourse and the construct of childhood education linked to nation building has been widely discussed (Riley, 1979; Steedman, 1990; Moss and Penn, 2003; Ailwood, 2008) and the literature connected with the war and nursery growth with be reviewed later in this chapter.

These views regarding the relationship between motherhood and nursery provision are expanded upon by Brooker (2005) who considers the social and cultural constructs of childhood. She examines the origins of thought behind Early Years education and adds another dimension to this theme. She argues that as institutions create their own constructs 'that the western, minority-world institution of early childhood education has evolved its' own persistent, and passionate view of childhood' (p117). All sources discussed thus far acknowledge the contribution of the nineteenth and twentieth century pioneers such as Froebel, Isaacs, Montessori and McMillan, although Brooker's (2005) views contrast with Walsh (2005) and Ailwood (2008) as they provide a sharper critique suggesting these thinkers to be responsible for promoting an idealised view and that early childhood education has become over dependent upon the origin of its' beliefs.

As already discussed a dominant aspect behind the formation of nursery education is that of economic and social development, Britain in this era was changing from an agricultural to a primarily industrial economy. It was the development of industry which caused discussion about the starting age of compulsory schooling (Nutbrown *et al,* 2008). Working women are wrongly seen as a twentieth century phenomenon, as early as 1870 schools took on the role of childcare and by 1900 more than fifty percent of three and four year olds attended infant schools (Moss and Penn, 2003). Current figures are less than this with only thirty seven percent of three year olds in maintained nursery and primary schools (DCSF, 2009); however, as will be discussed in this section and the next chapter, contemporary provision is offered in a variety of forms and percentages vary across the sector. This balance between care, development and education across the range of provision is an issue which concerns many authors and has shaped the delivery of the Early Years curriculum (Devereux and Miller, 2003; Edgington, 2004; Miller *et al,* 2002; Yelland, 2005). Both Moss and Penn (2003) and Woodhead (2002) cite Katherine Bathurst, an inspector who in

1905 raised this issue, she was critical of the early schooling system's failure to meet the needs of younger children. Her suggestion echoed the beliefs of the aforementioned pioneers and she promoted the notion that very young children in public education system should have a different classroom environment and style of teaching to their older counterparts. As in the discussion relating to the history of inspection, this is an example of an inspector's concern with pedagogy as well as policy.

In the same era, Scotland was developing its approach to nursery education following Robert Owen's initiatives (Nutbrown *et al,* 2008). Owen promoted a distinct approach to Early Years schooling and advocated kindness, activity and co-operation. One of the first inspection reports of this period reinforces the notions explored by other pioneers in the literature already reviewed. In 1913 His Majesty's inspector of schools reported that:

> This school is a bright spot in a rather dark neighbourhood…with two groups of children under five years of age. To these school lessons were not given. They engage in a variety of interesting kindergarten occupations and they learn to draw and sing. The rest of the time they spend taking care of pets, in attempts at gardening and in playing at housework. They mostly live in the open air and are obviously happy. Regular lessons in elementary subjects were given to those children whose ages are from 5-7. (City of Edinburgh Council/Early Education 1999 cited in Nutbrown *et al,* 2008 p.8)

This lengthy quotation encapsulates the origins of nursery education, as there is a recognition that young children have particular developmental needs. It demonstrates that provision which had been set up to provide care for children whilst their parents were at work had begun to develop ways of providing opportunities for the under-fives to learn. The inspection summary above describes a setting which many current practitioners would recognise, and demonstrates elements of an appropriate curriculum. Moreover, it highlights that inspectors were already aware that a nursery setting had a different teaching method compared to infant schooling.

The formation of nursery education has similarities with the evolution of the inspection system as both were promoted as being universal and supported by the government. Between the wars consideration was given to how nursery schooling should be provided. The prevailing theoretical perspective was considered and Susan Isaacs was involved in a consultation process commissioned by the Government in 1931. She argued that young children were driven by their emotions and that nursery schooling enabled children to become more detached from their mother's and allow them to play freely (Moss and Penn, 2003). She perceived the nursery teacher as separate from the home and urged well qualified woman to become practitioners, the construct of the teacher as a mother was declining. Woodhead (2002) provides a similar view as expressed later by Brooker (2005); he suggests that early childhood provision has been constructed by diverse discourses and practices, even within one society. Therefore during this time period it was Isaacs construct that prevailed and shaped provision, and she suggested that the nursery environment should be orderly particularly to support a child from an insecure background. Kammerman (2001) perceives this to be a divisive construct as it continued the 'pattern of fragmentation' (p.4) between care and education, and describes this as day care as 'protective service' (p.4). This discussion of ethos within the sector is revisited in a contemporary context by many authors (Abbot and Rodger, 1994; Devereux and Miller, 2003; Yelland, 2005; Clark and Waller, 2007).

This growth of the protective nature of nursery provision can be linked to the outbreak of the Second World War, Riley (1979) states that, 'during the last war, both day and residential nurseries were operating on a scale then unprecedented' (p.82). This expansion discussed by Moss and Penn (2003); Riley (1979) and Randall (1995) is viewed as a quality issue, they suggest that the administration was muddled and there was a continuing conflict between the ministerial departments of employment, education and health, as to who was responsible for nursery provision.

Moreover, little regard was paid to the education of the young children in a nursery; the service provided was based on meeting basic care needs. As Athey (2007) suggests the expansion of provision related to 'keeping children off the streets' (p14), whilst their parents were employed in the war effort, rather than seeing the worth of early education. However, as the war drew to a close as did the growth in the nursery sector. Athey (2007) highlights that even before the war had ended, free state provision ended as the government urged women to return to the role of housewives. Randall (1995) suggests that post war central government halved its' grant to the nursery sector. This is an indication of a future trend; Browne (1996) suggests that during the thirty years following the 1944 Education Act there was little expansion in nursery provision, emphasising that as there was no need to care for the under fives, there was no need to provide education for them either.

The reasons behind the lack of funding in the nursery sector during the twentieth century are well documented and discussed by many authors (Browne, 1996; Pugh and Duffy, 2006; Aubrey, 2007; Clark and Waller, 2007; Riley, 2007). Browne (1996) puts forward a widely held view as supported by the later authors listed above, that subsequent governments have been reluctant to respond to the increasing demand for services for the under- fives. She further suggests that this relates to the 'inhibiting views of Bowlby' (p371) and maternal deprivation. His views were popular and influential post war until the 1970's, this following statement is key to the evolution of Early Years education:

> What is believed to be essential for mental health is that an infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (Bowlby, 1953 p13).

This quotation has been frequently used as an anti daycare argument which in turn prevented the growth of nursery education (Browne, 1996; Moss and Penn, 2003;

Randall, 1995; Riley, 1979). Riley (1979) examines this argument in a critical

manner, she suggests that:

> …there is a vague but hardy feminist folk-myth about the war nurseries; that
> they were done away with because the government wanted women off the
> labour market and back to the home, and that it called in Bowlby's work to
> justify this (p82).

She takes an opposing stance to Browne (1996) as she ascribes the decline in

nurseries to another prevailing psychological perspective, the views of Melanie Klein,

who promoted the mother and child relationship as all important. However, both Riley

(1979) and Browne (1996) acknowledge that the rebuilding of British family life after

the war was dependent upon the role of the mother at the heart and this re-branding

of women led to the decline in the nursery sector.

Conversely, as female employment began to rise again in the late 1950's, part time

provision became the prevalent form of state pre-school settings, this next stage in

the evolution of nursery provision has been mentioned in connection with the

formation of the inspection system; The Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council,

1967). Browne (1996) stresses that the report reemphasized the views held by

Bowlby as it advocated part time nursery places to ensure mothers and children were

not separated for a whole day. Moss and Penn (2003) reiterate this psychological

viewpoint; however their interpretation of the report could also be attributed to Isaacs'

perspective; as Plowden also argued that nursery schooling could overcome social

disadvantage. This gave rise to the suggestion that Early Years education should

provide opportunity for constructed play. Randall (1995) suggests that this report

started to change the climate and the government started to review nursery

provision. Although this suggestion is shared by the other sources, Moss and Penn

(2003) in particular state the effects of Plowden more strongly. They use emotive

language in their discussion regarding the consequences of the report. They regard

the Plowden Report to have 'profoundly shaped the delivery of nursery education in

the UK' (p.23). The concept of nursery education was established as a non-compulsory part of primary schooling with a free-flow curriculum and child centred teaching. The continuity between the Primary sector and Early Years education was advocated, and gradually the discrete nursery classes became part of school provision, a reversal of the views expressed by the previously discussed literature.

In accordance with the trends emerging from the discussion of the inspectorate, the years before the formation of the National Curriculum in 1986 were significant. Provision and government opinion were being influenced by the view that Early Years education was more than an aspect of social policy (Randall 1995; Browne 1996; Athey 2007), learning outcomes were being considered and the balance between care and education was shifting again. The impetus behind the further consideration of nursery schools was twofold; the rise in women returning to work created a need for increased childcare, and the argument from practitioners that nursery education forms a strong basis for all future learning (Jowett and Sylva, 1986; Ball, 1994; Browne, 1996).

The report S*tart Right: the Importance of Early Learning* (Ball, 1994) discussed both these factors and proposed a restructuring of the education system, he argued that all three and four year old children should receive a part time nursery place and this could be funded by raising the compulsory school age to six. Significantly this view has been explored in the next decade in the Cambridge Review of Primary Education (Alexander, 2009), which advocates a starting age of six for formal education. Browne (1996) reflects on the Ball report in her own writing and recognises that a radical shift in society's thinking is needed to change the pattern of schooling. Randall (1995) endorses this reflection and expands upon the feminist construct previously explored by Riley (1979) that Early Years care and education is linked to the ideology of motherhood, to change the nature of provision it will take more than

extensive policy changes within welfare and education, the very notion of the child and the family is at the heart of the discussion.

Continuing the contextual information supporting research question one, this review will now examine the previous decades and recent provision. The mid 1990's brought forth a number of government initiatives reflecting the need for change in the sector; the introduction of the nursery voucher scheme in 1996 by the Conservative government was an attempt to fund the expansion of pre-school education (Browne 1996). Contemporaneous literature is critical of the method of funding and indeed the reasons behind the scheme, Burgess–Macey and Rose, (1997) considered the tension between policy and practitioners in this era. Their view was that the major concern amongst practitioners was that the vouchers could be used in any sector; with or without qualified staff. This was perceived as an 'indifference to the importance of early years' (p58). However as a nursery teacher in 1996, I share the opinion most stated by colleagues and summarised by Browne (1996) who suggests the fact that the voucher could be used to fund reception classes was the most detrimental aspect of the scheme. As controversially, this took children of four out of the nursery sector and into school, contrary to the underpinning philosophy of Early Years education. The consequences of this funding are still of significance more than ten years later, the current research 'Effective Pre-School and Primary Project' (EPPE, Sylva *et al,* 2004, 2010) advocates separate nursery provision with qualified staff.

The quality of nurseries became an election issue, education was perceived as the incoming Labour government's priority, and early learning was seen as a significant factor to ensuring that each child had the best possible start to life (Rahilly and Johnston, 2002). The government set a target for free nursery education to be available for every four year old child whose parents wanted it by 1999. Moss (1999)

heralds the first two years of the Labour government as an era where unparalleled attention and resources were given to early childhood services. In order to revoke the criticised voucher scheme, each education authority had to provide Early Years development plans to demonstrate how they would provide the needed nursery places. Athey (2007) saw this as an 'unprecedented effort' (p16) to increase government investment in young children and considers the development plan as a wide ranging scheme which has expanded and reformed the Early Years system. Her view is supported by Rahilly and Johnston (2002); Edgington (2004) and Rodger (2003) who all consider that childcare and nursery provision have received significantly more public and political attention since 1997. However, Edgington (2004) who promotes the practitioner view considers that this attention does not equal the delivery of high-quality nursery education, moreover that this diverse system has led to confusion. Moss (1999) perceives the early days of Labour as a missed opportunity, as a hurried rather than a considered approach was taken. He suggests that they ignored a central issue connected to early childhood provision, the construct of childhood. This is significant as it echoes the discussions earlier in this chapter; his critical stance reinforces earlier theoretical perspectives explored by Isaacs, Froebel and explores the latter work of Malaguzzi and the Reggio Emilia approach (1993 cited in Moss, 1999). From his criticism of early Labour key questions emerge that reinforce the continuing dialogue of this study.

> Who do we understand the young child to be? What sort of early childhood worker do we want? What are the purposes of Early Years services and pedagogical work? What do we want for our children, here and now and in the future? What kind of world are we living in and how should early childhood relate to that world? Moss (1999, p234).

This lengthy quotation summarises the dilemma posed by the New Labour approach, whilst it is commendable that more attention and money has been directed at the Early Years sector, the reflection required to ensure coherency and shared principles has not been undertaken.

This view is shared by a contemporary study Penn (2000) who is also concerned that

the model for the integration of care and education proposed in the early Labour

Party documents has not ensured rising standards and that more analysis of daily

practices in nurseries and consideration of the nature of childhood provision are

necessary to underpin policy changes. Significantly an overview of childcare policy

and local partnerships under Labour (Penn and Randall, 2005) reinforces this earlier

criticism that the mechanisms of implementing nursery education have been

considered rather than the questioning the working practices of the sector. In spite of

that, the partnership aspect of childcare provision promoted by this government could

be seen as a lead up to the integrated multi-agency approach of *'Every Child*

Matters' (DfES, 2003a) and Penn and Randall (2005, p89) acknowledge that they

could be perceived as an effective way of providing 'joined up thinking' in a

fragmented sector. The different approaches in the sector are a recurring theme in

this review and Penn (2004 cited in Penn and Randall, 2005) strongly summarises

the conflicts of interest within the partnerships.

> Child day care and nursery education interests have been differently construed
> and in opposition for over a century. The debate over public versus private
> provision is as longstanding (p93).

2.5 Workforce and curriculum reform

> How comes change?...when we live through history it is quite different: change
> take place on the ground not in the air, each year seems only too much like the
> next…Yet looking back over a period somehow change has come.
> Schiller (1979, p17)

Nutbrown *et al* (2008, p16) strongly describe this period of change as 'an explosion

of activity' They state in the last 20 years there have been at least 20 new policies,

which as a whole have changed the status and shape of early childhood education.

Literature portrays the proposed vision of 'educare' by the Labour government as

radical (Ball and Vincent, 2005; Pugh and Duffy, 2006).These constant revisions and

policy changes can cause conflict between the quality of provision and meeting the

economic needs of the community. A good example of Penn and Randall's (2005) aforementioned joined up approach is SureStart which started as a child centred multi-agency programme, but became embroiled in the childcare strategy and involved in getting parents back into the labour market rather than providing settings with a knowledge and understanding of child development (Ball and Vincent, 2005; Clark and Waller, 2007; Rodger, 2003). However, SureStart was conceived with the previously reviewed ideologies of Early Years educators such as McMillan and Owen in mind and can be seen as a movement towards integrated care and education (Pugh and Duffy, 2006). The changes proposed by government strategy were far reaching and parallels with the evolution of the inspection process are apparent, policy again impacts upon the performance of the sector and the quality of the changing provision is highlighted.

Alongside the development of provision, the government recognised that the nature of the curriculum had to be examined. When the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000) was introduced, it was well received by practitioners (Clark and Waller, 2007; Pugh and Duffy, 2006; Riley, 2007; Rodger, 2003). It advocated a play based approach which could be used across the many different settings and used accessible language that could be understood by the range of Early Years workers. The guidance argued that early education requires a relevant curriculum, one that builds on what children can already do and develops the views of the Early Years educators by emphasising the importance of play. *Birth to Three Matters* (SureStart, 2002) was introduced to provide a holistic approach to childcare and could be seen to be preparing the sector for the introduction of the *Every Child Matters* framework (DfES, 2003a). These two documents have been joined together to form *The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfES, 2007) which covers from birth to five years. It is evident that the joined up approach (Penn and Randall, 2005) is also apparent in curricular matters, as all settings which

provide care and education for this age group are required to follow the same guidelines. Riley (2007) suggests that this integrated single framework is revolutionary and is a significant shift towards uniting the sector. This movement is pertinent to this discussion as steps towards cohesion within the sector replace the existing notion of diversity.

Development of the curriculum could be said to affect the practices of workers within the sector, indeed the introduction of the Foundation Stage could be an indicator of policymaker's commitment to providing high quality nursery education (Rodger, 2003). It is expected that those working with young children will have an understanding of a holistic approach to learning and a knowledge of child development (Miller *et al,* 2002; Devereux and Miller, 2003; Edgington, 2004; Athey, 2007). However, there is a substantial divide within the sector regarding worker qualifications, within private day nurseries only 20 per cent of care personnel have a university or tertiary qualification (Athey, 2007), whereas, within the state sector it is a requirement to hold qualified teacher status to be responsible for a nursery class. A wide range of people work with children in nurseries in England: Nursery nurses, classroom assistants, teachers and nursery assistant. The level of training for Early Year workers has remained low (Bertram and Pascal, 2000; HM Treasury, 2004, CWDC, 2010). Whilst developing the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998) the new government realised the qualification profile of the practitioners had to be raised in order to ensure 'quality'. Therefore this review will consider the workforce reform within this sector, as issues connected to workers and managers impact upon the nursery inspection regime and quality matters. This next section provides contextual information for research question two focusing upon literature involving both practitioners and leaders.

At the beginning of this process of transforming the workforce, Abbot and Hevey (2001) captured the feeling of dynamism.

> The next few years could turn out to see radical changes in the nature and availability of Early Years training and the professionalism of the roles of early years workers' (p192-3).

The challenges of establishing a qualification framework have not been easy, as with other threads of discussions within this work there are economic considerations. If the government wish to have fully qualified nursery workers the issue of who pays their salary is relevant. There is a gap between pay and conditions between those working in school nurseries and those within the private sector (Sylva and Pugh, 2005). The Ten Year strategy (HM Treasury, 2004) outlined the proposals for ensuring quality through workforce reform, elements of this vision included a reformed regulatory framework and inspection regime; and local authorities working in partnership with providers to support continued improvement. Nevertheless, this can create a context of uncertainty, as workers, particularly in the private sector, become concerned about their future in a low wage sector which does not support continued professional development. Owen (2006) asserts that merely establishing training courses is insufficient; they need to be affordable, accessible and required. Training needs to be delivered in the private sector in the same manner as the maintained sector, there needs to be equity in this important matter to ensure successful strategic implementation.

When considering reformation, it is important to revisit the questions raised by Moss in 1999, how the government view the role of the Early Years worker is key to the development of the workforce. An exploration into concepts of pedagogy, universality and integration is necessary at this juncture. Previously referred to in this review the EPPE project (Sylva *et al,* 2004, 2010) has been a significant factor in determining the future of nursery provision and has provided evidence for the expansion of

universal services. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education is an ongoing European Longitudinal study which investigates the effectiveness of pre-school education in terms of children's development. The aim was to discover the characteristics of settings and staff that gave the children the best developmental outcomes (Sylva and Taylor, 2006).Their findings gave rise to the promotion of integrated children's centres, as the findings suggest that these alongside nursery classes tend to promote better all round development. These settings had the highest proportion of trained teachers, this has made the sector and government consider the qualification framework and has led to radical changes in the training and qualification framework (Owen, 2006).

Sylva, who was one of the leaders of the EPPE project (Sylva *et al* 2004, 2010) and Pugh (2005) examine the transformation of Early Years education and consider whether there has been a successful integration of education and care. They reiterate the findings of the EPPE research and assert that the higher the qualification of Early Years workers results in the creation of higher quality children's learning environment. In the early years of education pedagogy may not refer to the direct transmission of knowledge, it embraces talking to children, observing and intervening in play at the correct time. Therefore a number of researchers (Athey, 2007; Bertram and Pascal, 2000; Bronfenbremer, 1979; Bruner, 1996; Donaldson, 1978; Siraj-Blatchford *et al,* 2002; Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, 1986) suggest that to be an effective Early Years practitioner an understanding of child development and knowledge of how to scaffold children's learning is necessary. The quality of the interaction between adult and child is an issue for discussion, and underlines the previously expressed views by Booker (2005) and Moss (1999). As the construct of childhood determines the type of Early Years provision, it therefore shapes the training and education of its workforce.

Yet, Owen (2006) suggests that despite the radical changes in Early Years policy, some characteristics of the workforce have hardly changed at all. It is still a workforce that is predominately female and low paid, the Children's Workforce and Development Council was established by the government in 2005 with the objective to improve the lives of young children by ensuring that those who work with children have the best possible training, qualifications, support and advice. The CWDC's own statistics reinforce previous discussions they highlight that 98% of the workforce is female, and 40% of Early Years workers in the non-maintained sector do not have a qualification (CWDC, 2008). The government had a target of establishing a graduate led workforce by 2010, the introduction of an Early Years professional award is an example of the complex nature of the field. The Early Years professional is a post graduate award, which could be seen as a movement towards adopting the social pedagogue model used in Scandinavian countries, yet it does not confer the same status as becoming a qualified teacher (CWDC, 2008). Therefore reinforcing the argument promoted by Owen (2006) that the qualifications structure is still too complicated and the sector should focus on teacher training rather than creating yet another award. Clark and Waller (2007) reflect further on this situation and offer another perspective that as the level of training remains low, this perpetuates the low status and thus causes low self esteem amongst practitioners.

These workforce debates impact on quality matters, indeed Sylva and Pugh (2005) consider that:

> A government with elections to win is likely to put increased quantity on its agenda than improved quality (p23).

2.6 Quality assurance in the nursery sector

Nonetheless to return to the EPPE findings and the earlier statement by Moss (1999), the quality of the Early Years provision and the qualifications of the staff team

are crucial to the development of nursery education. To return to the central concern of this chapter and indeed this thesis the quality of Early Years education is central to all Early Years services. Therefore, although the government achievements are noted positively by many (Athey, 2007; Aubrey 2007; Clark and Waller, 2007; Pugh and Duffy, 2006; Riley, 2007; Sylva and Pugh, 2005); the central concern is the quality of the sector, the continuing 'mixed market' approach (Sylva and Pugh, 2005) embraces flexibility but does not guarantee high quality provision in both the maintained and non-maintained settings. The Ten Year Strategy (HM Treasury, 2004) and the Children Act 2006 outlined a vision for ensuring quality through professional support and a reformed regulatory framework and inspection regime. This chapter will now return to the central theme of quality and will discuss the evolution of the current nursery inspection system in conjunction with the *Every Child Matters* agenda (DfES 2003a).

Historically, the divisions within the sector have been further emphasized by the different approaches to quality assurance and inspection. Nursery education as a school based service was regulated by education legislation; however, childcare in the private sector, even if labelled as a nursery school, was seen as the responsibility of the parent and local social service departments. Misrahi (1997) in his examination of day care makes a thought provoking statement:

> There is virtually no literature-no studies, no articles about the actual inspection process (p77).

When contrasting this with the wealth of previously discussed literature connected to school inspection, this could be said to signify a lack of academic interest in the quality of nursery education in the non-maintained sector. This disinterest is mirrored by government policy and legislation, although the expansion of day care was evident during the second World War, before the 1948 Nurseries and Childminding Act day care was not regulated or inspected at all (Misrahi, 1997). From this point,

local authorities had a duty to register non- maintained settings but Misrahi (1997) suggests there was very little pressure on local authorities to inspect the settings and the criteria defining the standards for registration was vague. Furthermore, Clark and Waller (2007) state that this act was responsible for creating separate services for children, additionally this led to another problem as in the 1970's it became apparent that the complex and diverse nature of children's services were not adequately supporting quality provision or sadly in some cases not safeguarding children.

The keynote child protection cases of Maria Colwell, Jasmine Beckford and Tyra Henry contributed to the most significant piece of children services legislation, the Children Act 1989 (DfEE, 1998; Clark and Waller, 2007).This continued the split between private and state nursery inspection, independent nurseries were regulated under the act but maintained nurseries were subject to Ofsted inspections and supporting education legislation. The two regulatory systems operated in a different manner and independently of one another. Indeed Pascal and Bertram (2000, p63) feel it should be noted that the co-exisiting systems were very different in 'scope, nature and progress'. Limited contemporaneous literature (Abbott and Rodger, 1995; Mooney and Munton, 1999) considers the function of the regulation and inspection of children's services, but do not deliberate further on the disparities in focus or indeed the variation in inspection methods. The social service registration process was concerned with care, with particular concern for staffing, premises and equipment. Inspection officers required no sector specific training and indeed inspected other services such as residential homes for the elderly.

As Moss (1999) highlighted the view of purpose of early childhood services is crucial to the evolution of nursery education. Within the state sector in this era child development and learning outcomes were examined by Ofsted, however in private

nurseries the number of toilets was counted by social services. This disparity in

approach is emphasised by Bertram and Pascal's (2000) who affirm:

> The current systems of regulation and inspection reflect the historical split
> between education, care and health services…………..
> There is a lack of consistency, fairness and uniformity across the services, and
> in some cases the systems militate against partnership and integration (p51).

Later, Ball (2003) vehemently champions this view and uses emotive language in his

reflections on provision. He avers that the Department of Education had 'neglected

its moral responsibility' (p16) by not supervising, inspecting and ensuring the quality

of all pre-school education. Indeed until as recently as 2005, the inspection regime

enforced two different inspections for nursery education and foundation stage

settings conducted by teams of inspectors from Ofsted and in the case of the private

sector teams from the Early Years Directorate. This theme of diversity of provision

and approaches to quality occurs throughout this chapter. Penn and Randall in 2005

heralded the introduction of a combined approach to the sector with cynicism,

reinforcing the views expressed by many of the authors,

> …the government fanfares would have us believe that, somehow, a corner has
> been turned. A better knowledge of history would indicate how little has
> changed, and how much more change is necessary to break away from the
> policies of the past (p.124).

This restates views expressed in the introduction of this chapter; the examination of

the historical perspective evokes current debates.

Summary

In summary the literature connected to the dual aspects of the evolution of the school

inspection and nursery provision affords many commonalities. There is a recurring

concern within both threads with how to achieve good quality provision without

enforcing complex policy. The school based literature indicates a connection

between curricular matters and inspection; the Early Years sources explore this

relationship further by examining the ideology of provision and the balance between learning and caring. The issue of quality within the sector is apparent throughout the second half of this review; and the diverse mixture of settings and workforce composition is a contemporary as well as a historic matter. This is a distinct difference from school based literature; this may be because the bulk of the sources connected to inspection were written in the first few years after the introduction of Ofsted before the advent of workforce reform in school. Paradoxically the quality debate within the Early Years sector may become more relevant to school based colleagues as there is now an increasing diversity within the school workforce (Gunter *et al,* 2007).

Having examined the historical development of Early Years education and its corresponding inspection frameworks, the next chapter looks at the sector from a current perspective. While this chapter has been supportive in answering the first research question about what inspection is and the development of care and education in the nursery sector. It is anticipated to provide supporting evidence for the remaining research questions that the next chapter of this review will examine in more detail the current literature connected to quality matters, the inspection framework and the combined approach to nursery education as advocated by *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003a) and the Education and Inspections Bill 2006 (DCSF, 2007). This will involve views from practitioner and policy based sources. Finally, literature linked to workforce and management matters will be scrutinised as the systems and people supporting the quality framework are an integral part of this study.

Chapter Three

A Contemporary Perspective: The Current Context of Inspection and Nursery Provision

3.1 Introduction

Having examined the historical evolution of inspection and begun to consider how it supports the development of care and education in nursery provision, this chapter locates itself in the current context. In making reference to government publications and literature, this chapter firstly outlines existing nursery provision and policy in England. Subsequently, it will discuss literature connected to quality matters and the inspection framework, using both English and international sources. It also explores the combined approach to children services as advocated by *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003a) and the Education and Inspections Bill 2006 (DCSF, 2007). This will involve views from practitioner and policy based sources which underpins the remaining research questions and examines the potential of a shared approach in order to develop an evaluative quality assurance process involving both workers and managers. Finally, literature linked to workforce and management matters will be reviewed as the systems and people supporting the quality framework are the most pertinent aspect of this study. This section of the review will provide a foundation for the research question connected to practitioners and leadership and their views of quality and change. There is limited literature connected to the fourth research question, however sources connected to parental choice and involvement will be utilised in this chapter.

3.2 The nursery context: contemporary directions in policy and provision

Nutbrown *et al* (2008) convey a feeling of 'slow and fitful' (p16) development of early childhood education that nonetheless has been central to educational change. There has been a 'burgeoning of initiatives, interest and resources' (Nutbrown *et al,* 2008,

p16) in the nursery sector. Major changes have been taking place including the examination of relationship between care and education, the introduction of an appropriate curriculum and the training of practitioners, which were discussed in the previous chapter. Despite the introduction of a National Childcare strategy in 1998, *Every Child Matters* in 2003, and The Ten Year Childcare Strategy in 2004 nursery provision across England still remains fragmented (Clark and Waller, 2007).

The types of Early Years provision available to parents and children in England are varied, historically state funded nursery schools have not been widely available and the literature (Clark and Waller, 2007; Hines, 2008; Daycare Trust, 2010a) describes the contemporary situation as 'patchy' (Hines, 2008, p162; Clark and Waller, 2007 p30). Currently there are different types of nursery including private, community, council and workplace nurseries. There are also state run nurseries, in the form of classes or units attached to primary schools, children centres and single sector nursery schools. All local authorities provide some nursery education for children, but it may be sessional, part- time and not conveniently located (Clark and Waller, 2007). The sources used thus far suggest that the provision offered may not suit parents' working patterns or fit with other childcare options. In particular Hines (2008, p162) avers there are 'substantial restraints relating to geographical location, affordability and appropriateness'.

Choice for parents, the Best Start for Children: A Ten Year Strategy (HMT, 2004) gave a commitment to supporting parents in balancing their working life with family needs and nursery provision is part of this strategy. As part of this pledge, free early education is available for children from the term following their third birthday. They are entitled through Nursery Education Funding to at least 12.5 hours of free nursery or Early Years education a week (Daycare Trust, 2010a). Although this could be seen a major step to addressing the educational development of young children,

Nutbrown *et al* (2008) caution that the rapid and ambitious policy changes over the past ten years have led to more variety in provision, as curriculum delivery can be varied in settings ranging from a childminder's home to a dedicated Foundation Stage Unit in a primary school.

The variation in provision across the country is seen by many authors as an equality issue (Sylva and Pugh, 2005; Stanley *et al,* 2006; Hines, 2008; Nutbrown e*t al,* 2008). Families living in urban and inner city areas have access to state primary schools with a nursery class, state nursery schools and many have seen the establishment of a dedicated children's centre. However, Hines (2008) argues that the situation is different for children living in less major towns or rural areas where provision is located in the private and voluntary sector. Indeed, Hines (2008) further asserts that many of the private nurseries are located in more affluent areas. This supports Sylva and Pugh's earlier (2005) findings that children from a disadvantaged background can benefit significantly from good quality state run provision but geographically are unable to access a large proportion of it.

The cost and location of nursery education remains a central concern. Stanley *et al* (2006) consider that, despite the previous Labour government's increased commitment to families through a range of childcare policy, there is no equal access to provision. As those who stand to benefit the most are most often the least able to gain from what is available due to the costs involved. The Labour goal that by 2010 there should be 3500 children's centres (HMT, 2004), one for every community, was not achieved prior to that year's general election. The 'Working Tax Credit' was designed to ease some of the financial burden for parents, families where one adult worked at least 16 hours a week were entitled to claim up to 80% of childcare costs (DWP,2010). Yet, many families in 2008-9 did not claim their full entitlement due to the complicated eligibility criteria (Daycare trust, 2009). At the time of writing there

has been a change of Government and the current Conservative and Liberal Democrat alliance plans to cut funding to families by reducing the Working Tax Credit (Daycare Trust, 2010a). The funding in the early childhood sector is under review and the Children's Workforce and Development Council (CWDC, 2010) highlighted in the previous chapter is being disbanded. The 'Daycare Trust' in a post–election presentation to the newly formed alliance highlighted the need to provide high quality early childhood education as a 'wise investment in children's futures and to make savings in public expenditure in future years' (Slide 11, Daycare trust, 2010b). This statement with its language emphasising prudence and future saving may be an indicator of the new approach to the sector.

The most widely used current childcare subsidy is the free part-time Early Years education that all three and four year olds are entitled to receive. According to the Daycare Trust research (2009, p4):

> Only a small proportion of this age group are not receiving their 'free entitlement, although our research shows that those who are missing out are more likely to be those in disadvantaged areas.

The allocation of 12.5 hours free provision for three and four year olds was increased to 15 hours in September 2010. This allowance can be used across the sector, state nursery provision, private nurseries, playgroups and childminders (Directgov, 2010). 'Nursery World' the professional publication for the sector is concerned that the increase in hours will affect the sustainability of the sector. Private nurseries fear the scheme may adversely influence the quality of the sector and the state sector are concerned that provision will only remain part time and geographically unevenly distributed (Gaunt, 2010). The new established government alliance has undertaken a review of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the children's minister Sarah Teather stated:

It is not right or fair that children from deprived backgrounds that do really well in their early years are overtaken by lower achieving children from advantaged backgrounds by age five. We need good quality early learning for all children and a framework that raises standards, as well as keeping children safe (DoE, 2010a statement taken from webpage).

Therefore, this section on the current context concludes with a further reference to quality and sets the scene for the next stage of this review. Hines (2008), whose writing has shaped this part of the chapter, summarizes this issue effectively: 'So far there have been numerous references to 'quality provision' but we may all have different ideas about what this means' (p165).

3.3 What is 'quality'?

So far, the notion of 'quality' has been largely unexplored in this review. This is because defining the term is fraught with challenges. Allen and Whalley (2010) strongly stress the difficulties associated with the 'slippery' (p115) concept of 'quality' within the context of Early Years provision and practice. Yet, as they note the application of the term 'quality provision' is widespread across the sector, with the assumption that everyone concerned shares the same understanding of its formative factors. However, as Elfer *et al* (2003) suggest its meaning is dependent on different concerns and priorities and in this section an exploration of some different interpretations and applications of 'quality' will be undertaken.

Firstly examining the wider issue of 'quality' applied to education, Ball (1985, p96) suggests this is a complex issue:

'Quality in education' is a subject extraordinarily difficult to come to grips with, and full of pitfalls. There is no single final answer to the quality question and we should not look for it. But the issue cannot be avoided.

More recently, Brundrett and Rhodes (2010) still consider that 'quality' is a leading issue in educational thinking. As 'quality' could be perceived as connected to fundamental philosophical and ethical issues or it could be seen as complete

compliance to technical specification, 'the perfect product'. It could be said that we live in an age of 'quality', every brand and service must offer it and every consumer wants to have it. Moss and Dahlberg (2008, p3) consider that given this context, 'quality has become reified, treated as if it were an essential attribute of services and products that gives them value'.

The parallels between industry and education are pertinent to this issue; 'quality' branding is seen as an indicator of excellence and a marketing tool. In the 1990's the charter mark era, as previously discussed, education became more accountable to the public. This period drove the need for definitions and symbols of quality; Earley (1998) heralds the event of quality marks, such as investors in people and the British Quality award as providing evidence of an external measurement, as a physical indicator of quality similar to branding that parents could see. Recently Brundrett and Rhodes (2010) expanded on this view and suggest that the public debate on education has focused on quality in a manner that would be familiar to those in the private sector. They develop this idea by highlighting that in education or industry, quality enhancement could widely be perceived as relating to achievement of better outcomes and this presupposes that improving quality is one of the most significant tasks facing any organisation inside or outside education. Yet despite its importance, many sources already key to this review (Penn and Randall, 2005; Waller, 2005; Pugh and Duffy, 2006; Hines, 2008; Allen and Whalley; 2010) recognise that the term quality is a conundrum. Pascal and Bertram (1994, p3) point out that 'quality is value laden, subjective and dynamic', with the possibility of a multiple understanding dependent on culture and circumstance. The next section of the review will further develop the definition of quality within the context of this study.

3.4 Quality debates in early childhood education: service or system?

> 'Quality' is not universal but is a relative concept, depending on the cultural values and beliefs the nature of the children and childhood (Waller, 2005, p133).

The first chapter of literature review provides a firm foundation for the discussion generated by the wider reading used in this section. Debates about what constitutes 'quality' Early Years provision have been especially contentious and arguably a catalyst for change since the 1990's (Moss and Dahlberg, 2008; Siraj-Blatchford *et al,* 2002; Bertram and Pascal, 2000). These sources also note that the concept of 'quality' has been incorporated into the sector from the commercial world. Yet, more importantly they recognise that in the field of early childhood 'quality' is an evolving term discussed with the likelihood of different measurements and desired outcomes. This part of the review examines this evolution and considers the different mechanisms and constructs of quality within the sector.

Firstly, when considering the measurement of quality it is important to consider whether all parties want the same things measured and who makes the decisions about what is to be measured and how. Dahlberg *et al* (2007, p92) state:

> ...in the field of early childhood we can see a growing body of experts- researchers, consultants, inspectors, evaluators...whose job it is to define and measure quality.

Katz (1993) maintains that the quality of Early Years provision can be seen from a variety of perspectives:

1. From above as seen by visiting adults and observers
2. From below as seen by the children themselves
3. From the outside as seen by the parents served by the provision
4. From inside as seen by the staff who work in the setting
5. As perceived by society and policy makers (adapted from model on p5).

Her dimensions of 'quality' recognise that factors that signify high quality may not be shared by all perspectives. This had been instrumental in the development of the second research question: Do inspectors/headteachers/managers share the same perceptions of quality factors within nursery education as practitioners?

Building on this approach Pascal and Bertram in their Effective Early Learning project (EEL) in 1993 developed ten dimensions of quality. The literature consulted thus far all cites the EEL project as a source, it was a national research and development initiative which aimed to improve the quality of early learning in a wide range of education and care settings. Its conceptual framework was informed by contemporary Early Years practice and theory (Pascal *et al,* 1998). This framework shown on the next page, has three major dimensions similar to Katz' (1993) in number but not in meaning, as the focus places more emphasis on assessing learning process rather than learning outcome. Sheridan in her work on pedagogical quality in Swedish preschools (2001, 2007), also refers to dimensions of quality which focus on the overall experience of the child.

CONTEXT →	PROCESS →	OUTCOME
10 Dimensions of Institutional Quality	'BLACK BOX' INTERACTIONS	3 Domains of Impact
• Aims & Objectives • Learning Experiences, Curriculum • Learning & Teaching Strategies • Planning, Assessment & Record Keeping • Staffing • Physical Environment • Relationship & Interaction • Equal Opportunities • Parental Partnership Home & Community Liaison • Monitoring, Evaluation & Management	Emotional Well-being Child Involvement Symbiotic Synergetic Negotiation Adult Engagement (Sensitivity, Stimulation, Autonomy) Professional Self Image	Children's Development: • Emotional well-being • Respect for self & others • Disposition to learn • Academic achievements & scholarship (continuity to next setting) Adult Development (Short/Long term) Institutional Development (Short/Long term)
CULTURAL DETERMINANT	CULTURALLY DETERMINING	CULTURALLY DETERMINED

Pascal *et al's* Conceptual Framework (1998, Figure 1, p53)

Figure 1 illustrates the central aim of EEL which was to improve the content and process 'dimensions of quality' in order to enhance the outcomes. Pascal *et al* (1998) argued that providers and practitioners needed to be confident that they were offering productive early learning experiences. This emphasis on the evaluation of the learning process is distinctive, and led others (Moss and Pence, 1994; European Childcare Network, 1996; Woodhead, 1996; Sheridan, 2001) to talk about the

importance of the process of defining quality, moreover that these 'dimensions' or descriptions this should include practitioners, and parents. This acknowledgement of context, values, plurality and subjectivity is noted by Moss *et al* (2000) as important and inclusive. The recognition that quality could be looked at holistically and is not wholly concerned with measurable outcomes is significant to this study. Woodhead (2006) considers that this acceptance of the view that children's development is at the centre of the process has 'profound implications for way quality in early childhood care and education is understood, defined and monitored' (p23). Therefore, policies and practices based on specific, standardized quality criteria cannot be applied to the 'messy' social world of Early Years.

This recognition of development as a socio-cultural process is central to the ideas explored by Dahlberg and others. They challenge the idea that defining quality should be seen as a technical solution to reconciling the multiple discourses that 'shape the childhood landscape' (Woodhead, 2006, p23). Quality is seen, as mooted earlier in this chapter, as a philosophical and ethical issue entwined with the values and meanings attached to the active construction of childhood. The work of Dahlberg, Moss and Pence has evolved over a period of ten years, firstly, mirroring the discussion in this section, examining the problems connected with defining quality, moving onto evaluating different approaches to establishing internationally acknowledged 'good quality' Early Years provision, finally articulating their own approach to 'quality'. As their writing is significant to the development of my own ideas and is used as a key source by all the authors used in this section, the next part of this review will focus on the development of their ideas.

In the 1990's Dahlberg presented 'quality' in the Early Years sector as a problem or puzzle with its meaning open for discussion (Dahlberg and Asen, 1994). This approach resonates with the movement across Europe to achieve core values,

objectives and conditions for all children (European Commission Childcare Network, 1996). Moss and Pence, in this period, examined how definitions of quality are established, their edited work contained contributions from authors across globe (Moss and Pence, 1994). They concluded that:

> Quality in early childhood services is a constructed concept, subjective in nature and based on values, beliefs and interest, rather than an objective and universal reality…defining quality has been exclusionary in nature…The challenge is to develop a new paradigm for defining quality…the 'inclusionary paradigm (p172, 173).

The reason for including this lengthy excerpt is that it captures the first stage of the authors' distinctive approach. They remove the certainty from quality procedures and question its purpose. The aforementioned challenge is created by their view that the problem with quality cannot be addressed by reconstructing its current form but by developing a new 'quality'. Later, they develop this thinking by suggesting that quality is not a neutral word but a socially constructed concept produced within a 'discourse of quality' (Moss *et al,* 2000). Their use of this phrase is of paramount importance as they ascribe its meaning to a particular way of understanding the world citing Habermas' (1983) Project of Modernity. This is a philosophical perspective which values certainty, order, linear progress, objectivity and universality (Moss *et al*, 2000). Therefore the traditional and dominant 'discourse of quality' has embodied the aspirations of modernity and embraces a belief in the existence of factual measurable outcomes.

However, the modernist 'discourse of quality' as outlined above is rejected by those, like Moss *et al* (2000), who consider quality to be value driven, and what is deemed high quality will be influenced by the values and priorities of those who decided what the outcomes and the structures will be. Hines (2008) equates the modernist view of quality of provision to Ofsted inspections that identify how well a setting meets identified and uniform standards and outcomes set by the government's social and

economic agenda. This restrictive view of 'quality' means that dominant policies and practices would be based on specific, standardised criteria that originate in a narrow range of cultural contexts, values and practices (Woodhead, 2006).

Dahlberg, Moss and Pence take their argument against a limited, modernist view of quality and in favour of a more subjective, 'making meaning' discourse a step further. They radically advocate that as 'quality' is recognised as a philosophical tradition with a particular meaning, it may not be the right choice for evaluating the dynamic nature of early childhood. The next part of this review considers their conceptual proposal, the 'inclusionary paradigm…beyond quality' (Moss *et al,* 2000, p109).

3.5 'Beyond quality to meaning making' (Moss *et al,* 2000, p109)

According to Dahlberg, Moss and Pence's 'discourse of quality', in early childhood quality is generally understood as an attribute of services for young children that ensures the 'efficient production of predefined, normative outcomes, typically developmental or simple learning goals' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2008 p3). Moreover, they contest that many evaluation frameworks focus on easily measurable standards such as space and size. Indeed, prior to 1998 the inspection process for private nursery schools focused upon number of toilets per children, and the type of flooring (Clark and Waller, 2007), rather than the qualitative aspects such as the relationships and dispositions and the meanings constructed by those who use the setting. This notion of quality has created its own language i.e. Centres of Excellence, similar to the 'straplines' used in industry, and this conception leads to 'a pedagogy of uniformity and normalisation…and a definitive conclusion' (Moss, 2001, p131), ironically suppressing the development of outstanding provision.

Building on the belief that 'quality is a language of evaluation that fails to recognise a multilingual approach' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2008, p6), *Beyond Quality* adopts a discussional approach to quality, 'meaning making', acknowledging a range of voices. This contrasts to 'quality' conceptualised as a neutral, objective, approach with an association with judgement and power, as portrayed in chapter two with the comparisons of the early days of Ofsted with Foucault's technology of power (Foucault, 1979, in Maw, 1996). Dahlberg *et al* (2007, p ix) evoke meaning making as:

> …evaluation as a democratic process of interpretation, a process that involves making practice visible and thus subject to reflection, dialogue and argumentation, leading to a judgement of value, contextualised and provisional because it is always subject to contestation.

Therefore, meaning making is a participatory evolutionary approach to evaluation involving the context and its relationship to the child. Woodhead (2006) views this process as acknowledging the values and meanings that are attached to young children, and places the child in the centre of the vision of 'quality' as the co-constructor of knowledge, identity and culture. Moss and Dahlberg (2008, p8) describe 'meaning making' as 'valuing subjectivity, uncertainty, provisionality, contextuality and democracy'. Evaluation becomes part of a developing relationship, an 'exercise of collective deliberation' involving all parties connected with an early years setting. This democratic approach allows for judgements about the effectiveness of childhood education and care to be constructed, debated and disputed within a particular context based on data meaningful to the setting. A practical example of this would be early childhood in Reggio Emilia, Dahlberg *et al* (2007, p6) acknowledge the origins of 'meaning making' owe much to Malaguzzi, the first director of Reggio's municipal early childhood services. Their practice of pedagogical documentation embraces a democratic approach to evaluation as it affords the possibility of 'everything with everyone' (Malaguzzi, 1993, p9). His vision embraced transparency of practice, offering the opportunity for all, teachers, auxiliary staff, cooks and families to share

opinions by means of documentation. This approach will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The 'discourse of meaning making' as proposed by Moss *et al* (2000, p109) would necessitate a deeper understanding of practitioners work with children, so all those involved can participate in the discussions about the value of what is happening to children in settings and what might need to be changed (Hines, 2008). In this discourse what is considered to be 'quality' provision would be a focus for debate rather than a static set of outcomes. A government with clear economic and social targets may find a 'discourse of meaning making' (Moss *et al,* 2000, p109) problematic, as it may not provide quantifiable evidence that their policies and reforms are working. However, the current measurable outcomes that exist may not be meaningful to children and their families or seen as 'quality' indicators by practitioners. The process of inspection could be part of meaning making, but only if it was shared and developed by 'everything and everybody' (Malaguzzi, 1993, p9). This would mean rather than a 'snapshot' inspection there would be an emphasis on the need for practitioners to improve their knowledge of children and the effects of their interactions. Subsequently, this would then be collaboratively analysed and shared with children, families and other practitioners.

This harmonious approach to developing childhood education would need considerable workforce reform, as already discussed in chapter two; moreover it would need a 'cultural shift' of the view of 'quality'. Conversely, 'the discourse of quality', with the desire to meet the EYFS targets for five year olds (DfES, 2008) has brought forth the current drive to improve the education of nursery workers. Hines (2008) suggests that this initiative may facilitate a move towards a 'discourse of meaning making' as practitioners will become more knowledgeable and reflective in their approach to working with children and their families. However, Moss and Dahlberg (2008, p8) in

their most recent work reflect that 'working with the language of meaning making is difficult'. It requires a commitment to particular values and the collaboration of critical friends, such conditions are not widespread. At the time of writing the funding of Early Years education in England is under scrutiny, and the pay and conditions of practitioners is to be examined. It may be that the definitions of quality are likely to remain as 'minimum standards required', rather than the more worthwhile collaborative development of the sector.

To conclude this section, it is important to revisit the discussion presented at the beginning. The definition of 'quality' continues to be a contentious issue in the Early Years sector; the general implication is that benchmarks of quality are not intrinsic, fixed or prescribed by scientific knowledge about child development. Moreover, they are not about checklists noting floor space and numbers of toilets. The literature reviewed emphasises the need to for 'quality' to acknowledge the values and beliefs that underpin the construct of childhood. Equally, sources highlight the importance of collaborative evaluation shaped by all those involved in childhood care and education. This review will continue to explore perceptions of 'quality' by examining literature connected to two examples of internationally renowned Early Years approaches, Reggio Emilia and Te Whariki.

3.6 Reggio Emilia

This approach will be considered first, as above all other international perspectives, it could be said to be the catalyst for significant reflection on practice and provision in Early Years settings within England and across Europe. Indeed, Gardner (2004 in Rinaldi and Moss, 2004) asserts early childhood centres in Reggio 'stand as a testament to human possibility' p16. Reggio Emilia pre-schools and their founder Louis Malaguzzi have been cited as an example of good 'quality' provision by all the sources

used in this section and indeed, most of the Early Years literature utilised in chapter two. The municipal pre-schools of the region in Northern Italy came into existence in 1963, with their origins rooted in the commitment of the community to their children (Allen and Whalley, 2010).

The holistic vision of Early Years has an emphasis on interpretation of inherited theoretical and philosophical understanding of young children and how this has been 'articulated into a coherent pedagogical praxis' (Papatheodorou, 2006, p2). Malaguzzi's (1993) ideals established a curriculum that allows children the opportunity to build thinking relationships between people, ideas and the environment, drawing on communicative, cognitive and expressive languages. The focus is on each child being allowed to construct his/her understanding through reciprocal interactions with others and resources. Malaguzzi (1993) views the 'image of the child-as-rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and-most of all connected to adults and other children' (p10). Developing learning competencies is at the centre of this strategy, and the aim is through dialogue and communication, children will be able to fulfil their potential to think, build and test theories.

The approach to the curriculum, 'progetazzione', places the children's interests before content knowledge. The concept is based around children's ideas and uses multiple forms of expression to help children articulate their learning, sustain their interest and research and give value to these activities as they are shared with others, particularly parents (Stephen, 2006). This inclusive view of nursery education helped shape my idea of who should be part of this research, and the value placed on parents contributed towards the development of the fourth research question which examines parental perceptions of nursery education and quality matters. In Malaguzzi's model parents are viewed as their children's first and principal teacher, moreover, their contribution within and beyond the classrooms is respected and highly valued. Many of

the ideas for the emergent curriculum are developed from conversations with parents and children (Allen and Whalley, 2010).

Practitioners see themselves as facilitators, the role of the adult in the Reggio approach is seen as observing, listening to and partnering children in their construction of learning. In each of the nursery rooms there are two qualified Early Years teachers. Nutbrown and Abbott (2001) identify this pairing as significant, as it engenders a feeling throughout the setting of co-operative working and allows practitioners to share views about children's projects. An understanding of child development and a commitment to on-going professional learning is a requirement for their teachers (Curtis and O'Hagan, 2003).

The Reggio approach is also characterised by documenting the process of exploration as children work through a process. This is a key pedagogical activity, which offers children a progressive record of their learning 'journey' through their project; plus it gives educators a detailed insight into children's activities and learning. This is a significant approach when applied to quality matters, as this careful documentation makes the process of learning visible to parents and the community, therefore, arguably removes the need for an external audit or inspection. Dahlberg *et al* (2007) have worked alongside the directors of Reggio, and are described as 'travelling companions' (Rinaldi, 2007 in Dahlberg *et al,* 2007), engaged in dialogue, exchange and sharing. This procedure of documentation could be seen as a 'democratic possibility to inform the public of the contents of the school' (Vecchi, 1993, p96). Whilst some of the literature acknowledges that Reggio maybe a culturally supported approach and difficult to carry out elsewhere (Waller, 2005; Papatheodorou, 2004), its impact can be seen in current practice in England. The EYFS (DfES, 2007) uses terms such as a 'unique child', 'parents as partners' and assessing the children's 'learning journey'. However, a condensed version will not provide the complex range of

interactions which encourage children and practitioners to reflect on their learning. Moreover, unless there is complete adherence to the community ethos and the detailed documentation from all participants a 'mini' Reggio will not yield the 'unique source of information- precious for teachers, children, the family and anyone who wants to get closer to the strategies in children's ways of thinking' (Rinaldi and Moss, 2004, p3).

3.7 Te Whariki

As long ago as 1986, New Zealand became the first country in the world to combine national administration of pre-school education with Early Years care services, establishing early childhood centres (Moss, 2000; Bertram and Pascal, 2002; Stephen,2006). These sources and others used in this section believe that Te Whariki has received a great deal of worldwide interest due to its innovative and holistic approach to the curriculum. Its trained practitioners are seen as '… specialist knowledge bases of child development and early childhood theory' (Dalli, 2008, p173). The 'aspirational' (Allen and Whalley, 2010, p9) framework draws on the Maori word for weaving, and illustrates that children's learning is not in discrete subjects, similar to the Reggio philosophy, their education is a woven 'mat' of diverse principles, strands, people and services (Allen and Whalley, 2010; Waller, 2005). The literature sources (Allen and Whalley, 2010; Stephen, 2006; Waller, 2005; Bertram and Pascal, 2002, Moss, 2000) all suggest that Te Whariki adopts a specifically sociocultural perspective on learning that recognises the different areas in which children in New Zealand live. Also it seeks to promote bi-culturalism and create a nurturing environment based on Maori principles 'empowering children to grow' (Stephen, 2006, p12).

Fundamentally, Te Whariki is about providing children with a strong base that promotes respect for self and others, using a cross culture ideology which can

ultimately 'weave' people together (Pakai, 2004). Pre-schools have the freedom to create and develop their own programmes within the common framework of principles. This approach acknowledges the differences between contexts and celebrates each child's home background, as culture, language and interests form a core part of the experience (Allen and Whalley, 2010). Waller (2005) highlights this 'local flexibility' (p137) can be a strength of practice, yet cautions that this adaptable approach can lead to problems in maintaining standards.

The principles of '*Every Child Matters*' (DfES, 2003a), EYFS (DfES, 2007) and the previously discussed Ten Year Childcare Strategy (HMT, 2004), share a similar philosophical base to the New Zealand model. Its aims, also expressed in a ten year plan, emphasise the need to promote collaboration across services, with a commitment to increasing participation and 'quality' of Early Childhood Education and Care (*Pathways to the Future: Nga Huarahi,* Ministry of Education, 2002). However, there are significant differences in pedagogical approach and ethos of Te Whariki, as Stephen (2006) suggests play is not given the same value as it is in some other Early Years curricula. Pascal and Bertram (2002, p52) further illustrate this by stating there is a 'clear direction to the learning programme… outcomes for developing children's knowledge, skills and attitudes'. The curriculum assumes that children will be in mixed age groups yet does try to accommodate the different needs and capacities of the pre-school age range (Stephen, 2006).

Waller (2005) and Stephen (2006) capture the strong support from the Early Years sector that the approach has received and suggest this was due to extensive government consultation with the sector. They both highlight there has been a gradual change in practice, as the strong free play tradition in New Zealand needed to move away from individual selection of activities towards shared learning projects. This approach based on children's interests is tracked in a 'learning story' (Stephen, 2006,

p12), a process similar in nature to Reggio's detailed documentary dialogue. The evaluation of learning of children's experiences in early childhood centres offers an alternative to traditional assessment through a method which prompts practitioners to describe what children are doing, document it, discuss the evidence and make decisions about supporting each child's developmental needs (Anning *et al,* 2004; Stephen, 2006). Furthermore, the focus is also children's perspectives to define and evaluate 'quality' practices in their setting. This would seem to support Dahlberg *et al's* (2007) 'meaning making discourse', yet they do not use Te Whariki as an exemplar model, suggesting that the approach may be more difficult to apply consistently across a nation.

3.8 Indicators of quality

This chapter has discussed a range of findings from recent international and national studies of Early Years provision. Although 'quality' still remains a problematic and culturally relative concept, a number of significant trends are emerging from the literature which will be discussed in this section. By examining the two examples of internationally renowned approaches to pre-school education, it is evident that they have some common factors with the development of English provision as discussed in chapter two and at the beginning of this chapter. While the cultural context of Reggio and Te Whariki has to be considered (Waller, 2005; Stephen, 2006), what is appropriate for one nation may be unsuitable for another, there are important elements in their approaches that could be considered a 'quality' factors or indicators.

The key factors which are apparent throughout the literature associated with 'quality' in Early Years settings are unsurprisingly connected to the child, the family and the practitioner. Dahlberg *et al* (2007) aver that a broader view of childhood is necessary to develop the sector, and collaboration of all stakeholders is necessary to improve

Early Years practice. This theme of collaborative practice occurs throughout the sources, and could be seen as a characteristic of effective provision. Another underlying principle of successful pre-school education promoted by both the literature and the Reggio approach is the involvement of parents, Allen and Whalley (2010) stress that worthwhile relationships with parents have a positive impact on children's learning and development. In addition to building relationships between families and practitioners, both models and all sources feature the need for a qualified workforce with an understanding of child development. Indeed both the Reggio and Te Whariki approach support the findings of the report (Sylva *et al,* 2004, 2010) discussed in chapter two and strongly recommend that children's learning is facilitated by a qualified teacher. Alongside this, a need for a distinct, holistic curriculum driven by children's interests is an essential attribute of Early Years provision. Waller (2005), prior to the changes in the Foundation Stage guidance, warns that despite the rhetoric regarding the engagement of children in their learning process, they cannot be co-constructors of their own development in a culture of centrally dictated curriculum. These emerging characteristics are complex and dynamic and imply that a simplistic method of measuring quality may not be appropriate; therefore, this chapter will continue to consider the literature related to quality frameworks before moving onto the sources linked to the inspection process.

3.9 Quality and evaluation frameworks

 The literature reviewed in the previous section focused largely on how 'quality' is shaped by cultural values, different interests of stakeholders and the constructions of childhood. Although this relative aspect of 'quality 'is generally accepted, there is an argument for developing common indicators of quality (Waller, 2005; Mooney, 2007). Research primarily from the United States based on findings from the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) (Waller, 2005; Mathers *et al,* 2007; Mooney,

2007; Allen and Whalley, 2010) is used by sources to illustrate the drive to identify

clear indicators of quality in relationship to their predictive significance for children's

development. These indicators include both structural elements of the provision such

as adult:child ratios, staff qualifications, continuing professional development, stability,

and continuity of care and process elements such as the interactions between staff

and children and the activities available. These features of quality do not perform

individually but combine to create effective provision (Mooney, 2007). This will be

discussed further in this section using literature connected to the EPPE project (Sylva

et al, 2006; Mathers *et al,* 2007; Hall *et al,* 2009) which used ratings scales in its

research.

Although regulation of provision is perceived as one mechanism for promoting quality

within the Early Years sector in England, Mathers *et al* (2007) contest that Ofsted

reporting may not be a sufficient audit tool to rigorously assess standards. This view is

further discussed by Mooney (2007, p3) who suggests concern about the quality of

provision has led to the development of improvement initiatives particularly in the UK

and US where regulatory standards are seen as the minimum below which no setting

should fall. Indeed to reinforce this argument, this quotation from the UK statutory

guidance endorses this approach:

> Local Authorities need to set clear expectations about what high quality provision
> looks like, and settings need to know what support is available to help them
> improve…There should be clear benchmarking and transparent levers and
> incentives to improve quality - every setting should strive to push quality ever higher
> above minimum Ofsted standards (HM Government, 2007, p26).

The literature sources discuss approaches outside the regulatory framework, which

are used by the sector (Waller, 2005; Mathers *et al*, 2007; Mooney, 2007; Siraj-

Blatchford *et al,* 2009; Allen and Whalley, 2010). The first strategy outlined by Mooney

(2007) is the Quality Rating System (QRS); this is a method to assess, improve and

communicate the level of quality in Early Years settings through providing 'star ratings',

similar to a hotel or restaurant guide. In the United States accreditation of provision is increasingly promoted through the provision of incentives and rewards, which encourage settings to go beyond minimum licensing standards (OECD, 2006). However, she cautions that it is difficult to be certain that these ratings do improve quality as the methodology used to evaluate these systems is not always robust. Also rating systems are yet to gain widespread recognition or application in England. As although there are ratings schemes in the UK, for example, 'e-quality counts' a system which can lead to a recognised reward with an accreditation mark (National Day Nurseries Association, 2010, p2); there is no academic literature evaluating their impact on standards.

Mooney (2007) perceives improvement schemes as having a positive impact on quality and raising awareness of the importance of quality outside of the setting to the wider community. This concurs with Mathers *et al's* (2007) assertion that Early Years provision is seen as needing an additional quality mechanism to the Ofsted process, in order to move provision beyond the regulatory standards. Moreover, Allen and Whalley (2010) consider there is increased interest in developing quality improvement programmes in England. In 2008 the Early Years Quality Improvement Support Programme (EYQISP, DCSF, 2008) was launched to provide Early Years consultants and leaders with a quality improvement tool. Furthermore, they assert that the programme acknowledges the complexity of quality improvement and the socio-cultural aspects of high-quality provision. At the time of writing, there has been no formal evaluation of the EYQISP (DCSF, 2008) and a small-scale survey by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) suggests that although the scheme has been well received by those who have used it; the improvement programme has largely gone unnoticed by the sector (ATL, 2010).

The final approach to be considered in this section has been more widely explored by the literature sources. The original Early Childhood Ratings Scale (ECRS, Harms *et al*, 1998) was conceived in the late 1980's in the United States as a tool to measure the effectiveness of the learning provision for young children, aged two to five years. It remains in widespread use across the States (ECERS-R, Harms *et al,* 2004; Mathers *et al,* 2007; Sheridan, 2007) and the revised version is being increasingly utilised in English provision.

Lambert (2003) considers that the Environment Rating Scales were designed for three broad purposes: research on global classroom quality, formative evaluation for self improvement of teaching and Early Years quality and accreditation. Waller (2005) and Mathers *et al* (2007) found that all three applications were commonplace in the United States. In addition they used a European perspective by citing evidence from Sweden (Andersson 1999 in Mathers *et al,* 2007), the Swedish ECERS has been used as part of a self improvement programme with pre-school teachers, and this led to a quantifiable development in the quality of provision offered. This study is also cited by Sheridan (2007), who, contrary to Dahlberg *et al* (2007), asserts there is still value in using a standardised approach to the evaluation of quality within a nursery.

Yet, although the framework is used daily in the United States, Waller (2005) and Mathers *et al* (2007) stress that in the UK their usage has been confined mostly to research into early childhood. Waller (2005) further asserts that ECERS in the UK provides a perspective limited to staff and does not consider the key elements of children and parents. Equally, Mathers *et al* (2007, p263) proclaim that 'the Environment Rating Scales are growing in reputation as viable and manageable' audit tool to evaluate quality standards. All sources (Waller, 2005; Mathers *et al,* 2007; Sheridan, 2007; Allen and Whalley, 2010) refer to the EPPE project (Sylva *et al,* 2004, 2010) as an English example of applying the scales for centre improvement. Although

this study has already been mentioned throughout both chapters of literature review, as it is a well documented study using ECERS-R, the next section will extend the coverage of the EPPE project in order to explain the use of rating scales.

The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education was the first British large-scale prospective longitudinal study to examine the effects of Early Years provision, with more than 3000 children followed longitudinally, the first stage was in 2003 (Sylva *et al,* 2006). Using an 'educational effectiveness' design (Sylva *et al,* 2006, p9), EPPE aimed to explore the effects of individual pre-school centres on children's attainment and their behavioural/social development at entry to primary aged five and any continuing effects to the age of seven at the end of Key Stage one (Sylva *et al,* 2004). In the EPPE study, the quality of pre-school education and care was measured in different ways, including data collection on two elements of quality as described at the onset of this section of the review: structural elements and process elements (Sylva *et al,* 2006; Mathers *et al,* 2007; Hall *et al,* 2009). In order to assess pre-school quality, the project focused primarily on process elements, the nature of adult-child interactions or the type of learning opportunities available. The main measurements used were the observational rating scales ECERS-R (Harms *et al,* 1998). As early as 2004, Sylva and her team had identified ECERS's potential in assessing effectiveness (Allen and Whalley, 2010). However, they discovered that the original ratings scales primarily focused on social outcomes and following further research, introduced a revised scale, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Extension (ECERS-E, Sylva *et al,* 2004). Papatheodorou (2004) contests that these scales have real value in their use as a self-assessment and improvement tool, and as such, raise quality standards across the sector.

The following examples are taken from Sylva *et al* (2010a, p73). The first represents the 43 items used by ECERS-R, to assess seven aspects of centre-based care and education for children aged two and half to five, *example 1*:

ECERS-R Items	ECERS-R sub-scales
1-8	Space and furnishings
9-4	Personal care routines
15-18	Language reasoning
19-28	Activities
29-33	Interaction
34-37	Programme Structure
38-43	Parents and Staff

The second illustrates the Early Years Environment Rating Scale Extension (ECERS-E) which was developed by members of the EPPE project team and contains an additional four sub-scales, consisting of 18 items, *example 2*:

ECERS-E Items	ECERS-E sub-scales
1-6	Literacy
7-10	Mathematics
11-15	Science and environment
16-18	Diversity

Siraj-Blatchford *et al* (2009) claim this revised scale has been taken up by many local authorities and individual settings as an instrument to investigate pre-school 'quality', at this early stage of application there is no longitudinal research evaluating its success as an improvement device. Each item on the scale describes environmental practices and features based on practitioner interpretations of quality and good practice, another acknowledgment in academic research reinforcing the importance of

the Early Years worker. Waller (2005) contests the scales provide a limited perspective, additionally, Moss and Dahlberg (2008, p3) indirectly cite the EPPE research, 'a recent review that identified seven factors as indicative of good quality pre-school provision', as an example of solely expert derived criteria. However, the literature does not give consideration to whether a range of stakeholders would produce a wider range of quality factors, this omission helped develop the research question connected to perceptions of quality factors within the nursery sector.

The notion above regarding who is involved in deciding quality factors re-engages this final section examining evaluative frameworks with the literature exploring the definitions of 'quality' used at the beginning. Brundrett and Rhodes (2010, p11) ascribe the term 'conceptual turmoil' to the problematic nature of 'quality' and the literature used in this section encapsulates this turbulence. However, as Brundrett and Rhodes (2010) and Dahlberg *et al* (2007) assert 'quality' cannot be avoided as it is related to the established constructs of education and childhood. The stakeholders involved in these constructions are acknowledged by many of the sources, as is the policy underpinning the sector. Indeed, all contemporary Early Years literature utilised in this review has noted the contribution to the quality of the sector determined by policy reform over a ten year period. Brundrett and Rhodes (2010, p6), examining the broader education context, also note that 'quality has come to the forefront of educational thinking in a period when central government has intervened in all aspects of social welfare'. Therefore, to continue this discussion on quality it is crucial to examine the policies and related literature underpinning this period of change. The next section of this chapter will focus on 'one of the most significant initiatives in the UK' (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2010) the *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003a) agenda and explore the literature connected to the accompanying transformation of the inspection framework.

3.10 *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003a) some implications for the sector

The momentum behind the formation of the Children Act (DfES, 2004) was created out of the previously mentioned tragic circumstances of Victoria Climbie (DoH, 2003) and numerous other child protection issues. Roche and Tucker (2004) use emotive language to convey the strength of feeling shared by children's services regarding the origins of its inception. 'The Climbie inquiry left political and professional worlds reeling' (p214). They suggest the reform was generated from a negative premise; the failure to keep children safe married with a mistrust of the quality of practice. Concerns discussed regarding the diversity of Early Years provision were reinforced during this era; the sector was seen as fragmented and failing to work for all children and their families. The introduction of *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003a) and the supporting legislation was a significant response from a government already highlighting child-related policy and practice (Williams, 2004; Clark and Waller, 2007; Roche and Tucker, 2007; Jones *et al,* 2008).

The themes advocated by the green paper *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003a) and the subsequent Children Act (DfES, 2004) had the overall aim to improve outcomes for all children through the reconfiguration of all mainstream services. However, as Williams (2004) cautions there are 'some points of real tension in the document which reflect a weak framework of values' (p410). She raises concerns regarding the culture of respect for children and childhood, this concurs with themes explored in the previous chapter. Williams (2004) contests in order to create effective provision practitioners need to understand the underpinning cultural and societal constructs. Yet she acknowledges that *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003a) does constitute a good attempt to recognise children's needs and creates educational opportunities to enable them to become productive future citizens.

By examining the language used in the Green Paper, it can be seen that it only reflects a linear developmental model of childhood rather than a socio-constructivist view. For example, its proposals on workforce reform were (DfES, 2003a, paragraph 6.41, bullet points used in document):

- Understanding the developmental nature of childhood;

- Parents, parenting and family life;

- Managing transitions;

- Understanding child protection;

- Understanding risk and protective factors;

- Listening to and involving children and young people.

These elements recognise the difference that physical development and maturation make and could be seen as an approach which sees childhood as a series of steps upwards to achieving adulthood. Williams (2004) suggests to be successful the workforce need to adopt a broader perspective to the social construction of childhood and acknowledge the child, the home and the whole environment. This follows the models of excellence as outlined by the literature connected to the approaches of Reggio Emilia and Te Whariki. The last statement above is supportive of their attitude, as it uses affirming language, 'listening to' and 'involving children' and indicates a movement towards recognising that children have a part to play in workforce reform. Williams (2004) would promote this recognition as the most effective basis of 'care ethics' (p423) and that applying the concept of interdependence rather than integration may unravel the tensions that exist in the 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003a) agenda. Yet, in spite of the preceding discussion, Williams (2004) does consider the Green paper to be 'an organizational solution to existing problems of fragmentation and accountability in children's services' (p423).

3.11 The implications of '*Every Child Matters'* for the inspection framework

Since its inception in 1992 the role of Ofsted has evolved and moved from its perceived original remit of accountability to embrace school improvement. The key change in the inspection process is the inclusion of organisational self-evaluation as an important element in the inspection cycle for schools and for nurseries. In '*Making the most of inspection: a guide to inspection for schools and governors'* (OFSTED, 1998), the emphasis shifted from the solely external monitoring to encourage internal monitoring, analysis, evaluation of a school's performance and procedures. Although in this era state and private nurseries were still inspected by separate bodies, this change in approach had repercussions for both sectors. However, as in chapter two, the literature connected to this stage is largely associated with the school rather than nursery sector.

In 2003 the new inspection framework; which included all Early Years provision across the sector, shifted its focus more towards self-evaluation. However, there were still some differences between private and state sector, as the former was inspected by Ofsted but still had to meet the regulations set by the Daycare standards (DfES, 2003b). Headteachers and nursery managers had the opportunity to record the setting's characteristics: the strengths and weaknesses, the standards achieved by the pupils, the quality of education provided by the school and the leadership and management of the school. These categories were based on the framework for inspecting schools (OFSTED, 2003a) with further explanation provided in the handbook for inspecting nursery and primary schools (OFSTED, 2003b). Arguably, the most significant change to the wording of the documents makes it clear that: 'Inspectors must take into account the characteristics of the individual school particularly the school's evaluation of its own performance' (OFSTED, 2003b, p16). Plowright (2008), in his work connected to the Primary sector, believes this change in

approach and legislation encouraged a better relationship between schools' and Ofsted:

> There is no doubt that the government appears increasingly to value a school's ability to undertake its own self-evaluation as part of the Ofsted inspection process (p103).

Building on this new approach, and using the opportunity to embed the underlying principles of '*Every Child Matters*' (DfES 2003) the inspection framework underwent another change in 2005 and the Self Evaluation Form (SEF) was introduced. David Bell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in 2004, described this as '… the most fundamental review of inspection since Ofsted was set up…' (OFSTED, 2004, p76). As he was the 'public face' of Ofsted, his comments in his discussion regarding the future of inspection, are a positive validation of the contribution of Ofsted to school improvement:

> Even the most vociferous of Ofsted's opponents could not fail to acknowledge that we have seen a rise in standards and the quality of schools in England during Ofsted's first decade (OFSTED, 2004, p76).

His contestation of Ofsted as a major part of leading change influenced the development of research question three, which examines whether a sector new to inspection perceives the body as a 'change agent'. More importantly, Bell considered that his reforms were responding to earlier critics' views (Maw, 1996; Sandbrook, 1996; Wilcox and Gray, 1996; Jeffrey and Woods, 1998) that Ofsted was excessively bureaucratic and lead to a culture of fear. The changes proposed by Bell aimed to cut the notice period for inspection to the minimum possible period, increasing the frequency of inspection; and introduce shorter, sharper 'intelligent inspections' (OFSTED, 2004, p76). This he believed would reduce the excessive preparation that schools undertake before inspection, which in some cases amounted to 'well over 1000 working days' (p76). By giving minimal notice the aim is that inspection becomes a regular part of school life rather than 'a long anticipated trauma' (p76).

The *Every Child Matters* agenda could be said to be responsible for the next change, increasing the frequency of inspections prevents a child going to a nursery or school that has not been inspected for five years. Thus arguably if Ofsted is an agent in increasing quality, the more frequent the 'visit' the more responsive the setting is to meeting standards. The practical aspects of inspection, number of days spent in school, and number of inspectors are reduced to ensure that inspections (and reports) focus on 'what really matters in schools' (OFSTED, 2004, p76).

The new framework published by OFSTED in 2005 stated clearly that the main judgements regarding pupil outcomes would be measured against the 'five outcomes' of *Every Child Matters*. This measure is not without its problems; Roche and Tucker (2007) use the example of the inspection arrangements to highlight the challenges of implementing the 'five outcomes' within the education sector. Schools and nurseries had to evaluate the effectiveness of their provision in meeting each outcome. Therefore:

> The arena for considering the delivery of this new agenda of the ECM agenda is transformed from what might be called an aspirational framework to one where evidence is sought in relation to specific targets against each outcome (p221).

This is an important consideration, and could be seen as pertinent to the sector, as it highlights that the quality of provision can be skewed by the inspection process. The need to provide evidence can prevent headteachers/managers thoroughly considering the outcomes. For example, 'Staying Safe' can be handled superficially (and evidenced) by the setting providing a road safety campaign, whereas the agenda is far-reaching and covers the behaviour of children in education and in the wider community. These initial responses by policy and settings to embrace the language and ethos of *Every Child Matters* may at times appear artificial and contrived. Yet the literature sources do acknowledge that linking children's welfare to family support is a good attempt to eradicate risk to children and provide better

services, as Walker (2008, p151) cautiously summarises: 'Indeed at one level it is difficult to argue against this vision'.

3.12 Current Early Years inspection frameworks and the perspective of the inspectorate

Following on from the Inspection Act 2006 (DCSF, 2007) Ofsted refined the self-evaluation approach and introduced new arrangements for the inspection of state maintained nursery schools and private nurseries from 2009. In the early stage of the new framework, there is no empirically based research into this new regime, therefore this section of the review focuses upon government publications and will subsequently examine literature connected to the inspectorate perspectives of 'quality'. All Early Years settings are regulated by Ofsted, the new Childcare Bill (DfES, 2006) which came into force in 2008, rationalised the previous separate frameworks by introducing inspection for all providers using the EYFS (DfES, 2007). This ensured that the previous divisive regime of regulation, by daycare standards in the private sector as opposed to inspection linked to the quality of teaching and learning in the state sector, ceased to exist.

The legislative framework for early learning and childcare detailed in the Childcare Act (DfES, 2006) removed the legal distinction between learning and care in the early years, reflecting the integrated approach to provision for young children which is the foundation of high-quality practice. The introduction in September 2008 of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007), provided the opportunity to bring greater consistency to the inspection of early years provision across all sectors.

All early years settings in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector providing for children from birth to five have been registered since September 2008

on the Ofsted Early Years Register (EYR). Schools providing for children aged three to five do not need to register on the EYR. However, schools do need to register if they provide services for children from birth up to three years of age. The implementation of the EYFS in schools for children aged three to five is inspected under the existing Ofsted school inspection arrangements. In the PVI sectors the implementation of the EYFS is inspected under a revised inspection schedule.

3.13 Inspection frameworks

From September 2008, there has been a common early years evaluation schedule provided by an integrated inspection framework, a copy of this is provided in Appendix 1 .This was introduced to ensure that Early Years provision in both schools and Early Years settings is evaluated in the same way (OFSTED, 2009a). The schedule includes the key judgements that inspectors will make and what they will take into account when evaluating all types of Early Years provision. Judgements on the quality of provision will then be graded using the current Ofsted scale of outstanding, good, satisfactory and inadequate.

In all sectors inspection reports now include the key judgements accompanied by an evaluation of effectiveness of the Early Years provision. Inspection reports for maintained and independent schools now include a separate section on the Early Years provision. Inspections of maintained nursery schools are reported in the context of providing for children entirely within the Early Years Foundation Stage (OFSTED, 2009a). Inspections will take place every three or four years, there is a difference in the notice period across the sector, school based provision can receive up to two days notice, private and voluntary providers will receive no prior notification of an inspection visit (OFSTED, 2009a).

Although there is no current academic Early Years based literature relating to the new framework, prior to its introduction Plowright (2008) writing about the primary sector considered that the new approach would be less disruptive, as the inspections were shorter and based on the information provided by the self-evaluation forms (SEF). As yet, the self assessment process is not compulsory for the private nursery sector (OFSTED, 2009), however if you are a state provider you have to produce a SEF, this is continually updated by the school and can be accessed online at anytime by Ofsted (Plowright, 2008). Brundrett and Rhodes (2010) are cautiously optimistic about the new inspection approach, they contest that 'it may fit within a wider model of continuous improvement' (p126), yet speculate that the regime may still be a stressful process.

Ofsted have heralded the new process as successful:

> The reaction from schools experiencing the new inspection is positive. More than nine out of ten schools, who have responded to surveys following inspection, say they were satisfied with the way inspection was carried out. The vast majority believe the inspection judgements were fair and accurate and were satisfied with the clarity of the recommendations in their report OFSTED, (2010a, p1).

The above statement is yet to be discussed by academic sources; however it does suggest that the school sector is moving towards a more benign view of the inspection process. This section of review has presented an outline of the current inspection framework (OFSTED, 2010a). Its creation has been influenced by the views of critics of the earlier regime, such as Earley and Pascal and Bertram who were discussed in chapter two. Nevertheless, the early concerns of Pascal and Bertram (2000) regarding the difference in the inspection process across the sector; could still be applicable to this approach. As, ironically, the central aspect of the new framework, the SEF, is not compulsory for all nursery providers.

3.14 Inspectors perspectives of quality factors

Ofsted inspectors 'official' view of quality nursery provision is portrayed in their individual reports and the inspectorate perspectives are represented in the government body's publications. The most recent document 'Early Years...Leading to Excellence' (OFSTED, 2008) fanfares the positive impact Ofsted has had on raising standards across the sector.

> I am particularly impressed with the level of improvement in meeting the national standards. In 2005 we reported that less than 80% of registered Early Years and childcare settings met the national standards. Now almost all do. (Christine Gilbert, Her Majesty Chief Inspector, OFSTED, 2008, p1).

Yet, despite the affirming tone, the document does still highlight the diversity of provision, in particular regional differences, as discussed earlier in this chapter by Hines (2008), as having a negative impact on achieving quality standards. Throughout this document and others such as 'Staying Safe' (OFSTED, 2006), comments from inspectors adopt a vignette approach and personalise examples of good practice. It is possible to undertake a discourse analysis of all Ofsted nursery reports, and this may reveal commonalities in the reporting commentaries. Penn (2002), in the period before integrated inspection, coded 513 Ofsted reports of existing nursery schools, she provides many examples of the inconsistencies of inspector perspectives of 'quality' given in reports.

Yet, it is difficult to gain the standpoint of the inspectorate beyond the view enshrined in official documents, due to contractual and legal obligations. Stephen and Brown's work in Scotland (2004) regarding outsider perspectives of pre-school settings provides some insight from inspectoral documentary evidence that reiterates the earlier work of Moss *et al*, (2000). Their analysis of policy and reports suggests the goal of inspectors is that Early Years settings that offer consistent and standardised developmental support aligned with a Piagetian vision of maturation. Although this is a useful insight, it does not provide a personal view of quality from an inspector.

Cullingford (1999) is one of the only sources that use individual quotations from registered inspectors, but these are connected with the mechanics of inspection rather than explorations of quality beyond the framework.

3.15 Practitioners perspectives of developing quality within the regulatory framework

As, already discussed by the preceding sections, the interest in 'quality' within Early Years services has increased. Whilst there are a number of academic sources linked to the school sector, in particular the research of Brimblecombe and colleagues used in chapter two and Chapman's work relating to inspection and school improvement, the range of Early Years literature is more limited. However, corresponding to the growth in importance of quality matters there has been some recent academic work in this field. Tanner *et al* (2006) examine the quality defining process by using a case study of a large, urban local authority in England. Their approach revealed a range of views about the concept of 'quality' from practitioners, managers and parents similar to the sample used in this study. They discovered that the minimum standards definition featured in many interviews. Nonetheless, 'quality' was also defined more widely. Some managers emphasised a specific feature of service provision such as the training and qualifications of staff or the educational aspect of nursery as central to quality. These indicators have resonance with the previously discussed themes that emerged from the literature connected to Reggio, Te Whariki, and the EPPE project. Others considered quality to be 'more intangible' (Tanner *et al,* 2006, p8) and interchanged it with the word ethos to emphasise a response to the 'dynamic' nature of children's needs. Essentially, their study revealed that the differences in definitions related to opinions of individuals rather than a distinct type of provision, therefore the findings from the private sector were similar to those collected from state providers. Tanner *et al* (2006) did canvas parental opinion, as they adopted a pluralistic approach acknowledging stakeholders' as well as experts' views (Moss and

Dahlberg, 2008). Their research discovered that parents were more prone to characterize quality, by relating it to their child's well-being, using terms such as 'safety' and 'happiness' (Tanner*et al,* 2006, p8). This will be explored further in the latter part of this chapter.

Additionally, this paper captures the sectors' feelings of ambivalence and resistance towards the increasing dominance of national standards and targets in Early Years services. Much of this resentment was aimed at the perceived excessive bureaucracy; practitioners felt constrained by the emphasis on learning goals advocated by the curriculum guidance central to the inspection process (Tanner *et al,* 2006). These findings were shared by contemporary sources, for example, Osgood (2006) suggests that the common framework of inspection and the integration of services would lead to a prescribed environment, leading to a lack of professional autonomy. This word professional with its associations of identity, status and culture, already highlighted in chapter two, is a continuing concern in this second part of the review. Indeed, Garrick and Morgan (2009) contend it is a key quality issue; as indicated by the wider range of papers in this area rather than inspection, one that currently preoccupies practitioners and academics (Miller, 2008; Garrick and Morgan, 2009; Alexander, 2010; Osgood, 2010). Hence, this section will continue to examine practitioner perspectives regarding the inspection framework within the literature connected to the development of a professional workforce.

The changes to the qualification framework for practitioners and workforce reform over the last decade has been generally welcomed by those who have been working to elevate the status of Early Years workers and help them achieve a professional identity (Miller, 2008). However critics of this agenda, such as Dahlberg *et al* (2007) and Osgood (2006), equate the standardised approach of training to a 'technologising of policy and practice' (Miller, 2008, p260); which leads to the

inhibition of professional creativity and control. Furthermore, Osgood, in her later work in this area, expands on this notion by suggesting that the newly introduced role of Early Years professional could be attained by 'demonstrating a series of competencies' (Osgood, 2010, p120).

Moss's (1999) earlier exploration of the construct of the nursery worker, as cited in chapter two, is contemplated from a feminist perspective by Osgood (2010). She considers the consequences for the positioning and professional identity of workers by scrutinising classed, gendered and raced discourses attached to the 'reconceptualisation of professionalism in early childhood' (p121). Within this work Osgood (2010) draws upon the work of Foucault (1978, 1980 in Osgood, 2010), already discussed by literature sources in connection with Ofsted (Maw, 1996; Wilcox and Gray, 1996), who suggests that through the objectifying practice of perpetual monitoring and the promotion of normalising discourse, subjects come to self regulate making state power invisible and themselves passive participants rather than challenging negotiators. Following on from this discussion, Osgood (2010, p121) also selected Ofsted as a key example of audit culture, the 'seduction of surveillance'.

Within her study nursery workers were asked to identify times when they felt their professionalism was being judged, the inspection process featured in all interviews. This paper is one of the few pieces of academic work to offer nursery practitioner observations of inspection albeit the previous framework. Ofsted was collectively envisaged as the epitome of accountability and the main means of assessing quality within the sector. Practitioners applied various constructions to the regulations, for example Ofsted was perceived as a 'poisoned chalice' (Osgood, 2010, p122) offering the allure of elevated status but at considerable personal and professional cost. Significantly, the new integrated framework (DfES, 2007) was seen as a signal to

nurseries that their staff and their professional practice were given 'parity' (Osgood, 2010, p122) with the school sector. Regulation and inspection were considered as 'vital' and 'effective', by the respondents, as drivers for assuring minimum standards are met, moreover, as public indicators of the worst settings. However, Osgood's study (2010) noted that despite these affirmations of the inspection process, the partial nature of Ofsted inspections, in some cases less than a three hour visit; was considered a weakness. In addition, practitioners viewed inspectors with scepticism as they appeared to lack expertise in the field of early childhood. Significantly Penn (2002) in her work connected to the early days of inspection raised this issue, as does Edgington (2004, p248) in her work discussing the development of professional practice. She suggested that the sector would only respond to advice given by 'real early education specialists'.

Osgood (2010) highlights the importance that her participants placed on external assessment, although internal mechanisms involving team reflection and self – evaluation were discussed; highly emotive references to Ofsted dominated the practitioners' views of professionalism. The abridged quotation below encapsulates their perceptions and is a rare depiction in academic writing of a nursery worker's 'voice'.

> I know that I am conscientious, well qualified, experienced and reflect on what I am doing, I also recognise that there is also room for improvement. If that was what Ofsted was about then great. But I just felt there was an air of distrust; that my professionalism was being doubted and unfairly judged…come in and take a *good* look before making any assumptions…if judgements are being made they should be informed and considered (Natalia in Osgood, 2010, p123).

In this study practitioners perceived Ofsted as undermining their own professional judgement as the inspection assessment criteria were considered narrowly focused and overly prescriptive. In spite of this view the concerns raised in relation to regulation by government accepted that there was an 'unproblematic and linear causal relationship' (Osgood, 2010, p125) between 'professionalism' and 'quality'.

This is contrary to the work Dahlberg, Moss and Pence have carried out in early childhood education, previously discussed in this review, which 'problematises' the concept of 'quality' and suggests a move towards a new discourse of 'meaning making' (Dahlberg *et al,* 2007).

The literature reviewed in this section, focussing on practitioners, acknowledges that 'quality' moves beyond the 'prescriptive position' (Tanner *et al,* 2006, p7) as outlined by the regulatory standards and inspection framework. All sources (Tanner *et al,* 2006; Miller, 2008; Garrick and Morgan, 2009; Alexander, 2010; Osgood, 2010) recognise that different definitions of 'quality' and perceptions of Ofsted depend upon the role of the stakeholder, thus the next part of this review moves onto the another aspect of the second research question, the perspectives of nursery managers and headteachers.

3.16 Leadership perspectives on inspection

In a study in 2006 connected to leadership in the Early Years sector, Siraj-Blatchford and Manni raise a recurring theme in this review:

> …due to the paucity of evidence based literature (i.e. non anecdotal) that is related to management and leadership in Early Years settings, the authors were forced to consult leadership and management literature associated with both primary and secondary schools (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2006, p8).

However, although this was the case in 2006, due to the issue of workforce reform, there has been some recent academic work in this area. The first part of this section reviews sources connected to leadership and quality matters, moving onto examine literature capturing manager perceptions of inspection within the nursery sector. Subsequently, academic writing considering the school improvement aspect of Ofsted will be reviewed, although this still remains mainly located in the primary sector and, it will provide more underpinning knowledge for the third research

question: Do headteachers/managers/practitioners perceive Ofsted as a 'change agent'?

Leadership has been recognised as a major component in quality Early Years provision (Aubrey, 2007). Curtis and Burton (2009), in their work connected to the change in the nursery managers' role, produce a set of descriptors linked to the position. Their findings suggest that leaders working in the sector have to have a strong empathy towards others, a clear vision informed by a strong value base. This is combined with the ability to manage large staff teams, conditions of service, shift patterns plus liaison with a number of different individuals and agencies forms a complex job description (Curtis and Burton, 2009). A number of academic sources have found that the total nursery environment is strongly influenced by two managerial issues, the quality of leadership and levels of staff turnover (Mujis *et al*, 2004*;* Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2006; Aubrey, 2007).

Indeed, the research by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) in their study on Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector (ELEYS) strongly emphasises the relationship between strong nursery leadership and successful outcomes for children. Their findings reinforce the 'quality' factors that have been noted by the literature sources throughout this chapter that in the most effective settings better leadership was characterised by a clear vision, especially with regard to pedagogy and curriculum, which was shared by everyone working within the setting. These philosophies varied from being strongly educational to strongly caring, but all acknowledged the construct of childhood. The idea that the staff should develop or promote shared aims and objectives was consistently seen as crucial, similar to Dahlberg *et al's* (2007) proposed 'meaning making'. All of the most successful managers, in terms of child outcomes, facilitated a strong educational ethos. They cherished the importance of adult-child interaction and they supported their staff in developing better ways of

engaging children in their learning. Many of the settings were involved in projects such as, the already discussed, Effective Early Learning (EEL) project, and demonstrated interest in the cited international curricula models Reggio Emilia, and Te Whariki. Many of the examples that Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) utilised demonstrated that collective vision was embedded within the various practices described by interviewees; for example, planning and assessment in the nurseries was carried out by all team members. Their findings also endorsed the need for qualified staff by providing one manager's explanation of her strategic decision to trade the possibility of two nursery nurses for a qualified teacher revealed her belief that staff with a good understanding of child development could promote better 'quality' and child progress. This was supported by this leader's commitment to the on-going professional development of all the staff in her setting.

The level of qualifications and continuing professional development was also noted as key factor by the managers in Tanner *et al's* (2006) case study. Some managers had encountered recruitment problems due to the perceived lack of parity in the various standards of contemporary nursery worker qualifications. This is supported by the managers in Garrick and Morgan (2009) study on developing practice in the private, voluntary and independent sector, who cite pay, status and hours of work and staff retention as leadership issues. Both these findings support those of the example cited by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) and also illustrate the sector's feeling, as expressed by previous literature, that there is a need to go beyond minimum standards to ensure 'quality'. One nursery manager employed several members of staff who were teachers, reflecting an approach to quality that had a distinctive stress on the qualifications of practitioners. Although her thoughts are a lengthy inclusion in this review, they do afford an illustration of recommended practice by all sources connected with the discussion on the reason for the sector needing suitably qualified staff:

…All our staff have to be qualified to at least NVQ level three…or they have to be qualified teachers…obviously that doesn't ensure quality but I think the fact we've got teachers as well as nursery nurses does make a big difference…I think the more education somebody has, potentially they are more able to be critical about their practice and I think that is really important...' (Tanner *et al*, 2006, p9).

Garrick and Morgan (2009) also consider the issue of qualifications and continuing professional development to be a key quality issue in the management of settings. They highlighted sector differences between the commitment to training and staff development needs. For example, two nursery nurses in a private nursery were unable to attend a three day course, rated as important by the manager, as the owner would not fund their absence. In addition, their findings reinforce the views expressed by the EPPE research (Sylva *et al,* 2004, 2010) that quality in settings with a care tradition, despite adequate adherence to adult/child ratios and regulatory standards, without a practitioner understanding of pedagogical issues children will not make good developmental progress. Few staff, or significantly, managers in their study were qualified or enrolled on courses above level three; this supports the findings of Owen (2006), as discussed in chapter two.

Aubrey (2007) links the need for ongoing leader support and professional development with the creation of quality provision. Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) indicated that while dedicated training (National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership – NPQICL) gradually became available, there were still a majority of early years 'leaders', in around 30,000 pre-school settings whose specific training needs were not collectively being met. Many of those management courses that were on offer to early years leaders also tended to be geared to the school sector. This made the Early Years leaders feel isolated and marginalised in discussions concerning the nature of leadership. In her more recent study Osgood (2010) reinforces these earlier insights, her participants deemed the course content for the Early Years Professional qualification with its 'tick box exercise' approach as

lacking relevance to 'the practical-professional life in a nursery' (p129). Yet the managers studying for an Early Years degree offered positive views on the value of education and training, emphasising as with all other literature sources consulted in this section that depth of knowledge and reflection are the keys to professionalism in the Early Years (Osgood, 2010).

Continuing this discussion about the leadership role, Webb (2005) refers to the two dimensions of head teachers as 'leading professional and chief executive manager' (p69). The balancing of administration and teaching and learning is a major responsibility for the named leaders of a nursery setting. In Tanner *et al's* (2006) case study one private day nursery manager claimed that the dominance of paperwork has had a negative impact on quality in his nursery as the most highly qualified staff were spending time away from the children in order to produce detailed information about children and activities to meet the demands of Ofsted. These views are similar to earlier expressions by the school sector in relation to the imposed National Curriculum in 1989 and the accompanying inspection framework, Jeffery & Woods (1998) evaluating this period reported 'a growth of constraint, intensification of work and increasing managerialism resulting from school restructuring and Ofsted inspection' (p537).

Despite these concerns regarding bureaucracy, Ofsted was still viewed as the key driver for quality in England by some of the leaders in the reviewed literature (Garrick and Morgan, 2009, Alexander, 2010) and some of the managers used inspection reports positively to inform the nursery's action plan. Furthermore, some managers viewed an unsatisfactory judgement as an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, using an affiliative leadership (Goleman, 2000) style to motivate staff in challenging circumstances to consider strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, conversely, whilst recognising the constraints imposed by externally imposed standards and inspection

bodies, there is an alternative view offered by Miller (2008) and O' Kane (2005) in her earlier work based on the regulation of nurseries in Ireland. They suggest that the workforce agenda creates new opportunities for training and professionalism. Rao and Ling (2009), in their recent Hong Kong based work, were similarly positive regarding the development of government initiated performance indicators for pre-school, arguing that these enable managers to take an active role in enhancing nursery quality. These final sources affirm that managers and practitioners can be empowered by their training and become active agents in the process, thus regulation and standard can be an enabling process opening up professional dialogue and securing professional identity.

3.17 Managers' perceptions of inspection and school improvement

Illustrating the viewpoint expressed in the paragraph above, a founding leader of a children's centre considers herself to be a 'change agent' (Curtis and Burton, 2009, p298). She uses the skills from her NPQICL to develop a 'rich reflexive learning community' (Curtis and Burton, 2009, p296) which Fullan (2001), an influential source on educational change, would recognise as optimal conditions for developing practice. The literature, albeit limited, connected to management matters in Early Years advocates a 'distributed', 'participative', facilitative' or 'collaborative' models of leadership (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2006, p20); a shift away from the customary image of leader as one key individual towards a more collective vision, one where the responsibility for leadership rests within various formal and informal leaders. Muijs *et al*, (2004, p11) cites research by Osgood e*t al*, (2000, 2002) which promotes distributed leadership. They concluded that:

> While early years practitioners are committed to heightening professionalism, the most appropriate means of realising this is NOT through entrepreneurial approaches…but rather through collaborative, cooperative and community oriented lines.

This emphasis on collaboration supports Dahlberg *et al's* (2007) assertion that all stakeholders need to be able to contribute to the 'meaning making' discourse to optimise the opportunity for improving provision.

The current self-evaluation approach used by Ofsted could be said to build on this collaborative approach as a successful document would be the result of consultation with all stakeholders. However, Plowright (2008) referring to the primary sector, cautions that effective school development planning is dependent on deploying an appropriate range of evaluative activities to provide an insight into the needs of the school. Without these tools, self-evaluation would have a limited evidence base and could be centred on the views of the school's headteacher rather than representative of the whole setting. Furthermore, Plowright (2008) suggests that primary leaders need training and support from a 'critical friend' (p105) to enable them to effectively optimise the use of self-evaluation and develop the link between this process and school improvement. He highlights the importance of the role of the school improvement partner (SIP) in providing headteachers with professional challenge and guidance. Significantly, this assistive intermediary is unavailable to the majority of the nursery sector, as the Local Authority improvement partner only works with state based provision within schools.

Plowright's study is one of the most recent sources to provide an insight into the primary leaders' perspective into school improvement and explore the relationship with inspection. There is no current academic work in this field in representing the voice of Early Years leaders. However, it is noteworthy that unlike previous school based literature linked to Ofsted and improvement that convey the experience is concerned with accountability rather than improvement (Dean, 1995; Chapman, 2001); Plowright's (2008, p114) findings suggest that it can make a contribution to development of provision. Indeed one of his participants commented 'it has helped to

focus the school community on the big picture as a whole'. Moreover, the current process was seen as 'constructive' and 'non-threatening'. These finding have resonance with the literature connected to the Early Years field, as they emphasize that if the self-evaluation process constructs a deeper understanding of practice by engaging and involving others in the dialogue then it can contribute to the 'discourse of meaning making' (Dahlberg *et al,* 2007). However, despite Plowright's (2008) positive initial findings regarding the success of the SEF, the current Secretary of State for Education has announced that is it to be discontinued as 'it places an unreasonable bureaucratic burden on headteachers' (DOE, 2010b).

This section of the review has engaged with views from practitioners and leaders. In order to fully consider the involvement of others, Brundrett and Rhodes (2010) contest that if the school sector wishes to create an accountability system promoting continuing school improvement it is imperative to work in partnership with parents. This chapter will now examine literature connected with parental perceptions of nursery education and quality matters.

3.18 Factors that influence parental choice of provision

It is axiomatic that parents and carers are a central part of their children's life and education, particularly in the earlier years. Consequently most early childhood practitioner based sources include information regarding communication and relationship building with parents and acknowledge that their participation in their child's education is largely beneficial. Additionally, the academic literature used in both chapters underlines the importance of parental involvement in discussions and decisions regarding the quality of nursery education and care. Yet, in spite of this written verification of their importance, there is a dearth of empirically based evidence regarding parental choice of provision and their perceptions of quality matters.

Specific initiatives to involve parents in the Early Years have more often focused on young children's learning or aspects of the curriculum (Nutbrown *et al,* 2008). In particular, Athey's (2007) work on Froebellian concepts in education explores the development of an informed collaborative relationship between parent, teacher and child in constructing learning. The terms collaborative and informed are key to all discussions regarding parental involvement, as Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) contest the relationship between home and many early years settings remains 'unilateral' (p23), with the direction of information about children moving from the early years setting and staff to the parents, and seldom in the opposite direction.

One of the central aims of the (DfES, 2003a, 2003b) framework has been to ensure the improvement of the level and degree of support offered to parents and carers. With the increased integration of services revolving around children and their families, such as health services, social care and education, there is a growing need (and expectation) for the development of effective partnerships with parents and families (Draper and Duffy, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2006; Athey, 2007; Nutbrown *et al,* 2008). Both the Reggio Emilia approach and Te Whariki place emphasis on informed critical participation from parents and Dahlberg *et al* (2007) envisage parental involvement as 'a description of democratic process rather than a means of social control or technological transfer' (p77). The lack of academic literature connected to parental considerations of 'quality' in Early Years provision within England suggests that informed collaboration in the sector is evolving rather than established.

Tanner *et al's* (2006) case study, a central source in the latter part of this chapter, offers some insight into parental consideration of 'quality'. As stated at the beginning of this discussion regarding perceptions of stakeholders, parents talked about 'quality' in relationship to the happiness and security of their children. They

considered safety to be of paramount importance, this concurs with Bryson *et al's* (2006) findings, that parents placed trust as the one of the most factors in selecting a provider. In line with other stakeholder perspectives, the parents involved in Tanner *et al's* (2006) research also considered the staff to be a quality issue, however a distinct difference in from others' views emerged, their characteristics were judged to be more important than their qualifications. They used terms such as experienced, maturity and demeanour in their descriptions; they were unconcerned about the levels of qualification. This differs from Bryson *et al's* (2006) government sponsored report that links the concept of trust with the 'properly trained staff' (p204), Tanner *et al* (2006, p9) do note that their parental findings 'express a different emphasis… compared to official requirements'.

In the Tanner *et al (*2006) study, all the providers aspired to involve parents in the evaluation and development of services, but found it difficult to do so. Brundrett and Rhodes (2010); in their writing about the school sector, argue that 'at the most pragmatic and practical level parents may be disinclined to be involved with their children's schools' (p112). Athey (2007) and Nutbrown *et al* (2008) would state that this in not the case in Early Years settings, as historically from Pestalozzi in the 19th century to current SureStart initiatives, parental involvement is part of nursery education, it is implicit to practice. Nonetheless, as Draper and Duffy (2006) suggest parents are employed and although may be willing to attend events relating directly to curriculum (i.e. attending a session on emergent reading), may be less inclined to contribute time to activities they deem less relevant. Tanner *et al* (2006) tentatively suggest that this may be to do with deference rather than lack of desire to contribute. They explore the possibility that parents do not feel adequately equipped, or, to return to a previous literature theme, informed, to participate in discussions about the quality of Early Years provision 'as they do not regard themselves as having specialist knowledge' (p14). In addition, despite the community approach to nursery

education as advocated by best practice models such as Reggio, in this case study parents chose a nursery close to their place of work, making it unrealistic to expect parents to wish to develop a nursery's practice for the benefit of the immediate locality (Tanner *et al,* 2006). This particular finding, shared by Bryson *et al's* more extensive study (2006) who found that working parents travelled up to an hour away from their home to their child's nursery, has implications for Dahlberg *et al's* (2007) vision of creating better provision through 'meaning making', as it is based on involving all views from all participants.

Therefore the scarcity of academic literature capturing parental perceptions of 'quality' may be linked to the parents' lacking confidence or knowledge about the nursery sector. When analysing government documents or sponsored research connected to this area, such as the study on parental views of daycare and Early Years provision by Bryson *et al* (2006), it is noticeable that the quality is stated as a definite concrete concept, parents were asked to consider whether provision was high, medium or low quality but not asked about their reasons for reaching that conclusion. Moreover, in a recent Ofsted publication celebrating excellence in the Early Years (OFSTED, 2008), parental contributions to the quality process merited one paragraph in the 36 page document linked to curriculum development, and questions helping providers to evaluate their provision only included the local authority, the practitioners and the children.

This does imply that a research question aimed at capturing parental perceptions of quality may need to be offered in an alternative guise. Consequently, as Tanner *et al (*2006) concluded there was a 'consumerist' approach by parents to nursery provision, the issue of choice seemed more relevant. As a result the final research question examines whether Ofsted reporting influences parental choice, currently the reasons for choosing a nursery remain under explored by academic literature despite

it being the first educational choice a parent makes. School based literature, such as Gibbons and Machin (2006), present a number of reasons for choosing a primary school including good test results, appearance of buildings and league table performance. Yet these factors may not be relevant to choice of nursery, in one of the few research studies to be successful at gaining feedback from parents, Woodland *et al* (2002) discovered that 67% of parents choose their provider because they could be 'trusted' and the next most prevalent answer was that they demonstrated 'affection' (pvii). The findings in this survey were similar to other sources used in this final section and restate some of the employee characteristics established by the pioneers such as Froebel and Montessori as outlined in chapter two, the person not their qualifications, the child's happiness not the type of curriculum, were key parental determinants in choosing a setting. Individual communication with the nursery; and requests for longer hours were highlighted in the interviews held with parents in the work by Tanner *et al* (2006). These exchanges were seen as 'doing quality' (p14) by the parents, it is difficult to capture this as a feature of a quality mechanism, nevertheless, all the literature in this chapter connected to 'quality' extols the value of a parental contribution to the process. By giving quality the context of choice in my research question and subsequent questionnaire, it is hoped that parents may feel more confident about providing answers.

3.19 A summary

This chapter has considered the contested notion of 'quality' and has explored the development of a 'relationship approach' to developing Early Years care and education as advocated by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2000, 2007). The creation of nursery provision is aligned with the societal and political construction of childhood. Underpinning this concept in England is the combined approach to children's

services as advocated by *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003a), and the accompanying far reaching policy changes, as outlined by the sources in this chapter. Inspection and the need to reach the required standard as set by the regulatory system; could be perceived as a driver for workforce reform, and improved nursery experiences for children and their families. If all stakeholders are informed and involved in an evaluative discourse, paradoxically Ofsted in its current form could be seen as part of an empowering process.

Chapter Four

Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

> Questions should shape methods and not the other way round
> (Plummer, 2001, p22).

This chapter describes and exemplifies the research design utilised in endeavouring to answer my four research questions. Firstly it restates my research questions and purpose, before locating this study within the wider field of educational research. It addresses the application of a quantitative and a qualitative methodological paradigm and clarifies my philosophical approach by examining the ontological process and the epistemological context. Flick (2002) suggests that methods have to be appropriate to the issues being studied; therefore a discussion regarding the elements in research design is provided. Moreover, this section analyses the empirical base of this study thus reliability and validity are scrutinised alongside any potential difficulties and ethical issues connected with the research.

The aim of this research is to explore stakeholders' notions of 'quality' and consider the implementation of the new inspection framework across the nursery sector. The 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003a) agenda and the Government's ten year strategy (HMT, 2004), discussed in both the previous literature review chapters, have highlighted quality issues within Early Years provision. Thus this study aims to consider the implementation of new policy and approach in a range of settings. This thesis explores the concept of 'quality' from the perspectives of both private and state providers through engagement with a range of stakeholders, and examining their responses to the Ofsted framework. Based on these key issues the research questions are as follows:-

- Does the inspection framework support the development of care and education across the nursery sector?

- Do inspectors/headteachers/managers share the same perceptions of quality factors within nursery education as practitioners?

- Do headteachers/managers/practitioners consider Ofsted to be a 'change agent'?

- Is parental choice influenced by Ofsted reporting?

4.2 Wider framework

> There are many different languages and logics of educational research
> (Soltis, 1984, p5).

In order to understand the purpose of this research, it is important to consider the broader field of educational research. Furlong and Oancea (2005) suggest that although there is a wealth of literature focussing upon research methodology and widespread variations in the standards and traditions of educational research, there is evidence of a shared core of concern. Indeed, Pring (2000) avers the shared distinctive feature of educational research is that it requires an understanding of other people and their interpretations, therefore the conceptual underpinning of this study needs to acknowledge the worth of the 'social world' (p96). As, this research is concerned with capturing stakeholder perspectives, the 'Humanistic knowledge domain' as proposed by Ribbins and Gunter (2002, p378) could be seen as an appropriate supporting framework. Although their work is located in the wider field of educational leadership, they acknowledge the number of overlapping and related elements of this area. The parallels with governance and inspection are highlighted in their discussion regarding the nature of leadership and administration, as they cite Hodgkinson's (1996) view that when:

> …leadership is identified with administration it can be understood as the
> effecting of policy, values and philosophy through collective action. It is the

moving of men towards goals through organisation and it can be done well, badly, or indifferently (in Ribbins and Gunter, p362).

The issues of quality and adherence to the inspection framework are linked to leadership and the implementation of policy along with the subsequent effects upon the workforce and provision.

This interweaving of policy and people reflects the approach of this study. Ribbins and Gunter (2002) suggest that researchers in the humanistic domain seek to gather and theorize from experiences and biographies. The focus upon 'professional experiences' and 'context' (Ribbins and Gunter, 2002, p378) reinforces Furlong and Oancea's (2005) shared core of concern. In the follow-on article Gunter and Ribbins (2002) extend their ideas and much of the language used to explore the humanistic domain is echoed by the research questions given earlier. The stated purpose of 'Describing and analysing and through this contribute to enabling and improving' (Ribbins and Gunter, 2002, p378) mirrors themes connected to quality matters discussed in the second chapter of the literature review. As the focus upon the perceptions and 'everyday practice' (p398) of the people involved with the study occurs within both. This emphasis upon personal description and stakeholders' experience of impact of external policies has implications not only for the purpose of this study, but for the choice of research methods and the validity of data gathered.

4.3 Philosophical approach

Philosophical issues are integral to the research process because they constitute a researcher's internal 'dialogue'; this section aims to clarify my ontological and epistemological position in a transparent manner. Theory and method are inextricably linked; therefore the way a research project is approached is dependent upon the researcher's beliefs and their view of the nature of knowledge. A quantitative

practitioner may maintain that social science inquiry should be objective; a qualitative based researcher may dislike a passive, detached style. Both paradigms have to be considered and understood by the researcher, as different ways of knowing and diverse epistemological perspectives shape individual projects. However, as I wish to become an effective researcher, rather than defining each approach, I started with Walford's (2001) premise that:

> It is always necessary for researchers to examine their own 'grand theories' about how the world operates, and to recognise that this will have influenced the way the data were constructed and the interpretation that the researcher may give to them (p148).

My notions of the nature of truth and knowledge are influenced by my interpretations of my experiences. Foucault believed it was important to investigate the truth and understand its impact on the histories of societies (Faubion (ed.) 2002 xviii). Both the physical and social world are in a constant state of flux which creates as well as uncertainties, new possibilities for knowing, therefore it is vital to investigate, to build on the picture we have. Nothing in this world is static, yet this does not mean that there are no truths or factual knowledge. The manipulation of knowledge and truth, such as through the withholding of information, can be used as a means to gain and maintain power. This use of knowledge is central to Foucault's consideration of the relationship between power and knowledge (Faubion (ed.) 2002). This view of knowledge disillusions the researcher, as it demonstrates the flaws in human nature. It also relates to themes identified by previously discussed literature connected to the power of the inspectorate. I prefer the view which Foucault attributes to Nietzsche that 'knowledge is like a luminescence, a spreading light' (Faubion (ed.), 2002, p8). The knowledge I gained through my interaction with my respondents, through my case studies, through the 'truths' we have constructed together, can be used to inform practice and policy with the hope that inspection can be a beneficial experience for all involved.

Before embarking upon my research design, I held assumptions regarding my construction of knowledge and my view of the truth. Throughout my working life I have been immersed in a female environment, much of the literature connected to Early Years is written by women. Moreover, the overriding construct of childhood historically has been connected to the ideology of motherhood (Athey, 2007; Bowlby, 1953; Browne, 1996). Therefore, I had presumed my research design would be based on a feminist approach, indeed Habermas (1971) maintains that research and its supporting epistemologies are ingrained and inseparable from interests. Yet, referring back to the work of Plummer (2001) I considered that my design should not be based on the construct of early childhood but upon my research questions. The purpose of feminist enquiry is to facilitate female understanding of women's views of the world and female emancipation (Robson, 2002). Although the knowledge sought in this research is something that the researcher could only study by interaction with mainly female participants due to the already discussed gender composition of the workforce, and indeed utilises some literature, such as Osgood's work (2006, 2010) on the 'professionalisation' of the sector, which embraces a feminist perspective, this does not confine the design to this approach.

A reoccurring theme emerging in this discussion is that of construction of knowledge. The qualitative paradigm acknowledges that people do not simply exist within the environment; they interact to construct their world. Cohen *et al (*2007) assert that

> The social and educational world is a messy place; full of contradictions, richness, complexity, connectedness and disjunctions…It has to be studied in total rather than in fragments (p167).

As this world is at the heart of my study, the view that qualitative researchers are part of the construction of the social reality which is being investigated is pertinent (Gall *et al*, 2003). Indeed Robson (2002) suggests that the label of constructivism is one of the labels given to a contemporary view of qualitative research, a consideration of the

role of the researcher helping to construct a reality with the researched. Dahlberg *et al* (2007) take this as the position further and suggest: 'researchers, members of the project are co-constructors in the process of change' (p141). This would seem to reflect my view of knowledge and support an interactive pursuit of truth. Interpretative humanistic processes are fundamental to understanding the meaning arising out of social situations, therefore a method investigating complex and dynamic interactions is at the heart of this approach.

The ontological stance of this study is based upon the truth and reality generated by the participants. The interpretation of their responses will allow themes to develop and conceptual models to emerge. Therefore it would appear that this design is firmly in the qualitative paradigm, yet Scott (2000) makes a pertinent observation that to make too great a distinction between quantitative and qualitative research techniques is to lack subtlety. Quantitative techniques such as the parental questionnaire used in this study, have traditionally been viewed as centring on measurement, not meanings, nonetheless as Scott (2000) postulates a questionnaire tends to be quantitative in nature but can still explore meaning. This research embraces Dewey's (1944) vision of educational researchers being members of an associated community rather than warring factions. Indeed Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) assert there is a third paradigm, mixed methods research, which draws upon the strengths and weaknesses of both positions. Significantly, they suggest that:

> What is most fundamental is the research question, research methods should follow research questions in a way that offers the best chance to obtain useful answers (p17).

Robson (2002) suggests that this mixed methods approach is underpinned by pragmatism, itself a philosophical position based on the works of Peirce, William James and Dewey; they state the truth is 'what works' (p43). The view of pragmatism is to endorse human enquiry alongside experimental and scientific enquiry, practical

epistemology. Brown (1992) contests that a blending of methodologies can be justified in order to fully describe the phenomena, for example large scale data bases can be combined with in depth personal interviews to produce complete knowledge. In this study the use of a quantitative approach in the form of questionnaire has been utilised, at first the mathematical nature of this research tool would seem to contradict the constructivist and interpretivist nature of this study. However, the statistical analysis generated by this instrument combined with the interviews and focus groups to provide rich descriptive data. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) support such a combination:

> '... In a qualitative research study the researcher might want to qualitatively research and interview, but to supplement this with a closed-ended instrument to systematically measure certain factors considered important (p19).

Combining methods in this manner could be viewed as triangulation rather than the third paradigm. Flick (2002) defines triangulation as a term used to name the combination of different methods, study groups, local and temporal settings and differing theoretical perspectives reflecting with a phenomenon. Triangulation can be applied to data, observation techniques, theory, and methodological approaches (Denzin, 1988). In this study to address the research questions, Denzin's theoretical 'systematology' of approaching data with multiple perspectives could be applied in order to derive maximum knowledge production. This could be viewed as blurring of the paradigms; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) highlight dissent regarding this approach; as purists contend that a researcher should only work within one methodological perspective. Also, as in this case, it can be difficult for a single researcher to carry out both approaches concurrently and comprehensively equip themselves with the necessary skills. Nevertheless the combining of these skills could lead to better selection of methods respecting the underlying research questions, rather than being curtailed by methodological purism. Therefore to return to Plummer's (2001) thought that questions should shape methods, although this

thesis is predominately in the interpretive qualitative domain, on occasion a positivist

objective stance is desirable.

4.4 Methodology

> …to describe and analyse methods, throwing light on their limitations and
> resources, clarifying their suppositions and consequences, relating their
> potentialities to the twilight zone at the frontiers of knowledge
>   Kaplan (1973, p23) in Wellington (2000).

This section aims, as BERA (2004) suggests in a transparent manner, to discuss the

suitability of the chosen methods for the purpose of the research. As previously

discussed this thesis lies mainly in qualitative domain using an underpinning

humanistic framework, therefore it is important to select methods and theories that

allow the recognition and analysis of different perspectives. A holistic method would

allow the participants responses, the researcher's reflections and different forms of

data to generate the desired rich descriptions. As I am drawn to the view that the

'truth' is constructed through my interactions with my respondents, the case study

approach which affords various perspectives and understandings interests me.

Ribbins and Gunter (2002) suggest that empirical developmental case study work

supports the humanistic knowledge domain. Firstly, I will discuss the features of the

case study approach before describing my choice of sample and data collection

methods.

4.5 Characteristics of case studies

> This emphasis upon the uniqueness of events or actions, arising from their
> being shaped by the meanings of those who are the participants in the
> situation, points to the importance of the 'case study'… (Pring, 2000, p40).

Case studies can be considered as a research approach in the qualitative paradigm.

An exploration of the features of a case study reveals many facets which are

pertinent to this thesis and its questions. Robson (2002) suggests that a case study is a well-established research strategy where the focus is on a case in its own right and taking contextual details into consideration. The constitution of a case can be interpreted widely to include a study of an individual, a group, a setting or a sector. Robson further indicates that a typical case study will involve multiple methods of data collection, some of which may be quantifiable. A particularly appealing definition by Geertz (1973), his view of case studies supports my desire to generate a rich detailed overview, as the phrasing used evokes this richness, '… to catch the close up reality and thick description' (in Cohen *et al*, 2007, p254).

Yin (1981; 1992; 2003) cited by many (Bassey, 1999; Cohen *et al,* 2007; Robson, 2002, Stake 1995) as the leading exponent in the social sciences of case study; asserts that:

> The case study method...is an empirical enquiry that:
> - Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when
> - The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which
> - Multiple sources of evidence are used.
> (Yin, 1992, p123, presented as original source)

In his evolving work connected to case study, he explores their advantages and disadvantages (Yin, 1981; 1992; 2003). Significantly, he highlights ideas discussed earlier in this chapter as he considers that triangulation of data is needed to support this approach. Throughout his discourse he gives examples from both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The essence of his view is that the case study approach is enquiry based but in a 'real life context' (Yin, 1992, p123), rather than in an experimental setting, this corresponds with the pragmatic approach outlined earlier by Brown (1992) and latterly by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004). This emphasis on context provides meaning to the case study; the detailed description provides the reader with a good sense and feel for the chosen area of investigation.

This particular focus on context is relevant to my research questions; my chosen humanistic approach needs to generate data that is applicable to a sector (Ribbins and Gunter, 2002). This would seem to be a more suitable methodological approach than a survey or developmental study, as it allows for detailed information to be gathered in a specific setting. The blending of the description of events with an analysis of them; allows the researcher to develop an understanding of the significance of events that are relevant to the case (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995) i.e. the significance of inspection to the nursery sector. In his work Stake (1995) identifies three main type of case study: *Intrinsic*, studies that are specifically undertaken to understand a particular question. *Instrumental,* which consists of an examination of a distinct case; that provides insight into an issue or theory. *Collective,* a group of cases are studied to provide a fuller picture. This last category is the approach which could be said to underpin my methodological approach, as I wish to gain a holistic view from my chosen nurseries. Earlier, Stenhouse (1985) chose to define this type of study as *evaluative;* his description further validates my choice, as his outline reinforces my desire to generate productive data:

> In *evaluative case studies* a single or collection of cases is studied in depth with the purpose of providing educational actors or decision makers (administrators, teachers, parents, pupils etc) with information that will help them judge the merit and worth of policies, programmes or institutions (in Bassey, 1999, p28).

This evaluative style particularly lends itself to examining the impact of government policy regarding inspection on specific nurseries, as it combines human perspective and contextual data with official documentary sources. Moreover, it supports the underpinning framework echoing the inclusive language used by Gunter and Ribbins (2002). Finally, Yin (1994) maintains that case studies can be holistic or embedded, with embedded studies having multiple units of analysis within the same case study. This study uses an embedded case study design because it presents opportunities for extensive analysis through the linking of stakeholder perspectives.

In spite of these evident justifications for employing the case study approach, the methodological approach has some perceived weaknesses. Flyvberg (2006) suggests there are 'misunderstandings' (p219) regarding the value of case studies, especially when examined using a positivist standpoint. He cites Dogan and Pelassy (1990); Diamond (1996) and the less recent Campbell (1966) (all in Flyvberg, 2006) as critics of this 'uncontrollable', 'pointless' (p220), model. They opine that both single and multiple case studies make it difficult to summarise and develop theories from the collected information. Bassey (1999) précis's critics concerns by citing Walker (1983) who again uses the similar phrases. He implies that a case study can be an 'uncontrolled' (p35) intervention in the lives of others, can give a distorted vision of the world and can present a snapshot of a moving, changing image. However, it should be remembered that these criticisms are generated by researchers in the quantitative domain, used to the historic scenario, when a case study would have been well suited for pilot studies but would have been considered unsuitable for a large scale research scheme. In their paradigm they are pursuing 'truth' constructed by experimental context-independent knowledge; whereas my 'truth' is constructed by practical context-dependent knowledge.

My choice of the case study methodology reinforces and enables my mixed methods approach. To prevent merely presenting a limited 'snapshot' of nursery provision, different methods are employed to capture the complex nature of the questions and increase the validity of the research. Triangulation of data further strengthens my selected approach as by using more than one method of a data collection in a single study (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995) and by comparing and contrasting my findings from four sources; focus groups, questionnaires, interviews and documentary sources, I am able to provide a fuller account of my 'phenomenon with its real life context' (Yin, 1992, p123).

4.6 Justification for selection of case study settings

In this research five different types of nursery setting have been selected in order to gain collective views of the workforce and to assess the impact of the integrated inspection framework. The careful choice of these nurseries is essential as their diversity produces the data I require to produce a broad base for this research (Bell, 2001). Therefore my site selection aims to provide a 'voice' from each distinct type of nursery provision; Stake (1995) suggests that it is useful to select cases which are representative of others. Yin (2003) asserts that case selection is one of the most difficult aspects of case study research. Using his rationale for selecting multiple-cases, I have chosen settings which 'reflect strong positive examples of the phenomenon of interest' (p13), as they each represent one of the five main types of nurseries available in England. Before describing these nurseries in detail, the issue of my own role as a researcher and site access needs to be considered.

4.7 Role of the researcher

Researchers within Education are dependent upon their own skills as communicators and are the main investigators within their projects; a key element in case study, research is the successful establishment of field relations. Because of this human element, some argue (Flick, 2002; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Schostak, 2002) it is difficult for the researcher to adopt a neutral role in the domain and in their interactions with interviewees. Flick (2002) suggests that to overcome this situation it could be desirable to assume a role or position. This may be a more appropriate stance for a teacher researching their own institution, as it may be necessary to negotiate the role of researcher rather than participant.

However, my own role is more clearly defined and distant, as rather than working within the nursery sector, I am an initial teacher educator responsible for developing Early Years practitioners. This role has provided me with access to my chosen

settings and contextual knowledge. Prior to working in Higher Education I worked in Early Years settings in the state and private sector, I have no personal connection with any of my chosen sample, other than as an annual professional visitor to the three state settings, *Whitehouse, Greenleaf* and *Cherrytree* (see *Table 1*) as a teaching practice supervisor. This role involves one visit to the setting a year, carrying out a lesson observation of a student teacher. This 'insider' knowledge is considered an asset by Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) as it provides a commonsense approach to the landscape.

Yet as Schuster (2002) cautions this personal history and knowledge of the chosen context can be problematic. Flick (2002, p59) refers to this aspect of the educational research process as a 'conflict between strangeness and familiarity'. My 'insider' position could have affected the interviewer/interviewee relationship in that the interviewees may have held assumptions about my level of professional contextual knowledge. They also may have been less likely to divulge their perspective for career or personal reasons. Inspection of a nursery involves evaluation of team members by senior management, and despite Ofsted reporting being in the public domain individuals could have been fearful of the repercussions of being 'singled out'.

Hence in order to overcome Flick's (2002) suggested conflict, I have implemented Bassey's (1999) advice regarding '*respect for persons'* (p77). From the onset of this study I have taken a distinct role as an Early Years researcher rather than fellow Early Years worker and have been transparent in my approach. Bassey (1999) and BERA (2004) suggest that it is vital to share the agreed principles that govern the conduct of the project. Therefore, I have sought permission from the 'gatekeepers' of the settings, shared arrangements regarding recording information, I have been open

regarding the confidentiality of contributors and discussed the eventual dissemination of my findings (see Appendix 2) .

4.8 Access

Access to the sample was an early factor to be considered in this research. As although I have established links with Early Years settings, I have chosen a neutral role as a researcher and wanted a representative sample not a group of familiar faces. Also I was aware that Ofsted and the inspection process is a sensitive issue for many nurseries, headteachers and managers may not want their institution to be further scrutinised regarding quality and may fear weaknesses will be revealed. Conversely, those who are successful may not want to share their tactics with other providers. Thus this seemingly easy task is much more complex, it is important for the researcher to have outlined a credible project and be clear about the demands placed on individuals or groups involved. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggest that it is important that researchers take account of the social, political and cultural nature of their chosen contexts. Despite these concerns, all the settings I approached readily agreed to participate in this research and at least three-quarters of the participants have thanked me after their interviews stating that they enjoyed the opportunity to share ideas and reflect.

4.9 Description of settings and research methods

The first area of research design approached by this study was the selection of the nursery settings. As Stake (1995) suggests gathering of data is generally carried out on somebody's 'home ground' (p57) additionally gaining access involves an invasion of work space and feelings. The 'gatekeepers' who facilitate entry have to be co-operative and made aware of the whole scope of the project, Cohen *et al* (2007) suggest that rather than strive for shared understanding at the point of entry, it is

more advisable to agree terms and required level of involvement. For these case studies I wished to draw upon the experience of established settings and have used, as Stake (1995) suggests, my professional knowledge to shape my selection. I have selected nurseries that are part of existing Early Years networks through initial teacher education and local initiatives and are accustomed to external interest. Their experience and practice underpins the interpretivist approach, the collection of data from the workers and the managers has formed a strong body of evidence for this study. This distinct sample of five types of nursery was chosen as representative of provision across the state and private sector. Purposive sampling as suggested by Cohen *et al* (2007) has been used in this research, as the cases have been chosen in order to gain access to 'knowledgeable people' (p115) and each case has been chosen on the basis of a particular characteristic, which builds up a sample to meet the specific needs of this study.

The management of the case study can be seen as incremental, Walford (2001) presents the image of the researcher's role evolving through phases, newcomer, provisional acceptance, categorical acceptance and imminent migrant. I have moved through these phases as my answers to the research questions developed. Information was given to each setting regarding the identity of the researcher and the nature of the research being undertaken. My selection was based upon five distinct types of nursery provision across the West Midlands. All the nurseries involved have been given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The descriptions below are based on Ofsted data, information provided in the prospectus and website, and field notes.

Whitehouse Nursery is a small, popular nursery school in the state sector; it is located in an inner city location within a deprived area (OFSTED Reporting, 2006). It has both full time and part time places operating from 8.45 until 2.45. The percentage of children whose first language is not English is very high and around three quarters

of them are at the early stages of speaking English. The number of children claiming free school meals is high. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, and the range of their needs includes physical disability, autism and learning difficulties (OFSTED reporting, 2009). Attainment on entry is well below the levels expected of children of this age. It has good outside provision, despite being in a 'built-up' area and the children are taken on a number of educational trips. They are also involved in enrichment activities such as the 'artist in residence' scheme. The headteacher and teaching staff are all qualified teachers and the support staff are either qualified nursery nurses or teaching assistants holding a range of level three qualifications, some staff are bi-lingual. The nursery is in a purpose built Victorian building, with a good range of resources and display work which reflect the wider community. The current Ofsted grading of this setting is 2, 'Good' and it was awarded 'Good' in its previous inspection report.

Cherrytree nursery is part of a newly formed SureStart children's centre within the state sector, it is situated in an outer city urban location within an area with some deprivation (OFSTED Reporting, 2006). It provides full-time places, operating from 8.45-2.45. The percentage of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Most children are from White British backgrounds. There was a sharp reduction in the number of children on roll from 2008 because of part of the building was converted to a children's centre, there are more state nurseries in this outer city area, thus the nursery needs to attract families in order to remain open. The outdoor area is small but well planned, and constantly used. The children participate in many city wide initiatives, such as work with the museum service and are taken on several school trips linked with developing their cultural awareness (OFSTED Reporting, 2009). The headteacher and teacher, both hold teaching qualifications and the remaining staff are both qualified nursery nurses with

appropriate level three qualifications. The nursery space within a purpose built buildings is small, yet extremely well resourced. The current and previous Ofsted grade awarded to this setting is 2, 'good'.

Greenleaf is a part-time nursery unit operating from 9.00 - 12.00 attached to a state sector primary school located in an affluent residential area in a market town (OFSTED Reporting, 2007).The school is larger than most primary schools. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic heritages. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. This is because there is a unit within school that caters for pupils with speech and language difficulties (OFSTED Reporting, 2009). The nursery class is located in a separate part of the school in the Foundation Stage unit. There are strong links between the unit and the main school, and the nursery children attend assembly. The unit is open-plan and many of the activities are shared by reception and nursery. Because of the part time nature of this provision there are limited opportunities for trips. There is a small outside area, the shared resources are good. The nursery teacher is also the school's deputy head teacher, within the foundation stage unit there are two other qualified teachers and three qualified teaching assistants. The previous overall school Ofsted report was 3, 'satisfactory'; Early Years provision was graded at 2, 'good'. Both the current school and Early Years provision grade is 2, 'good'.

Umbrella Day Nursery is a private home nursery serving the local and surrounding areas. It operates from ground floor rooms and two conservatories in adjacent houses in a Midlands market town. All children share access to a fully enclosed outdoor play area with play equipment and some safety surfacing (OFSTED

Reporting, 2010). It is registered by Ofsted on both the Early Years Register and the compulsory part of the Childcare Register. The setting is open from 8.00am until 6.00pm. The setting supports children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language (OFSTED Reporting, 2010). The nursery is popular with working families and has a long waiting list; it is well resourced and staffed. There are no qualified teachers, but some of the supervisors are studying for their foundation degrees in early childhood care and education. The owners are both qualified nursery nurses. All supervisors hold a level three qualification either by NVQ route or the diploma in childcare and education. The remaining nursery nurses and assistants either hold a level three or two qualification. The current Ofsted report awarded the provision a grade 1; 'outstanding' and the previous report deemed the setting 'good', grade 2.

The remaining nursery *Tophat* is part of a chain of nurseries across the West Midlands, with branches in Worcestershire, Shropshire, Warwickshire and the Birmingham area. It operates from a converted detached house in a Midlands new town. The setting offers provision in the main house for children aged from three months to under five-years-old. A maximum of 71 children may attend the setting at any one time. The provision is open from 07.30 to 18.00 for 51 weeks of the year. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area. Children generally come from the surrounding local area. The setting currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language. The rooms are small but well equipped and colourfully decorated. The setting employs 18 members of staff. Of these, 17 hold appropriate early years qualifications at levels two and three gained through a variety of routes. As the nursery is part of a chain, staff may be required to work in another setting. Several staff are working towards improving their

qualifications, either through the practitioner based foundation degree or by gaining Early Years professional status. There are no qualified teachers. The owner is a qualified nursery nurse who holds a degree in Early Childhood studies. It is registered by Ofsted on both the Early Years Register and the compulsory part of the Childcare Register. In the current and previous Ofsted reports it received a grade 2, 'good'.

In addition to these five focus settings. I also used a private nursery to pilot all my methods of data collection. **Tall trees** private day nursery is located in the grounds of a primary school near a midlands town centre. The nursery currently supports a number of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and children who speak English as an additional language (OFSTED Reporting, 2009). The nursery is also registered by Ofsted on the compulsory and voluntary parts of the Childcare Register. It is well resourced and the rooms are spacious, and display children's work. There are good links with the local town and services. The nursery employs 17 members of staff. Of these, the manager has an early childhood degree and is a qualified teacher, one member of staff has a degree in education, and 15 members of staff have Early Years qualifications to Level 2 or 3. The nursery received a grade 2, 'good' in its recent and previous Ofsted inspections.

These choices alongside external evidence from documentary sources, such as Ofsted annual reports and publications offer the possibility of different perspectives regarding the issue, thus generating Bassey's (1999, p51) credence through the layering of sources in support of the *'fuzzy generalisations'* yielded by educational research. The settings were selected as they represent the five main types of nursery provision for three and four year old children in England and the workforce composition reflects the array of Early Years qualifications, length of service in the sector and gender as discussed in chapter two. To ensure consistency, although the

private settings cater for birth to five years of age, practitioners and parents of three to four year olds only were involved in this study. The nurseries were also selected in a range of different geographical locations across the West Midlands; they are used by a range of parents and children, therefore yielded data representative of different cultural and socio economic groups. At the time of initial selection all the chosen Early Years provision was graded as 'good' by Ofsted. All the fieldwork was carried out in a two year period between September 2008 and September 2010.

Yin (2003) emphasises that the richness of the context based case studies means that the study cannot rely on one method of data collection. Multiple research tools; interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, field notes and documentary sources are employed to gain data from the five nursery settings. Each method has its own advantages or disadvantages, yet using a multi-method approach can develop a complementary effect. The results of one method can clarify or enhance the results from another; moreover the researcher can bring consistency to the application of methods, thus enhancing the validity of data and its analysis. This approach supports the construction of 'truths' through participant responses and generates the 'rich descriptions', and reflects the complex nature of the study's context. In order to summarise the various settings and data collection methods employed, a table (*Table 1*) is provided overleaf and a discussion of each method will follow.

Table 1: List of settings and methods used

Type of Setting	Method Used and Details of Participants
Umbrella **Private** Day Nursery	**Interviews** **2** x Owner, both Nursery Nursing Exam Board (NNEB) trained, over 20 years sector experience (joint interview) **2** x Supervisor, Diploma in Nursery Nursing (DNN),over 10 years sector experience **1** x Nursery Nurse, Diploma in Childcare and Education (DCE), 2 years sector experience **2** x Nursery Assistant, NVQ in Childcare and Education (CCE) level 2, newly qualified **Questionnaires** **36** x parental responses, return rate 90% **Documentary Sources** Current and previous Ofsted reports/Nursery prospectus **Field Notes**
Tophat **Private** Day Nursery	**Interviews** **1** x owner, NNEB and BA Hons. in Early Childhood Studies, and Early Years professional award over 15 years experience in sector **1** x Manager, NNEB, NVQ level 4 in Nursery Management, over 15 years experience in sector **1** x Deputy Manager, BA Hons. in Childhood Studies and Early Years professional award, over 5 years experience in sector **1** x Nursery Nurse, DNN, over 10 years experience **1** x Nursery Assistant, NVQ, CCE, level 2 newly qualified **1** x Apprentice, working towards level 3, CCE, on programme for a year **Questionnaires** **44** x parental responses, return rate 88% **Documentary Sources** Current and previous Ofsted reports/Nursery website **Field Notes**
Whitehouse **State** Nursery School	**Interviews** **1** x Headteacher, Cert Ed in primary education, BA. Hons in Early Childhood Studies, over 30 years experience in sector **1** x Deputy Headteacher, NNEB, B.Ed. Hons. in Nursery Education, Over 40 years experience in sector **1** x Teacher, BA Hons. in Childhood Studies, GTTP, over 5 years experience in sector **1** x Nursery Nurse, NNEB, over 15 years experience in sector **1** x Bi-lingual Teaching Assistant, NVQ level 3, CCE, 3 years experience in sector **Questionnaires** **40** x parental responses, return rate 80% **Documentary Sources** Current and previous Ofsted reports/School website **Field Notes**

Type of Setting	Method Used and Details Of Participants
Greenleaf **State Primary** School, Nursery Unit	**Interviews** **1** x Headteacher, B.Ed Hons. in Primary Education, no direct experience in sector **1** x Nursery Teacher/Deputy Head, B.Ed Hons., 20 years experience in Key Stage 2, 2 years experience in nursery **1** x Early Years Co-ordinator, B.Ed. Hons. in infant and nursery education, over 15 years experience in the sector **1** x Teaching Assistant, Level 3 teaching Assistant, over 10 years in sector **1**x Teaching Assistant, Level 3, new to nursery, previous experience in Key Stage 2 **Questionnaires** **34** x parental responses, 97% return rate **Documentary Sources** Current and previous Ofsted reports/School website **Field Notes**
Cherrytree **State** Nursery school and **Children's** **Centre**	**Interviews** **1** x Headteacher, Cert. Ed in Infant Education, over 30 years experience in sector **1** x Teacher, NNEB, B.Ed Hons. in Primary Education, over 30 years experience in sector **1** x Nursery Nurse, NNEB, over 15 years experience in sector **1** x Nursery Nurse, NVQ Level 3 (CCE), over 20 years experience in sector **Questionnaires** **26** x parental responses, 54% return rate **Documentary Sources** Current and previous Ofsted reports/Centre website **Field Notes**
Pilot Study Tall Trees **Private** Day nursery	**Interviews** **1** x Manager, DNN, over 10 years in sector **1** x Pre-School room manager, DCE, over 5 years in the sector **Focus Groups** **1** x 6 parents **1** x 4 parents **1** x 6 nursery staff, qualified teacher, levels 2 and 3 **Documentary Sources** Current and previous Ofsted reports/Nursery website **Pilot Questionnaires** **20** x parents, 60% return rate **Field Notes**

The other interviews (See *table 2* overleaf*)* were carried out in order to provide an

'outsider' stakeholder view of inspection and involved the officials responsible for the

implementation of the regulatory framework or nursery improvement. As it is part of

the Ofsted contractual agreement that inspectors views regarding the quality of settings are given solely through the reporting process, therefore I decided it would be unethical to ask inspectors to participate. However, I have obtained interviews with inspectors working for a private agency undertaking inspections for Ofsted. Also as the local authority is responsible for overseeing and developing provision, Early Years advisers were interviewed.

Table 2: List of interviewees and method used

Type of Inspector	Method Used and Details of Participants
Former Daycare Registration officers/current advisers	**2** x **interview,** participants had over 20 years prior experience of working with sector, 1 had direct experience of working in the sector for 5 years
Agency Inspector	**2** x **interview,** I participant had conducted over 200 inspections on behalf of Ofsted and was a former primary teacher. The 2nd inspector was new to the role and was a former member of a secondary school senior management team. Neither had direct experience of nursery but did have experience of the primary sector. **Documentary Sources** Ofsted Annual Report 08-10,Ofsted Reports on Early Years 2006-2010

4.10 Pilot study

The nursery *Tall Trees* acted as my pilot study for my research methods, this setting was chosen as although it is a private nursery it could be seen from its prospectus that its workforce reflected the range of qualifications and experience in both sectors. Also as it was on the premises of a local state school it provided me with good access to parents. Roberts-Holmes (2005) in his work on Early Years research projects strongly recommends undertaking a pilot study at the beginning of a study, to address the specific, the practical and the ethical issues connected to the research questions. Thus, all the methods described below have been trialled at this setting and any resulting alterations are discussed within the relevant section describing the method. The first part of the next chapter will focus upon the pilot study in more detail.

4.11 Focus groups

The first research question to be addressed focused upon canvassing views of parents and carers and examining whether their reasons for choosing their child's nursery had been influenced by Ofsted reporting. I selected this as the first area to be examined, as although it is my final research question, I anticipated it would develop my knowledge of my chosen settings. To be successful I needed access to the parents/carers of each setting, inspection reports are in the public domain yet managers of settings may not want to raise awareness of their own report. Cohen *et al* (2007) suggest that establishments may fear criticism or loss of reputation through involvement in a project which examines quality measures. Therefore, it was important to produce a method which did not invite criticism of the setting and did not upset the established arrangements for parental involvement. To explore suitable methods and gauge the parental level of understanding of inspection and quality matters; I decided to hold a focus group in my pilot nursery setting. I devised the

questions (see Appendix 7) using information derived from the literature sources connected to parental view on quality (Tanner *et al,* 2006) and parental choice of nursery (Bryson *et al,* (2006).

Wilson (1997) states that focus groups are useful as a method for eliciting respondents' perceptions, attitudes and opinions. Moreover, Vaughn (1996) proposes that focus groups are best utilised as an exploratory tool. She suggests that often a first stage in a research study focus group interviews are followed by subsequent studies designed to refine and develop the findings. My use of a focus group interview lies in the qualitative domain (Vaughn, 1996; Wilson, 1997; Cohen *et al*, 2007) as the aim was to generate descriptive data, yet its results were subsequently used in conjunction with literature sources (Penn, 2000; Bryson *et al,* 2006; Tanner *et al,* 2006;) to design a questionnaire with some quantifiable data for all the parents in each setting, this will be discussed in the following section.

The structure of the focus group, the number of participants, the setting, and the chair of the meeting are elements of its success (Cohen *et al*, 2007). Groups normally comprise of between four to twelve people with shared characteristics, selection of the sample is a major aspect of a successful focus group (Morgan, 1988). In conjunction with the nursery manager I was able to access a small but representative sample of parents, they all had children aged between three and four and had different occupations. One group of six parents and another of four from the pilot private nursery in the study attended the sessions which lasted between one hour and one hour 30 minutes. There were difficulties in finding suitable times to work with the demands of working families, but the nursery manager arranged a crèche. Vaughn (1996) avers that people are articulate enough to voice their opinions and feelings and the effect of group dynamics enhances the likelihood that participants will be more eloquent in their responses. The reverse has to be

considered, group dynamics may lead to withdrawal and conflict, thus the situation requires skilful facilitatation by the researcher. As an experienced facilitator, I have undertaken annual student evaluations in the form of focus groups for over ten years, I am aware of the importance of balance, timing and atmosphere. The focus group was held at the beginning of a school year, when children have recently started, and the parents were motivated to provide a good range of responses, as their reasons for selecting the nursery were fresh in their minds. A successful discussion linked to Ofsted reporting of the nursery sector was achieved and their opinion of how best to gain the views of parents was acquired. A questionnaire was adopted as an appropriate method to canvas the views of all the parents at each nursery and the focus group provided me with a useful set of developmental data to inform my questionnaire design. This data will be discussed at the beginning of the next chapter.

Another use for focus groups as an exploratory tool (Vaughn, 1996) was to develop my interview questions for practitioners (for questions, see Appendix 8). In conjunction with the literature sources (Alexander, 2010; Osgood, 2010; Tanner *et al,* 2006), this focus group of six nursery practitioners, representative of the range of qualifications and experience in the sector, generated a large amount of data in a short space of time (Cohen *et al*, 2007). This data can be used to complement the other forms used to develop a full picture (Vaughn, 1996). It made me aware that length of service affected perceptions of the inspection process, newly qualified members of staff only knew of the current regime, and more experienced participants focused on previous inspection systems. Therefore this knowledge made me aware that in order to fully explore the current inspection framework, the interviews had to enable the participants to focus on the recent changes to the inspection framework thus the questions were phrased accordingly (see Appendix 4, question 11). Moreover, the focus group responses generated by a query regarding previous

inspections (see Appendix 8, question 2) informed a question connected to the

desired characteristics of the inspectorate (see Appendix 4, question 15) which

generated a key theme of the findings. Hence, this focus group did yield data that

helped me develop my interview questions and was a portent for the themes that

have arisen in connection with practitioner perspectives'

4.12 Questionnaires

The literature connected to the use of questionnaires may present a negative view.

Roberts-Holmes (2005) cautions that:

> Questionnaires can only ever provide part of the answer to your overall
> research questions (p142).

He further asserts that they can provide a superficial view of the subject, lacking the

detail and richness of interview data. Arguably, both semi-structured interviews and

questionnaires may seem more suited to a cross- sectional survey approach (Cohen

et al, 2007), as they too could capture a 'snapshot' of provision. Yet, as previously

stated the context is important to this study, the literature sources (Osgood, 2006,

2010; Tanner *et al,* 2006; Hines, 2008; Miller, 2008; Garrick and Morgan, 2009) in

chapter three suggest that perspectives of staff and managers are affected by their

working conditions, state or private funding does alter the type of provision being

offered. Unquestionably, parents are also part of this contextual detailed description,

thus it is important to examine the most suitable method of collecting data from this

crucial group from all the nurseries. In this study, after reviewing literature sources

connected to questionnaire design (Munn and Drever, 1995; Robson, 2002;

Campbell *et al,* 2004; Cohen *et al,* 2007; Thomas, 2009; Mertens, 2010), and

discussion with the managers of the settings and the parents involved in the pilot

study, questionnaires were selected as an appropriate tool to collect the views of all

parents across the chosen Early Years settings. I could have continued to carry out

representative focus groups in all of my settings but I wanted to engage with a wider audience; additionally, I was mindful of the demands of parental time, as discussed by Brundrett and Rhodes (2010) in chapter three and the logistics of providing suitable after-school care in a suitable venue at a suitable time. Thus a questionnaire was devised using Likert Scale ratings based questions (see Appendix 3) which Robson (2002) suggests are a suitable method for gauging perceptions and a good way to engage respondents' interest, followed by questions requiring more reflection and longer answers.

Robson (2002) positively suggests questionnaires are often the most practical way of collecting data from a large set of people. They can be administered without the presence of a researcher and are comparatively straightforward to analyse. The number of parents/carers attached to each nursery ranges from over 30 to over 50, therefore a questionnaire would seem a suitable method, as their use can ensure consistency and standardisation in the collation of large number of responses (Denscombe, 2003). The return rate is reported in *Table 1.*

Also, Robson (2002) recommends a formal pre-test to ensure the best format is reached. The participants in the pilot study were asked to comment on the clarity of the questions, the layout and the time taken to complete. The feedback was helpful and positive, and minor alterations were made to the structure of the questions. The pilot questionnaires were distributed at the end of a school year in *TallTrees* and achieved a response rate of 60%, most attempted to answer all the questions and in some cases wrote in extra information. Campbell *et al* (2004) postulate that sometimes single questions are insufficient; multiple questions are needed to replace them. The questions were altered to take into consideration this information and the amended questionnaires (see Appendix 3) were distributed at the beginning of the academic year to all parents/carers in the sample, as this could be considered as the

optimum time for data collection for this study, as parents may have recently accessed Ofsted reporting to inform their selection of a nursery. This is a further example of purposive sampling, parents selected for the questionnaires, form a representative cross-section of people with nursery aged children within the population.

Questionnaires can appear in schools and nurseries at regular intervals; therefore timing and distribution are key success factors. The pilot questionnaire was distributed at the end of the summer and achieved a good response rate of 60%; despite it being holiday season. However, distribution across the sample has been at the beginning of the school year, Mertens (2010) suggests timing is very important, as parents may be more eager to participate at the start of an educational phase; therefore a better response rate has mostly been achieved. Both Mertens (2010) and Robson (2002) consider 70% to be a desirable response rate. The response rate achieved across the settings was 75%; individual differences will be discussed in the next chapter as they are linked to parental perceptions.

Postal questionnaires often have a poor return (Robson, 2002; Roberts-Holmes, 2005; Cohen *et al*, 2007); and not all parents had access to email, therefore distribution by the nursery headteacher or manager was decided as the best method to maximise the response rate. This did place the responsibility on the setting to distribute and collect the questionnaires; nevertheless the nursery leaders felt the parents were more likely to return them to somebody they knew rather than an unknown researcher. I could have distributed and collected the forms in my state settings as they have set start and end times but this was impossible in my private nursery settings where parents could be at the settings at different times throughout the day. I set the scene for my research by attaching a brief opening description of

the purpose of the research and an outline of the ethical considerations which guaranteed their anonymity (see Appendix 3).

Although as suggested at the beginning of this section, questionnaires can be viewed as ineffective collectors of rich data. In this study they are used as part of the mixed methods approach, and their formation was influenced by parental opinion embracing their expertise though shared discussion. Their analysis is quantifiable, seemingly at odds with the philosophy of this thesis and the aim to construct meaning from interactions rather than numbers. However, the questionnaire proved to be a valuable contribution to this study, the interpretation of the generated data is detailed and supported by the information obtained by the stakeholder interviews in which a question was asked regarding parental choice.

4.13 Interviews

> Much of what we cannot observe for ourselves has been observed by others. Two principal uses of case study are to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others. The case will not be seen the same way by everyone. Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities (Stake, 1995, p64).

Each interviewee (See *Table 1)* has been selected because they have a perspective on the research questions; there are many types of interviews ranging from highly structured formal interviews to informal conversations. Most interviews have some structure; Flick (2002) suggests that 'openess' (p5) is at the heart of successful interactions and that the semi-structured interview is one of the methodological bases of qualitative research. The researcher's approach to interviewing is entwined with their epistemological position; it is difficult to divorce my view of knowing from my way of trying to know. As my view of knowledge is constructed with the responses of my participants, the semi-structured interview is central to my research strategy.

Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) focus upon this relationship between interviewer and interviewee, and suggest that a balance emerges between both parties providing data based on emotions, experiences and feelings. Conversely, this relationship can also be problematic as the knowledge that emerges may be shaped by the relative status of the interviewer and subject, and the outlook of each and degree of friendship between the two. In this study interviews will be carried out with colleagues within the Early Years sector, where arguably I have a professional identity and role. Nonetheless as Cohen *et al* (2007), suggest it is important to remember that rapport needs to be developed, it should not be assumed. The purpose, duration and nature of the interview were shared with all the respondents.

In this study, all nursery practitioners, owners, managers, headteachers and Early Years 'experts' and inspectors were chosen to be interviewed. Denscombe (2003) believes that interviews are a particularly good tool for gaining insights from stakeholders. These respondents are responsible for monitoring quality internally and externally and semi-structured interviews were selected to enable them to express themselves at length. Although time consuming, the data generated is central to the constructs of this study, as Cohen *et al* (2007) affirm:

> …the interview is not simply concerned with collecting life: it is part of life, its human embeddedness is inescapable (p349).

The interview enables participants to discuss their interpretations of their working world; this method develops the construction of knowledge through interaction which will then inform the involved parties.

In my pilot study I conducted interviews (See *Table 1*) with the manager and a room supervisor to gain an overview of their thoughts of the inspection process and their notion of 'quality' connected to nursery education and care. At these first interviews these were two areas which formed a professional dialogue between participant and

interviewer. These interviews lasted between 90 minutes and two hours and were informal in nature in the sense that there was no attempt to work from a standardised schedule, and ask set questions in a specific order. From these unstructured conversations and the reviewed literature, I was able to construct a set of questions (see Appendix 4) to use as an outline for my more structured interviews. As suggested by Drever (2003) this approach guides 'consistency' (p18) and enables comparison.

I visited each of my chosen settings and had a discussion with the leader of the nursery about the nature of my research. I adopted Roberts-Holmes (2005, p74) view that access is not 'a once and for all event but is something that needs continual negotiation'. All leaders are important as 'gatekeepers' of their realms; they have an overview of their policies and an understanding of their staff team. Although Hammersley and Atkinson (2005) state ascribing this role to headteachers may lead to them controlling the findings, I did not find this to be the case. Without their assistance it would have been difficult to gain information regarding of experience and qualifications. To enable them to release staff I have kept them informed of my progress, and my schedule. Schostak's (2002, p25) image of the 'gatekeeper paving the way' is apt, I provided them with my intentions and they provided me with suggestions of appropriate staff to interview. I interviewed the headteachers, managers and owners prior to interviewing the staff; these interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

The next stage involved interviews with practitioners (for range see *Table 1*) these took between 60 and 75 minutes, and as above, a list of prompt questions had been compiled in advance of the interview (see Appendix 5). The exceptions to this were the two newly qualified practitioners and the apprentice, their interviews took 45 minutes. There is much debate over an 'ideal' time for an interview, Robson (2002)

rejects interviews of less than 30 minutes as they are unlikely to produce worthwhile data yet contends that over an hour is asking too much of the interviewees in terms of concentration. Whilst Wragg (2002) argues that an hour is the minimum time. These interviews were not time prescriptive but allowed the participants to explore their views of inspection, Ofsted and 'quality'. As with the headteacher interviews, a digital voice recorder was used to capture the conversation. It allowed my style of interview to be nearer to a conversation than a formal interview. Campbell *et al* (2004) aver that recording affords a 'far richer source of data for analysis' (p129) as it captures tone and inflection. There are potential pitfalls with digital recording, such as technical failure and the possibility that it might alarm the participant (Roberts-Holmes, 2005). However, the people who were identified were highly confident or not daunted by the use of this small, unobtrusive device. Although recording can be onerous and extremely time consuming in terms of transcription (Campbell *et al,* 2004), the ability to 'download' the file onto my computer alleviated some of this difficulty. I felt it was vital to do my own transcriptions (see Appendix 9) to elicit meaning and become familiar with my interviewees 'grand theories of the world' (Walford, 2001, p148). At the beginning of each interview a statement was presented which explained the project and how confidentiality and anonymity would be observed (see Appendix 2).

I also interviewed two Early Years local authority advisers (see Appendix 6), who were former inspectors under the socials services inspection regime and two inspectors who work for an agency who carries out nursery inspections on behalf of Ofsted. I had a telephone conversation prior to interview with each of these participants in order to discuss my research aims and structure. All of these interviews lasted approximately one hour.

4.14 Children's voice

Embedded in the current policy context of *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003a), indicated in the work of Dahlberg *et al* (2007) and practised by Reggio Emilia, is the recognition that children are stakeholders in their education and care. If this is part of the construct of nursery provision, as users of this service children should be visible participants in the evaluation process. However, this thesis is concerned with exploring the concept of quality and discussing the impact of inspection; rather than investigating the strengths and weaknesses of education and care provided across the sector. Yet, in order to develop care and education that meet their needs, children's voices should not be overlooked. Thus, when interviewing the headteacher and managers, I asked questions connected to their evaluation procedures to ascertain whether their children had a role in shaping their provision.

4.15 Fieldwork notes

Schostak (2002) suggests that fieldwork notes are more than a 'stream of consciousness' (p25) connected to the project. I used my notes to record contextual features relating to particular interviews. I included details that could not be captured by the tape, such as the body language of the interviewee and notes on how the setting displays its information for parents. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggest that dated field notes form another supplementary layer to the triangulation process.

4.16 Documents

Prior (2003, p201 in Cohen *et al*, 2007) when considering the usefulness of documents cites the analogy of the 'inert opera libretto', which cannot be read alone, it needs its supporting context. He suggests that documents are part of the mixed methods 'jigsaw'. In this study in order to collect data, a range of documentary sources have been consulted, internet sites alongside books, journals and

government publications have been used to gather data. Cohen *et al* (2007) suggest that many documents in the public domain may have been written by 'highly skilled professionals' (p201), and therefore may hold more worthwhile information than can be obtained by researching lesser accomplished participants. The documentary evidence collected from Ofsted was a worthy contribution to this study. It is a government organisation with trained professional experts, who produce informative reports albeit from particular perspective. Their findings have been interwoven to add another dimension to this study.

On the other hand, Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) urge caution; can the documentary source be regarded credible? Recently, this has become a more pertinent question as sources on the internet, in particular, may have been written for another audience, and may be generalised not empirically researched documents. Therefore, it is important to remember reliability and validity when consulting documentary research; and in this study these sources are a supplementary source supporting other data.

While interviews and questionnaires were regarded as the major tools for the collection of evidence, a small amount of documentary evidence collected from the nursery settings was also used to support the building of the case. The documents which were drawn upon were the nurseries' current and previous Ofsted reports and websites and prospectuses. These served to provide knowledge of 'activity that the researcher could not observe directly' (Stake 1995, p68) and that was not obtained through interviews. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) underline the different interpretation which readers bring to texts depending on their 'knowledge, assumptions, cultural difference, experience and insights' (p228).

4.17 Analysis of data

> Fundamentally what it is about is an intellectual struggle with an enormous amount of raw data in order to produce a meaningful and trustworthy conclusion which is supported by a concise account of how it was reached (Bassey, 1999, p84).

Generating data in a qualitative study is not problematic, as each person involved in this study will add their own view to the overall picture. It is capturing the whole essence of the respondents that can be a struggle; Stake (1995) evokes a 'mental dissection' (p72); seeing how the parts of the cases exist together and then apart, he imagines an almost mystical side to analysis and interpretation, creating the right ambience for deep thinking and understanding. In this instance, after completing this exercise a view of the data apart from the settings of the case study began to emerge as an important issue.

The thread running through the initial discussion regarding methods and design was the view that questions shape the approach (Plummer, 2001). With regard to case study analysis Stake (1995) parallels this outlook, the focus of the research questions, the nature of the study and the relationships within determine the analytic strategies that are followed. Cohen *et al* (2007) suggest that this is an effective way of organising data, returning to the research questions closes 'the loop' (p468) and refocuses the study. In this approach all the data from the various data streams are collated to form a coherent answer to a research question. This requires a degree of systematization, for example in this study the qualitative data produced by the interviews with the inspectors, managers and practitioners is presented supported by numerical data from the questionnaires, in turn the evidence from the initial focus groups and documentary sources is also interwoven. This approach has enabled emerging patterns, relationships across the range of data to be explored with clarity. In doing this exercise it became apparent that the data emerging would be better linked to different stakeholders generated by each setting rather than constrained to the confines of the individual original case study.

In terms of developing this systematization, it is important to consider which approach or system to adopt, Robson (2002) significantly asserts that a case study approach does not lend itself to a particular system of data analysis, however he does recommend the Miles and Huberman approach as being a particularly useful framework for conceptualizing the data gathered in case studies. Their view that qualitative analysis can deal with a complex network of contextual relationships and connections is significant to this study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Their definitions of three concurrent 'flows of activity' (p10), data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification has been applied to the generated data.

Miles and Huberman (1994) advocate looking for 'patterns and processes, commonalities and differences' (p9).I have clearly stated from the onset, grouped my findings around the original research questions. Using a grid and different coloured pens I employed what Thomas (2009) identifies as 'the basic analytical method of the interpretative researcher' known as 'constant comparison' (Thomas, 2009, p 198). The constant comparative method involved the process of going over my transcripts and any other qualitative data again and again and comparing the elements (words and sentences) with one other. Common themes then began to emerge as a direct result of the constant comparison, which in essence helped me to 'capture or summarise the contents of the data collected' (Thomas, 2009, p198). Using Miles and Huberman's (1994, p67) 'marginal remarks' approach in the initial stages of this process field notes, interview transcriptions and questionnaires were read and re-read and reflections and annotated. These remarks were sometimes related to the individual perceptions which were discussed, and might therefore identify sections of text, for example, from the headteachers', practitioners' or inspectors' transcriptions which related to a specific factor (hence a note saying holistic curriculum might be written). However, these comments were also sometimes connected to issues which were emerging, for example, the role of peer-evaluation as tool for developing care

and education, would prompt the reflection 'critical friend'. From carrying out this exercise, it became evident that the themes emerging were linked to stakeholders rather than to each case study; this led to me grouping the findings by stakeholder to represent a distinct 'voice' rather than case study by case study.

Another mechanism for ordering information from individual interviewees about specific factors was to ascribe a code to sections of the text to identify themes which emerged. I did this by hand, as although there are software programmes such as 'Nvivo' or 'Code-a-Text' available, I felt that use of these would negate my approach, my sense of constructing 'truths' through interaction. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe how coding can support analysis of field notes by helping to 'differentiate and combine the data' which has been retrieved and the reflections which have been made about the information (p 56). For example, in bringing order to the interview transcription of the Early Years professional at *Tophat*, codes such as 'role', 'reflection', 'professional dialogue' and relationships' were identified. These codes were then grouped under the relevant research question, again focusing on the stakeholders, therefore as Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that this approach to coding is 'predetermined' as the entire study is derived from the questions.

In addition, I have adopted Miles and Huberman's (1994) outlook regarding data display and their suggestion that, matrices, graphs and charts promote efficient data analysis and avoid display of 'terribly cumbersome' (p11) large amounts of text, has been employed. For example, in order to provide an overview for my second research questions connected with exploring the notion of 'quality' from a range of participants, I have designed a diagram to display diverse 'quality' factors interrelating within different perspectives. I have also provided a graphical overview of the data collected from the Likert scale questions on the parental questionnaire. In analysing the questionnaire data, Munn and Drever (1995) advice was to put it into a

more manageable form. To aid this organisational process, I used an Excel

spreadsheet as recommended by Campbell *et al* (2004) and was able to logically

summarise the responses, for a scaled question each respondent in each setting was

assigned a number ('1' = 6= most preferred choice) or'6'=1=least preferred choice).

In all cases percentages from the Likert scales and ratings scales were rounded up.

The questionnaires were analysed to provide three perspectives, parents from

individual settings, parents from all settings and a comparison of parents from the

state and private settings. Information had been obtained regarding occupation and

this was analysed using the standard occupational classification (NoS, 2010).

Following suggested processes to build 'a logical chain of evidence' (Miles and

Huberman, 1994, p246); has produced my desired 'rich descriptions' and provided a

holistic perspective of the nursery sector. Continuing to use the research questions

as a focus after the fieldwork had been completed, written up, and sifted through on a

regular basis, there emerged a strategy for drawing together the evidence from the

whole range of data gathering methods, and maximising the opportunity of

constructing knowledge with my respondents. This constant documentation of

evidence from all the sources enriched by contextual detail recorded in the field notes

and professional dialogue is akin to Dahlberg *et al's* (2007, p107) 'meaning making'

approach; I have made sense of my data by drawing on 'concrete human

experiences' (p107) and my findings present reflective and democratic practice rather

than a standardised notion of 'quality'. Returning to the opening discussion is a fitting

end Plummer's (2001, p22) statement: 'Questions should shape methods and not the

other way round' has remained a constant thought throughout this process.

4.18 Trustworthiness

Whilst the data collection techniques and research tools chosen support the gathering of 'rich descriptions' and multi-perspective accounts, consideration has to be given to whether the data generated is reliable and valid. Reliability is more often linked to the framework of the positivist paradigm where quantitative data can be replicated or checked. Yet Flick (2002) asserts that in the qualitative domain, this understanding of reliability should be rejected and reformulated to consider the checking of the dependability of the data collection. Therefore, it is important in case study research to remember that although researching contexts and people is neither static nor repeatable; this study can use its chosen methods consistently and record their progress with accuracy. Consequently this study uses the advice of Bassey (1999) and Yin (2003) although non-standardisation of research tools prevents formal reliability; the errors and biases are possibly reduced by implementing the following discussed measures.

The first measure is to ensure objectivity, knowledge of the field; and of the particular sites in which the research took place was beneficial in many ways, but it also called for careful attention on my part not to make assumptions about the evidence which was being gathered. While it was impossible to be entirely objective when carrying out qualitative research of this nature where the researcher, and all that they bring, is an acknowledged part of the process, every attempt was made to ensure that through careful listening, questioning and analysis, contradictions which arose were acknowledged and reflected upon. An openness to new knowledge which emerged during the process was an essential element of this. Thus every effort was made to reduce the effect of previous knowledge on judgements which were made as a result of the study. In many ways this was not difficult to achieve since as the inspection process had changed considerably since I have been a practitioner, and the evaluation processes within the nurseries were completely new to me. This enabled me to more aware of the wealth of experience generated by respondents. I also

piloted my questionnaire and interview questions in order to increase the reliability of my data and to ensure right blend of questions, again listening and responding to advice offered by the participants.

Indeed Stake (1995) argued that although testing generates data that is demonstrably valid and reliable, case studies can go beyond the simple repetition of retesting to make a deliberate effort to validate the data through triangulation and corroboration. This study attempts to achieve validity by using a number of strategies to present as Stake (1995) suggests '… a substantial body of uncontestable description' (p110). Since evidence is gathered from a range of methods this assists the reduction of bias; the triangulation of the mixed-methods approach can be used to complement and develop the same phenomena. For example the sector perspective on quality factors have been contrasted with the beliefs given by the documentary sources and interviews from the inspectorate. Flick (2002) suggests that this consistent gathering of viewpoints by interview or focus group carried out by one researcher, increases the comparability of data and reliability. In addition the research management of the questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and documentary evidence provides an audit trail which promotes confidence in the study's findings (Flick, 2002; Robson, 2002; Yin, 2003; Cohen *et al*, 2007). This chapter transparently provides information on the pilot study and the development and subsequent modification of the interview questions; notes on the process of data collection tools and records of data analysis and possible reductions.

As stated at the beginning of this section, reliability is a more difficult concept to address in relation to qualitative research in general, and this study in particular with its varied settings and participants. While quantitative research assumes the possibility of replication if the same methods are repeated, this is not the case with qualitative research. As Cohen *et al* (2007) highlight, the strength of the latter lies in

the uniqueness of the situation being studied, but this in turn makes attempts at ensuring reliability very difficult. They suggest that in qualitative research judging reliability might more appropriately be confined to considering the degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness of coverage, rather than striving for uniformity. Bassey (1999) discusses the need to consider 'trustworthiness' as a concept in relation to case study rather than reliability and validity which are more appropriate to survey and experimental research. His model for building in respect for truth includes consideration of a range of issues which apply to the collection of data, centred on the following questions:

1. Has there been prolonged engagement with data sources?
2. Has there been persistent observation of emerging issues?
3. Have raw data been adequately checked with their sources?

(Bassey, 1999, numbers as in original, p75)

In pursuing my research I kept these questions in mind to ensure that sufficient data was collected through 'prolonged engagement'; that I used my field notes and coding within the data to have an eye for 'emerging issues' and that my mechanism for checking was through sharing results of the parental questionnaires with the nurseries. This aspect of study was intended as an opportunity for the nurseries to examine factors that influence parental choice and consider further strategies of engaging parents in the evaluation process of the setting. Additionally transcripts were made available to all interviewees and all agreed that these were representative of their responses This, it is hoped, goes some way to taking into consideration issues of 'trustworthiness' within the context of carrying out a case study, and ensuring that the whole process has been carried out 'with reasonable care' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p 278).

4.19 Limitations of the research design

Although it is my hope that this research will be of value and inform key stakeholders within the nursery sector and the inspectorate, it is important to consider its limitations. Bassey (1999) highlights, that lack of supporting evidence does not help the *'fuzzy generalizations'* (p12) of using the case study approach. I have carefully chosen five distinct types of nursery provision across the West Midlands, yet the findings from these settings may not be generalisible, but will be of value to others in order to reflect upon their work.

Also in order to address my research questions I have selected a mixed method approach, using the tools of interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussions and documentary evidence. In my selection I may have overlooked another tool, for example a structured diary approach combined with observations of staff preparations for the inspection may have yielded detailed data. However, the methods chosen offer an opportunity to complement and corroborate findings, and as I am the sole researcher, can ensure consistency lending support to data analysis.

Also, finally it is important to consider that although nursery practitioners and managers have a good insight into the impact of the '*Every Child Matters'* (DfES, 2003a) combined inspection framework. This perceived strength could also be viewed as a weakness, as the workforce perceptions of Ofsted can be largely negative connected to issues relating to pressure and paperwork. Moreover, the inspection framework itself has recently changed and although all the respondents were questioned after its implementation they may have been influenced to some extent by previous regulatory systems.

4.20 Ethical considerations

> Taking others into account has both political and ethical implications. To open a door into the life of another and portray them for all to see will have many consequences…
> Schostak (2002, p191).

The act of establishing an epistemological stance and the discussion of methodology should include an awareness of ethical concerns. These considerations continue the positioning of the researcher regarding the nature and potential uses of knowledge. Indeed within the Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004) is confirmation that the British Educational Research Association (BERA) has recognised the multi-disciplinary nature of educational research and the resulting variety of paradigms and methodologies that accompany its diversity. It applauds the critical analysis that accompanies these approaches; however, it does require that methodologies are made transparent to ensure that methods used are fit for the purpose of research.

The ethical implications of research need to be considered at the beginning of the research design, and throughout each phase of the project itself. In a thesis which focuses upon the implementation of mandatory policy and its impact upon provision across the sector, its findings may encroach or invade upon the lives and views of those who are participants. The researcher has a responsibility to handle all the generated data with sensitivity and at all times be mindful of confidentiality. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) maintain that to preserve the essential ingredient of personal experiences; safeguarding the rights and promoting confidence of those involved is crucial. To protect the participants in this study, pseudonyms have been used for all the nurseries involved in this project and in the case of individual responses anonymity has been observed. The paper data collected such as field notes were kept in a secure filing cabinet and any transcripts have been stored on a password secure computer system. In order to ensure these ethical and confidentiality issues are considered fully, Cohen *et al* (2007) suggest that ethical codes of the

professional associations and bodies as well as the personal ethics of the researcher are all important regulatory mechanisms. The majority of institutions have their own research committees and this research design has been considered using the University of Birmingham's recommended ethical guidelines (2008), in addition has referred to the Statement of Ethical practice for the British Sociological Association (2002), the National Children's Bureau's guidance (2003) and the previously mentioned British Educational Research revised guidelines (2004).

Voluntarily agreeing to participate in a research project is a key principle of all professional codes and is known as 'informed consent' (National Children's Bureau, 2003), and is based on complete disclosure and understanding of all relevant information. Gaining informed consent to carry out research is integral to building trust in the relationship between you and the research participants (Flick, 2002; Roberts-Holmes, 2004).This requires ensuring that the information in the study, its purpose, how the data will be reported and disseminated is shared and clarified with each respondent. In this study information regarding the project and its dissemination is provided in print to the respondents, moreover obtaining written consent from interviewees is employed as a further measure to ensure ethical issues are addressed. It is also important to ensure that participants are aware that their involvement in the study is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any stage or choose not to answer certain questions. Although this can be explained to all participants, Robson (2002) warns there may be overt or covert penalties for non-participation, for example an employee may be viewed negatively as a promotion prospect by their manager, an ethical consequence which cannot be accounted for by professional codes of practice.

It may seem that many of the ethical issues connected with informed consent, such as the developmental level of children, which are raised by the professional bodies,

are less of an issue with a study dealing with parents and professionals. However, as Schostak (2002) suggests, there are political as well as ethical implications, research has an effect on people's lives through their being involved in the project or their context may be affected by the research findings. Robson (2002) supports this view by highlighting that ethical dilemmas are present in any research involving people, as we cannot as researchers in a scientific context would, control the situation. Therefore as a researcher, although all mechanisms may have been put in place to ensure responsible ethical practice, it may not be possible to fully protect participants from the unseen consequences of portrayal. As Schostak (2002, p91) asserts:

> 'The intertextual plays that emerge as messages are snatched from one set of circumstances and placed into others are beyond prediction'.

4.21 Summary

The choice of using case study to look across the nursery sector was influenced by my preference for an interpretivist approach. This qualitative approach reflected my initial belief in the power of constructing knowledge with respondents as a mechanism for illumination. The methods which I employed allowed me to both build on previous skills, and further refine them, thus enabling personal and professional development in the conduct of the study, as well as the opportunity to increase my knowledge and understanding of the questions in focus. The interviews, focus groups and questionnaires involved my visiting the nurseries on numerous occasions in order to allow time for staff to fit their interviews around their full working schedules. At all times the children's well being was a shared central concern, interviews took place at times that did not disturb crucial staff ratios. All involved in the settings were consistently welcoming during the many times when I visited the nurseries.

Having considered the issues which were outlined in this chapter, that is, the debate about educational research; a consideration of epistemological and methodological

issues; my proposed methods for data collection and allied ethical issues, and the limitations of the research, I want to move on in the next chapter to look at the findings of each of the research questions in turn.

Chapter Five

The Findings

>…the dimensions of partial failure and the limits of one's own knowledge should be taken into account as elements of the findings which are worthy of presentation,
>Flick (2002, p241).

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the five nurseries. As stated from the onset of this study the research questions will provide the central framework and structure to this section. Flick (2002) suggests that making your work clear and coherent involves a consideration of audience. To return to Ribbins and Gunter's (2002) work on knowledge domains, they suggest that a humanistic approach enables communication not just to the research community, but to policymakers and practitioners. Thus my aim in organising my findings is to make them logical and accessible to the above parties. Therefore the interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and documentary sources have broken down into themes connected to the research questions and are supported by tables and quotations from the participants. I have used my chosen nursery sites to draw out responses to form a collective voice from each group across the sector and the overarching themes have been generated from the interviews with the participants and the parental questionnaire responses from this sample of nurseries. An additional insight into these themes is provided by the documentary sources and interviews with Early Years inspectors and advisers.

Each section focuses on the explanations and meanings expressed by individuals to generate shared understanding in relation to research question. Although the research resonates with the complexity and diversity of the settings, the aim is to provide a range of perspectives rather than presenting the data case study by case

study. The data gathered is full of dynamic accounts of practice and beliefs and I wanted to present it in a manner allowing these explanations to be fully portrayed and explored. Consequently, although the methodological approach for data *collection* was a multi-level embedded case study and indeed these settings have provided the variety of responses necessary to gather a perspective from a contextual broad base; the data *analysis* generated from these settings chosen for their different forms of nursery provision, lent itself to an approach which constructed meaning from the participants. Thus the findings from the interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and documentary sources have been grouped around the central stakeholders involved in the study providing a 'voice' for each set of respondents. The first is the **leaders;** this group includes owners, nursery supervisors and headteachers, the second is the **practitioners** this group is formed of nursery nurses, teachers, teaching and nursery assistants, the third consists of **parents** which includes parents and those who are designated as the central carers of children and the final group composed of **inspectors** which includes the agency inspectors and the local authority Early Years advisers. These 'voices' include examples from each setting gathered using the methods outlined in *tables 1* and *2* in chapter four. In the subsequent data analysis chapter comparisons will be drawn.

This chapter of findings focuses on the four research questions:

- Does the inspection framework support the development of care and education across the nursery sector?

- Do inspectors/headteachers/managers share the same perceptions of quality factors within nursery education as practitioners?

- Do headteachers/managers/practitioners consider Ofsted to be a 'change agent'?

- Is parental choice influenced by Ofsted reporting?

The findings linked to each research question are briefly summarised at the end of each section and the overall description of data concludes with an overview of all the findings in chapter six. This summary provides identification of the emerging issues which will be discussed and analysed in chapter six. Before focusing on the main research questions the next section briefly discusses some pertinent findings from the pilot study which affected the subsequent data collected from the parents involved in this research.

5.2 Pilot study

As discussed in the previous chapter to ensure reliability and validity, moreover to increase researcher confidence and competence, questions and methods were trialled at *Tall Trees* private nursery. In the focus groups questioning parents about their reasons for choosing the nursery and their understanding of Ofsted reporting (see Appendix 7), I began by exploring their notions of quality and key Early Years issues such as curriculum approach and practitioner knowledge of child development. Their responses reinforced the parental views expressed in the study by Tanner *et al* (2006), parents do not expect to contribute to significant discussions about nursery provision as they do not regard themselves as having 'specialist knowledge' (p14). They deferred to the experts and did not consider themselves sufficiently 'informed' (Athey, 2007) and felt they did not have a professional understanding of their child's day at nursery. I recorded in my field notes that there was a sense of embarrassment at their lack of understanding and the group's body language demonstrated unease. The abridged quotation below epitomises the feeling of both focus groups.

> Although I want Yasmin to be happy and enjoy her day, I do not know much about what nurseries should do. I leave that to the staff…I just want her to be happy, I feel a bit silly as I am saying this (Parent *Tall Trees*).

Therefore the bulk of responses representing parental views are derived from the

questionnaire data. The total summary of the parental questionnaires is shown as a beginning to the next chapter. However, views from the parent and practitioner focus group are used in this study when they provide an additional insight.

5.3 Presentation of the Findings

This chapter is organised around the research questions and the themes generated by **all** the stakeholders responses using the 'constant comparison' (Thomas, 2009, p198) analysis. Each theme is clearly labelled at the beginning of each section and there are subheadings within each themed section, for example, Theme one: 'assessing the need for nursery inspection' has 'who should inspect nursery provision' as a subheading. A summary of the findings is presented at the end of each research question.

N.B. In discussing the findings the following terms have been used to describe proportions of responses:
Overwhelming Majority = around 85%
Most = around 70%
Some = around 50%
Few= around 25%

5.3.1 Research Question One: Does the Inspection Framework Support the Development of Care and Education across the Nursery Sector?
5.3.1.1 Theme one: assessing the need for nursery inspection

The findings connected to this theme explore the acceptance of the inspection process by all the stakeholders and discuss the suitability of Ofsted as the vehicle for Early Years inspection. When asked whether Ofsted should inspect all nurseries in

the state sector and private sector, the overwhelming majority of respondents in all

groups acknowledged the necessity for an external body to monitor provision.

Parents

Only one participant in the parental questionnaires did not agree with this initial

statement. The two pie charts below display these parental responses.

Figure 2
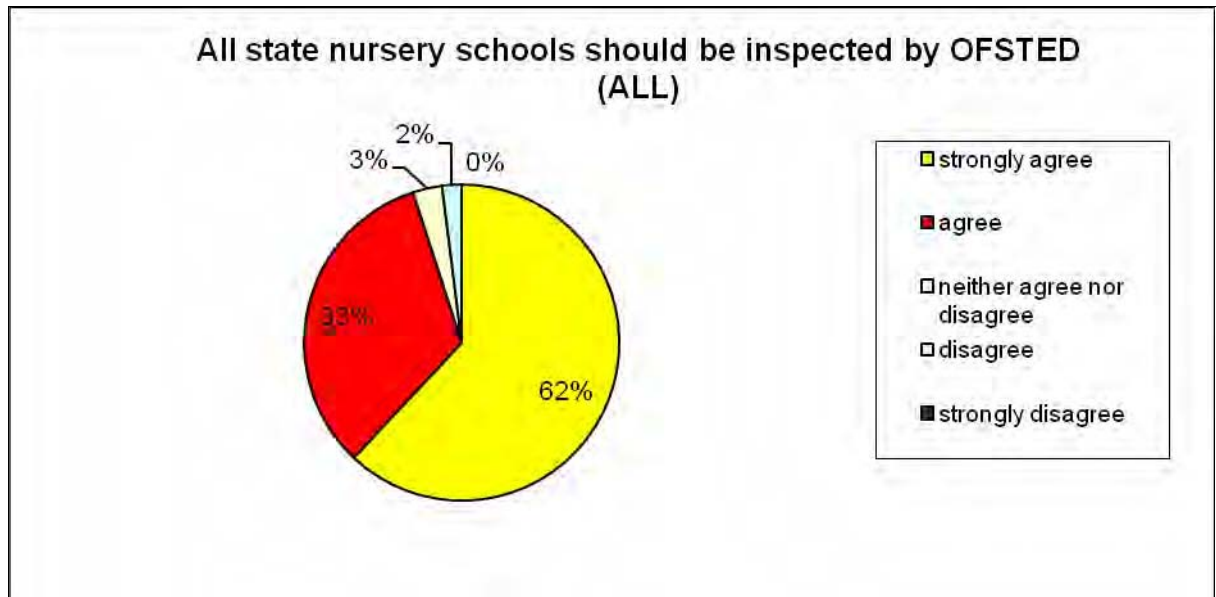
Figure 3
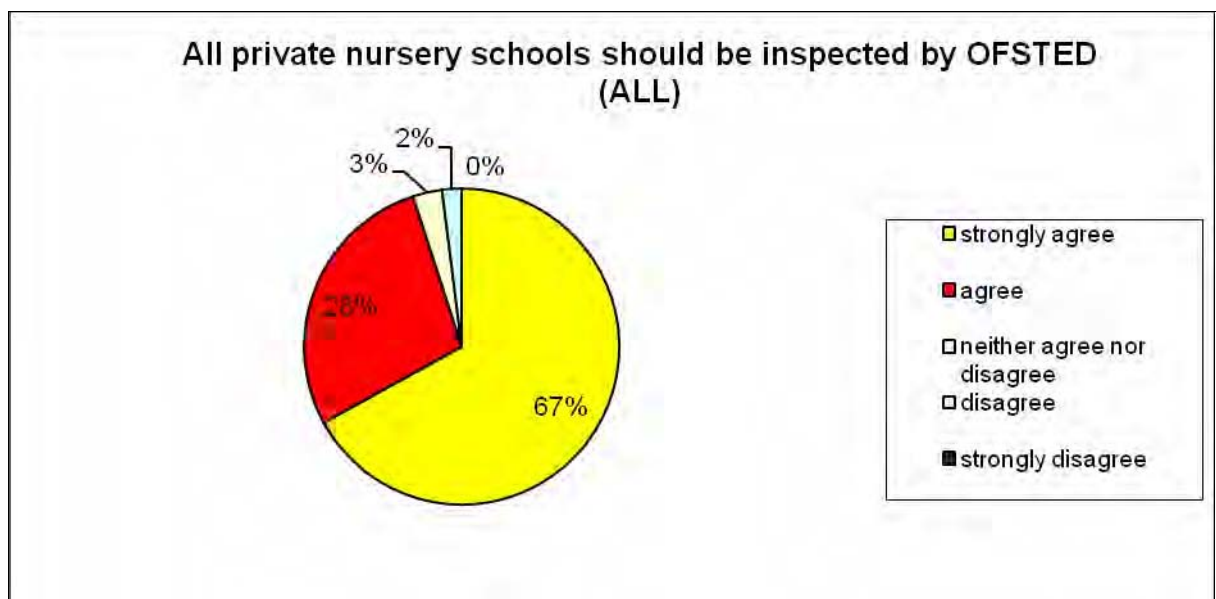
All Stakeholders

All the respondents in relation to inspection referred to accountability, consistency across the framework, and the maintenance of standards.

Leaders and Inspectors

In this first area most of the leaders and all of the inspectors spoke of the professional judgement involved and the necessity for a universal measurement. This is clearly illustrated in the response by one of the inspectors:

> "There needs to be a measure for quality that uses professional objective judgement. Inspection ensures consistency across the 'board' and value for money. It informs parents of choice, but more importantly the safety of the child is a paramount concern in the process"
> (experienced inspector).

The overwhelming majority of this group spoke of the need for inspection because of the different forms of nursery provision:

> "It is important to have guidance on what constitutes good quality across the sector" (headteacher at *Whitehouse*).

Practitioners

As can be seen from the parental data in figures 2 and 3 there was a slight difference in the recognised need for inspection in the private sector nurseries. This was reflected in some of the responses from the private nursery practitioners based at *Umbrella* and *Tophat*, who suggested that the sector deserved different consideration, there should be "a bit of leeway" (newly qualified, nursery assistant, *Tophat*) as they considered their focus was predominately on care rather than education and was staffed by nursery nurses rather than teachers. But this view from a more experienced colleague provides a fuller explanation, possibly capturing the reason for the difference in parental data.

> "We are out of the system; we don't have headteacher direction or local government control. We have to work out for ourselves what is best for the children. We are not the same as a nursery based in a school they need to know that. It can be more important for us to be checked"
> (nursery nurse 2 years experience, *Tophat*).

However, the overwhelming majority of practitioners noted that common guidelines were necessary in a diverse sector, and indeed most indicated that an integrated inspection approach signalled to others that nurseries were being treated in the same way as schools.

> "It means that we are in the same league as schools, and treated as professionals not just as carers but educators. It is valuable for us, the children and the parents"
> (Early Years professional, *Tophat*).

Yet, despite this almost universal approval for inspection, there arose from these early replies a clear note of enquiry regarding who should carry out inspections. The next section examines this topic.

Who should inspect nursery provision?

"Should it be Ofsted..."?
(Early Years Adviser, direct sector experience)

The above query concerning Ofsted captures a thread running through all the interviews and focus groups, respondents clearly endorsed the need for inspection, yet speculated whether Ofsted was the correct body that should be responsible for its implementation. Both the practitioners and leaders, including the primary headteacher,overwhelmingly indicated that specialist knowledge was required to undertake a nursery inspection.The practioners were particularly vehement in expressing their requirements:

> "How dare somebody from an infant/junior background tell us what to do. I know I am right, nursery nurses, nursery trained teachers need to become inspectors. They need to understand child development; they need to be a nursery expert" (teacher at *Whitehouse*).

Both the inspectors interviewed acknowledged that the current two days training for the sector "may not equip" inspectors with the necessary knowledge and expertise. The more experienced inspector related anecdotal evidence supporting the practitioners comments regarding child development :

> "Contractors are obliged to match skills but there is no official requirement, it would be unlikely that a secondary subject specialist would be inspecting a nursery, however you do hear stories of inspectors asking to see children's writing. It is a fitness for purpose issue, you should be looking at the children and recognising all their abilities".

Despite his reassurances, the above quotation does express contain some of the concerns raised in connection with this theme and the following section provides illustrations from the distinct perspective of each stakeholder.

Parents

There are no questionnaire findings linked to this area and it did not arise during the focus group discussions.

Leaders

The two headteachers in *Greenleaf* and *Whitehouse* state settings did not question the suitability of Ofsted; however all the other leaders raised this as an issue. All the owners of the private nurseries agreed with the need to regulate their provision, yet their own experience of the process had raised questions about the composition of the inspection team and their understanding of the nature of Early Years care and education.

> "Inspection is necessary to raise standards in the sector, but whether Ofsted is the vehicle..."
> (owner nursery chain).

Her view is echoed by one of the owners of *Umbrella,* who reflected that:

> "Ofsted don't recognise that care is at the centre of what we do, yes, learning is
>
> part of that, but we want the care side to be recognised as important".

Furthermore, the headteacher at *Cherrytree* highlights a concern which will be developed in this section:

> "I do think all settings should be inspected, equally across the board, but I don't necessarily think it should be Ofsted. We've been inspected by non-Early Years specialist and there has been no understanding. Primary training is not the same, we need a specialist".

The above captures a shared unease; the remaining leaders alluded to different perceptions affecting the grades awarded by the inspectorate. They suggested that lack of knowledge of child development may lead to a misreporting of events. The manager at *Tophat* provided this example:

> "They see us as we are, it is instant, the children could be fantastic or they could 'act up' to a stranger'. The inspector needs to understand age and stage of this phase. A child that is not engaged may just be shy that day, Ofsted do not communicate, there is no professional dialogue, they see what they see".

Practitioners

All the experienced practitioners in all settings expressed similar anxieties connected with understanding of the nature of provision; the less experienced workers did not raise these fears. The former group indicated a need for expert advice which they believed gave the process credence:

> "I don't believe we should be inspected by Ofsted at all, we need an expert from the local authority, who understands the children and the context. Unless you are nursery trained how can you know in a two minute snapshot what is best for our children" (deputy headteacher, *Whitehouse*).

This was reinforced by the deputy manager at *Tophat:*

> "I feel we should be inspected by the sector not Ofsted, it is not a reflective process. It is more 'them and us'..."

Additionally, there was a feeling that Early Years philosophical approaches are complex, that the nuances of practice would be misinterpreted by an outsider. Indeed, the nursery nurse at *Cherrytree* recounted that during one inspection, an inspector revealed she was a secondary physics specialist and confessed she did not know what was going on.

Inspectors

Although the inspectors themselves did not comment on their indirect employer, the advisers both thought Ofsted was a "good body as any" and kept them informed of "the big headlines". They thought the shift from regional to national offered the sector a national database and gave parents a mechanism to compare settings. They did signal a concern that school inspectors were used in the sector, and in addition both outlined a discrepancy in the system. If the nursery is based in a school, like *Greenleaf,* then the provision's awarded grade will be the same as the schools, this may not reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the nursery's practice.

5.3.1.2 Theme two: the distinct nature of nursery provision and inspection

This theme is connected with the respondents' beliefs that the nursery sector needs a different approach to inspection. The responses were connected to the philosophy of Early Years education and the 'mechanics' of inspection, the notice period, the duration of the visit and the frequency of inspection.

Nurseries are different

An overwhelming number of participants across the *leader, practitioner and inspector* groups believed that as nurseries are different to schools due to the care environment and the nature of young children's learning. Therefore, they should have a different inspection framework and approach, which due to recent changes is now the case. The owner of the nursery chain fully represents these views, her apprentice made the point more succinctly:

> "Schools and nurseries are two different environments, 3 to 5 is very different to 5 plus. Government policy now recognises this but want education to be at the centre of inspection. But we learn through play, our children shouldn't be ordered to read or write. It is naturally different, we don't fit into a prescribed system, practice is more fluid. It is not one class with one teacher"

> **"Schools are just different"**
>   (apprentice, *Tophat*)

However, the parental responses from both the questionnaire (see figure 4 below) and the focus group revealed a different feeling, most parents did view nurseries as needing the same "treatment" as schools.

Nursery education should be inspected in the same manner as schools (ALL)

- strongly agree: 41%
- agree: 33%
- neither agree nor disagree: 17%
- disagree: 9%
- strongly disagree: 0%
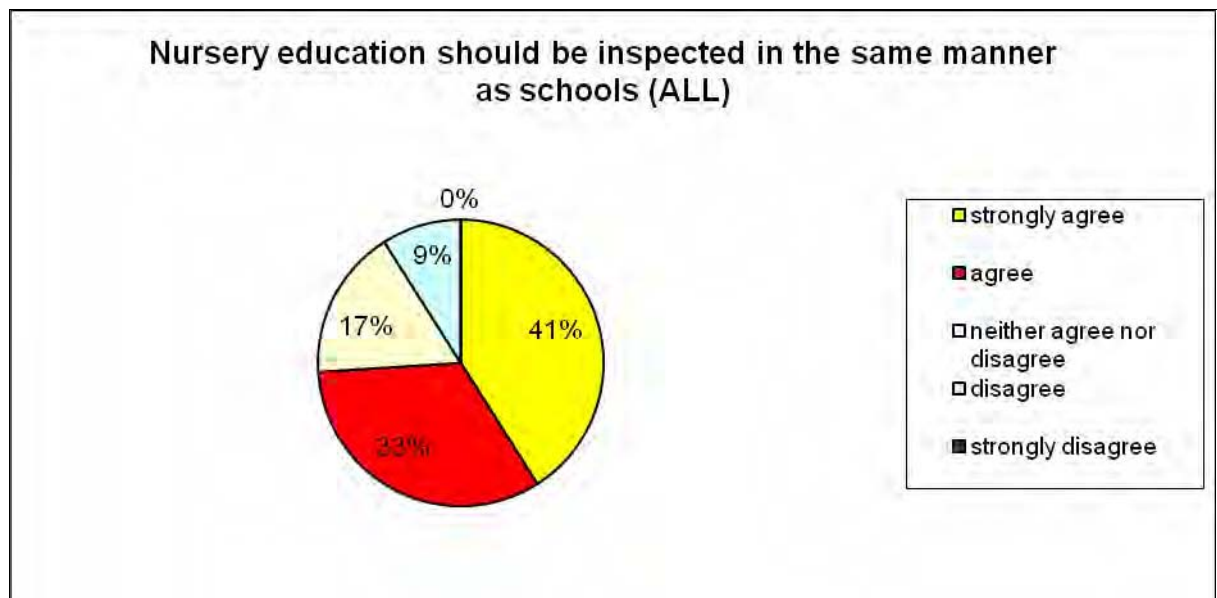
Figure 4

Parents in both focus groups in the pilot study intimated they would like the nursery sector to be treated in the same manner as schools, yet they did cite reasons connected to health and safety rather than curriculum rigour. They also felt that "less than one day every five years" (parent at *Talltrees)* did not offer parents a reassurance that standards were being met. Although the concern regarding the frequency of inspection is based on inaccurate information, timing and notice period were often mentioned in responses from the other participants and provide the focus for the next section of this theme.

Inconsistencies in the inspection process

Variation in approach and notice period were raised by the overwhelming majority of
nursery based stakeholders whilst exploring whether there was a need for inspection.
The current official guidelines outlined by Ofsted in 2009 state that provision will be
inspected once every three years. According to this documentary source (OFSTED,
2009a) there is no notice period for non state maintained settings such as *Tophat*
and *Umbrella,*and the state providers receive a two day notice period. This situation
was broached by the overwhelming majority of participants from the *leader,*
practitioner and *inspector groups.*

Leaders

All the leaders felt that three to four years could be too long in between inspections,
however, the reasons given for this differed greatly. The managers in the private
settings *Umbrella, Tophat* and in the pilot study nursery *Talltrees,* reflected back on
the previous annual daycare regulation system. They all valued the yearly contact
with an external body and remarked on the professional relationship that had
developed:

> "Three to four years is too long, realistically we were happy with the previous
> annual inspection, I knew the registration officer and could talk to her about our
> intentions " (owner nursery chain).

The owners of *Umbrella developed* this view in conjunction with a concern that too long a gap between inspections could lead to variation in practice, as staff turnover, recruitment and training routes may change annually.The headteachers in the state sector felt that the current remit was " merely adequate", and suggested that the lengthy gap could place more pressure on staff teams rather than less. They also suggested that a 'mini' inspection could be held annually or every 18 months to follow up recommendations made in the Ofsted report, a "health check". The headteacher at *Cherrytree* supported the views of the private sector, she stated:

> "Inspection should be carried out once every two years, it should be the same team or same lead for at least two inspections. You could then have a conversation with them about their recommendations. It wouldn't matter if you had a bad report, as you would have a relationship with them, it may make you want to improve more, to show them".

All the leaders in the private sector nurseries drew my attention to the differences in the notice period prior to inspection and the duration of the inspection. "Schools still get up to 3 days notice, we get none!" (owner of nursery chain). They asserted that having a notice period led to a distorted impression of the provision, as people "slept in the school, painting and putting up displays" (manager at *Talltrees).*The phrase *What you see is what you get,* was used by all of the owners and managers, they linked this with the grading process, if the inspectorate did not receive a true 'picture' of provision' the awarded grade could be unjust " a good is not always good"(manager at *Tophat).* Only one of the leaders in the state sector raised the issue of notice period saying:

> "I would prefer no notice, 'this is how we are', as I feel this would be a more affirming process an acknowledgement of this is how a typical day seems to an outsider" (headteacher, *Cherrytree)* .

The short duration of inspection was mentioned by all the leaders, in particular the headteacher at *Greenleaf* state school was concerned that the nursery could be overlooked in a whole school inspection. However, he did not want the Early Years provision to be inspected separately as it is "a key part of the school" and needs to

be developed with the rest of the provision. All of the respondents mentioned that the visit from the inspectorate was too brief to be thorough, in some instances the inspection lasted less then a day and they felt this could lead to the exercise being a confirmation of the self-evaluation process. This, and the frequecy of inspection will be discussed further in relation to research question three.

Practitioners

The opinions articulated by the nursery workers were more forthright, the practitioners in the private sector clearly communicated a sense of unfairness regarding the differences in notice period and all suggested that inspection needed to be undertaken on a more frequent basis. Even the apprentice nursery nurse who had generally provided very brief answers and was very nervous throughout the interview, (clasping and unclasping hands, not maintaining eye contact ,noted in field notes) articulated a need for regular checking:

> "I have been here for three years and we have not had Ofsted, and if they came in tomorrow I wouldn't know what to say to them I would be too scared. I think if they came in more regularly, like every year, it would be better for us and the children, as we would get used to it…they are only there for one day anyway you could be putting on a show", (apprentice, *Tophat* nursery)

The Early Years professional working for the same nursery chain shared her colleague's anxieties and reinforced the observations made by the leaders:

> "I have only been through one inspection, I was spoken to for less than half an hour and didn't feel valued. Inspection should happen more regularly, it should be totally 'out of the blue' there should be no notice. It should happen more frequently than every three years, things can change very quickly, policies and staff have changed, Ofsted do not know how we are operating. I know that in other nurseries staff are borrowed to make up ratios for that day. Yet are awarded 'good'…"

The overwhelming majority of practitioners in the private sector settings when talking about the inspection cycle conveyed a sense of apprehension, they remarked that a three year gap was too long to be sure of children's welfare and noted that the 'instant' nature of inspection could present a misleading picture:

> "It all depends they could come in on a bad day and then we could get a bad report, sometimes you just have a bad day. A totally different day offers a totally different result due to different staff, different children. Like the ECERS inspection, the week before our Ofsted, we came out a weak, the very next week we got 'outstanding' from Ofsted, (nursery nurse, *Umbrella*).

There was a feeling of resentment regarding the lack of notice period and all of the respondents in the private sector cited this as a significant difference between them and their state sector colleagues. Practioners based at *Greenleaf, Whitehouse* and *Cherrytree,* did not mention the notice period as a contentious issue, but did all share the same concerns relating to duration of inspection and the recommended cycle, as their private sector colleagues, they used terms such as "snapshot", "one off", and referring to the days before inspection "it's like cleaning up your house before the in-laws arrive". All pointed out that the children were only in a state nursery setting for one year, therefore it was important to "get that year right for the children" (teaching assistant new to role, *Greenleaf*). However, a few focused on their own performance rather than connected to the wellbeing of children

"I put a lot of effort into my activity but Ofsted just sat in the office, and I thought that's it for another three years" (Teacher, *Cherrytree nursery*).

Parents

As stated in the previous section the parents from the focus groups discussions did desire longer and more frequent inspection, further probing into this issue revealed a lack of knowledge about the processes and arrangements connected to the Ofsted framework.

Inspectors

Both the inspectors referred to the current Ofsted remit when discussing the duration and frequency of nursery inspection. They stated that 'outstanding' and 'good' settings would be inspected less frequently than 'satisfactory'. Despite their

adherence to 'official' guidance, the more experienced inspector did share some of

the concerns expressed by the other participants and admitted that:

> "There is a danger in Early Years settings; infrequent inspections do not take account of the quicker turnover of children and staff".

The advisers advocated no notice across the sector:

> "No notice gives you flavour of the sector, 'warts and all'...it gives you an indication of what it is like for a child in that setting, today, everyday" (adviser with 20 years experience).

The other adviser alluded to the differences in provision and suggested that the

private sector may need more frequent inspections due to higher staff turnover and

felt without external inspection "... settings may let things slide". The responses in this

and the practitioner section, indicate possible differences in the perceptions of the

inspection system between the state and private sector, this tentatively noted

disparity will be discussed in more detail in chapter six, 'an analysis of the findings'.

5.3.1.3 Theme three: a holistic approach

When asked about the current inspection system, all nursery based stakeholders

acknowledged that the new system based around the Early Years Foundation Stage

(DfES, 2007) had made the approach more holistic. The following section begins with

an overview of this new framework provided by Ofsted documentary sources.

The impact of Ofsted in the nursery sector

As stated at the onset of the findings linked to the need for inspection, the

overwhelming number of participants acknowledged the need for an external body to

maintain standards and ensure children's welfare. This acknowledgment is significant

as it suggests that inspection does play a part in developing care and education in

the nursery sector. Indeed, Ofsted perceive the inspection of nurseries in particular to

be a 'success story", the table overleaf presents a first year summary of Ofsted

reporting under the new remit:

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

	Total number	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery	99	57 (58%)	36 (36%)	4 (4%)	2 (2%)
Primary*	2971	242 (8%)	1289 (43%)	1182 (40%)	258 (9%)
Secondary**	592	58 (10%)	210 (35%)	249 (42%)	75 (13%)
Special schools	236	78 (33%)	100 (42%)	48 (20%)	10 (4%)
Pupil Referral Units	92	17 (18%)	37 (40%)	27 (29%)	11 (12%)
All schools	3990	452 (11%)	1672 (42%)	1510 (38%)	356 (9%)

* includes middle-deemed primary schools.
** includes middle deemed secondary schools, all-through mainstream schools and academies.
Table 3 Summary of Data (OFSTED, 2010a, p2)

As can be seen a far higher number of nurseries achieve an 'outstanding' grade

compared to school settings. This was confirmed by the experienced inspector, who

using the city of Birmingham as an example, stated that "out of 27 state run nurseries

in the city 24 were ranked as 'outstanding'". This could be said to be an indicator of

the 'quality' of education and care within the sector and will be discussed in more

detail in relation to the second research question.

However when asked the question, "What has had the greatest influence on the

development of care and education in the last ten years", no one considered

inspection to be the largest factor. Most of the respondents recognised the

contribution the framework has made to regulating settings and promoting

safeguarding but saw it as a part of a process rather than the major component. In

initial interviews I did provide a list based on policy and research generated in both

chapter of the literature, my list included EPPE, ECM, workforce reform, combined

inspection and the EYFS. However, the overwhelming majority of respondents

across the *practitioner, leader* and *inspector* groups did not need prompting, all of

them bar two, referred to the introduction of the EYFS as the major influence in the development of care and education. It is important to remember at this point that the inspection framework is now based around the EYFS, and that the EYFS has just been reviewed by the coalition government and changes are due in 2012 (Tickell, 2011).

As indicated in the paragraph above the overwhelming number of stakeholder interviewees discussed the significance of the introduction of the EYFS in their responses connected to the development of care and education. They averred if the curricular approach is right the holistic needs of the child are met. All nursery based stakeholders and the inspectorate endorsed the developmentally based curriculum and welcomed the restored focus upon the keyworker system.

Leaders

Two of the leaders, the headteacher at *Whitehouse* and the owner of a nursery chain did suggest alternatives to the EYFS, their answers are connected. The former suggested the EPPE research project (Sylva *et al,* 2004, 2010) had the greatest influence, as she felt it gave "long needed recognition to the necessity of having qualified teachers working in nurseries". The latter suggested workforce reform as the funding for training, in the form of apprenticeships schemes up to level four and foundation degrees, enabled her to have a workforce that has an understanding of child development and could take their own "small steps to becoming better qualified".

The remaining leaders from *Talltrees, Umbrella, Tophat, Cherrytree* and *Greenleaf* spoke of the introduction of the EYFS, and used phrases such as "accessible to all types of practitioner", "holistic view of the child", "generates good activity ideas and record keeping". Although they did feel that the "better practitioners" were already

achieving the aims of the EYFS, they still perceived it as a significant policy change.

One of the owners of *Umbrella* nursery captures this feeling:

> "The EYFS has definitely had the biggest impact on the sector. For us, it brought things together, made us look at our philosophy and positively focused the sector on workforce reform. The emphasis on a key worker system has improved the quality of the overall experience for the child. It has highlighted development and helped the worker by opening up communication".

Practitioners

All of the respondents in the interviews and preliminary focus groups cited the EYFS as having had the greatest impact on the sector and their working practises. In particular the least experienced practitioners in the settings considered that the key worker approach had made them more confidence in their ability to plan according to children's needs as it provides "specific guidance" and is "user friendly"; this can be seen in the following examples:

> "The EYFS came in when I started working; I had trained using the C*urriculum Guidance* and *Birth to Three Matters*. This is a lot better; it is easy to follow, so easy. The key worker system reassures parents, the contact with one person gives them a better understanding of their child's day. It gives the child a better experience, and makes me feel more confident. I am only young I need the support of a document"
> (newly qualified assistant, *Umbrella*).

> "The EYFS made me feel more professional, the 'developmental matters' can be helpful as it justifies what we do and made me more aware of what I am looking for"
> (new teaching assistant, *Greenleaf*).

However, one of the more experienced practitioners, although acknowledging the beneficial guidance aspect of the EYFS, firmly denounced its focus on "learning goals" and "results":

> "I feel so strongly that Early Years has become too curriculum driven and formulaic, the EYFS labels children as failures if they are not writing at the end of their reception year. Should they be? It should be child centred and I don't care if they are not writing, Montessori had the right idea, play is at the heart of what we do. In a way the focus on the end product has detracted from the quality..."
> (deputy headteacher , *Whitehouse).*

Parents

This part of this research question remains unexplored by the overwhelming majority of parents. As indicated by the pilot study nearly all the parents in the focus group were not aware of Early Years curriculum and policy matters. One of the parents in the focus groups was a Key Stage two primary teacher and she had been informed about the EYFS, but considered her knowledge of the sector to be too insufficient to comment.

Inspectors

Both the advisers and the inspectors felt that all the major initiatives since 1997 had had some influence, starting with the development of Early Years partnerships, the creation of SureStart, the *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003a) agenda through to the recent changes in the inspection framework. Nonetheless there was a common agreement regarding the importance of the EYFS, there was a suggestion, in accord with the leaders, that the new guidance had been developed from existing practice, therefore had "more meaning for the sector" (experienced inspector).

The documentary sources linked to inspection do indicate a rise in standards of provision since the introduction of the combined inspection regime in 2005, in the 'Journey to Excellence' (OFSTED, 2008); an Ofsted review of Early Years provision, Michael Hart, Director (Children) illustrates this:

> I am encouraged because our inspections show not only that most registered settings are providing good or outstanding quality care and early education for children, but also that many are improving (p29).

Although this document was written prior to the mandatory introduction of the EYFS, the aspects that the practitioners and leaders believe develop care and education are highlighted as indicators of 'outstanding' provision:

> In the best settings adults organise the day to focus on the needs of each child. The providers promote an ethos where children are welcomed warmly and

adults show how they value each child as uniquely special. Every child is treated as an individual. Each child has a key adult assigned who knows the child well. The key person also leads the assessment and planning in close liaison with parents to ensure the child's welfare, learning and development needs are met effectively. Adults listen and respond to children sensitively and this enables them to feel accepted and to make good progress in all areas of learning (OFSTED, 2008, p15).

The document does suggest that inspection is part of the pursuit of quality and that this pursuit does provide better care and education for children (OFSTED, 2008).

5.3.1.4 Summary of Findings Research Question One: <u>Does the Inspection Framework Support the Development of Care and Education across the Nursery Sector?</u>

From these responses it is evident that all respondents acknowledged a need for inspection within the nursery sector to maintain minimum standards. However, at times participants across the sector were preoccupied with the mechanics of inspection and the characteristics of the inspectorate when discussing the relationship between inspection and the development of care and education. This chapter has presented the themes raised by the respondents connected with their explanations of the relationship between inspection and the development of education and care. All nursery based stakeholders in this study indicated that the sector needs an inspection system that recognises and celebrates the unique nature of their provision. They welcome the opportunity to engage in professional dialogue and develop a relationship with their inspector. Within their responses I noted a recurring reference to the nature and qualities of the inspectorate, therefore I developed this aspect further and from their accounts a list of essential and desirable characteristics of a nursery inspector began to emerge. From the responses presented thus far, the nature of the inspectorate coupled with the process seems to be a central concern. Therefore as a summary of these comments, this next section presents in tabular form the 'job specifications' of an inspector based on the most

frequently occurring descriptors given by the *leaders, practitioners* and *inspectors*

group, this issue did not arise the parental focus group. *Table 4* entitled 'The Ideal

Inspector' is shown overleaf, descriptors shared by two groups or more are

highlighted in red ink. The EYFS is the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007).

Inspectors must have…   _Table 4_

Leaders	Practitioners	Inspectors
At least 10 years experience in the sector	At least 10 years experience in the sector	The ability to relate to people at all levels
Been a manager or headteacher	Be able to see the 'whole' picture	The abilty to assimilate information
Awareness of whole sector	An understanding of context	The ability to apply professional judgement across the sector
An understanding of EYFS	An understanding of EYFS	The ability to compare provision
Good communication Skills	Good communication skills	Good communication skills
Respect for the philosophical approaches of the sector	Understanding of the unique nature of nursery provision	Recognition of the philosophical approaches of the sector
Good listening skills	An open mind	Good listening skills
An understanding of child development	An understanding of child development	The ability to judge against a set of criteria
The ability to develop a relationship and provide realistic targets.	The ability to develop a relationship	The ability to capture an 'instant' picture

Table 4 does highlight some common approaches, as do all of the findings for this chapter. The nursery based stakeholders all want a more contextually attuned collaborative approach, the current inspection framework does recognise the distinct nature of Early Years provision. As stated at the beginning of this summary,

explanations of inspection generate perceived problems, these perceptions seem to be acting as a barrier to inspection being a key part in the development of education and care. These issues will be discussed further in the analysis chapter. The final paragraphs of findings for research question one indicate that inspection is part of a process that develops a child's nursery experience and the recognition that the pursuit of 'quality' is at the heart of these findings begins to emerge. The next section of these findings presents the responses to research question two and explores the notion of 'quality' from a number of perspectives.

5.3.2 Research Question Two: <u>Do Inspectors/Headteachers/Managers Share the Same Perceptions of Quality Factors within Nursery Education as Practitioners?</u>

> "Health not brain is the heart of what we do; quality means that the child and their family's lives are enhanced by the nursery experience"
> (headteacher at *Whitehouse*)

The Ofsted inspection framework (OFSTED, 2009a) aims to assess the 'quality' and standard of nursery education. Throughout all government policy documents and indeed the websites and prospectuses of the settings involved in this study, the word 'quality' is used frequently without explanation. This first section of the findings linked to research question two presents the varied responses of the stakeholders when they were asked their thoughts about 'quality' in the nursery.

5.3.2.1 Theme one: 'quality' and the happy child

All of the respondents discussed their notions of quality with reference to children and their interaction with aspects of their nursery experience. These explanations are highly individual but the overwhelming majority use the word 'happy' in their responses whether referring to the environment or relationships.

Leaders

There was a distinct difference in the response from the headteacher in the primary school (*Greenleaf*) compared to the leaders in the nursery sector. He made reference to pupil progress, learning and focus, whereas the overwhelming majority of responses were connected with care and "happy children":

> "Quality is in the setting, the environment, the progress made by the pupils; the environment should encourage constant learning and have a clear focus. The child centred approach is taken too far; you could have one child learning about 'Thomas the tank' all year. That is certainly not quality".

The other respondents placed the child at the forefront of their explorations of the term; and used phrases linking a child with confidence and security. They used the term 'quality' with certainty and no respondent asked me for a further explanation of the question. The owner of the nursery chain had conducted a similar exercise herself and had gathered staff perceptions about 'quality' and had summarised her findings into three areas "happy staff, happy children, happy parents". The owners of *Umbrella* had a similar vision and firmly stated that 'quality' is more than "meeting the standards", it is about "happy and safe children". Both they and the owner of the nursery chain mentioned that staff training and a "professional approach" were crucial to maintaining high quality provision. They raised the issue of sector status in connection to 'quality', emphasising the demands of the workplace:

> "Quality is a feeling, an ethos; it conjures up, happy, content. But it needs to be channelled and responsive to the children's needs, we as a sector have been 'put down' so much over the years, 'mums running playgroup' comments. People don't realise the level of negotiation, the child, the worker, the community, the whole thing has to be of good quality".

It is interesting to note that their emphasis on community is exceptional and further into this discussion, they described their philosophical approach as 'like Reggio'.

The manager at *Tophat* supported her employer's vision; she asked for time to reflect on the question and provided this response:

> "What is quality? It is connected to total care, here and at home. It means gaining a relationship with the parents, and having high standards connected to recruitment, staff training, developing their understanding of child development in particular is very important".

The remaining managers and headteachers added individual thoughts such as "outstanding provision equals extremely happy children and staff" (headteacher, C*herrytree*) to their definitions but they all highlighted similar themes to those outlined above and all included meeting children's needs as a requisite.

Practitioners

"Quality is if the children are happy, well cared for secure, all "mumsy" things " (experienced teaching assistant, *Greenleaf*)

In accord with the majority of the leaders, the practitioners also used the words "happy" and "secure" children in their responses. Yet their answers were even more child centred making little reference to staff training, parental involvement or philosophical musings. Their definitions are more connected with the immediate environment and the children's learning experience; they do highlight learning more in their responses than the leaders. This example from the Early Years co-ordinator at *Greenleaf* captures the flavour of the answers:

> "Quality is to do with the nursery environment, not to do with the cupboards, fixtures and fittings but the level of interaction between the children and the staff. We should be extending the children's learning, it should all look exciting".

Her vision resonates with the responses given by practitioners in the private sector, on this occasion there were more similarities than differences in the responses across the settings. The views of the nursery nurses, teaching assistants and teachers were alike, as can be seen when comparing this example from a nursery nurse with the one above:

> "Quality is in everything we do, children are happy, cared for, and interact with the adults. We take time to get to know the children, education is everywhere in snack time, in tidy up time, learning is everywhere. Most of all the children need to be children"
> (nursery nurse, 2 years experience, *Umbrella*).

Common to the overwhelming majority of the practitioner responses was the reference to specific events and the recognition that they are key 'players' in their explanations of 'quality'.

Parents

The responses here were collected in the pilot study at *Talltrees*; the initial research question did include parental perspectives on quality. However, these findings from the focus group and the choice of questionnaires as the sole method of gathering parental data narrowed the stakeholder perspective. Both the focus groups were uncertain how to answer the question, in my field notes I have observed there were awkward pauses and shifting seat positions. A few parents did provide definitions and these were connected with children's safety, happiness and trust in the setting:

> "I think of this nursery as a good quality happy place for my child, I trust the staff and don't worry when I drop her off."

One parent likened 'quality' to a feeling, the "happy buzz you get when you open the door". After this response there was a period of quiet, and I moved the discussion onto reasons for choosing the nursery, which produced a wealth of responses which are included in the section connected to research question four.

Inspectors

"Quality is all about the interaction and the relationship"
(Early Years adviser, 20 years experience).

This group, perhaps unsurprisingly, held different notions about 'quality' and significantly different words and phrases were used to define and explore the concept. Ofsted documents use 'quality' as a fixed concept, for example: 'Overall, quality is generally poorer where there is most poverty and social deprivation' (OFSTED, 2008, p13). Although they clearly define what constitutes 'outstanding', 'good', 'satisfactory' and 'inadequate' in their framework, they do not offer an

explanation of their understanding of 'quality'. Both the inspectors interviewed had outlined ideas connected to "proficiency", "effectiveness" and "making progress against the standards". The experienced inspector's views provide a contrast with those leading and working in the sector: "It is not just about being happy; nurseries should produce academic, proficient learners."

However, he did echo the concerns of the primary headteacher regarding the nature of Early Years education, as he averred he was "totally against total child centred learning". Yet, he and the other inspector did place the child at the heart of their explanations of quality, they did emphasise that "but above all children should be safe" (inspector, new to role) and "comfortable" (experienced inspector). The experienced inspector implied that the philosophical approaches could be problematic, a strict adherence to a particular approach such "Highscope or Reggio" could prevent the growth of quality provision; he contested: "What works is important."

It is interesting to compare this with the response of one of the adviser's who described having shared principles supported by an underpinning philosophy such as Reggio, as vitally important to the quality of nursery education. Both of the advisers provided 'blended' explanations of 'quality', some of their responses reflected the views of the workforce; others would have found accord with the inspectorate. Primarily they expressed a notion that 'quality' is about meeting the individual needs of a child and linked this back to the curriculum framework, "EYFS is at the heart of good practice, if it is done well it is good quality" (Adviser with 20 years experience). The quotation at the beginning of this particular section is part of a longer response confirming the importance of the role of the practitioner:

> It's all about the interaction and the relationship, a church hall with a small amount of equipment can do the job, it's not about what you've got, it's about

what you do. Having a shared ethos and vision, that's quality" (adviser with sector experience).

Although the inspectors and advisers do not provide a majority view, the reference to relationships also occurs throughout the interviews with the nursery participants. The next part of this discussion develops the issue, and examines quality factors from the different perspectives of the various stakeholders.

5.3.2.2 Theme two: the dimensions of 'quality'

The next question probed further the issue of 'quality', respondents were asked to provide examples and descriptions of 'high quality factors' within a nursery setting and subsequently the discussion moved onto indications of poor quality. All of the stakeholders gave lengthy answers to this particular question and the overwhelming majority of their explanations featured factors which fell into four categories. These are *relationships and interactions, progress of the learner, the nursery environment* and *staff recruitment and training* forming the 'dimensions of quality', this term has been adapted from the work of Sonja Sheridan on the dimensions of pedagogical quality in preschool , who states 'a dimension can be evaluated as a structure, process and outcome and from different perspectives' (2007, p200). Some of the following responses contain examples of more than one dimension.

Dimension one: 'quality' is all about the relationships

 The overwhelming majority of respondents began their accounts with a reference to the level of interaction between child and practitioner or the relationship between all parties in a setting. Relationships provided a clear theme, there were differences in the words and phrases used to illustrate their examples, yet their initial thoughts were largely similar. As the explanations developed each group of the stakeholders did reveal distinct ideas and their individual perceptions are outlined below.

Leaders

Each leader held their own 'mental picture' of how their own nursery operates and this particular question brought forth answers that were less generic and richer with descriptions from the settings. Paradoxically, some leaders found it easier to speak about what they perceived as 'poor' quality and then return to the indicators of 'good'. Their responses were connected to interactions, resources, staffing and opportunities for learning. As there were distinct variations, this section provides a précis of each participant's perspective, an illustration of indicators of both good and poor quality provision.

Headteacher, *Whitehouse*

> "When you walk into a nursery everybody should be engaged, the adults should be interacting with the children, it shouldn't be one sided the staff shouldn't be doing all the talking. Yet it isn't just about interaction, it is about good record keeping, rigorous assessment, planning, it should all be there...The opposite consists of poor management of funding, resources, buildings and record keeping. No evaluation of activities can lead to an ineffective learning environment indoors and outdoors. There is a lack of involvement with other people, no partnership with other nurseries and no CPD."

Headteacher, *Greenleaf*

> "Staff and children should be productive; there should be clear planning around the curriculum and progress should be made by the children. The children should feel safe and happy...It starts to go wrong when staff do not know what they are encouraging, they don't understand the needs of the children, the same equipment is put out everyday..."

Owner, Nursery Chain

> "You need stability to create a quality environment, good solid staff team that relates well to the children and each other. Good training leads to better quality, specifically Early Years training, no good having a degree unless it is connected to child development. Physical resources need not be expensive, creativity leads to a high quality experience. Parents and children should feel part of the experience, their views are important....You can tell the environment is poor when the children flock to you when you walk in, you can tell they are bored. If staff are treated badly, there is high staff turnover, and they uninvolved in their work that can be the worst thing."

Owners, *Umbrella*

"The most important factor is that you love and care for the children, that they feel happy and safe, that all is child initiated. Qualifications don't guarantee good quality, experience is important, the recent training leaves gaps, they have no real understanding of child development. The keyworker system ensures good quality, the relationship between worker, child and parent...Poor communication and lack of interaction, doubts about safety, unhappy children, these all would concern me."

Manager, *Tophat*

"...children need to be engaged stimulated, the staff need to understand the whole child. Regular team meetings are very important, staff still need to be trained when they are here, the NVQ has a tick box approach... Workbase needs to be good to develop staff; good leadership should encourage constant reflection on practice. Poor quality is all down to the staff, poorly managed, not dedicated and do not have specialist knowledge, it is not about the children or the resources..."

Manager, *Umbrella*

"The best provision you can give children builds around their interests, all the staff should be interacting with the children, the children's work should be displayed, the outside should be used as much as the inside. We are getting them ready for school... If you walk in and no one greets you, staff are talking to each other and no one is sure what to do. Then that is poor quality."

Headteacher, *Cherrytree*

"The most important factor of all is interaction with the children; the staff should have a good understanding of child development and be responsive to the children's needs. The environment should be accessible, this area is disadvantaged, but some families are privileged, we welcome both, parents are everything to do with quality their involvement makes us stronger, the fabric of the building is important but not that important..In a poor quality setting I would see disengaged children flitting from task to task, disruptive, disrespectful..."

As can be seen there is some consensus, as previously stated some common factors or dimensions are emerging, relationships, staff knowledge, and resources appear in most responses. Yet although children are mentioned, specific references to learning and the curriculum are in the minority. It is interesting to note that managers and owners of the private nurseries share a similar philosophical approach, for example the owners at *Umbrella* use the phrase "child initiated", their manager stated that activities should be "built around the child's interests" and although they use different words their quality indicators are largely the same.

Practitioners

Although relationships are still a key feature, there are some variations in the examples the practitioners described as high quality, in the main they are connected more to children and resources than the leaders' responses. There is less distinction between responses; most refer to practice to illustrate their explanations, they were confident of their opinions, only the inexperienced apprentice gave a limited response. Their focus was clearly on the children's daily lives and the factors that they felt made nursery a good experience; their answers provide more of "working knowledge" of the settings.

Dimension two: 'quality' and the progress of the learner

An overwhelming number of practitioners referred to providing high quality learning experiences when reflecting on quality factors. They illuminated their answers by outlining exciting activities for the children; this is fully exemplified by following:

> "You need to use your imagination, foster creativity and provide experiential learning. The children should be empowered by their nursery experience, allowed to make choices, encouraged to work as a team. We are fortunate with our environment, we can go outside and explore, build houses for woodland animals, make snow shelters. The staff are confident and experienced, it should be a happy environment, children should be able to see adults having a relationship, laughing, we are modelling friendships."
> (Early Years co-ordinator, *Greenleaf*).

Her vision is shared by colleagues across all settings, the teacher at *Cherrytree* suggests that children should experience "...awe and wonder, the curriculum needs to be engaging and creative", the staff should be "happy with one another". Conversely staff relationships and behaviour issues connected to dimension one are highlighted as poor practice by some practitioners:

> "Staff talking to each other, ignoring the children..." (bi-lingual teaching assistant, *Whitehouse).*

"Staff disinterested and talking about their social lives..." (Early Years professional, *Tophat)*.

"Staff sitting there and reading an Avon book..." (nursery nurse, *Whitehouse*).

Dimension three: quality and the nursery environment

"Building and environment need to be inviting" (nursery assistant, newly qualified *Umbrella*)

Although the *leaders* did mention the environment in general terms, more specific references were made to the resources and the nursery building itself by the overwhelming majority of the practitioners when considering quality factors, more as an indicator of poor quality as opposed to good:

> "If the equipment is tatty, no displays on the wall, peeling paint and a dirty floor, it has got to affect the quality, it is not connected with money, it is to do with care" (deputy head, *Whitehouse*).

Even the least confident respondent commented on the fixtures and fittings as an issue:

> "I went to a bad nursery before this one, the room was too cramped, there was not enough room for the children, the carpet wasn't hovered and there were not enough resources, they kept on doing the same thing, I was bored, they were bored" (apprentice, *Tophat*).

Dimension four: quality and the qualified workforce

"Staff should understand children" (Early Years professional, *Tophat*).

The above quotation reflects the leaders references to the workforce most of their responses outlined in dimension one mentioned the importance of understanding child development rather than specific job roles. It is perhaps unsurprising that issues connected to staffing emerged from a group of workers, most of the practitioners did mention staff qualifications and roles as a quality factor; however their remarks did vary according to their own level of qualification and range of experience. Their

responses were not connected to the type of setting they worked in but their own personal working lives. Some practitioners referred positively to degree level qualifications and teacher status, others felt that personality and character were more essential features. The following quotation from the only Early Years professional (*Tophat)* in the study summarises some of the dilemmas regarding qualifications within the nursery sector:

> "Workforce matters do generate heated discussion. Experience is not enough, we need to explain to parents what we do, how important it is to raise the level of qualifications. I agree with the Labour government every setting should have a graduate. Nobody understands what an Early Years professional does; I definitely think it needs teacher status."

Her views are supported not, as perhaps might be expected, just by teachers in this study, the nursery nurse at *Whitehouse* who reflected on her move from the private sector to the state:

> "Keyworkers still need to be qualified; teachers feel that everyplace should have a qualified teacher. I felt undervalued when I first arrived here but I have really benefitted from working alongside a qualified teacher, I feel more confident and can share my understanding of child development."

 However some of the practitioners did not share these views, and outlined a different vision:

> "Qualifications are a standard but characteristics are more important, being warm and friendly in a practical situation is more important than academic learning. There are people here doing degrees but it is not essential for good quality"
> (nursery nurse, 2 years experience, *Umbrella*).

> "Nursery is a community, it is important that staff get on well together, qualifications may be important to some parents, but care is more important, you need to be approachable and talkative"
> (nursery nurse, 10 years experience *Tophat).*

Although more practitioners highlighted experience rather than their leaders desired understanding of child development as a quality factor, there are commonalities in their answers. Indeed many respondents' quotations feature aspects of all the outlined themes. The next section presents the inspectors view of quality factors

provided by the Ofsted documentary sources and the interviews with the inspectors

and the advisers. These findings also contain examples from the four dimensions of

quality and these interconnections will be presented in tabular form in the summary

of the research question.

The 'official view' of quality factors

When examining the documentary sources connected to Early Years inspection, the

examples provided reflect the four dimensions generated by the other stakeholders'

responses. The 'official' view of quality factors is clearly set out by Ofsted in its

guidelines for inspection, in order to make a judgement about the overall quality of

the provision they look at the following criteria:

- how well does the setting meet the needs of children
   in the Early Years Foundation Stage?

- the effectiveness of leadership and management of
   the Early Years Foundation Stage

- the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation
   Stage

- outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation
   Stage.

   (OFSTED, 2009a, p16, bullets points as original)

Both of the inspectors referred to the document "Are you ready for inspection" (see

Appendix 1) in their answers. They said that the guidance established the 'quality'

factors that Ofsted were looking for. The more experienced inspector did expand on

this 'official' answer and outlined his personal vision of "top quality", which included

references to the nursery environment, staffing and progress of the learner:

> "Top quality nursery provision enables children to make progress across the
> curriculum, applying their skills...funding and resources are pretty unimportant,
> I inspected an 'outstanding' nursery part of a charitable trust, they didn't have
> as much money as the state sector but their activities were fantastic. The
> quality of the staff not the number, how they are deployed and developed is
> important. The best nurseries are looking for ways of improving, looking for the

best... Inadequate nurseries demonstrate a basic failure to meet the children's needs, I am always looking for children to be purposeful, if they are confused or distressed then the setting is not making sufficient progress against the standards."

The other inspector stated that it was beyond his remit to comment on quality factors beyond the scope of Ofsted reporting. This was also the reply I received from a spokesperson by email:

"It is not within our policy to provide individual inspector perceptions. We publish reports on our website that provide a view of quality within the settings we inspect. We also publish an annual report that includes detailed analysis in relation to quality within the Early Years sector."

However, the response from the one inspector and the documentary sources 'Leading to Excellence in Early Years' (OFSTED, 2008) and 'Are you ready for Inspection?' (OFSTED, 2009a) do highlight similar factors to other respondents and their answers could be grouped under the 'dimensions' generated by the leader and practitioner responses. Indeed their reasons for deeming provision as 'inadequate' mirror the factors of poor quality raised by others:

- adults are suitable to have unsupervised access to children

- training and qualification requirements are met

- space and equipment are appropriate for children to play safely

- enough adults are present to meet the children's needs

- assessment, planning and evaluation arrangements are sufficient to promote children's development

 (OFSTED, 2008, p14, bullet points as original).

The one key difference is that the inspector and the documentation do mention evaluation processes as a quality factor. The leader at *Whitehouse* did refer to evaluation in her response and the findings linked to research question three emphasise the value of reflection from all stakeholders. It could be that the omission

of evaluation from the answers is that it is an established part of practice and included in the relationship they frequently cite as a crucial quality factor.

The advisers both spoke of the ECERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scheme) which their local authority was using to support the growth and development of nursery provision. They suggested that this method had made them reconsider their perceptions of quality as it did have a strong focus on meaningful interactions between children and adults. However, they did also indicate that it could be too prescriptive, "Why should a setting be poor because there isn't a telephone in the main room" (adviser with sector experience) and they still used their own judgements:

> "Poor nursery provision occurs if the staff have different viewpoints, different attitudes, there are no keyworkers, the children are disengaged and the resources are grubby. The systems and environment are poorly maintained" (adviser with 20 years experience).

> "Mess can be good but not dirt. The equipment is not fully utilised. The staff are unwilling to go outside or participate; they care more about their hair than the children"
> (adviser with sector experience).

Their explanations are comparable to both the leaders and practitioners and contain references to the main dimensions developed from their responses. However, they found it easier to focus on poorer practice and did not refer to specific 'working' examples. Moreover they referred to a need for their service as they did not feel confident in the sector's ability to deliver high quality provision:

> "There is still a lot of bad practice out there, I don't always agree with Ofsted's judgement on a setting. I think how can that nursery be 'outstanding'? I don't think it is. There are now big gaps in the training of nursery nurses, we shouldn't have to offer an introduction to social and emotional development but we do"
> (adviser with sector experience).

This reference to the awarding of grades did appear in some of the responses to the first research question and will be developed further in the next set of findings.

5.3.2.3 Summary of Findings Research Question Two: <u>Do</u>
<u>Inspectors/Headteachers/Managers Share the Same Perceptions of Quality</u>
<u>Factors within Nursery Education as Practitioners?</u>

From these responses it was evident that all respondents held their own notions of 'quality' and could offer examples of factors that indicated 'high' or 'low' quality provision. Significantly, none of the nursery participants, even the apprentice nursery nurse, needed further explanation or prompting regarding 'quality' as a term; moreover all of the responses were confident and provided lengthy descriptions, enriched by personal reflection. Each group offered a distinct illustration of their perceptions of quality factors yet the most frequently mentioned words were "relationship" or "interaction". *Table 5* overleaf offers a comparative visual summary of the dimensions of quality identified by the respondents:

Table 5 __Dimensions of 'quality'__

Dimensions of quality	Inspector	Practitioner	Leader
Interactions/Relationships	Evaluation process involves all stakeholders	Positive and informed relationships between staff, children and parents	Responsive and informed adult and child interactions
Progress of the Learner	Children are able to apply their skills to EYFS	Creative and experiential learning empowering the child	Planned learning equals engaged child
Staff Recruitment and Training	Optimise staff development and deployment	Qualified keyworker with an approachable manner	Qualified workforce with ability to understand and apply child development theories. Strong CPD
Nursery Environment	Maintain safety standards and meet individual children's needs	Fully utilise indoor and outdoor. Maintain equipment and building. Provide stimulating wall displays	Effective management of resources and buildings

As identified by the respondents, all four 'dimensions' were mentioned in each set of responses. The summarised factors indicate perceptions of 'quality', and were taken from each group's explanations of 'good' and 'poor' practice, offering a visual comparison of stakeholders' perceptions of quality factors.

5.3.3 Research Question Three: __Do Headteachers/Managers/Practitioners Consider Ofsted to be a 'Change Agent'?__

This question develops some of the explanations given in the findings connected to the first research question and explores the current approach to inspection and whether it supports 'improvement' in the nursery sector. The responses provide explanations of the settings different approaches to the self-evaluation form (SEF)

and examine whether Ofsted has directly influenced their policy and practice.

Although this section focuses on work based stakeholders' considerations, the views

of the inspectorate gained from documentary sources and interview have been used

to provide an introduction to this section.

An 'official' overview

The reaction from nurseries experiencing the new inspection is positive. More than

nine out of ten settings, who have responded to surveys following inspection, say

they were satisfied with the way inspection was carried out. The vast majority

believe the inspection judgements were fair and accurate and were satisfied with the

clarity of the recommendations in their report (OFSTED, 2010a). This press release

was confirmed by the experienced inspector who stated that the sector is "positive"

about Ofsted and "95% of nurseries think that the process is satisfactory. When

examining change and improvement in 'Early Years leading to excellence' it clearly

states that provision is improving as a result of inspection:

> The quality of childcare and education in daycare settings has risen year on
> year. Providers have made a wide range of improvements for children in
> response to issues raised at their previous inspection (OFSTED, 2008, p9).

Yet, conversely although the experienced inspector emphasised that inspection was

beneficial, particularly the previous framework organised around '*Every Child*

Matters' (*DfES, 2003a*), he did not perceive it as the best method for improvement:

> "It can actually be negative, can slow down school or in this case nursery
> improvement, settings can rest 'on their laurels' after an inspection and only
> 'crank up' again when one is due."

However, he did support the official documentary sources and averred that:

> "Early Years inspection is a success story, the outcomes are good, the recent
> statistics* demonstrate that nurseries are effectively managing the learning
> environment. Secondary and primary colleagues could learn a great deal from
> their Early Years colleagues. They cope better with the stress of inspection
> because of the collegiality; the staff are always on show to other adults, state
> nurseries in particular are the best quality" (*see *table 3, research question 1*).

It is important to note his last statement is based on his personal opinion and experience of conducting inspections, rather than Ofsted's official statistics. Indeed it is difficult to compare state and private nursery provision by Ofsted reporting, as state nursery provision can be included in a school report and does not receive a separate grade. Although in 2008 Ofsted did provide data for the quality of education in private daycare, there is not an equivalent summary of the quality of education across state providers. Nevertheless, to return to the central question, this brief overview with its affirming statements could suggest that Ofsted does perceive itself as a motivating force for change; the combined inspection process is having a positive impact on the sector. The next section will examine the responses of the advisers to this question.

Advisers

In this instance the advisers provided a distinct contribution, as they themselves provide guidance on the completion of the SEF. Both the advisers believed that the advisory team had more influence on improvement than Ofsted and perceived themselves as 'change agents'. The support from advisory teams across different authorities in the Midlands and the relationships they formed with their group of settings was mentioned by the overwhelming majority of respondents in the five settings and in the pilot study. Indeed some practitioners suggested that their adviser would be a good inspector, and they would respect their advice as "it comes from the sector" (deputy head, *Whitehouse*).

Yet, the advisers themselves articulated a need for Ofsted:

> "The sector is not capable of judging itself, external validation is a driver for change, it gives you a reason to celebrate" (adviser with sector experience).

They clearly perceived their role as empowering rather than enforcing, and wished to keep to their remit of providing support and promoting continuing professional development (CPD):

"Our service makes a difference; CPD is important, the dialogue we have creates mutual understanding" (adviser with 20 years experience).

Despite this affirmative reflection on their own practice, they did consider that Ofsted had contributed to improvement across the sector; particularly as local authorities "respect the view of a national government body" (adviser with 20 years experience).They viewed the SEF as a valuable exercise and hoped that despite it being non-compulsory that settings would continue to produce meaningful evaluations. Nevertheless despite this endorsement, the advisers outlined some fears:

"It is a driver when it is well done, sometimes the inspectors aren't trained properly, sometimes their preoccupation with technicalities suppresses good practice" (adviser with sector experience).

This perceived inspectorate fixation on paperwork and policy is developed in the following sections by all sector participants.

5.3.3.1 Theme one: the administrative burden of the evaluation process

Leaders

This research question generated personal reflections on previous nursery inspections and the current approach using self-evaluation as a tool. Although all of the leaders accepted that the current framework with its requirement for self-evaluation had made them focus on the priorities and identify clear areas for improvement, they did all highlight that there was additional leadership responsibility incurred by its implementation. Their shared concerns regarding this burden generated the above theme.

As there are statutory differences in requirements, in the private sector the SEF is non mandatory, there are contextual differences in response. The next section will examine the evaluation systems in place in each setting and then move onto the

leaders' discussion of the SEF. Following this an overview of the practitioners'

responses to the evaluation process will be provided.

Whitehouse State Nursery

The headteacher undertakes observations of adult and child interactions using the

framework recommended by the Effective Early Learning (EEL) project developed by

Christine Pascal and Tony Bertram. These help create a picture of the learning

environment for the evaluation process. In addition all stakeholders are involved in

systems that contribute to the nursery's SEF, the children are encouraged to self

evaluate; the staff evaluate their planning and their own experience of the nursery.

Parents are asked to complete termly evaluations of provision and all the governors

are required to observe one area of learning. As part of the state sector they do have

a designated Early Years adviser who visits at least twice a year. The headteacher

highlighted that she is not entitled to a School Improvement Partner (SIP) and that

this omission places:

> "An excessive responsibility on the head, the SEF is a huge responsibility, it
> involves too much documentation... there is no national data for the nursery
> sector but still Ofsted require you to 'benchmark'. The SEF has made me focus
> on my priorities and made me really think about national priorities. But I have
> paid for advice on how to develop the SEF so it represents the nursery in the
> best light. I think there is a problem with the involvement of everybody, we only
> have parents and parents governors for one year, they lack the knowledge and
> understanding to contribute...I do ask the staff to contribute to the school
> development plan but I don't involve them in the SEF."

Greenleaf State Primary School

The headteacher was positive about the recent changes to the inspection process,

he had felt the previous inspection of the school had delivered an "unjust" grade

('satisfactory') and the emphasis on self-evaluation had enabled him to "clearly

present the school's progress since the previous inspection". The whole school is

involved in the evaluation process, they do not use any prescribed packages but

students, staff and parents evaluate their experience. Parents in nursery have an

opportunity to express their views in the parent pages of the interactive website. The headteacher does have access to a school's improvement partner and the nursery does work in conjunction with an Early Years adviser.

The headteacher takes responsibility for writing the SEF, and subsequently shares it with the governors and the staff team:

> "In our case the SEF is written for the whole school, the foundation stage co-ordinator canvasses the opinions of the nursery staff and I use these to inform my assessment. Although the nursery is an important part of our school, the beginning for children and parents, in Ofsted terms it is mainly ignored, a couple of lines in the report."

Tophat Private Nursery

The owner of the nursery chain highlighted that the SEF is not mandatory for the private sector, and that not all of her settings had completed the process. However, as the owner, she has an overview of all the chain's evaluation processes, and does deal with all complaints, which she sees as "... an enjoyable part of the quality process, I like to come up with the solution". She works with four separate local authorities has seen different interpretations of the inspection framework:

The supervisor at *Tophat* outlined a dilemma for nurseries in the private sector, that although the SEF is non compulsory "Ofsted expects it to be there". Unlike the other leaders she did see the writing of the document as:

> "A collaborative process, as part of our collective leadership approach, we share decisions, each room has a leader, it is a good system...The staff need to know what is in the SEF, otherwise they won't be prepared for the actual inspection."

Umbrella Private Home Nursery

This is a much smaller setting than *Tophat* and the owners are involved in the daily running of the nursery. They advocate an approach that is similar to Reggio as they

encourage staff to keep records of everything, through their keyworker system

parents and children evaluate the setting, parents complete formal feedback forms

and children are asked to talk about or draw pictures of their ideal day at nursery.

They do not have a SEF but their evaluation documents were fully available during

their most recent Ofsted in 2010, their grade awarded was 'outstanding'. However,

they did hold similar views to the other nursery owner regarding inconsistent advice

from local authority advisers:

> "As we are keen to develop our practice we volunteered to be part of the ECERS pilot scheme. It was a totally different mechanism to Ofsted and produced a totally different outcome. The ECERS system rated us as 'poor, it was a real shock to us and to our staff... Then Ofsted arrived the next week, and we got 'outstanding', lifted our morale. But there is a problem here, we are getting mixed messages about care and education, although the ECERS experience helped us reflect, we feel this huge difference in opinion shouldn't happen."

One of the problems with involving staff in the SEF process in the private sector

identified in this setting is the time it may take:

> "It is not easy to organise as if we take a member of staff out of the nursery it upsets ratios. We don't have lunchtime supervisors. We run long shifts 8 until 6.00, staff want to get home...the supervisors contribute but most of it falls to us."

One of the nursery managers endorsed this view:

> "The SEF is a big form, it creates lots of work for staff, it is difficult for us to collaborate, it involves work out of hours our staff aren't paid teacher salaries, they get fed up sometimes. I think it is important to involve staff, the owners fill it out and then ask our opinions."

Cherrytree State Nursery and Children's Centre

The concerns related in this setting share commonalities with the four other nursery

leaders. The sector has no access to a SIP, the SEF process is time consuming,

disengaging to staff and an additional administrative burden for the headteacher. The

setting also uses the keyworker system as their evaluation model; they have a termly

meeting where the parent, member of staff and child share their "nursery journey".

The headteacher did raise a different point in connection to the SEF:

> "I asked my adviser how I could improve my SEF; she said if you want to get outstanding, you have to say you are. I find this difficult I can always see ways to move practice on; I am naturally more inclined to say we are "good". I believe in collective leadership, this has to be the nursery's vision not mine. The framework for inspection should be more collaborative, they are inspecting something society needs. Coming in and slapping hands doesn't do it, an inspector should be a critical friend not a force for destruction, it is a community service it should be a community process."

This collegiate vision was mentioned in the most of the other responses but the allusions to societal need provide another 'layer' to the discussion, a consideration of the value of nursery provision. Moreover, the reference to collaboration reinforces the recurring reference to relationships and interaction which is apparent in all of the findings thus far. Significantly, although the leaders mentioned consulting parents as part of their own evaluation processes, they did not refer to them as a part of the Ofsted self-evaluation process, although gaining a parental perspective of your setting is a requirement of the current framework (OFSTED, 2009a)

Practitioners

Most of the leaders of the settings implied the responsibility of the administration and compilation of the SEF was clearly seen as a management role by themselves and their workforce. This was confirmed by the practitioners' responses, for example, although the supervisor at *Tophat* outlined a collaborative evaluation process the only team member to confidently include the SEF in her answer was the Early Years professional who was responsible for quality assurance in the nursery chain. The overwhelming majority of the practitioners evaluated their own practice and as keyworkers established a reflective dialogue with their children and their parents but did not refer to the SEF unless prompted. The exception to this was the Early Years co-ordinator at *Greenleaf;* she substantiated the headteacher's account:

> "I write the SEF for the Foundation Stage, using our 'in house' feedback from staff, parents and children and this is used in the whole school's document"

When asked the about the central focus of this question regarding Ofsted as an improvement tool, initially the practitioners were negative focusing upon the stress connected to inspection: "I felt so under pressure" (nursery assistant, *Umbrella*), "...suits are intimidating..." (bi-lingual teaching assistant, *Whitehouse*). Yet when the question was rephrased and they were asked to think about the positive aspects of inspection, richer descriptions of practice emerged. The next section focuses upon the responses connected to change from the leaders and practitioners.

5.3.3.2 Theme two: an informed professional dialogue

This theme was developed by the nursery based stakeholders examples of "ill considered Ofsted recommendations" (headteacher, *Greenleaf*) and their collective desire to discuss the development of practice and policy with an Early Years expert.

Leaders

"It seemed to be mostly about soap..." (owner, nursery chain)

The above quotation symbolizes the disquiet expressed by the overwhelming majority of leaders when reflecting upon Ofsted's recommendations. When asked to recall specific examples of changes to policy or practice as a consequence of an Ofsted inspection, there was a tendency to focus on perceived incorrect judgements. Most leaders suggested that inaccurate reporting slowed down improvement as they found it hard to overcome their initial emotional reaction to the report:

> "... I think the instant nature of inspection is wrong, catching a nursery two months into a new system led to us being awarded an 'inadequate', when I read the report it seemed to be mostly about soap, we had ordered some soap, it hadn't arrived ... I did agree with a couple of things they were fair but it seemed to be about policies and certificates, this does not move practice on..." (owner, nursery chain).

> "I had a recommendation to improve outdoor provision but there was building work going on to extend the children's centre, this was beyond my control, but still in the introduction of our report it states that outdoor provision is restricted" (headteacher, *Cherrytree*) .

"Our recommendation was to develop continuous outdoor provision but I would need an extra member of staff, it just isn't possible" (headteacher, *Greenleaf*).

"We got an 'outstanding' in all areas except maths, and then got a 'good', it seemed picky, they suggested counting the children when they are lining up but we do normally do that, the member of staff was nervous... I would prefer a star rating, as I don't accept our 'good' was justified" (supervisor, *Tophat*).

However, when asked to reflect on the positive aspects of inspection, the overwhelming majority of leaders provided answers which involved aspects of improvement for the setting itself, the children or for the staff team. They referred to the experience as affirming practice, enabling reflection and team 'building':

"Does make you review your practice, the workforce has become better qualified to meet the demands of Ofsted" (headteacher, *Whitehouse*).

"Better all round nursery provision, brings challenge and comparison as they become part of a national system" (headteacher, *Greenleaf*).

"Outside evaluation makes us pick up our practice and can help staff development" (owner, nursery chain).

"It can be affirming and enables staff to reflect on their practice" (owner, *Umbrella*).

"It can build confidence, young staff need to experience working with an external body" (supervisor, *Tophat*).

"It can help raise self esteem, and pride in the nursery's work and I think it does push up quality in the sector" (supervisor, *Umbrella*).

"It is an affirmation, an acknowledgement of your contribution" (headteacher, *Cherrytree*).

Yet, despite these accolades there was reluctance from participants to provide concrete examples of any changes that had occurred as a direct consequence of an inspection. Most leaders felt they had already identified areas for development prior to inspection as part of their internal processes, but the supervisor at *Umbrella,* which did move from 'good' to 'outstanding' did outline some alterations to practice:

"Even though we got outstanding they did make us think more about our planning and we are changing this to be more explicit about the links to assessment. Also we do a 'group time' which we introduced after the last inspection, they were pleased with that."

Some leaders admitted to using Ofsted as an external enforcement agency of their own wishes, they felt evoking a higher authority added credence to their own plans:

> "...staff need a bit of scare sometimes" (supervisor, *Tophat*).

> "Prior to last inspection, when I said we need to do things I used Ofsted as a reason" (headteacher, *Greenleaf*).

> "It enables me to ask staff to do things ...what would Ofsted think" (supervisor, *Umbrella*).

Therefore there is some agreement and recognition that Ofsted is a 'change agent', yet there are still concerns about the understanding of the inspectorate. Some of the leaders expanded on their answers relating to improvement and presented an alternative system. Once more the importance of relationship was emphasised alongside sector experience:

> "The process needs to more collaborative, currently I can't see how Ofsted contributes to quality, they are inspecting for it. But I can't see how the process contributes to improving quality. The better way would be to involve all the sector, more liaison between private and state, more informed development planning" (owner, nursery chain).

> "We are a distinct sector, we need to be confident that an inspector understands child development and the range of learning experiences, we don't need a different system, just a different person, one of us" (owner, *Umbrella*).

> "Our local authority uses a different method to evaluate us (ECERS); this seems to me to signal that we need something different, something that looks at the care as well as the learning" (supervisor, *Tophat*).

As can be seen the leaders in the private sector were more outspoken about Ofsted's approach, possibly because they had experienced another system which was based on a relationship with a particular daycare registration officer. At first this could be seen as a division of opinion between the sectors, and a continuation of the issues raised in connection with notice period in the findings connected to question one. However, as demonstrated in the following section practitioners across the settings communicate the same message.

Practitioners

"The passion for children that's what is needed to drive up quality" (deputy head, Whitehouse)

The above quotation reinforces the common child centred focus of all the practitioner responses in this section and throughout this chapter .In other respects, the practitioners' primary responses were comparable to the leaders; they related anecdotes about inspector misconceptions about practice:

> "Inspectors only go on EYFS, they don't know about real children" (NNEB, at *Cherrytree*).

> "They said they wanted the children to use more ICT, we got more ICT resources, then they said that they weren't modelled correctly, what about child centred learning" (teacher, *Whitehouse*).

Also, in common with their managers, the workers found it difficult to think of specific changes to practice as a result of an Ofsted inspection and the accompanying framework. In fact, some of the more experienced staff were vehement in their denials:

> "...it hasn't affected my teaching one iota, they want a simultaneous environment, but we found it didn't work... We have the right balance here, child initiated supported by qualified adults" (deputy head, *Whitehouse*).

> "Personally, I don't respect their judgement; my own research through gaining my Early Years qualifications has moved my practice on" (Early Years professional, *Tophat*).

In comparison, the less experienced staff were more accepting of Ofsted's right to disseminate advice and therefore did provide some examples of how their own practice had improved:

> "Individually it has made me tighten up on my paperwork regarding assessment and planning. I think it has improved my practice and helped the children. Documenting everything, filling in the profile is important; it helps me get an accurate picture of the children. I really think it is positive" (nursery nurse, 2 years experience, *Umbrella*).

> "It has made me less nervous with outsiders, and helped me to see more about the nursery, made me think about the activities linked to PSRN (mathematical area of EYFS). It has brought us together as a team" (recently qualified assistant, *Umbrella*).

It is important to remember that both these respondents are working in a setting that was recently awarded 'outstanding'; hence they may be more likely to be positive. Indeed the nursery nurse in particular described her feelings connected with this successful outcome:

> "When we got our 'outstanding' it felt really good. Some parents even bought us in cards. My self esteem was raised and I felt really proud to work here...The process made us all work together. I think I am doing a good job, it was nice to be told so by somebody important."

The remaining practitioners did not share her 'glowing' review of the process but most did agree with their leaders that Ofsted offered reassurance and affirmation "you know you are doing right" (new teaching assistant, *Greenleaf*). Despite this there were still some concerns about the differences in approach across the sector and the 'snapshot' nature of the current framework:

> "Not sure if it drives up quality, people perform then relax; they are only 'outstanding' on that day" (teacher, *Greenleaf*).

> "Ofsted is about putting on a show, titivating" (deputy head, *Whitehouse*).

> "They need to stay for longer, 3 hours is not enough, it should be two days" (nursery nurse, *Talltrees*).

> "Why should schools have notice, everything should be spot checked" (nursery nurse, 2 years experience, *Umbrella*).

In addition, one of the practitioners from a private setting contributed a distinct explanation of professional differences:

> "I think the difference between us and our school based colleagues is that teachers think Ofsted is criticising them as professionals, whereas we don't think that way. We think about the children, are we doing our best, are we letting them down" (nursery nurse 10 years experience, *Tophat*).

Her response was exceptional, nobody else alluded to professional identity as a barrier to quality, yet other participants implied there was a variation in practice across the sector that made it difficult to maintain standards. In particular both the nursery teacher and Early Years co-ordinator at *Greenleaf* deemed this to be problematic as their nursery is part time:

"90% of our children move to a different setting in the afternoon, we know nothing about the other half of their care and development. I would welcome developing long term relationships with private nursery providers, we can learn from one another. We need to establish a professional dialogue and moderate practice together. Similar situation dialogue would really help; I am worried that the staff in the other settings don't know what goes on here" (Early Years co-ordinator).

The overwhelming majority of responses in both the private and state sector continued to build on the ideas outlined by their managers, "collegiality is crucial", a "documentary trail" would prove our quality". One practitioner developed this idea further:

"I think we are happy to respond to advice and guidance from ourselves and from other Early Years colleagues, I would welcome the opportunity to visit other nurseries, observe activities and for any staff to come here and watch me. It is the word that is wrong here, not the process, I don't like the word inspection, it is too regimented. If was renamed, as, I don't know? External evaluation? Appraisal? I think we would be happier, we do evaluations all the time and observe each other with the children, we could just make it formal" (new teaching assistant, *Greenleaf*).

Again, this reinforces the perceived need for the sector to work together, for 'quality' to be managed from within, and to establish a 'professional dialogue', these phrases occur throughout the findings.

5.3.3.3 Summary of the Findings for Research Question Three: **Do headteachers/managers/practitioners consider Ofsted to be a 'change agent'?**

The findings for this question began with evidence from an Ofsted documentary source proclaiming that the inspection process in the Early Years sector had led to improvements in provision. This view is not universally endorsed by the leaders and practitioners in this study, and they found it difficult to provide concrete examples of change to their policies or practice as a consequence of the Ofsted framework. Indeed some of the answers refer to other evaluation schemes such as ECERS, and EEL, being used to monitor provision, and these were devised specifically for the nursery sector. Although there was some acceptance of the worth of the Ofsted

driven self-evaluation process, the reluctance to accord credit to the inspection process is part of a continuous thread running throughout this chapter.

This set of nursery managers and their workforce desire the distinct nature of nursery provision to be, not only, acknowledged but understood by the inspectorate. This perceived lack of understanding, moreover empathy, with the sector could be a barrier to change as the recommendations made in Ofsted reports can appear to be uninformed, unrealistic and lacking an appreciation of the complexities of the total nursery environment. There is an indication that a more collaborative sector driven approach would be welcomed and that an informed relationship approach would open up a professional dialogue between private and state settings. This is discussed further in the 'analysis of the findings' in chapter six.

5.3.4 Research Question Four: Is Parental Choice Influenced by Ofsted Reporting?

The findings for this particular research question are mostly derived from the parental questionnaire, which was distributed by each nursery to all of their parents of three and four year old children. Although there is a set of data for each of the case study settings and individual pie charts were produced for each of the Likert scale questions, it became evident that there were similarities across the case studies and that there were only useful units of analysis for a limited number of the questions. Therefore at beginning of this chapter a summary of all the parental questionnaire results is presented in graphical form and where there are distinct contextual differences between case studies in parental opinion further illustration and explanation is provided. These graphs are supported by a commentary and followed by a summary of the parents written explanations of their reasons for selecting a nursery, these responses have generated themes relating to the research question.

This themed summary will be supported by documentary sources and the findings from the interviews and focus groups with the practitioners, the leaders and the inspectors. Following this, an overview of the findings connected to this research question will be presented. This chapter ends with a summation of the findings relating to all four research questions, which are subsequently analysed in chapter six.

5.3.4.1 Introduction to the questionnaire

As the questionnaire required parents to have an awareness of Ofsted reporting, this section begins with a short description of the nurseries methods of informing parents of the inspection process, this is based on information from field notes, Ofsted reporting and the setting's own website. All of the nurseries had prominent well maintained noticeboards containing general setting based information for parents and a copy of the most recent Ofsted report. All of the nurseries have information packs or prospectuses for parents and these contained excerpts from Ofsted reporting. All of the nurseries except for *Cherrytree,* have their own website, all of the websites have a clear link to their Ofsted report. The Ofsted logo features prominently on the websites for *Tophat* and *Greenleaf.* All of the nurseries Ofsted reports confirm that parents are involved in the settings evaluation processes; moreover all the reports contain positive parental comments regarding the provision.

Questionnaire data

The findings are presented in the form of piecharts with the questionnaire statement used as a heading. A copy of the questionnaire is provided in the Appendix (see Appendix 3)
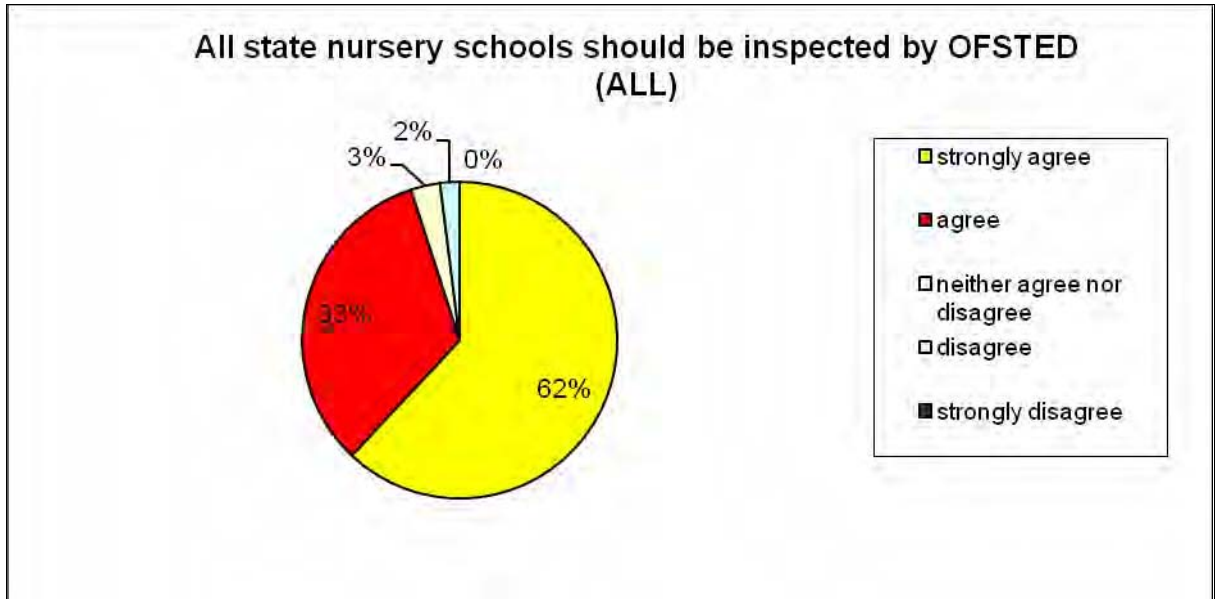
All state nursery schools should be inspected by OFSTED (ALL)

2%
3%
0%
33%
62%

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree

Figure 2

All private nursery schools should be inspected by OFSTED (ALL)

2%
3%
0%
28%
67%

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree

Figure 3

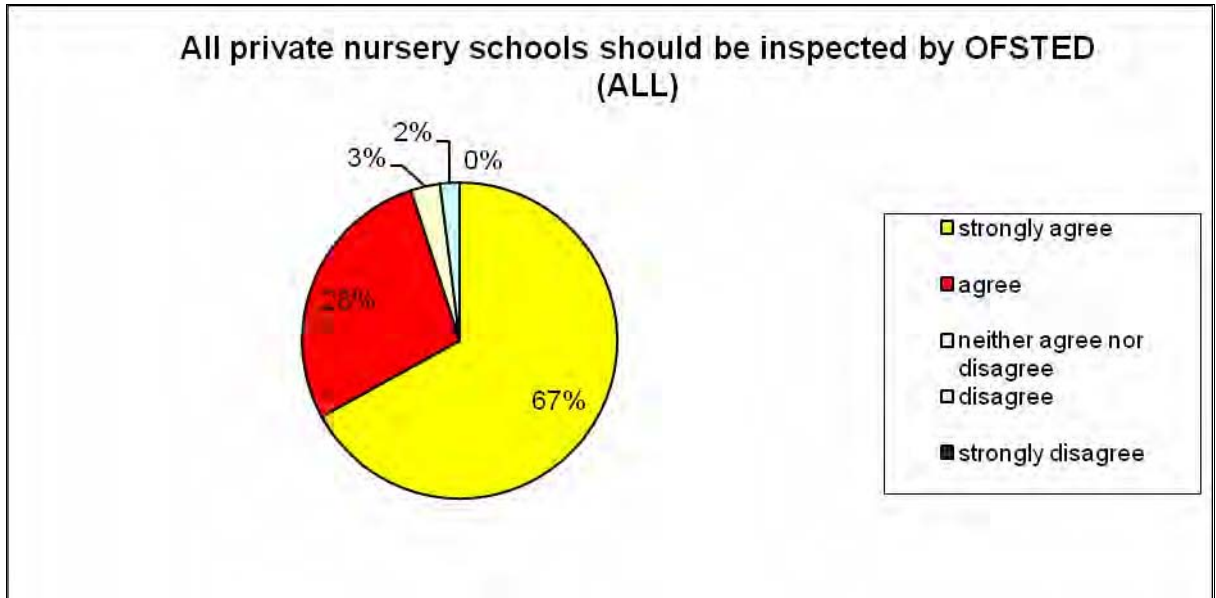These first two graphs indicate that the parents are in agreement with the other

stakeholders in this study that there is a need for inspection in the nursery sector. A

slightly higher percentage perceive there to be a greater need for inspection in the

private sector and some of the written comments mention parental concerns relating

to this type of provision. Their level of agreement may indicate there is a general

acceptance of the existence of Ofsted as a body and therefore inspection is an
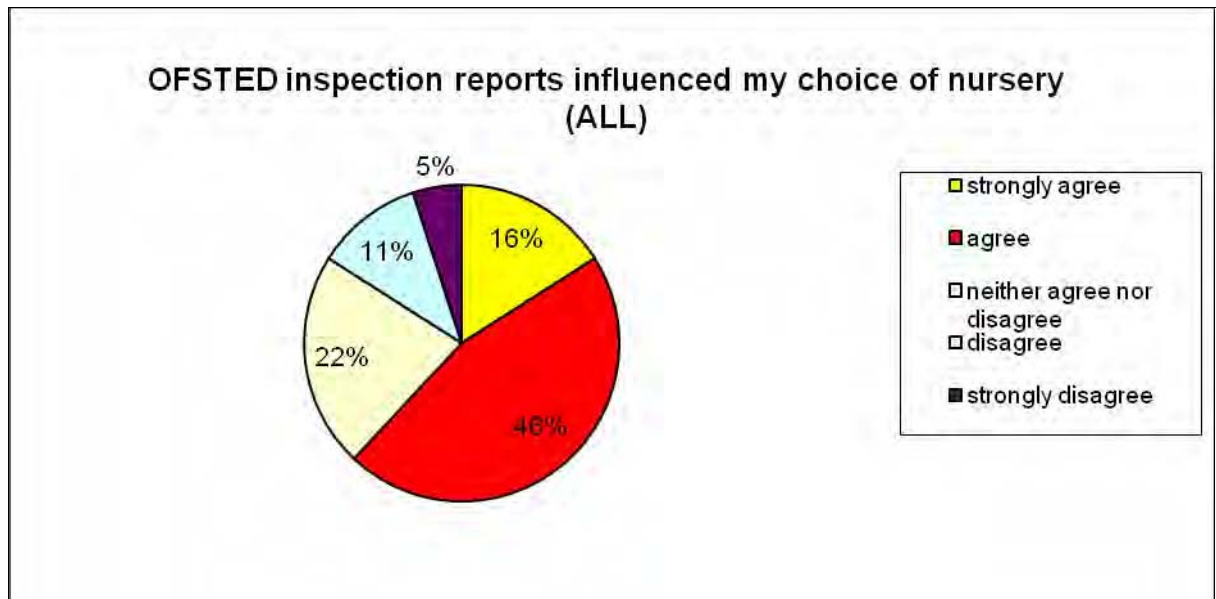
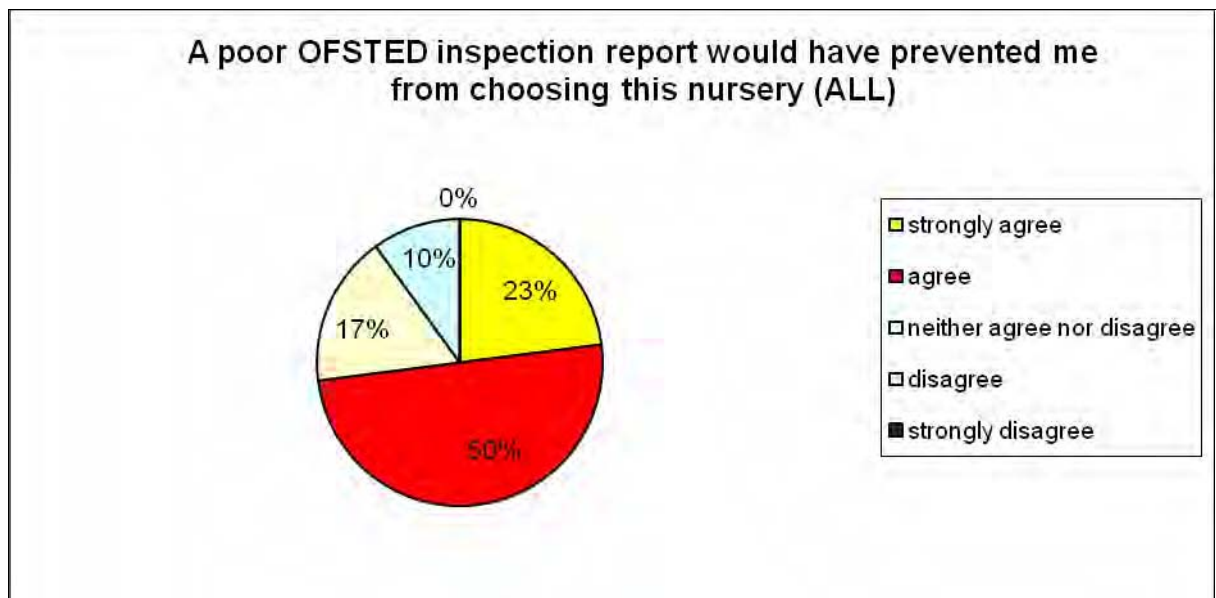established procedure.

Figure 5

Figure 6

When considering whether Ofsted reporting influenced parental choice, all of the

leaders suggest that for their parents Ofsted reporting is a "starting point" (supervisor,

Umbrella), and considered that Ofsted influences the initial selection of nurseries but

not the final choice. Commenting on parental perspectives, one of practitioners used an interesting analogy:

"It is the same as booking a holiday, you would read the reviews, look on trip adviser" (nursery nurse with 2 years experience, *Umbrella*).

The other stakeholders all considered that their parents might have looked at the report but it would not have been their overall influence. This is illustrated by these two graphs (figures 5 and 6); indeed some parents suggest that Ofsted reporting was not a factor in their choice. This aspect is developed in the later questions and the written responses.
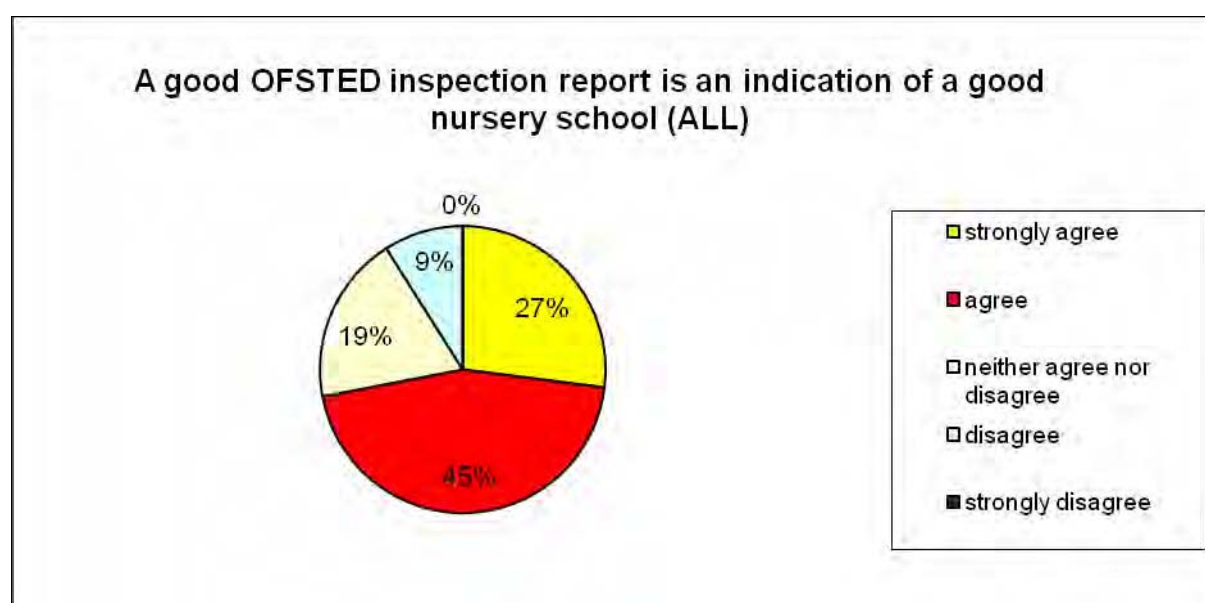
Figure 7

There is a stronger sense of agreement for this statement than with other stakeholders who felt that there could be inconsistencies in grades awarded. These results follow a similar pattern across the five settings, and do not accord with the concerns expressed about grading by the *leaders* and *practitioners* discussed at the beginning of this chapter. However, both the supervisor and Early Years professional at *Tophat* offered an explanation for parental acceptance of Ofsted grading, they felt

that this was because parents did not have an understanding of the terminology used in reports or the requirements linked to the Foundation Stage. Therefore parents do not question the awarded grade and accept judgements at 'face value'.
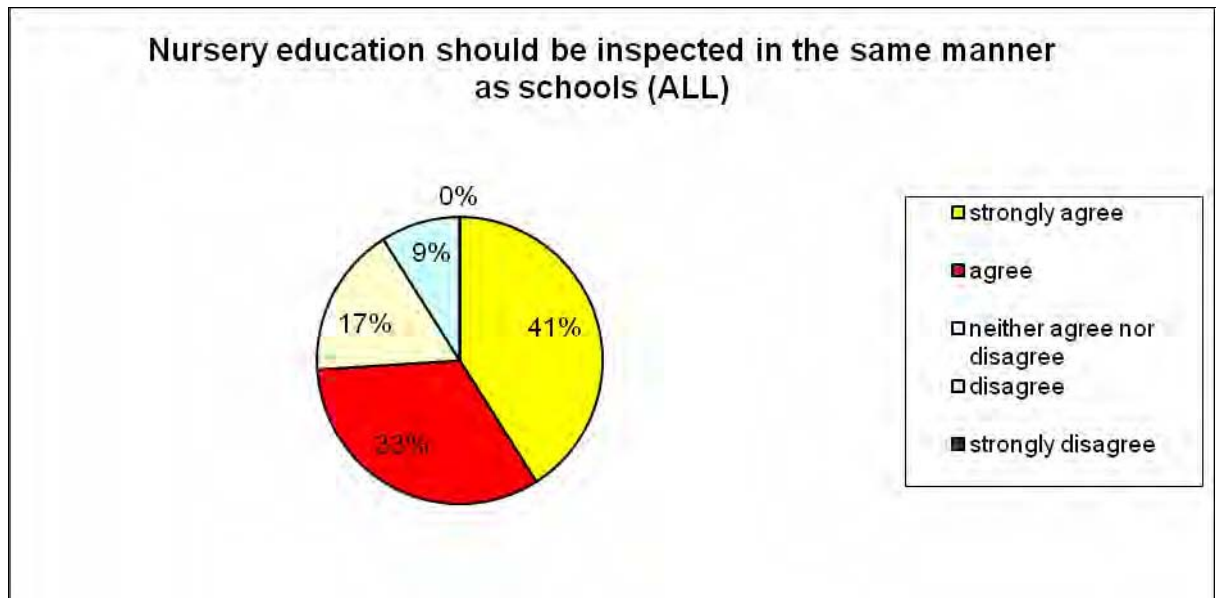
Figure 4

As raised in chapter five the overwhelming majority of parents agree that nurseries should be inspected in the same manner as schools. Yet, as suggested by the previous answer if the parents do not understand the requirements, they could be unaware that there is a separate framework for nurseries. The parents from *Umbrella* had the highest percentage of disagreement 22% compared to the average of 9% and one offered this written comment as further explanation:

"School and nurseries are different, in nursery the care and development should come before planning for learning".

The provision of care in a nursery school is as important as the provision of education (ALL)

1%   0%
0%

31%

68%

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree
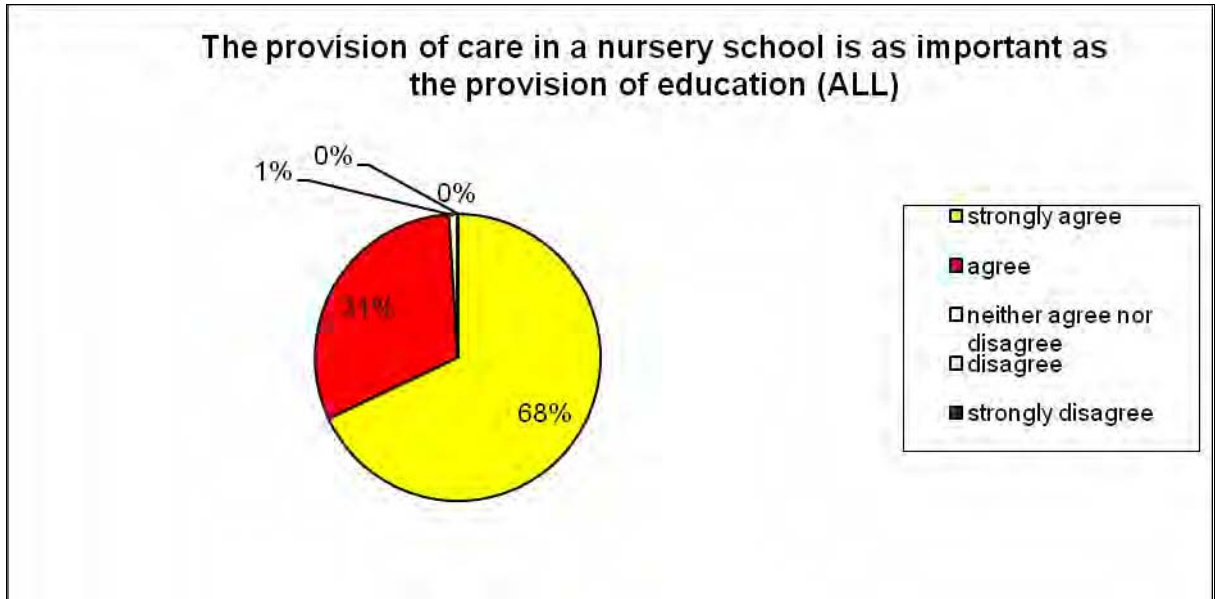
Figure 8

Figure 8 reinforces aspects of the findings from most of the practitioners and leaders

in this chapter that the care of the child is of paramount importance in nursery

education. Only one parent at *Tophat* did not agree with this statement.

Nursery schools should have health and safety inspections (ALL)

0%
0%   0%

33%

67%

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree
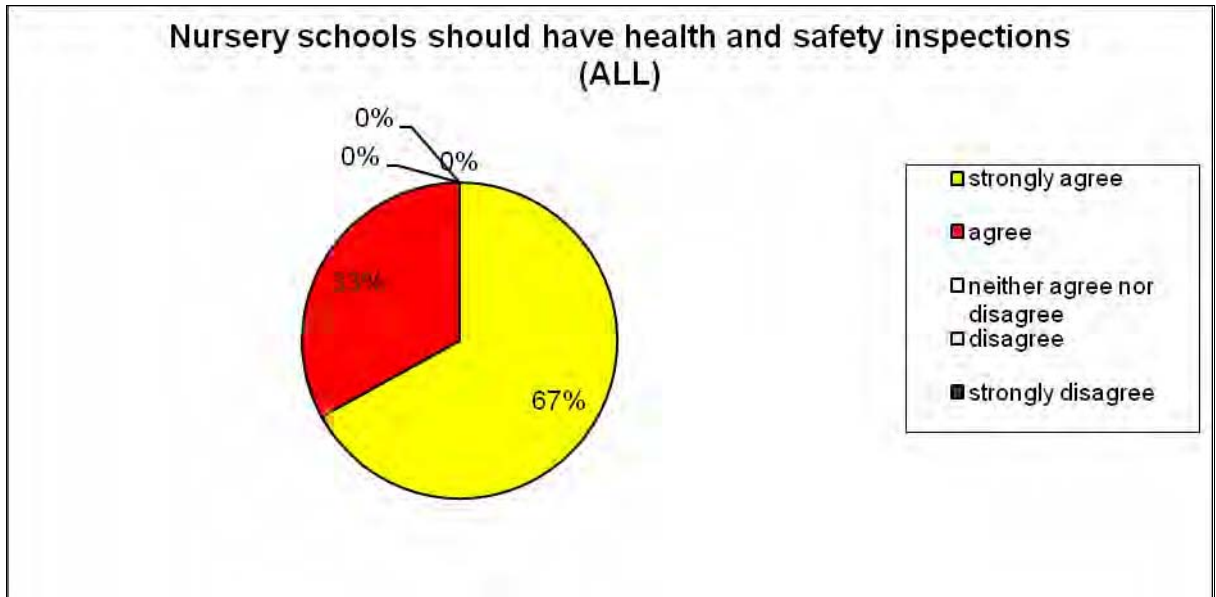
Figure 9

Health and safety inspections were part of the previous Social Services remit for

annual registration of private nurseries and are no longer part of the Ofsted

inspection process. However, as can be seen by figure 9 all parents agree that

nurseries should have health and safety inspections.
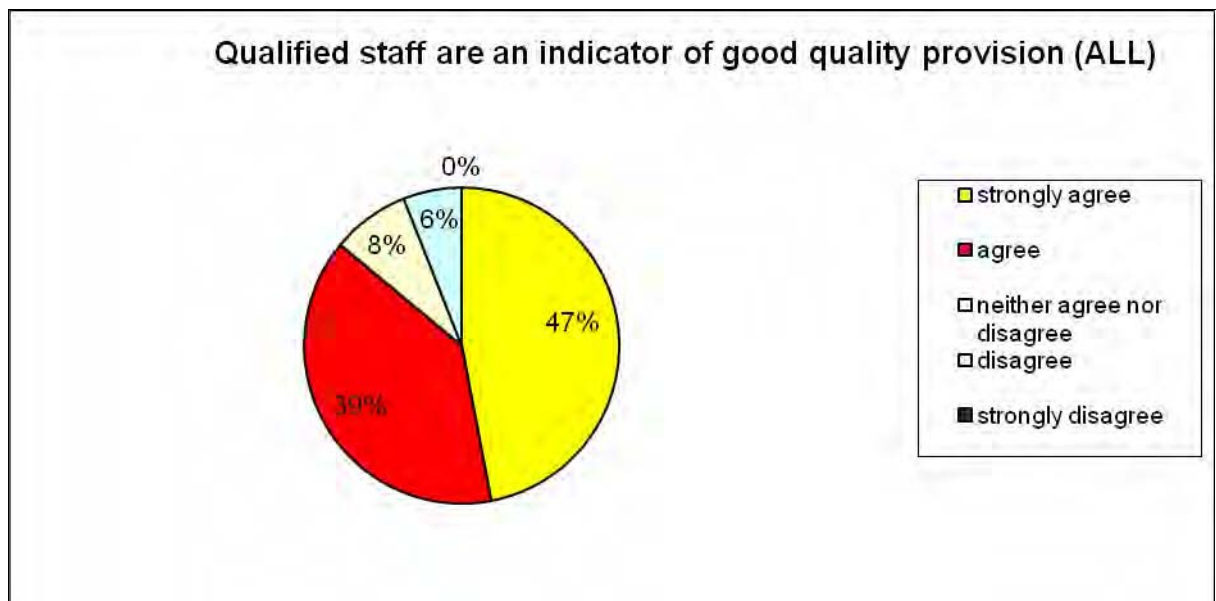
Figure 10

The overwhelming percentage of parents either agreed or strongly agreed with this

statement, indicating that they do place value on staff qualifications.
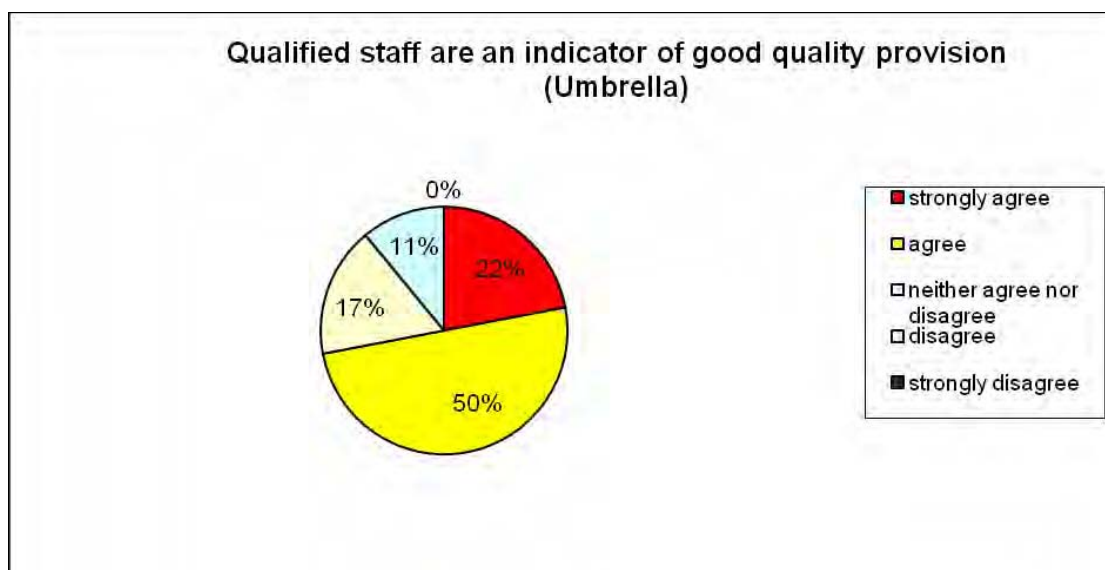
Figure 11

However, figure 11 illustrates significantly fewer parents at *Umbrella* strongly agree

than across the other settings. This is supported by their comments discussed at the

end of this section which suggest that they consider staff characteristics to be more

important than qualifications. To illustrate this they use phrases connected to

happiness and enjoyment, rather than focusing upon development progress and

preparation for school.
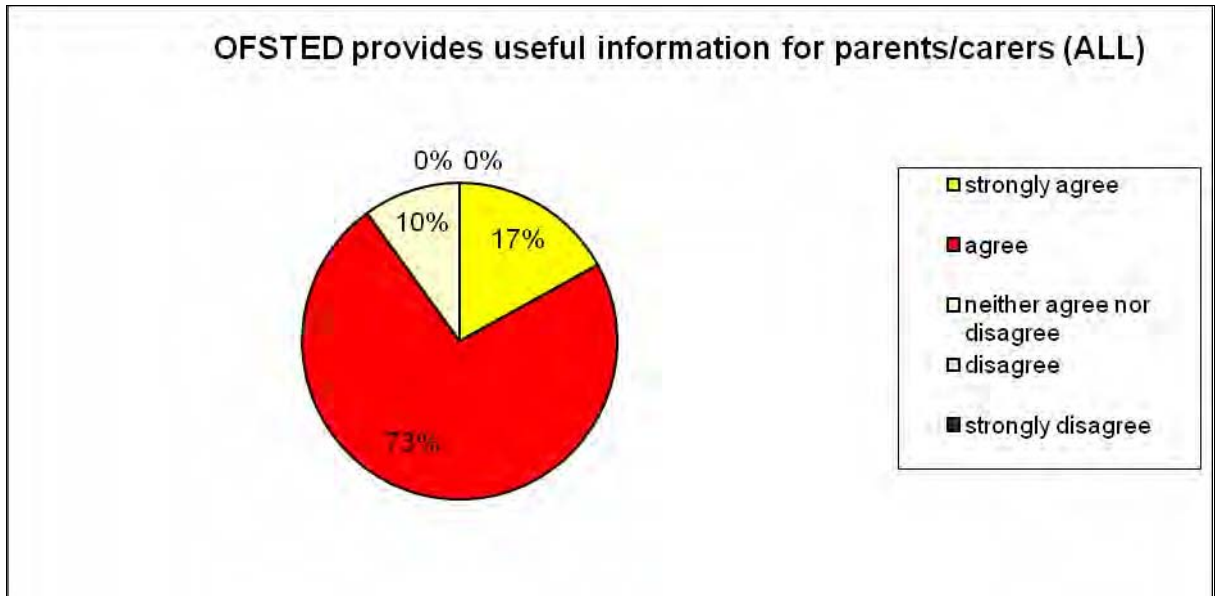
Figure 12
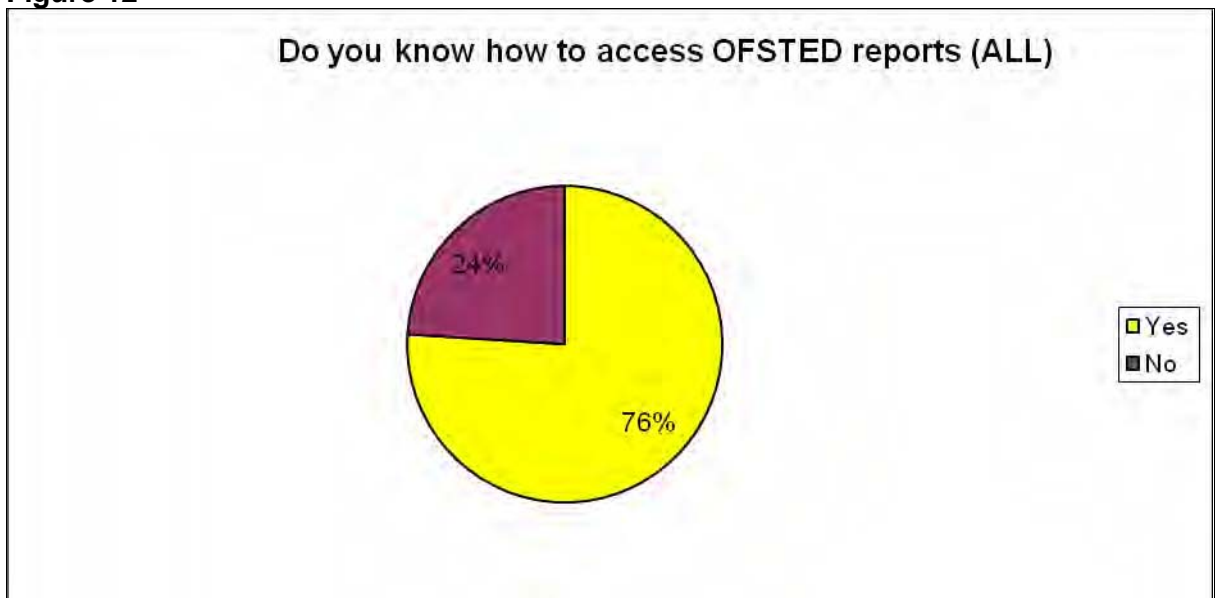
Figure 13

Figures 12 and 13 support the assertions of the *leaders* and *practitioners* in this

study, that reading the Ofsted report is part of making an informed parental choice,

as most parents acknowledge that Ofsted provides useful information and they know

how to access reporting. However, there is a discrepency between the number of

parents stating they know how to access a report and those that have actually read

the report for their specific setting.
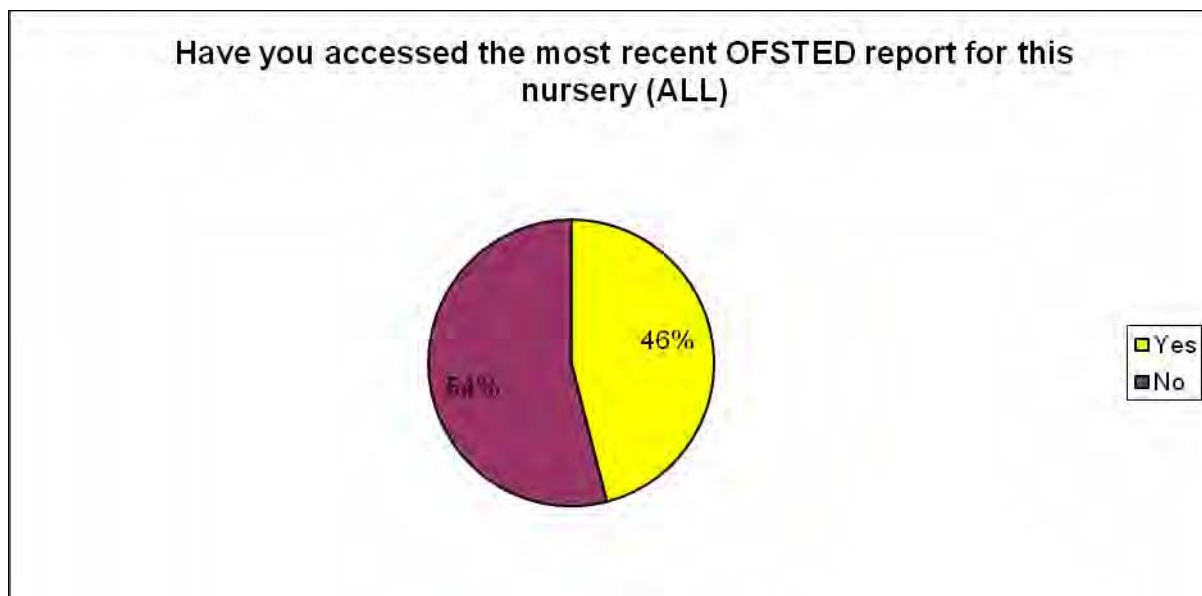
Figure 14

There was a variation in results across the case study settings; therefore these will

be presented in tabular form to aid comparison. The non shaded nurseries represent

the highest and lowest number percentages of yes responses.

Summary of parents who have accessed the nursery's most recent Ofsted

report

Name of Nursery	% of Yes responses	% of No responses	Total number of respondents
Umbrella	60	40	36
Greenleaf	70	30	34
Whitehouse	25	75	40
Cherrytree	12	88	26
Tophat	64	36	44

Table 6

Table 6 may suggest that although most of the parents connected to this study are

well informed about Ofsted and do perceive it as a selection tool, some of them seem

to have used other means to inform their final choice. This issue will be discussed

further in the summary of parental comments and the next chapter which provides an analysis of these findings.

A description of parental reasons for selecting a nursery

The final opinion based question asked parents to rank the reasons for choosing a nursery in order of importance. The six reasons were generated from the stakeholder interviews, the parental focus groups and the study by Woodland *et al* (2002) commissioned by the DfES to examine parental reasons for selecting their childcare setting.
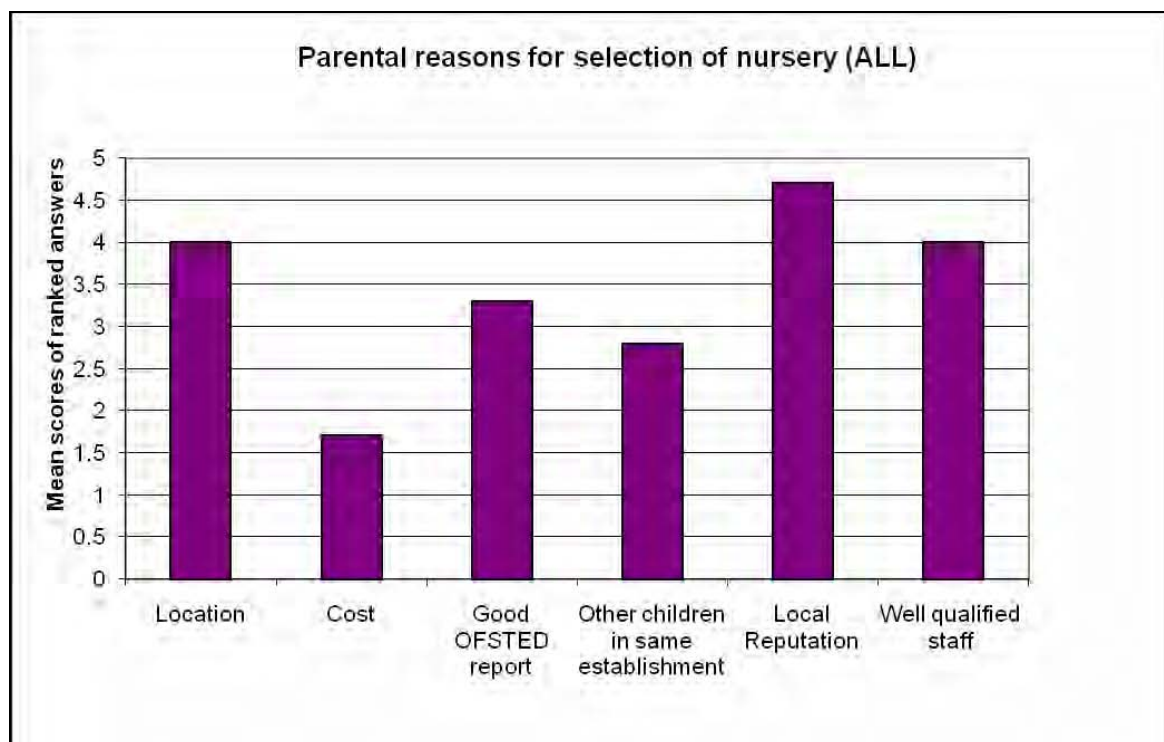
Table 7

In all five case study nurseries the parents did acknowledge that Ofsted reporting had influenced their choice of setting to some degree. In addition the variation in ranking corresponded with the findings shown in *table 6,* the parents at *Cherrytree* and *Whitehouse* did not rate Ofsted as a major selection influence. Moreover, no parents

accorded Ofsted the highest rating, yet as can be seen most ranked it higher than 'cost' or 'children attending the same establishment'. The overwhelming number of parents rated 'local reputation' as the main reason for choosing a nursery. The factors that constitute this community standing were discussed by the parents in their written comments and the stakeholders in their interviews. These are portrayed in the next section.

5.3.4.2 Explanations of parental choice

When asked to provide a further explanation for their choice of nursery, the overwhelming majority of respondents did provide some additional reasons for their selection. Their explanations reflected aspects of the 'dimensions of quality' outlined in the previous chapter in table 5: interactions/ relationships; progress of the learner; staff training and the nursery environment .The most number of responses were connected with relationships, yet in this instance it could refer to their own relationships in the form of a recommendation from their own friendship groups or family history with a setting. Therefore the personal connection was important, and was the most cited reason for choice across the case study nurseries.

5.3.4.3 Theme one: community networks

Parents

As local reputation was the most highly ranked parental reason for selection of a nursery, it is perhaps unsurprising that the views of the community in the form of friends, other parents and family members are frequently featured in the parents written comments. The overwhelming majority of parents mentioned a personal recommendation as a reason for visiting the nursery in the first instance. The following section provides a selection of written responses from all the nurseries:

"I moved into this area, knew no one. My other children are older, I asked the parents in the playground, they said this nursery was good, well great..." (*Umbrella*).

"The reasons I choose this nursery are more to do with personal connections than the Ofsted report" (*Umbrella).*

"Ofsted gives a good indication of some of the key areas, but 'word of mouth' locally is important. I asked my friends and colleagues who they rated, it is just as important to have a good feeling about staff and the way they treat the children is crucial. It is about more than 'education', it is about care and sensitivity" (*Tophat*).

"A good Ofsted report helps in choosing a nursery but community reputation counts for a lot more" (*Tophat*).

"This nursery is closest to our house. However, we did move house to be near this school. I took my daughter out of private nursery because of the poor Ofsted report and moved her here even though it makes my working life more difficult and it is more expensive for me to do so. My friends and family told me it was a good nursery and I think it was worth it" (*Greenleaf*).

"Everybody knows that *Greenleaf* is a good school, and I had been told by the mum's at my toddler group that the nursery is good."

"My niece went here before my daughter so my sister in law informed me of it and how happy she was with it. My brother in law is a governor here and recommended it" (*Whitehouse*).

"The reason I chose this nursery is because all my other children had previously attended...once my eldest child had been to the nursery, the teaching staff, the atmosphere, the whole environment, which was very child friendly, made me determined my other children would also attend the nursery" (*Whitehouse*).

"Five of my cousins attended this nursery and they all have very fond memories... I believe, looking at my cousins today, that *Whitehouse nursery* set them good foundations for their future learning".

"If I didn't know friends that had used this nursery then I would have accessed Ofsted to look at the report, but it was highly recommended" (*Cherrytree*).

"I can honestly say this is one of the best nurseries in the area, my other child came here a couple of years ago and my friends' children come here" (*Cherrytree*).

Leaders and Practitioners

As previously stated in the commentary to the questionnaire data, all of the other

stakeholders felt that Ofsted was part of the selection process but not the main

reason for selection. Most of the respondents referred to 'word of mouth' and local

standing as a factor influencing parental choice, some examples of responses are provided below:

"I think Ofsted may be a more important factor in other areas, here we have a history with the families, the parents of the children came here themselves. I think they place value on their own judgements, we are known for having the best quality care in the area..." (deputy head, *Whitehouse*).

"I don't think Ofsted reporting myself I think reputation is a big factor, ours has grown, that and proximity" (Early Years co-ordinator, *Greenleaf*).

"Word of mouth is important in this area; parents here don't have access to computers or go to the library" (headteacher, *Cherrytree*).

"Word of mouth, reputation is more important to parents than Ofsted...it is about relationship building with the area and its parents" (supervisor, *Tophat*).

"We don't advertise, we don't need to, our links with families and the locality offer continuity of service, parents know what they are getting..." (owner, *Umbrella*).

Inspectors

In accord with the other stakeholders, both the inspectors suggested that Ofsted reports did inform parental choice but may not be the main reason for selection of a nursery, they did not refer to locality or personal connections. The more experienced inspector considered that Ofsted's judgements became more important to parents as their children became older. Although both of the advisers did support the view that Ofsted reporting formed part of the selection process, a distinct perspective was offered from one of the advisers regarding community. She stated that:

"For a lot of parents local is good, but it depends on where they live, if they live in a village there maybe one or no providers, quality doesn't come into their choice. It also depends on the type of parent, what they want from a nursery, their own level of interest and education" (adviser with sector experience).

The issues raised in the last sentence will be developed further in the next theme, as the next most significant reason for choice outlined in the written comments is connected to parental perceptions of nursery provision.

5.3.4.4 Theme two: parental requirements of nursery provision

Most of the parental comments included some indication of their requirements of

nursery provision. This comparative theme arose as there appeared to be a clear

division in parental perceptions of what nurseries should provide, some perceived the

nursery role as educational, others discussed the flexibility of opening hours.

Although at first these responses could be seen to be allied to the distinct nature of

nursery provision, the second theme of the research question one, the parental

comments generate a separate discussion and different findings. Some parents

mention play and development in their responses which could be linked to

preparation for school, but some parents require specific preschool skills. Some

parents' requirements focus on the nursery as a service, meeting their own needs as

working parents. A sample of both types of parental responses is provided below:

Preparation for School

> "The nursery is an established place of education with an excellent track record
> and reputation. The staff are highly qualified and experienced and I know they
> receive regular training, they provide excellent support advice and
> communication. The resources of the nursery are very good, as are the trips
> and visits. I choose this nursery as it is a 'stand alone' independent of an infant
> and junior school and provides all round education" (*Whitehouse*).

> "I wanted him to be prepared for school, to learn the basics before he starts"
> (*Whitehouse*).

> "Initial education is important, the school uniform, the planned morning, all of it
> will prepare him for reception" (*Greenleaf*).

> "I like the fact the children mix with the school children, it encourages them to
> learn" (*Greenleaf*).

> "The other children looked like they were having fun, I felt that my son would
> enjoy himself at the nursery and so would learn and develop quicker"
> (*Umbrella*).

> "I wanted her to mix with other children and learn to behave before she goes to
> school" (*Cherrytree*).

> "I wanted Jade to understand what school is going to be like" (*Cherrytree).

<u>Childcare Service</u>

> "It had availability at the time I was asking for and the fact the nursery opens at 8.00 am is great" (*Tophat*).

> "It had opening times that suit my working hours" (*Umbrella*).

> "It had places available when I moved house" (*Cherrytree*).

> "It had availability at the time I was asking for" (*Tophat).*

> "It is convenient for my place of work" (*Umbrella*).

> "It offers a free full time place" (*Cherrytree*).

There were no responses that mentioned this aspect in *Greenleaf* or *Whitehouse*, and at first it could seem an obvious divide as parents using state sector provision may not expect opening hours to reflect their own working hours. Yet *Cherrytree* is also a state provider and some of their parental comments did mention the service aspects of hours and availability. This issue is further explained in the stakeholder interviews in the next section.

Leaders and *Practitioners*

When asked whether they considered parental choice to be influenced by Ofsted reporting, some of the leaders and practitioners held similar views to the experienced adviser. They suggested that some parents did not access Ofsted reporting as "some parents just care about the opening hours and want a childminding service" (supervisor at *Tophat*). This view was not confined to the private sector as the headteacher and practitioners at *Cherrytree* used the same phrase and offered further explanation:

> "Somehow we need to get parents to understand what we do, we try to share our philosophy through our events but you can't make all parents attend, I think we need to shout about what nurseries do more" (teacher, *Cherrytree*).

This lack of parental interest was also highlighted by the Early Years co-ordinator at *Greenleaf:*

> "We offer training but parents don't come, our parents are busy they see this as our job and not theirs. It is not that they don't understand, it's more that they don't want to."

However, some of the other leaders and practitioners develop the last issue raised by the adviser in connection with the previous theme, they hypothesize that parental level of education and occupation could be a reason for accessing Ofsted reporting:

> "Professional parents are more likely to take notice of Ofsted reporting" (supervisor, *Tophat*).

> "Some parents might look at a report, it depends on what they want some just want a childminding, more educated parents might look" (nursery nurse, *Cherrytree* with 20 years experience).

All the parents were asked to provide the occupation of the main income earner, most (67%) parents completed this section, and according to the analysis of this data using the standard occupational classification (NoS, 2010), their assertions can be applied to all the parents responses. A higher proportion of parents with a professional or managerial position were more likely to strongly agree that Ofsted had influenced their choice of nursery than the remaining parents, 87% as opposed to 64% in the remaining classification. At *Cherrytree* where the lowest number of parents indicated that they had looked at their settings Ofsted report. All the respondents at *Cherrytree* did provide details of their occupation, and using the standard occupational classification index (NoS, 2010), none of the parents had a professional or managerial position and 50% were unemployed. In addition, as stated in chapter four *Table1*, this particular nursery had the lowest rate of questionnaire return at 54%.This could be due to lack of awareness of web based Ofsted reporting, as it was stated by the headteacher that parental access to the internet is restricted due to lack of household income. The postcode data provided by" A Classification of Residential Neighbourhoods" (CACI, ACORN, 2010), did confirm that *Cherrytree* is located in area of low income families.

Inspectors

The Ofsted documentary sources, inspectors and advisers did not make any further contribution to this theme.

5.3.4.5 Theme three: quality is a feeling

An overwhelming number of parents mentioned alongside personal recommendation and local reputation that they had looked around the nursery. During this nursery tour, they formed an impression of its environment connected to "feeling" and "atmosphere". Although these descriptions don't mention 'quality', their examples contained many of the quality factors discussed by the other stakeholders in question two but used non-specialist terminology. They refer to the initial impression gained in their tour as a strong influence on their personal choice of nursery, a selection of parental responses is provided below:

> "Ofsted gives a good indication of some of the key areas. However, it is just as important to have a good feeling when looking around about staff and the way they treat the children is crucial. It is about more than 'education', it is about care and sensitivity" (*Tophat*).

> "It is the general 'feel' 'ambience'- a gut instinct that it is right for your child-it is very personal" (*Umbrella*).

> "When I visited I liked the comfortable atmosphere and the friendly staff..." (*Umbrella*).

> "There was a really welcoming atmosphere, it was clean and the other children looked like they were having fun, the staff were friendly" (*Tophat*).

> "It was obvious from the first visit to the nursery that the staff were dedicated and the children were happy" (*Whitehouse*).

> "The most important factor was the impression I gained during my visit" (*Whitehouse).*

> "The whole atmosphere is child friendly and the staff are lovely" (*Cherrytree*).

> "It is difficult to put down on paper; I just felt it was right" (*Cherrytree*).

> "When you walk in there is a buzz, the children are happy with each other, the staff are supporting them..." (*Greenleaf*).

"Everything is bright and cheerful, there is a good feeling" (*Greenleaf*).

These findings support the views expressed by parents in the pilot study focus group, they spoke confidently about the overall atmosphere and "the buzz" of the setting as being their most important reason for selecting a nursery.

All Other Stakeholders

The overwhelming majority of other stakeholders, including inspectors and advisers, responses indicated that they placed value on parents visiting a setting prior as a selection tool:

"A wise parent looks..." (experienced inspector).

"We tell parents to look" (Early Years adviser with sector experience).

"Looking around is important..." (nursery nurse with 2 years experience, *Umbrella).*

"I always recommend a parent looks" (supervisor, *Umbrella*).

"I think they need to go and see the nursery" (apprentice, *Tophat*).

A few of the stakeholders explained the reasons for parents needing to visit:

"I think parents haven't got the experience to 'read between the lines' of the report, they don't understand the terminology and need to see things for themselves" (supervisor, *Tophat)*.

"Discerning parents might take notice of the report but many don't understand what they are reading. We recommend that they visit and judge us themselves" (owner, *Umbrella*).

Yet these outlined stakeholder responses merely affirm the need to visit a setting to aid selection, they do not place a similar value to feelings and atmosphere which are clearly of importance to the parents.

5.3.4.6 Summary of the Findings of Research Question Four: Is Parental Choice Influenced by Ofsted Reporting?

From the findings of the parental questionnaire it would seem that there is an awareness of Ofsted as a body and in accordance with other stakeholders an acceptance of the need for inspection. Yet although there is recognition that Ofsted reporting provides a service for parents enabling them to make an informed choice, it would appear that only some of the parents involved in this study had accessed the inspection report of their child's nursery. The written comments with their outlined reasons for choice provided a distinct perspective of 'quality'; the parents' explanations are not constructed with an 'expert' knowledge of the sector but with an understanding of their child. Their required components of a nursery may be different to the quality factors described by the professional stakeholders, yet they still can be related to the four dimensions of quality. In their responses, they do mention relationships, the environment, staffing and progress of the learner but as their examples connected with service or school preparation are not based around theoretical approaches or professional concerns they can seem ill considered. Yet, as the some of the practitioners suggested, perhaps their choice is not ill considered but uninformed. This reiterates the findings of all the research questions, that in order to develop nursery provision an informed collaborative relationship between all stakeholders is needed.

5.4 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has presented the findings from the various forms of data collected from the settings, the inspectors, advisers and documentary sources. It has focused on the Early Years context, the perspectives of all stakeholders and the current approach to inspection. It has also sought to explore notions of 'quality' and establish

common factors that develop care and education across the sector. The findings that contribute to the 'dimensions of quality' (*table 5)* demonstrate that all stakeholders value relationships and that informed interactions with children form the foundation for a productive learning environment. Common themes, similarities and differences have been highlighted throughout between those who inspect, lead and practice, from these stakeholder perspectives a universal regard for the sector is apparent. Conversely, despite this affirming view of nursery provision there is a sense that the development of care and education is occurring in spite of the inspection framework.

All of the groups acknowledge a need for inspection to maintain standards, yet there is disagreement about the form it takes, the frequency it occurs and the nature of the inspectorate. There is a definite call for a sector based approach, particularly from the practitioner and leaders from the case study settings. There is strong recognition from these stakeholders that the nursery workforce should understand the holistic nature of child development and that this knowledge leads to improved practice. Therefore, in order to evaluate and develop provision through inspection, they believe that it is essential for the 'official' body to have professional experience combined with an awareness of developmental matters. This would provide a nursery with an informed inspection judgment.

The current view of inspection that emerges from these findings is that despite the self-evaluation document, the regulatory process is unilateral. There is no relationship with the nursery's inspector and no opportunity to engage in professional dialogue. Moreover due to the 'instant' nature of inspection, the nurseries felt that the judgements of Ofsted could be based on an insubstantial 'snapshot'. Yet, although the leaders and practitioners shared misgivings regarding the frequency and duration of inspection, their largest sense of unease was connected to the lack of continuing interaction with the inspectorate. The development of a collaborative continuous

relationship between the setting and the inspectorate could prevent inaccurate reporting, and facilitate change. This emphasis on collaboration appears to be important; indeed some practitioners considered that the optimum method to develop care and education would be to move away from infrequent external inspection to a regular, collegiate, partnership approach.

Finally, all the other stakeholders refer to parents in their explanations and their liaison with the nursery setting is perceived as a quality factor. The parental questionnaires indicated that parents have an acceptance of inspection and an awareness of Ofsted reporting as an information source. Ofsted may be a selection tool; however parental reasons for choosing a nursery are complex. From the responses in the pilot study focus groups and parental opinion gauged by the written comments in the questionnaire, it is evident that the parents in this study hold different notions of the purpose of nursery provision compared to the sector. Parents are an integral part of all the settings evaluation systems; however in a similar manner to the inspectorate, they may not be an informed part of the process. This issue and the others outlined in this summary will be analysed further in the next chapter.

Having now summarised the findings and described the evidence generated from my combined research methods in relation to my research questions. I am now able to develop further meaning to my findings by connecting them to the literature reviewed and by discussing whether the inspection framework does support the development of care and education within the nursery sector. Furthermore, by examining the dimensions of quality based on contextual evidence and experience, it will be possible to identify a stakeholder perspective of 'quality' and inspection. This will enable me to develop a framework of quality factors and a mechanism for evaluation that could be used by the nursery sector and possibly lead to improvement. It will

also consider whether greater sector and parental collaboration leading to the creation of documented professional dialogue would enable Dahlberg et *al's* (2007) 'meaning making' approach. Following on from this discussion, tentative suggestions can be made for a more suitable nursery inspection model, which will be useful for sector improvement. This approach advocating sector knowledge and dialogue could benefit not the only internal stakeholders and those responsible for monitoring and developing provision, but ultimately the nursery child.

Chapter Six

An Analysis of the Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis and discussion of the findings identified in the preceding chapter. To ensure continuity and coherence each research question and its generated themes will provide the central structure. The intention of this chapter is to construct meaningful answers from the stakeholders' rich contextual explanations blended with the substantive issues identified in the literature review and methodology chapters. By combining these perspectives, I aspire to produce a framework which reflects the knowledge gained by addressing the research questions. The overall aim of this study was to consider the sector response to an integrated inspection system and to explore how different aspects of 'quality' are defined, expressed and evaluated from the diverse stakeholder perspective. Ultimately this chapter will outline in the form of a model how the research outcomes of this study can contribute to the development of an organised sector generated professional dialogue based evaluation system. This model demonstrating a relationship approach to quality could provide an alternative collaborative approach to nursery improvement as part of the inspection approach.

6.2 Research Question One: Does the Inspection Framework Support the Development of Care and Education Across the Nursery Sector?

6.2.1 Theme one: assessing the need for nursery inspection

It is evident from all the stakeholder views expressed in this study that they perceive an external inspection system to be an established component of nursery provision. There was acknowledgement and acceptance by leaders, practitioners, parents and inspectors that there is a necessity for a universal measurement of quality. The stakeholders believed there was a need for external monitoring as children may not

receive adequate care and education in all the different forms of provision across the nursery sector. This demonstrates that the concerns of the sector are still in accord with Bertram and Pascal's (2000) earlier insistence that the diversity of nursery provision within England means that it is difficult to ensure quality, hence a system of inspection and enforcement of regulations is necessary. Moreover later literature by Tanner *et al* (2006) and Alexander (2010) deeming nursery inspection as unproblematic within the sector, reinforces the practitioner and leader acceptance of the inspection process. It is an integral part of their working lives and its existence remained unquestioned by the majority of the respondents.

This level of agreement with the existence of inspection was possibly due to the age range and experience of the nursery based stakeholders. The younger more inexperienced practitioners, in particular, were positive regarding inspection as a process; they would not have encountered any other approach. Whereas the older more experienced workers had been part of previous regulatory regimes. In some cases, particularly in the state settings, their memories caused benign reflections, endorsing Wilcox and Gray's (1996) view that Ofsted's predecessors HMI were part of an approach which valued 'educational consensus'. The teachers spoke of having a relationship with their inspector and a continuing dialogue, a view reinforced by colleagues in the private sector who applied similar phrases to their continued contact with their daycare officer.

Yet, there are some sector differences from the respondents in this study. The increased need for inspection in the private sector was expressed mostly by the practitioners based in the two private nurseries and the parents. This seems to be derived from perceived differences in role and lack of support from the local authority. Some nursery workers and leaders suggested that their work was more about caring for children than educating them; therefore their provision may deserve a different

approach and greater recognition from the inspectorate and government policy that the care of children is as important as education. This debate about the nature of nursery provision and the role of its workforce has been a recurring theme in the literature ranging from Isaacs (1924) to Moss (2000) to the more recent work of Osgood (2010). Indeed the previous regulatory framework prior to the Childcare Bill (DfES, 2006) which came into force in 2008 reinforced the diversity of the sector and solely accredited the quality of care in the private sector. Yet, the stakeholder references regarding the acknowledgment of care in the inspection process were in responses from the state and private sector. The practitioners and leaders suggested that over dominance of predetermined preschools skills within the inspection framework could prevent children's developmental needs being met. This view is reinforced by Tanner's *et al's* (2006) findings that suggest that some nursery workers felt that inspection promoted a restrictive approach which countered their notion of early childhood as a time for free play and relaxation.

However, unlike the school based views, expressed by Earley (1998) and Cullingford (1999) in the first ten years of Ofsted which questioned the necessity for inspection, the nursery based stakeholders and the parents in this study clearly feel an external evaluation system is necessary. The Early Years sources (Tanner *et al,*2006, Miller, 2008, Osgood, 2010) in this equivalent period of the first ten years of Ofsted inspection across the nursery sector also seem broadly accepting of the need, if not the process. Moreover, rather than considering Ofsted to be a controlling influence in schools taking away teacher autonomy as suggested by Maw (1996) and later by nursery based sources Miller (2008) and Osgood (2010), some of the leaders and practitioners in this study, particularly those in the private nurseries, felt it conferred 'higher status' on the sector, and made the public view them in the same way as schools. This is well illustrated by the following extract:

"There needs to be somebody external inspecting us otherwise standards would slip, everybody needs someone to check... when it was social services nobody took us seriously, but now it is Ofsted, we seem important. It makes us feel valued and that we are considered the same as schools...it makes us appear better to the public" (supervisor, *Umbrella*).

Therefore, this presents an unusual view of inspection seen as empowering and elevating, with a sense from these stakeholders that it is better to be included within the inspection framework than to be overlooked and excluded. Osgood (2006) would suggest that this lack of resistance to inspection could be seen as 'powerless and fatalistic resignation' (p7) and she cites Foucault's (1978) image of docility as an illustration of practitioners compulsion to conform to a policy that they do not believe in but feel helpless to resist. However, I did not gain an impression of passivity from these respondents; on the contrary the last respondent's positive image regarding status reinforces their affirming view that inspection is a necessary process in maintaining the standard of the care and education of young children across the nursery sector.

Who should inspect nursery provision?

Earlier literature regarding quality in the Early Years (Abbot and Rodger, 1995) did not indicate that they had considered the future possibility of nursery inspection by Ofsted. However, their outline of what was needed to develop good quality provision included a commitment to training to ensure that the entire workforce has a good understanding of child development and a feeling that 'the quality of relationships' (Abbot and Rodger, 1995, p8) will influence provision more powerfully than anything else. Even at the beginning of their interviews, before they had an opportunity to develop their thinking, the nursery based stakeholders' explorations of inspection mentioned these phrases and continued to use them at regular intervals throughout their explanations, confirming their importance. From the onset of each interview, the need for the inspectorate to be cognisant with the developmental stage of nursery

children and have the ability to develop a relationship with the nursery was seen as an essential requirement of the official role.

The nursery based stakeholders did not appear to hold the same concerns regarding the stress levels and emotional implications of inspection, as expressed in the school based studies of Brimblecombe *et al* (1996) and latterly in Perryman (2007). Yet, they do have anxieties about the professional competency of Ofsted to undertake nursery inspections as illustrated in the literature connected with the introduction of Ofsted inspection by Penn (2002) and Stephen and Brown (2004) which outlines the misrepresentations of nursery provision given in Ofsted reporting. Their perceptions of Ofsted as a body continue to be dominated by previous misconceptions expressed by the inspectorate during their own inspections. Furthermore, the lack of trust in the inspectorates' level of expertise in the sector was based on the stakeholders understanding of their own settings report or misplaced remarks made by an inspector during the inspection process. No nursery based respondent referred to Ofsted publications, suggesting that all of their reflections were based on their own experiences. These past personal experiences tended to inhibit positive reflection and were a recurring problem in this study, as at times participants' feelings concerning a reporting inaccuracy or apocryphal evidence regarding the judgement of 'a nursery down the road' prevented the role of inspection being fully explored.

However, the desire for an Early Years inspector to be familiar with nursery practice would seem reasonable, yet there is no requirement from Ofsted for its inspectors in this phase to hold a relevant qualification or have undergone a prescribed number of years in the sector. Nevertheless despite the misgivings of the practitioners and leaders in this study, both the inspectors referred to 'Conducting Early Years Inspections' (OFSTED, 2009b), which establishes protocol and arrangements, and clearly states:

In order to carry out rigorous inspections of early years provision inspectors must have a thorough knowledge and understanding of all aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework (p9).

The handbook also recognises that the wellbeing and care of nursery children is as important as the education, an aspect mentioned by most practitioners and leaders:

The inspectors' role is not to judge the setting's preferred methods, but to evaluate whether the setting gives sufficient attention to the welfare, learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, so that all children's individual needs are met (p17).

Consequently, some of the fears outlined in this section may be unfounded, furthermore as Andreae and Matthews (2006) contest:

"The evaluation of complex settings calls for a high level of inspection expertise, for inspectors should be thoroughly conversant with the inspection framework and guidance..,the Foundation Stage...the 2004 Children Act. They may also need to be acquainted with the Key Stage 1 curriculum and features of quality in relation to child and family support. Do such paragons exist?" (p58).

Hence, the nursery based stakeholders in this study may have somewhat unrealistic expectations, as across the settings in this study there were different philosophical approaches and constructs of childhood revealed by the participants, the extremes of favouring a child centred readiness approach to a constant skill based approach were used as examples by the respondents. It may not be possible to ensure 'ideal' inspector who has experienced the many types of nursery provision, however the findings do indicate that sector experience is seen as of paramount importance to the practitioners and leaders in the study.

6.2.2 Theme two: the distinct nature of nursery provision and inspection
Nurseries are different

Historically, as discussed by Walsh (2005) as young children are seen as having different developmental needs, it follows that they require a different learning environment. Views expressed by the overwhelming majority of practitioners, leaders, and advisers in this study reinforce the principles of Early Years education

and care as established by the pioneers of nursery provision, Froebel, Montessori and the MacMillian sisters (Steedman, 1985; Nutbrown *et al,* 2008). The need for children to be allowed to confidently explore their environment with the support of trained adults was articulated in different ways by the respondents. Therefore, it followed in their responses that this distinct approach to education should be supported by a different approach to inspection, as suggested as early as 1900's by Katherine Bathurst and Robert Owen (Woodhead, 2002; Moss and Penn 2003; Nutbrown *et al,* 2008).

However, these nursery based groups had all received some form of Early Years training and many of the respondents had been in the sector for over ten years. The stakeholders without this training, the parents, the inspectors, the primary headteacher and nursery teacher at *Greenleaf,* did not embrace Early Years principles in their answers. Indeed, both the inspectors and the headteacher gave responses that could be seen as a negative view of Early Years educators, as they implied that child centred education was ill conceived and did not promote learning. As these were the only male stakeholders, it could be argued as proposed by Osgood (2006) that it is their masculine fear of the ultra feminine world of Early Years which makes them counter its central beliefs. Yet, it would not be realistic to apply this argument to this small sample. Their negativity is more likely to be linked to their lack of understanding of child development as they had not undergone Early Years training; this relates back to concerns about the variance in training of leaders expressed by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) and reinforces the diversity of qualifications within the sector raised by Owen (2006). Another reason for their reluctance to endorse a child centred approach could be connected with their construction of childhood. Dahlberg *et al* (2007, p44) suggest that some educators, in this case the inspectors, primary headteacher and some parents view the child as a 'knowledge, identity and culture reproducer...Locke's child', akin to the empty vessel

or *tabula rasa,* in this construct nursery should provide a child with useful preparation for school and training for the compulsory sector. Rather than the construct used by the practitioners and nursery leaders of the child as a 'knowledge, identity and culture co-constructor' (Dahlberg *et al,* 2007), an image of the child not solely connected with receiving information but rich with their own potential to contribute to learning as agents building on experiential knowledge.

Inconsistencies in the inspection process

The short duration and infrequency of inspection were perceived not to support the development of care and education in the nursery sector. Although accepting of policy, the leaders, practitioners, focus group parents and advisers did present opinions that Osgood (2006) would suggest are in 'stark polarity' to government recommendations regarding inspection. They wished for more frequent inspection, indeed some practitioners suggested annual inspections, in contrast to the current Ofsted framework (OFSTED, 2009a) which states there is a legal requirement for inspection for every three to four years. Although some leaders spoke of the need to improve the whole sector due to the continuing need to safeguard children, the desire for increased inspection was not solely connected to the need to maintain sector standards. It appeared to be more linked to the stakeholders' requirement for a continuous relationship with their inspector, an opportunity to engage in professional dialogue with a 'critical friend'. This could be related to the feelings of isolation expressed by the leaders in Siraj-Blatchford and Manni's (2006) research. Moreover, the inspectorate guidelines state that they must not have 'a connection with the provider which could undermine their objectivity' nor must they stray from 'a purposeful dialogue' (OFSTED, 2009b, p10).

Osgood (2006) and Alexander (2010) assert that the nature of Early Years practice is based on emotional relationships involving strong feelings from the workforce about the protection of children, the necessity to form a bond with a child's family and wider community and supporting colleagues. In the findings relationships and dialogue are mentioned frequently by the nursery respondents in this study, perhaps it is unsurprising that they want to replicate the tenets of their own practice with an external body. Furthermore, as the state and private nurseries do not have access to a designated improvement officer, this may explain their need for more frequent external evaluation of their settings. At first it could seem that the respondents were preoccupied with the mechanics of inspection, however it is much more complex than this, and it would appear that an objective three yearly external view may not have much impact in a sector that values a more subjective collaborative approach.

Another central concern highlighted by all the stakeholders is the duration of the nursery inspection, in a study where respondents spoke confidently about continuous team reflection; Ofsted's one day visit was seen as insufficiently rigorous, this is supported by the evidence Daycare Trust's (2010c) recent review of Ofsted's role in the Early Years sector, as the changes suggested made by Ofsted were not viwed positively as they were a result of 'snapshot' inspection. As in Osgood's (2010) study the partial nature of Ofsted nursery inspection prevented inspectors spending enough time in a setting to form a valid judgement. In addition Osgood (2010) suggests that there is awareness amongst nursery workers that nursery quality is mostly constructed through documentation of practice linked to the framework of standards. This view is reinforced by the pragmatic responses in this study conveying a strong feeling that being good at Ofsted's required paperwork was more likely to earn a setting a better grade than the half day's observation of nursery activities. However, it is important to remember that the current central position of self-evaluation in the

inspection process was seen as a useful development tool by the case study

nurseries. This will be discussed further in relation to research question three.

Finally, some differences do emerge from the broad base of stakeholder responses

the two nurseries in the private sector contained a degree of resentment regarding an

inconsistency in the Ofsted framework. There is little reference in Ofsted publications

or academic literature to the differences in the inspection notice period, yet this was a

contentious issue particularly from the practitioner viewpoint in the private sector.

Although Ofsted documentation states there should be 'little or no notice to the

provider' (OFSTED, 2009b, p10), if the nursery is in the state sector they continue to

receive two to three days notice in a similar manner to primary schools. Arguably this

lack of parity continues to reinforce the historical divisions between providers of

childcare and nursery education as outlined by Bertram and Pascal (2000) and Sylva

and Pugh, (2005). Indeed Alexander (2010) suggests that the government's policy of

creating a universal approach to the care and education of children highlights the

conflicts within the system. Significantly Ofsted's own publications, such as 'Staying

safe' (OFSTED, 2006) were aimed at improving the provision of care and education

solely in the private sector. The resentment of the practitioners may be linked to more

than the differences in Ofsted notice period; their feelings may be attributed to overall

differences relating to workforce pay and conditions. Whilst a plethora of Early Years

sources (Bertram and Pascal, 2000; Sylva and Pugh, 2005; Owen, 2006; Aubrey,

2007; Clark and Waller; 2007) discuss this as a major factor in the development of

care and education, it was not mentioned by any of the respondents in this study.

6.2.3 Theme three: a holistic approach

The overwhelming number of stakeholder interviewees discussed the significance of

the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007) in their responses

connected to the development of care and education. The current inspection

framework (OFSTED, 2009a) is aligned to the principles of the Foundation Stage, and could be said to be part of this more holistic approach. The literature sources (Clark and Waller, 2007; Pugh and Duffy, 2006; Riley, 2007), leaders and inspectors suggested that the reason that the new Early Years framework was fully endorsed by the practitioners is that it affirmed existing good practice. All of the respondents in both the private and the state sector spoke confidently about the principles of the EYFS, Riley (2007) suggests that this integrated single framework is revolutionary and is a significant shift towards uniting the sector. This is contrary to the discussion of the findings relating to notice period and the need for inspection. This could be linked to the renewed focus the EYFS places on the keyworker system. The importance of the relationship between the child and the practitioner is acknowledged by Ofsted:

> Inspectors should check that in childcare settings there is an effective key person system in place. To ensure that individual needs, including emotional needs, are being met, each child should be assigned a key person (OFSTED, 2009a, p42).

Additionally, the emphasis on a continuous relationship between practitioner and child could be said to support an interpretation of Bowlby's view (1953) that a secure attachment to an adult is necessary to promote secure mental health. Moreover, it could be an indication that Early Years provision is still embracing the ideology of motherhood (Riley, 1979; Randall, 1995; Browne, 1996; Moss and Penn, 2003, Stephen and Brown, 2004) as in the EYFS model the practitioner could be said to be a replacement mother figure.

However, in this study, although practitioners and leaders did not explore the attachment aspect of the keyworker system, they did talk about how their relationship with a child improved the child's overall experience of nursery. This continuing reference to a relationship further endorses Abbot and Rodger's (1995) prophetic statement that the 'quality of relationships' (p8) will influence provision more than

anything else and the subsequent EPPE findings highlight interactions between practitioner and child as being crucial to the overall quality of the setting (Sylva *et al,* 2004, 2010). In this study workers endorsed the keyworker system as the best mechanism for supporting children's development, and forming a meaningful relationship with parents. Furthermore, their responses contained references to their own status and professional identity. In particular, practitioners who did not have qualified teacher status (QTS) suggested that being a keyworker gave them professional status and the EYFS provided them with a framework that made their holistic approach credible to parents. This sense that sector specific government policy can contribute to professional identity reinforces the findings suggesting that inspection can be empowering. Miller (2008) asserts that standards and regulations are an important indicator of professionalism and the demonstration of a specialist body of knowledge and skills can lead to an enhanced sense of professional identity. In this study the nursery nurses and teaching assistants believed that their EYFS defined role of a key worker gave them specialised knowledge of a specific child's developmental levels, which enabled them to contribute to discussion on an equal basis with higher qualified colleagues.

6.2.4 Summary of the Discussion relating to Research Question One: Does the Inspection Framework Support the Development of Care and Education Across the Nursery Sector?

Recent Ofsted data presented in the findings (*Table 3*, OFSTED, 2010a) does suggest that the new framework is a successful regulation mechanism. 94% of nursery schools inspected in the first year are delivering good or above care and education as defined by the EYFS (DfES, 2007). Indeed there is recognition from these stakeholders that the new inspection framework based on the EYFS is part of a system of policy changes (Nutbrown *et al,* 2008) that have supported the

development of care and education in the nursery sector. All the stakeholders suggest there needs to be monitoring from an external agency. Dahlberg *et al* (2007) and Osgood (2006, 2010) would suggest that this lack of challenge regarding the existence of regulations from the stakeholders is due to an unquestioned acceptance that inspection and measuring quality must lead to better outcomes for children. However, in spite of an acceptance for the necessity of inspection, this discussion does not demonstrate a lack of reflection regarding the process. The stakeholders in their explanations do describe the need for an inspection system, yet desire an inspectorate that recognises the 'complexity, values, subjectivity, interdeterminacy and multiple perspectives' (Moss *et al,* 2000, p108) of the nursery sector.

The leaders and their workforce place value on being part of a process and feel empowered by the recent changes that have given the nursery sector a distinct curriculum and inspection approach. They wish to develop their practice within the 'regulatory gaze' (Osgood, 2006, p1) nonetheless, they are not compliant or passive (Osgood (2010) as they have strongly articulated their own vision. Dahlberg *et al* (2007) in their 'meaning making' (p105) discourse envision an alternative approach to 'quality' which places importance on professional dialogue and sector collaboration in place of external validation. However, these stakeholders did not express a desire to be outside the official remit, they do perceive inspection as part of a process that develops care and education, but they want the approach to further embed Early Years principles. Their collective vision of a contextually attuned collaborative inspection system is a contribution to knowledge as it forms the basis of a potential model for evaluation of the nursery sector, this will be presented in the section relating to research question three.

6.3 Research Question Two: Do Inspectors/Headteachers/Managers Share the Same Perceptions of Quality Factors within Nursery Education as Practitioners?

The understanding of the term 'quality' has been a contested issue in literature (Ball 1985; Elfer *et al,* 2003; Moss and Dahlberg, 2008; Brundrett and Rhodes, 2010). Central to this debate has been the extent to which quality is recognised as objective and static or subjective and dynamic (Tanner *et al,* 2006). The former approach regards quality as something that can be similarly defined and measured, this could be applied to all government policy documents and indeed the websites and prospectuses of the settings involved in this study, in these the word 'quality' is used frequently without explanation. In contrast, the discussion in the previous chapter would seem to favour the latter approach, where quality can be defined differently taking into consideration the diversity of ideas about early childhood.

6.3.1 Theme one: 'quality' and the happy child

Although there are 'many competing views of the nature of the concept' (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2010, p13), the nursery based stakeholders and the advisers used the term 'quality' with confidence. They did not need any prompting when asked 'what is quality', suggesting that they do not see 'quality' as contestable or problematic as suggested by Dahlberg *et al* (2007), yet as their responses indicate they do not appear to see it as standardised or measurable (Earley,1998; Brundrett and Rhodes, 2010). They had constructed their own definition of 'quality', which was not linked to quality assurance or quality control, but connected to their own philosophical stance. Their perceptions shown in *table 5* support Pascal and Bertram's (1994) and Tobin's (2005) assertions that there are the possibilities of multiple understandings of 'quality' depending on culture and context.

Unlike the notions of 'quality' described by Tanner *et al* (2006) few of the participants referred to maintaining the standards, conversely their definitions seemed to convey that 'quality' as Dahlberg *et al* (2007) contest is based more on their own dynamic understanding of children's needs. However, like Tanner *et al's* (2006) findings, the different approaches to 'quality' seemed to relate to individuals more than the type of nursery provision. The nursery leaders and practitioners placed the child at the centre of their explorations of 'quality' and used affirming phrases that were connected to children's wellbeing and happiness. In their study Tanner *et al* (2006) found that parents and frontline workers, such as nursery nurses, were more likely to emphasise safety and happiness in their definitions, indeed a teaching assistant at *Greenleaf* described her notion of quality as being about 'mumsy things'.

The reference to 'happy children' Alexander (2010) contends is a common image used by Early Years practitioners, in a similar manner to this study, all of her 65 participants applied the term happiness to their definitions of a 'successful child' (p110). Nonetheless she suggests happiness, like 'quality' as described by Elfer *et al* (2003) is a relative and slippery concept, dependent on the childhood setting. Based on Tanner *et al's* (2006) findings I had been anticipating different notions of quality to be expressed in the private nurseries compared to those in the state sector, as they are mostly staffed by nursery nurses. However my findings suggest the stakeholder constructions of 'quality' are influenced by more than nursery context, in this study training, experience and leadership philosophy seemed to be a factor. There were stronger differences between teaching assistants and teachers within the same setting rather than a day nursery compared to a state nursery unit. For example at *Greenleaf,* the headteacher and nursery teacher have both undergone primary training and are Key Stage two specialists, their definitions focused on the learning experience within the nursery. Yet, in the same setting, the Early Years co-ordinator and the experienced teaching assistant's explanations placed emphasis on the

child's total environment and their interactions with others, both of these practitioners had undergone Early Years training and are Foundation Stage specialists. In comparison at *Umbrella* there was a shared vision of 'quality', all the staff have received some form of Early Years training, indeed the owners, supervisor and nursery nurse had all received training from the same Further Education college. Moreover, they follow a stated approach created by Reggio Emilia (Malaguzzi's, 1993) and their definitions contained references to the environment, community and relationships reflecting this philosophical stance.

The remaining stakeholders, the parents and the inspectors, provided more diverse descriptions of 'quality', there was less consensus and their responses did not universally apply it as a term. Dahlberg *et al* (2007) consider this to be unsurprising, as they suggest it would be worrying if members of broadly defined groups, such as parents, were in complete agreement regarding 'quality' as that implies there is a single right answer. The parents in the pilot study focus group were the only people to be uncertain of the meaning of 'quality'; they did not consider themselves to be 'experts' (Tanner *et al,* 2006; Athey, 2007; Plowright, 2008; Brundrett and Rhodes, 2010). Their notions of 'quality' were indefinite and related to atmosphere; this will be discussed further in relation to research question four. The inspectors' definitions inevitably referred to 'the standards' and provided an extreme contrast to the nursery based stakeholders using phrases such as "academic proficient learners" rather than the 'happy child'. The two aspects may not be incompatible but the former can be measured by the inspection process.

As stated in the discussion relating to research question one, the experienced inspector did not place value on a 'child-centred 'approach. Stephen and Brown (2004) suggest that it is difficult to harmonise the values of 'child-centredness' or 'child-led' (p341) learning and the professional demands of accountability.

Furthermore, Stephen and Brown (2004) and Dahlberg *et al* (2007), consider that the term 'child-centred' can encompass a variety of interpretations dependent on a person's construction of childhood. Stephen and Brown (2004) propose that the inspectorate may primarily think about development as mediated and facilitated through adults, akin to the 'child as a receptor' (Dahlberg *et al*, 2007) model discussed in question one. Moreover, as outlined in chapter three the *'Every Child Matters'* (DfES, 2003a) agenda, which the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007) and the current inspection framework (OFSTED, 2009a) are based on, has a linear view of the child based on a Piagetian view of staged development, therefore good practice could be reduced to measuring children's success in one specific developmental area. This contrasts with the socio-constructivist viewpoint favoured by Early Years practitioners which places value on the whole child and their interaction with the environment (Vygotsky, 1978, Bruner, 1996). This may provide an explanation of why the stakeholders in this study with Early Years training hold a different notion of 'quality' to those who inspect nurseries.

6.3.2 Theme two: the dimensions of 'quality'

As discussed above, the stakeholders in this study have developed their own concept of 'quality' dependent on their own construction of childhood, Tanner *et al* (2006) contest that central to the development of care and education beyond the minimum standards is the recognition that 'quality' is a process, which can be defined from a variety of perspectives. Their study produced a 'continuum model of quality' (p6), highlighting the different facets of the quality defining process, which can be applied to the findings discussed thus far:

Quality-defining continuum

Dimensions	Official approach......................Pluralistic approach		
Actors responsible	Experts..................................Stakeholders
How viewpoints are presented	Agreed....................................Contested
Method of Defining quality	Written Documents.................Discussion
Evolutionary nature of the concept	Static......................................Dynamic
Philosophical approach	Objective...............................Subjective
Extent of applicability	Universal................................Context Specific
Arena in which quality is defined services	Government...........................Early Years

Table 8 Tanner *et al* (2006, p7)

In particular, the 'method of defining quality' would seem particularly relevant as the nursery based stakeholders would like a professional dialogue rather than a 'snapshot' report, but all of the aspects of the continuum could also be applied to their responses. However, when asked to consider the findings that relate to the factors that indicate high quality provision this polarised model may not be applicable, as from all the participants' descriptions common features emerged *relationships and interactions, progress of the learner, the nursery environment* and *staff recruitment and training* forming the 'dimensions of quality', a summary of which are provided in *table 5*. This suggests that it may be possible to find common ground between the 'experts' and the stakeholders' and employ an evaluative model which incorporates all of the 'dimensions of quality'. This will be discussed further in the discussion linked to research question three and the concluding chapter.

The next section of this research question aims to examine perceptions of quality factors from the different stakeholder perspectives and, this part of the analysis will be organised accordingly.

The Leaders

If the nursery based stakeholders notions of quality are connected to their construction of childhood and they are relating their practice to socio-constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978, Bruner, 1996), it is unsurprising that they all placed relationships and interaction at the centre of the explanations of quality factors. However, the leaders did stipulate that to be of high quality, the interactions must be guided by a qualified adult with a good understanding of child development. Their responses could have been influenced by the findings of the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) project (Sylva *et al,* 2004, 2010). In a recent article reviewing the impact of EPPE on the nursery sector, Siraj-Blatchford *et al* (2009) contend that the research programme with its focus on pedagogic practice has had a considerable impact on government policy and has contributed towards improving nursery provision.

Unlike the EPPE findings, the leaders placed greater importance on practitioners acquiring a good understanding of child development than being a graduate or qualified teacher. This could be linked to their socio-constructivist view of childhood (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996), as in order for a practitioner to plan to extend the child's learning they need to understand 'age and stage' development. Or in the nurseries in the private sector this could be because of budgetary constraints, although all the owners interviewed indicated that they wished their staff to undertake degree level qualifications, they also stated they had insufficient funds to pay them at the same salary scale as teachers. Miller (2008) suggests that lack of pay and recognition continues to be a problem for many graduates working in private sector nurseries.

Yet, although not committed to fulfilling the target set in the Ten Year Strategy (HMT, 2004) for a graduate to lead the provision in every nursery setting, the nursery

owners and supervisors in the private settings were concerned about the type of Early Years training their workforce had undertaken. Osgood, (2010) contests that qualification routes that favour technicist practice prevail in this sector. These leaders suggested that the current 'tick box' approach to training, such as the NVQ, did not provide staff with the necessary level of understanding. This issue regarding type of qualification did not arise with all the leaders as the state funded *Whitehouse, Cherrytree* and *Greenleaf* had at least one graduate per setting; however they were all still unanimous that their staff needed a good understanding of child development. Their view is reinforced by the much cited international exemplar curricula models Reggio Emilia, and Te Whariki (Nutbrown and Abbott, 2001; Curtis and O'Hagan, 2003; Papatheodorou, 2006; Stephen, 2006; Allen and Whalley, 2010) who insist that their practitioners have a specialised knowledge of child development.

Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) in their study on Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector (ELEYS) strongly emphasises the relationship between strong nursery leadership and successful outcomes for children. Most of the nursery leaders in this study do acknowledge their part in ensuring good quality provision. In particular the owners and managers in the private settings responses demonstrated a commitment to continuing professional development (CPD) and ensuring staff retention. This may be connected to the higher turnover of staff in the private sector, which a number of sources indicate has a strong negative influence on the development of care and education within day nurseries (Muijs *et al,* 2004*;* Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2006; Aubrey, 2007). Also within the private sector the funding of CPD is a contentious issue, although the workforce may be encouraged to undertake further qualifications, it can be at a personal cost with little financial gain (Osgood, 2010).

The leaders in the state settings did not emphasis their own role as much as their private sector colleagues. This may be linked to the fact that they themselves are

supported by a local authority and are not responsible in the same manner for staff development and salary scales. Moreover, their lack of reflection on their own role may be linked to their own security regarding professional identity, all the participating headteachers were established leaders with qualified teacher status. Whereas the leaders in the private settings have 'ambiguous status' (Miller, 2008) outside of their own setting, a headteacher has a clearly defined public role compared to a nursery supervisor. However, this latter role entails management of large staff teams, conditions of service, shift patterns plus liaison with a number of different individuals and agencies and forms a complex job description (Curtis and Burton, 2009). Although all of the leaders gave fluent responses regarding quality factors, they did not mention that they are responsible for the external portrayal of 'quality' to parents and prospective parents, however they did recognise that it was a function of leadership to manage the quality factors of the nursery. This will be discussed further in research question three.

The Practitioners

The practitioners place themselves at the heart of quality provision, their explanations involve reflection on their practice and they recall specific activities. The leaders did not connect their answers to children and everyday work practices in the same manner, as their role may mean that they are removed from this aspect of the provision (Aubrey, 2007). The practitioners reinforced the need for good relationships they placed stress not only on interactions with the children and their parents, but with each other. This relates to the 'everything and everybody' (Malaguzzi, 1993, p9) approach used by Reggio, which is explicit that its construction of early childhood settings is not child or adult centred, but 'a place of shared lives and relationships' (Malaguzzi, 1993, p9). However, the EYFS (DfES, 2007) places the role of the adult as a manager of the learning environment and their responses also reflect this

construct. Their descriptions of activities indicate a shared understanding from nursery practitioners that provision should offer a range of structured and unstructured activities aimed at developing individual children. Figure 15 adapted from a model proposed by Stephen and Brown (2004, p330) illustrates their perspective on classroom practice:
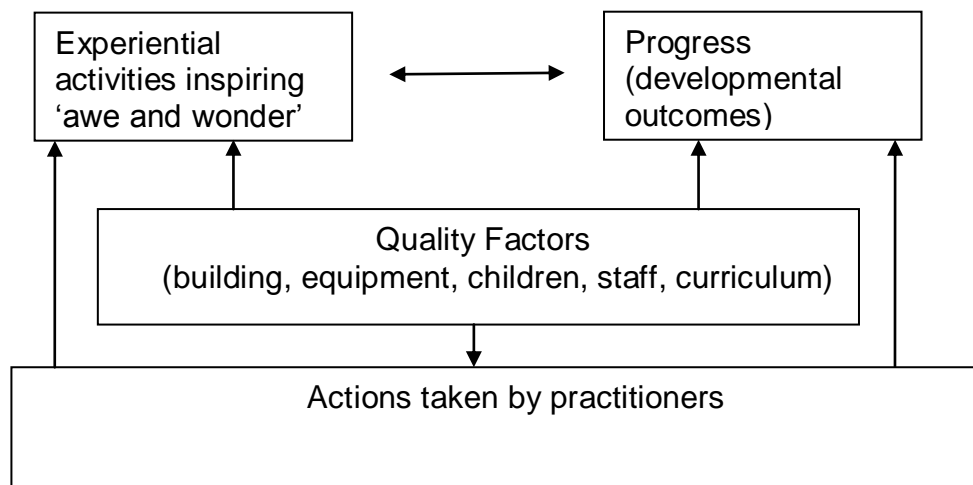

*Figure 15. **The practitioners' perspective on nursery practice***

In their responses they linked their activities to the progress of the learner, and the choice of activity could be influenced by the progress that had already been made, hence the double headed arrow between activities. Assessment is an integral part of the EYFS (DfES, 2007) and these practitioners appeared to have been influenced by the targets and goals. Yet, although they talked about interactions as being at the heart of their practice, they did see themselves as directing these exchanges; this is indicated by the one way arrow. In their descriptions of quality factors the practitioners prioritised the role of the adult interacting with the child. They did not mention children's interactions with peers as a quality factor, which suggests although they do not consider children to be passive receptors of knowledge, they may not have embraced the post modern socio-constructive perspective (Stephen and Brown, 2004; Dahlberg *et al,* 2007) which acknowledges that 'childhood is

constructed for and by children' (Stephen and Brown, 2004, p337). Despite the practitioners inclusion of 'everything and everybody' (Malaguzzi, 1993, p9) in their quality factors, Stephen and Brown (2004) and Osgood (2006, 2010) would suggest that the lack of importance placed on children's voice in their responses indicates that their vision of provision is more connected to the outcomes of the EYFS (DfES, 2007) and the inspection framework than they realise. This could signify more of an allegiance to a potentially developmentally limiting structured outcome driven approach rather than a shared cultural approach such as Reggio Emilia.

Additionally, when considering the value placed by both Te Whariki and Reggio Emilia on a highly qualified workforce (Allen and Whalley, 2010; Stephen, 2006; Waller, 2005; Bertram and Pascal, 2002; Moss, 2000), the practitioner reflections upon the desirable characteristics of Early Years workers within their considerations of quality factors are significant. The nursery leaders emphasised the importance of recruiting qualified practitioners with a good understanding of child development. Yet, some of the practitioners, particularly those without degree level qualifications, stressed that appropriate characteristics such as warmth and friendliness were more important than holding an appropriate degree. Their emphasis on personal qualities could be ascribed to the origins of nursery workers, as stated in the literature (Wiebe,1896; McMillan, 1923; Brehony, 1994; Steedman, 1985; Nutbrown *et al,*2008) the 'mother made conscious' (Steedman,1985, p149) approach valuing feminine qualities has been the prevailing influence in workforce recruitment for over one hundred years. Stephen and Brown (2004) contest that practitioners attribute the keyworker role to being 'motherly' and this leads to children's individual needs being met as opposed to the team work construction of practice observed in Spain and Italy.

The Inspectors

Stephen and Brown (2004) contest that the goal of inspectors and policy makers is to produce pre-school settings that offer children 'consistent and standardised developmental support' (p335). This emphasis on the restrictive nature of the inspectorate's standardised provision in a complex and diverse sector is a common theme in the literature (Penn, 2002; Osgood, 2006; Miller, 2008). However, it should be noted that there has been no academic evaluation of the approach of the present Early Years inspection framework (OFSTED, 2009a). Indeed the current handbook for inspectors contains a section entitled 'educational and philosophical approaches' (OFSTED, 2009b, p17), which urges the inspector to familiarise themselves with the different approaches, such as Reggio, used in nurseries and clearly states that it is acceptable for there to be a variety of teaching styles.

Conversely, the findings relating to the inspectors involved in this study suggest that they do not appear to have embraced this recent recommendation, as the experienced inspector stated he did not agree with philosophical approaches such as Reggio Emilia being closely followed. However, he did provide a reason for his view which may have surprised the nursery based workers and may have contradicted their opinion that the inspectorate does not understand the complex philosophical nature of Early Years education:

> "The Reggio Emilia approach was developed around a close knit community based around a collection of Italian villages. Can this cultural approach be successful in urban Wolverhampton?"

Woodhead (2006) would consider that this viewpoint has acknowledged that a child's development is a socio-cultural process and is an indication that this particular inspector has moved away from a narrowly conceptualisation of childhood. Yet, Osgood (2006) would argue that the inspector is a part of the social-engineering regime constructed by the previous government which desired nursery education to become mechanistic and prescribed. However, Tanner *et al's* (2006) findings support

the inspector's views, as they discovered it was not possible to replicate the Reggio community ethos, as most parents were only interested in meeting the needs of their own child. Indeed Moss and Dahlberg (2008), who strongly advocate the Reggio Emilia model, agree that the networks of service providers and parents sharing the same values central to achieving success have not been established in England.

Throughout this discussion relating to research question two, there have been references to the qualifications and characteristics of the staff in the nursery provision, reflecting the Reggio and Te Whariki approaches of recruiting staff with specific pedagogic expertise (Allen and Whalley, 2010; Stephen, 2006; Waller, 2005; Bertram and Pascal, 2002, Moss, 2000). The official Ofsted guidance does not support the leaders' and the literature sources emphasis on Early Years practitioners having a good understanding of child development (OFSTED, 2009b); it merely states that staff should hold 'appropriate qualifications'. Furthermore, neither of the inspectors mentioned this as a quality factor. However, it was mentioned as a significant issue by the two Early Years advisers, who connected the "gaps in the training of nursery nurses" to the need for an external body to check the sector. Their view was mostly concerned with provision in the private sector, the literature (Athey, 2007; Aubrey,2007; Garrick and Morgan, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford *et al,* 2009), Ofsted data (*Table 3,* OFSTED, 2010a) and the inspectors interviewed all indicate that state sector nursery provision is a "success story" (experienced inspector) because of its highly qualified staff.

6.3.3 Summary of the Discussion Relating to Research Question Two: Do Inspectors/Headteachers/Managers Share the Same Perceptions of Quality Factors within Nursery Education as Practitioners?

The starting point for this summary is the '*Dimensions of Quality'* table depicted in chapter five (*table 5*), which clearly shows the similarities and differences in the perceptions of these groups of stakeholders grouped around the four dimensions of *relationships and interactions, progress of the learner, the nursery environment* and *staff recruitment and training* . As previously stated there is less polarity between the 'actors responsible for defining quality' (p7) compared to the depiction in Tanner *et al's* (2006) quality continuum. There was a greater consensus amongst the nursery based stakeholders definitions of 'quality', which were linked to their constructions of childhood and their wish to meet their children's developmental needs. There were still some differences between the official understanding of 'quality' and the practitioners' views but these were less pronounced than in previous studies (Penn, 2002; Osgood, 2006; Tanner *et al,* 2006; Osgood, 2010), therefore this study contributes more of a shared understanding of 'quality' across the sector.

Also, unlike Sheridan's (2007) dimensions of preschool which are outlined below and place value on the macro level of Early Years provision, the nursery participants' emphasis was not on the external 'dimension of society' (p204):

(1) the dimension of society

(2) the dimension of teachers

(3) the dimension of children

(4) the dimension of learning contexts (numbered as in original article, p204).

 Although they considered wider policies and systems, their descriptions of quality factors focused on the internal aspect of relationships. In particular, the nursery practitioners offered accounts based on the immediate environment and their planned activities, indicating that they value the meso and micro levels of the nursery context. This clearly shows that these nursery stakeholders see 'quality' as being constructed within their own settings and by their own relationships with others, only one participant highlighted working in partnership with another nursery. These

findings indicate that this particular set of respondents hold a socio-constructivist view of childhood (Woodhead, 2006; Dahlberg *et al,* 2007) where relationships are important within the immediate context of the settings. Moreover, they have not embraced a post-modernist view of childhood in which the children and the community are co-constructers of the development of care and education in the nursery sector (Dahlberg and Moss, 2008). This lack of recognition of a community role may prevent all stakeholders playing a part in the improvement of the sector.

Sheridan (2007) suggests that each of her dimensions can be evaluated as a structure, process and outcome using different perspectives. The key difference between this study's dimensions of quality and Sheridan's (2007) is that the latter, like the EPPE study (Sylva *et al,* 2004, 2010), is based around findings generated from a prescribed measurement of quality. Both the EPPE study (Siraj-Blatchford *et al*, 2009) and Sheridan (2007) used the predetermined Early Childhood Environmental Scale (ECERS; Harms *et al*, 1998) to generate their universal quality factors. In contrast, contributing new knowledge to this area this study has developed its four dimensions of quality from stakeholders' explanations; however they can still be applied in the same manner as Sheridan's (2007). For example, *Quality Dimension 1* '*Interactions and Relationships'* (taken from *table 5, chapter five*):

Dimensions of quality	Inspector	Practitioner	Leader
Interactions/Relationships	Evaluation process involves all stakeholders *Structure*	Positive and informed relationships between staff, children and parents *Process*	Responsive and informed adult and child interactions *Outcome.*

The dimension of *Interaction/Relationship* could be applied across the sector using an adapted model of Effective Early Learning (Pascal *et al*, 1998) shown overleaf:

A Multilateral Model of Informed Interaction

Assessed
Child
Involvement

Symbiotic informed relationship

Evaluated
Adult
Engagement

Symbiotic informed relationship

Purposeful
Parental
Involvement
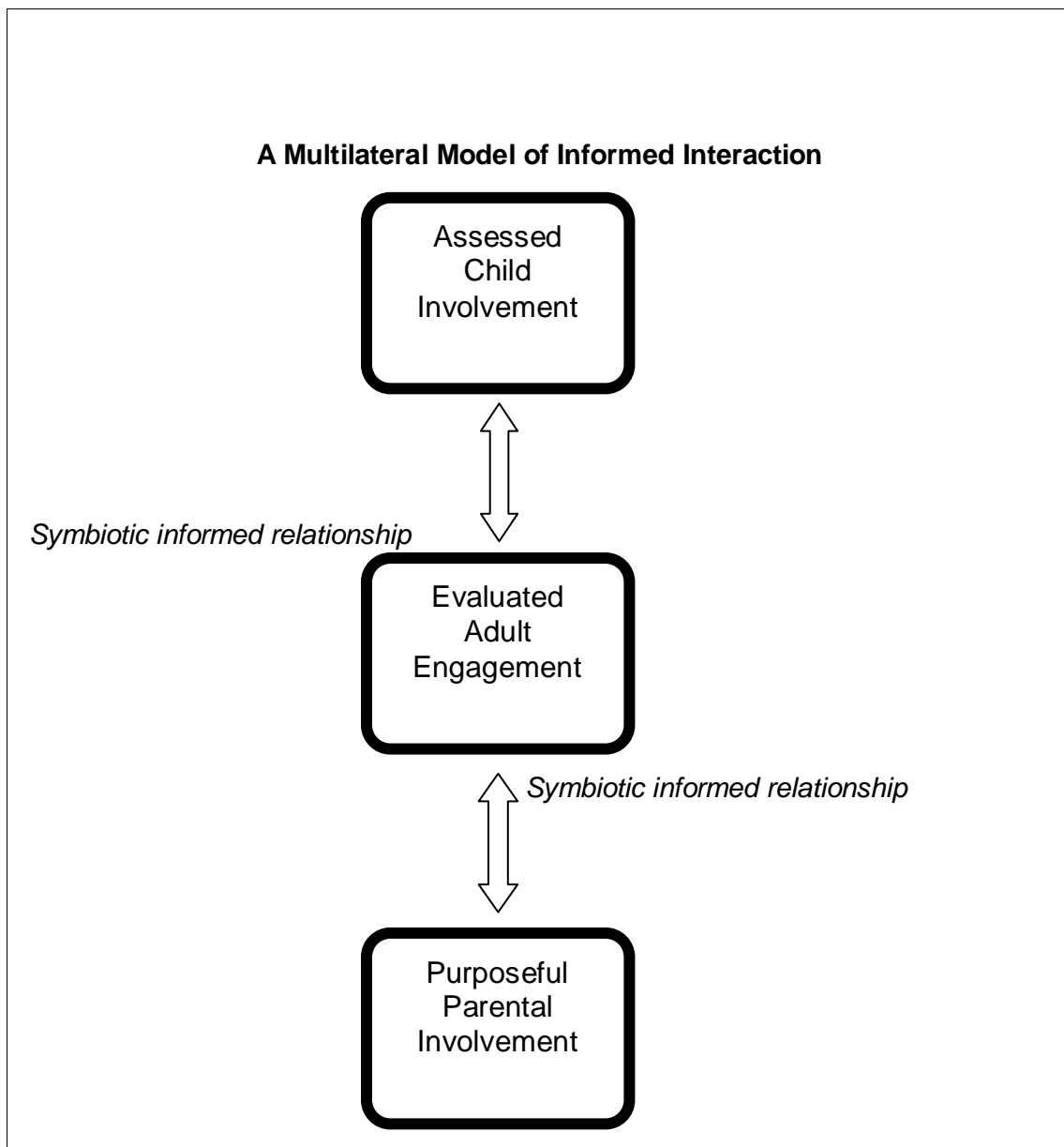
Figure 16. A multilateral model of interaction

Figure 16 provides a visual interpretation of '*Quality Dimension 1*' and the double

headed arrows illustrate the nursery stakeholders' perception that informed

collaborative interaction is essential to ensure high quality provision. In order to

reflect the findings the practitioner is placed in the centre of the model, this depicts

the practitioner as the focal point yet acknowledges the importance of the other

stakeholders. The other *dimensions of quality* could be included to provide a

conceptual evaluation model for the nursery sector; this will be further discussed and

illustrated in the next section.

6.4 Research Question Three: Do Headteachers/Managers/Practitioners Consider Ofsted to be a 'Change Agent'?

This research question has been the most challenging to answer as the nursery based stakeholders were reluctant to attribute any provision changes or improvements they had made to the Ofsted framework. However, when examining all of the settings last two reports it became evident that some of the changes that had been implemented during the inspection cycle were made to meet Ofsted's recommendations. For example, in the previous *Umbrella* report (OFSTED Reporting, 2007) recommended that practitioners develop more of a link between observations and planning; in the most recent report (OFSTED, 2010a) this aspect was praised and the settings grade moved from 'good' to 'outstanding'. However, despite this positive result the *Umbrella* practitioners and leaders did need prompting to cite this particular issue. This reluctance to afford Ofsted credit seems to be partly connected to the required documentation, these are similar findings to Tanner *et al's* (2006) study, suggesting that the new approach to inspection (OFSTED, 2009a) has not alleviated the sector's concerns relating to administrative matters.

6.4.1 Theme one: the administrative burden of the evaluation process

The findings relating to this theme provide an overview of each setting's evaluation procedures and discuss the other mechanisms used as improvement tools. It is important to note that procedural changes to the inspection framework have been recently implemented by the coalition government and the self-evaluation form (SEF) from 2011 will no longer be mandatory (DOE, 2010b). Michael Gove, the current Secretary of State for Education stated its removal would help 'drive up standards and reduce bureaucracy' (p1), the findings indicate that the latter intention may find favour with the leaders in this study.

All the leaders discussed internal evaluation systems in relation to 'change' and unlike the acknowledgement by literature sources of Ofsted as the key driver for 'quality' (Garrick and Morgan, 2009, Alexander, 2010) they perceived their own systems as having the most impact on their settings. The nursery leaders saw the evaluation process as a reflection on their collaborative leadership approach, and genuinely desired the practitioners and other stakeholders to contribute fully to the process. The examples they gave reinforced the collective vision of practice outlined by the findings of Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006), however, their wish for a fully shared evaluation process mostly remained unachieved. Yet the primary headteacher who did not advocate a collaborative leadership style did realise full staff and parental participation when compiling his SEF. This could be connected to lack of nursery management training Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) indicated that while dedicated training was available, through the National College of Leadership there were still a majority of early years 'leaders', whose specific training needs were not collectively being met. Possibly this is now more of a quality issue as this dedicated training has been discontinued (NCL, 2011).

Additionally, the primary headteacher did not mention the leadership administrative burden of the SEF process. It might have been anticipated that the private nursery leaders would cite this as more of a problem; however the findings highlight that there are some differences between the whole of the non-compulsory nursery sector and maintained primary schools. Plowright, (2008) states that local authorities (LAs) have been providing support for headteachers in their endeavour to manage and lead the self-evaluation process and a key mechanism for providing this support in the form of a 'critical friend' (p106) is the School Improvement Partner (SIP). All of the nursery based leaders mentioned the need for a 'critical friend', not only to help them prepare the SEF, but to improve their provision of care and education. This role was not discussed by any of the literature sources or raised by the numerous Early

Years policy changes of the previous government, this lack of consistent designated LA support does appear to be a barrier to nursery improvement. As the sector has no access to a SIP, the SEF process is seen to be time consuming, disengaging to staff and an additional administrative burden for the leader. Therefore although the self-evaluation process constructs a deeper understanding of practice by engaging and involving others in the dialogue, this study suggests that full collegiate collaboration is not occurring and the need for a sector based improvement partner is evident.

Additionally, the sector response connected to evaluation is fragmented, (Allen and Whalley, 2010) and each LA responsible for the case study nurseries had adopted its own approach. The literature sources (Waller, 2005; Mathers *et al,* 2007; Mooney, 2007; Hall *et al,* 2009; Allen and Whalley, 2010) contest that the inspection process merely maintains standards, therefore there is a need for an additional improvement tool within the nursery sector. Indeed these findings provide a base for a potential improvement model, which will be discussed at the end of this section. Siraj-Blatchford *et al* (2009) suggest in order to support the development of 'quality' provision the most successful evaluation device applied by LAs is the extended Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-E Harms *et al,* 1998, Sylva *et al,* 2010a), indeed in this study it was the most cited supplementary method. However, unlike the literature sources rather than being perceived as an effective evaluation and improvement aid, it was mentioned by the participants in connection with inconsistent advice.

Although Sylva *et al* (2010a) state that the ratings scale used by ECERS-E 'resonates well with many of the domains' (p8) included in Ofsted Early Years inspection; in one local authority visit *Umbrella* were awarded an overall score of inadequate using the ratings scales and the following week achieved a judgement of

'outstanding' from Ofsted. This could be attributed to "quality is in the eye of the observer" (adviser with sector experience) as the scores awarded by the ECERS-R assessor can only reflect the observed practice, plans and evaluations are not taken into consideration (Sylva *et al,* 2010a). Moreover, it could reveal an inconsistent application of the ECERS scale, indicating that more training for nurseries and local authority officers is needed. Furthermore it could indicate an example of Early Years philosophical approaches not fitting prescribed frameworks, as *Umbrella* embraces a Reggio 'child as co-constructor' approach, this may not have been awarded high scores using the ECERS scale (Harms *et al,*1998) as it places high value on academic 'readiness' for school. This extreme example of the application of ECERS may be an isolated incident; however, other responses from the stakeholders indicated that although they were unhappy about some aspects of the inspection framework, they were more discontent about having to fulfil the standards for additional quality measurements. This is why it is important to develop a model which can enhance the existing inspection system. There was no mention of any other approach such as the Early Years Quality Improvement Support Programme (DCSF, 2008) suggesting, despite its promotion by the previous government, that this has not been adopted by LA's. .

6.4.2 Theme two: an informed professional dialogue

Throughout the findings and this discussion the word 'informed' has been applied to both the inspection process and the participants. Athey (2007) indicates that partial knowledge and understanding of nursery education and child development across stakeholder groups can be problematic; moreover there can be a serious mismatch between the rhetoric of policymakers and the concerns of informed practitioners. Furthermore she contests that the problem in Britain, is not the absence of excellent Early Years provision, but a weakness in the evaluation systems due to a lack of

shared professional vocabulary and dialogue. Athey's (2007) views reinforce the discontentment of the nursery based stakeholders regarding the inspectorate's lack of Early Years expertise; this extract taken from an account from the deputy head at *Whitehouse* regarding emergent writing provides an apt illustration:

> "Ofsted told me to focus more on modelling correct letter formation for my three year olds."

Both Athey (2007) and the practitioner would suggest that this is an uninformed comment by the inspector, as children's early writing can appear to be full of mistakes and unformed scribble to a novice observer. However, thorough knowledge of the EYFS (DfES, 2007) and experience and understanding of child development would inform the inspector that a three year old needs to systematically test out hypotheses on the nature of print (Donaldson, 1978; Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1982) in order to learn how to write. Furthermore, this practitioner's concern and other examples in the findings imply that this particular set of stakeholders still hold the same sceptical views regarding the lack of inspector expertise that were connected to the earlier form of Early Years inspection (Penn, 2002; Edgington, 2004).

This discussion and the presentation of the findings in the previous chapter are dominated by a stakeholder tendency to focus on the perceived incorrect judgements derived from their setting's experience of Ofsted inspection and the subsequent report. Indeed, the leaders and practitioners, in common with Osgood (2010), felt that the inspectorate's ill conceived judgements provoked negative emotional responses which prevent change taking place. In particular, the more experienced leaders and practitioners, in a similar manner to Roche and Tucker (2007), perceived the Ofsted framework as a barrier to developing and improving quality as the emphasis on fulfilling the outcome driven SEF exercise can mask the real opportunities for change. Moreover, the length of time between inspections, despite David Bell's intention to introduce more frequent inspections (OFSTED, 2004), is a cause for

concern. All of the stakeholders, including the experienced inspector, indicated that the long gap led to complacency or erratic standards of practice. This was perceived by the advisers, inspectors and leaders and literature sources (Muijs *et al,* 2004*;* Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2006; Aubrey, 2007) to be a particular issue for the private sector, as the low levels of pay and shift work can make it difficult to maintain a consistent staff team. Continuous relationships between stakeholders are seen by Curtis and Burton (2009) as a vital part to the development of a collaborative reflective culture, which Muijs *et al* (2004) and Fullan (2001) cite as necessary for change.

Significantly, the experienced inspector highlighted Early Years collegiately as a strength of the sector, yet as the discussion relating to the Ofsted self-evaluation process demonstrated the current system is failing to utilise this strength. The analysis of research question one onwards has indicated that relationships across the stakeholders groups are seen as the strongest influence on the development of care and education within the nursery sector (Abbot and Rodger, 1995). Indeed, in accordance with the literature sources (Abbot and Rodger, 1995; Fullan, 2001: Muijs *et al,* 2004; Dahlberg *et al,* 2007; Curtis and Barton, 2009) this study reinforces the notion of collaborative reflection. During the individual interviews, respondents' reflection upon the importance of relationships enabled them to produce their own vision of a collegiate approach to evaluation and inspection across the nursery sector. By the end of each interview, indeed as the relationship between interviewer and interviewee developed the overwhelming majority of the leaders and practitioners had began to construct their desired sector based strategy, which appears to be strongly advocating a peer dialogue informed private and state partnership.

As documented by Penn and Randall, (2005) and Clark and Waller (2007), the previous government tried to establish area partnerships between private and state providers in 1998. However, the findings from this particular set of nurseries suggest this has not happened and Hines (2008) implies that the partnerships have been bureaucratic rather than practice based. Only the headteacher at *Whitehouse* mentioned working in partnership with another state nursery school, the other settings had no established relationships with other providers in either sector. This is significant as all nurseries were located in areas where local connections were possible; moreover *Tophat* was part of a large nursery chain yet did not undertake any shared peer observations or evaluations, this situation would seem to be a missed opportunity. The reasons for this could be connected to the care aspect of nursery work, Alexander (2010) emphasises that social and emotional development is valued by nursery practitioners and leaders, for example in all of the case study nurseries the staff and the children ate lunch together to encourage and model social interaction. Therefore, nursery practitioners work pattern differs to school based colleagues, opportunities to leave the nursery for staff development are more limited. Additionally, as Garrick and Morgan (2009), any staff training activities have cost implications for the private sector as to release one member of staff to visit another nursery would necessitate another staff member being employed in order to maintain the under fives adult child ratio (OFSTED, 2008).

Therefore, as Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) and Curtis and Burton (2009) contest, the role of the nursery leader is central to developing a culture of reflective practice. Partnership between nurseries may be possible if it managed, Brundrett and Rhodes (2010) suggest it is a leader's role to create and manage partnerships to maximise the benefits for staff and children. Although these stakeholders are strongly advocating further sector collaboration and opportunities for shared professional dialogue this would only be possible with support from policy makers. The Early

Years advisers were defensive regarding partnership, they stated that LA Early Years network meetings were not well attended, however, Allen and Whalley (2010) reason as Early Years work is collegiate, leaders and practitioners would prefer to visit other settings and learn from their peers. Indeed, this group of stakeholders' responses place value on the knowledge of their colleagues in their own settings, Dahlberg *et al* (2007) would suggest this is moving towards the view of the 'early childhood institution as a forum' (p158). However, although the findings signify a willingness to form 'participatory relationships' (Dahlberg *et al,* 2007, p158) with peers and parents, Dahlberg *et al's* (2007) forum, which is part of their vision of a 'discourse of meaning making' (p76), involves children, pedagogues, parents, politicians and members of the community sharing their views about nursery care and education.

Hence, although the findings relating to change seem to indicate that this set of nurseries wishes to develop a relationship approach to evaluation and inspection, their responses show a readiness for different strategies but not for a totally different approach. Although they mention concepts, such as an informed professional dialogue, key to the Reggio Emilia approach advocated by Dahlberg *et al* (2007). They do not seem ready to embrace a complete self-regulation system, as they still wish to be inspected by an external body. Osgood (2006, 2010) suggests this could be linked to insecurity amongst Early Years practitioners regarding their ability to reflect, or it could be linked to market accountability and the 'branding' aspect of Ofsted (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2010). However, I consider it to be connected to lack of awareness of alternative discourses of 'quality'. In their responses the practitioners in particular illustrated their examples of change with references to practice that aligned with Dahlberg *et al's* (2007) 'meaning making' discourse (p76). For example the practitioners mentioned "documenting everything" (nursery nurse, 2 years experience, *Umbrella*); the EYFS (DfES, 2007) requires all nurseries to compile a learning journey for each child, profiling daily learning events. Currently, this is mostly

unilateral passive document compiled by the practitioners and shared with the parents, but it could become a multilateral dynamic recording process with regular contributions from all the stakeholders akin to Reggio Emilia's much praised pedagogic documentation (Vecchi, 1993; Nutbrown and Abbott, 2001; Waller, 2005; Stephen, 2006; Dahlberg *et al,* 2007; Allen and Whalley, 2010). Dahlberg *et al* (2000, 2007) believe that this 'living record of pedagogic practice' can deepen self reflexivity and empower the practitioner to recognise the value of their own contributions, removing the need for validation from an external body such as Ofsted.

However, as highlighted by this discussion and Moss and Dahlberg's (2008) more recent work, the replication of the conditions in Reggio Emilia is not widespread. Although the responses of these stakeholders demonstrate a commitment to improving their practice, they see themselves doing so within the existing system. They are only familiar with the 'top down' aspect of Katz' (1993) dimensions of quality but imply they would welcome the inclusion of the other three: outside-inside, bottom-up and inside-out. If nurseries adopted a similar approach implemented by the *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003a) extended schools scheme, which saw state and private sector provider work together in a 'cluster' (p5) to operate 'wrap around' care, they could optimise their improvement strategies and employ peer observation and evaluation. This cluster or partnership would need co-ordination from an Early Years expert, a designated 'critical friend' (Plowright, 2008), and as previously stated, this would need approval and capital investment from policymakers, a proposed model based on the findings is shown overleaf:

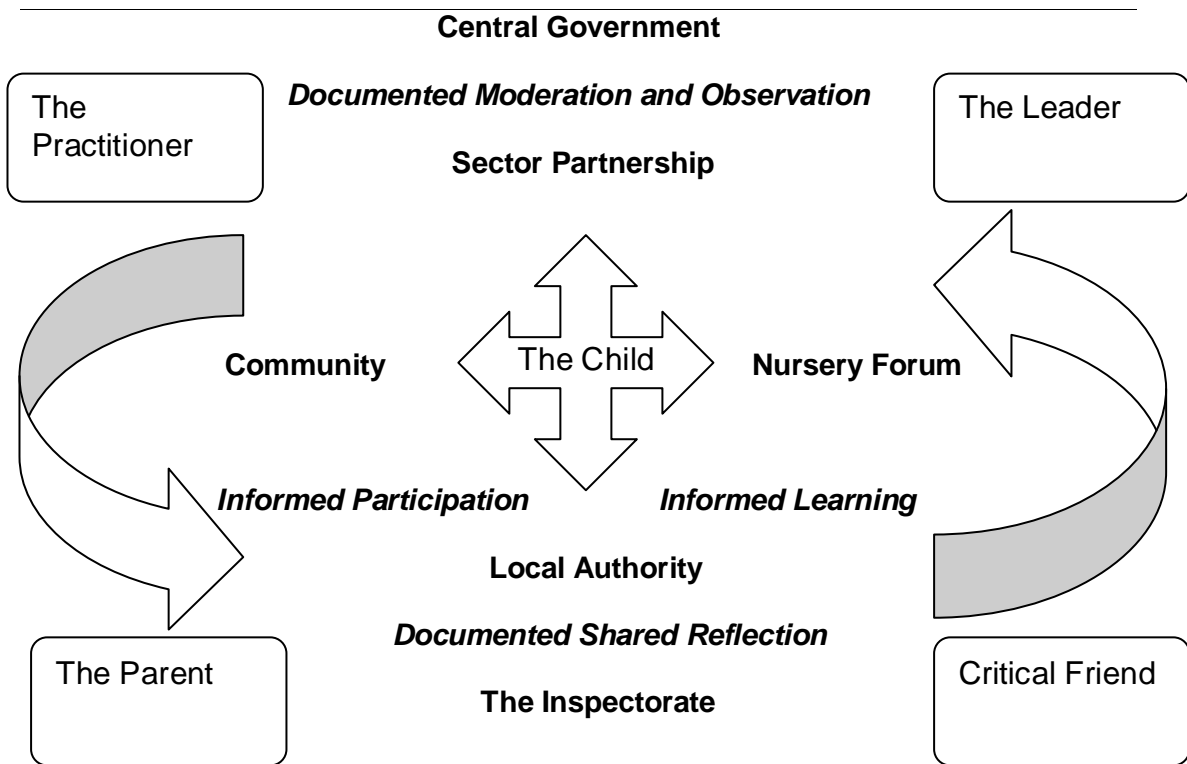**Relationship Quality: A Collaborative Model**

Figure 17. Relationship Quality

Figure 17 reflects the findings from the Early Years based literature and this research which suggest that the challenge is to develop the mechanisms of the existing 'in house' evaluation systems to promote a cross sector collaborative approach, whilst ensuring that national Early Years standards are maintained by an informed inspectorate. If this new model was applied to the nursery sector, it could extend existing relationships and could involve nursery practitioners, managers and inspectors, the children and parents, and still be based around the current Ofsted framework. In order to further develop the reflective nursery culture, highlighted by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) and Curtis and Burton (2009), a mixture of private and state settings could work in 'clusters' of four to six utilising the dimensions of quality: relationships/interactions, the progress of the learner, training and recruitment of staff and the nursery environment (outlined in *table 5,* chapter five) as a basis for their evaluative structure. The shared reflection could include peer

observations, management observations of staff, staff evaluations of the management, and peer appraisal of nursery settings. Each cluster's evaluation activities would be facilitated by an Early Years 'critical friend', an adviser or improvement officer and involve children and their parents and wider community. However, it is important to be realistic, the findings and literature sources such as Tanner *et al* (2006) and Moss and Dahlberg (2008) illustrate that nurseries, despite the SureStart initiative promoting a multi-agency approach, are not perceived as a 'community hub' in England. Moreover, significant amounts of work would be needed to develop this aspect of the evaluative model; some possibilities will be explored in the discussion connected to research question four: Is parental choice influenced by Ofsted reporting? Whilst this model is not intended as a replacement for inspection, it does provide a visual representation of the potential scope of a relationship approach based on shared professional dialogue across the sector and beyond, that could develop the existing evaluation processes and enhance a child's 'total environment' (Bronfenbremer, 1979,p3).

6.4.3 Summary of the Discussion of the Findings Relating to Research Question Three: Do Headteachers/Managers/Practitioners Consider Ofsted to be a 'Change Agent'?

Despite some of the Early Years literature sources (Garrick and Morgan, 2009, Alexander, 2010) suggesting that Ofsted is viewed as a key driver for quality by the nursery sector and Ofsted's statistical evidence illustrating the sector's continuing improvement against the standards (OFSTED, 2008, 2010a) these findings clearly indicate that this group of nursery leaders and practitioners do not consider the inspection framework to be a 'change agent'. Indeed, the negative perception of the inspectorates' sector knowledge and inspection frequency act as a barrier to change. Stephen and Brown (2004) and Andreae and Matthews (2006) contest that the sector is sensitive regarding 'outsider' advice, moreover to ensure fully effective inspection, inspectors have to accept that central directives may be ineffective in some settings.

Some of the examples relating to outdoor provision given by the stakeholders in chapter five demonstrate that the inspectors were focusing upon national policy regardless of contextual constraints. However, it is important to remember that the new guidance (OFSTED, 2009b) does emphasise that:

> In order to carry out rigorous inspections of Early Years provision inspectors must have a thorough knowledge and understanding of all aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework (p9).

This may lead to a more informed inspection process, and ameliorate the concerns linked to ill conceived judgements raised by the literature sources (Penn, 2002; Edgington, 2004; Andreae and Matthews 2006; Osgood, 2010) and these findings.

The discussion generated by this research question realises the existence of the highly reflective culture but this is not being captalised. The practitioners and leaders were all involved in evaluating their provision and their descriptions of the process included children and parents, indicating that there may not be the same difficulties connected to gaining parental opinion as expressed in the school based literature (Plowright, 2008; Brundrett and Rhodes, 2010). However, most of the stakeholders did not refer to policymakers or the wider community nor did they see their own collaborative systems as replacing the external validation of Ofsted, as envisioned by Dahlberg *et al*, (2007). Yet, they did indicate that a more cross sector based approach based approach working in conjunction with Ofsted would improve the care and education of nursery children. For this to be successfully implemented Stephen and Brown (2004) suggest that it would be necessary for inspectors to realise that centrally based policies may be ineffective, and practitioners would have to be willing to adopt a reflective critical approach. The high level of engagement and reflection from these participants in the later stages of the interviews indicates that the latter may be possible. Indeed, as one practitioner's level of involvement increased during the interview she developed the confidence to contribute her own idea, and outlined a post-modernist approach in line with Dahlberg *et al's* (2007, p76) 'meaning making

discourse'. In a similar manner to their work connected to removing the word 'quality' as its usage is too problematic, she suggested that as evaluation is apparent in all aspects of Early Years work, the inspection process should be renamed as 'external evaluation' which would remove the negative feeling associated with Ofsted. Significantly, Harber and Stephens (2010) in a study of quality of education in developing countries, highlight that inspection became more productive in Zambia when inspectors were renamed 'standards officers' (p46). Furthermore, Brundrett and Rhodes (2010) suggest the Ofsted model of external appraisal has been criticised since its inception, therefore perhaps a change of name as well as approach is necessary for nursery improvement.

6.5 Research Question Four: Is Parental Choice Influenced by Ofsted Reporting?

6.5.1 Discussion of the graphical findings derived from the parental questionnaire

As previously stated in the findings, although this question was constructed to gauge cross sector parental awareness of Ofsted reporting and its influence on parental choice, I had anticipated differences in parental opinion reflecting their distinct choice of provision. However, as shown in chapter five, parental level of agreement with the statements remained mostly consistent despite contextual differences. Upon reflection, this is unsurprising as all of the settings used similar mechanisms to ensure their parents were involved in the evaluation process and made aware of the nursery's own Ofsted report. All the nurseries and the primary school recognised Ofsted as a marketing tool, using their report and the Ofsted logo on their prospectus' and websites as a quality mark. Earley (1998), and later Brundrett and Rhodes (2010) suggest that this use of 'quality' is similar to branding in the private sector.

Indeed, *Tophat* which is part of a nursery chain has an interactive website with the Ofsted logo prominently displayed and uses Ofsted data to highlight good practice to prospective parents, for example:

> 'Over 80% of our staff have achieved a recognised early years qualification, 50 % is the usual benchmark within children's nurseries (OFSTED, 2009a)' (*Tophat* website, 2010).

This approach is used by most of the nursery settings, in addition, *Greenleaf* primary school's prospectus and website contain 'quality' kitemark indicators i.e. 'Investors in children, a SureStart quality assurance scheme' and the phrase 'quality education is an outstanding environment' is used as a 'footer' on every web page, without any accompanying explanation (website, 2010). As Allen and Whalley (2010) suggest this use of 'quality' assumes that everybody has a shared understanding of its formative factors.

However, the responses from the literature (Penn, 2000; Tanner *et al,* 2006; Athey, 2007), focus groups and questionnaires, indicate that parents do not perceive themselves as having sufficient understanding of quality factors within the nursery sector. This suggests that despite the previous government's initiatives aimed at improving parental involvement in nurseries (Bryson *et al,* DfES, 2006; Tanner *et al,* 2006; Athey, 2007; Nutbrown *et al* 2008) parental understanding of the sector still accords with Penn (2000):

> Apart from knowing when and how to drop off and pick up their children, parents knew very little about what went on in the nursery (p50).

Moreover, Draper and Duffy (2006) suggest that if practitioners have a view of themselves as 'experts on children's learning' (p155), as highlighted in the discussion linked to research question two , this would lead to parent's feeling devalued and unable to express their opinions. Therefore, the parental recognition and acceptance of nursery inspection, shown clearly in figures 1 and 2 in chapter five, could derive

from their need for 'expert' reassurance due to their lack of confidence in their views regarding nursery care and education.

Consequently, it is unsurprising that a high level of parental acceptance of the need for official bodies and inspection is indicated throughout the questionnaire findings. Yet, paradoxically although these parents appear to value Ofsted's judgments, less than half of the total respondents had accessed the inspection report of their child's nursery. As noted in chapter three and a recent Daycare Trust report (2010c) examining the performance of Ofsted in the nursery sector for the newly elected coalition government, there is limited empirical evidence connected with the extent to which parents use Ofsted reports when choosing an early years setting. However, these findings correspond with recent Daycare Trust research which states that '50.2 per cent of the sample of parents had consulted Ofsted reports' (p1) before selecting a nursery. Moreover, their report also suggested that parents used other sources to inform their choice. This issue is also related to these findings and is discussed in the next section connected to the themes generated by the parental responses.

6.5.2 Theme one: community networks

In *table 7* chapter five, local reputation was the most highly ranked parental reason for selection of a nursery. The attributes or quality factors of this community standing remain largely unexplored by the parents; however, it is interesting that they place more importance on peer or family recommendation than Ofsted reporting or council generated information services. Leaders and practitioners reasoned that the professional language used by Ofsted reporting made it inaccessible to some parents, thus it did not influence parental choice. This assertion was supported by Draper and Duffy (2006) who contest that a lack of shared language alienates parents; moreover, the recent Daycare Trust research (2010c) suggested the format

of Ofsted reporting was difficult for parents to understand. Yet, none of the parents mentioned this in their written comments; they clearly rated subjective anecdotal evidence more highly than an objective measurement of quality. They had constructed their own reasons for choice, which were not informed by quality assurance or quality control, but connected to their own personal values. Their preferences underpin Pascal and Bertram's (1994) and Tobin's (2005) assertions that there are the possibilities of multiple understandings of 'quality' depending on culture and context, as their understanding of 'quality' is based on the views of other parents within their community.

However, recent government initiatives have been established to provide information to parents to ensure access to children services including nurseries (Clark and Waller, 2007; Hines, 2008; Daycare Trust, 2010a). Yet, none of the parental questionnaire responses, focus group participants or the other stakeholders mentioned other official channels such as the family information services established by the Ten Year Strategy for Childcare (HMT, 2004) as influencing or informing choice. Furthermore, Hines (2008) and research by the Daycare Trust (2010c) indicates that families on low incomes or from ethnic minority groups experienced difficulty accessing information about nursery provision. This could explain why the parents from *Cherrytree,* situated in an area of deprivation, and *Whitehouse,* which serves an area where families originated from Pakistan and are largely affiliated to the Muslim faith, had the lowest number of parents accessing their chosen nurseries Ofsted report. Yet, it does not explain why the remaining parents based this important choice on casual 'word of mouth', Stanley *et al* (2006) suggest that it is a difficult issue as the reasons surrounding parental preference and access to information are based around a number of complex, potentially sensitive, social and cultural factors. Moreover, the reasons for selecting a nursery can seem more intangible compared to the reasons offered in school based literature, such as

Gibbons *et al* (2005), for choosing a primary school features such as good test results, appearance of buildings and league table performance, may not seem relevant to this sector.

As can be seen by the questionnaire references to local reputation, it is evident that all of the nurseries involved in this study have an established community presence. Although the nursery as a 'forum' (Dahlberg *et al,* 2007) or 'hub' (Tanner *et al,* 2006) model has not been achieved, clearly there are effective mechanisms to promote parental and local involvement as the overwhelming majority of parents have based their decision on the previous parents' satisfaction with the nursery experience. Indeed, there is evidence throughout the findings and the nurseries' Ofsted reports that all the settings regard partnership with parents as an important quality factor. For example, *Whitehouse* nursery's most recent report in 2009 (OFSTED, nursery reporting) states the nursery is regarded very highly by the local community and parents are delighted with the support and information the nursery provides and feel included in the evaluation process. The nursery holds regular consultation events providing the opportunity for parents and children to meet with their keyworker. It also holds termly family celebrations and workshops, and its prospectus and website clearly state their links with the local community. Therefore, it is to be expected that parents whose child had previously attended the nursery would hold *Whitehouse* in high regard and it is also evident from the prospectus, Ofsted report and the nursery website that the nursery has been an established part of the community for nearly 50 years and as can be seen in the findings has links with generations of family members.

Moreover, the other state nurseries, *Greenleaf* and *Cherrytree,* are in a similar situation, they serve a community and a catchment area, yet the parents who chose the private nurseries *Umbrella* and *Tophat* also stated that local reputation was the

main reason for selection. This could be attributed to the explanation provided by the adviser with sector experience, "for a lot of parents local is good..." endorsing Penn's (2000) view that convenience is important to parents. However, it is important to highlight that the nurseries in this study do appear to have built good reputations and go beyond the minimum standards. Parents may have proffered reason other than personal recommendation for their preference, if their chosen nursery had a recorded health and safety problem. The recent research by the Daycare trust (2010c) and the experienced inspector offered another explanation for parents relying on 'word of mouth' rather than Ofsted reporting to inform their choice; that official judgements become more important to parents as their children get older. This could be connected with parental understanding of nursery education and care, or their regard for the sector, as Penn (2000, p50) suggests some parents are 'not bothered' about the educational content of pre-school sector, merely desiring a child minding service. Draper and Duffy (2006) and Athey (2007) suggest this could be attributed to lack of appropriate informed parental involvement and this issue will be explored in the next section.

6.5.3 Theme two: parental requirements of nursery provision

Although all the nurseries prospectus', websites and information leaflets, provide detailed descriptions of the EYFS (DfES, 2007), the responses from parental questionnaires and the focus groups revealed that these parents, as discussed in research question one, do not share the practitioners and leaders philosophical understanding of the principles and purpose of nursery provision. They do not refer to meeting developmental needs or creating opportunities for experiential learning in their responses, indeed the parents in the focus groups seemed unsure about what their children should be learning and the routine of their day. This concurs with Tanner *et al's* (2006) and Penn's (2000) findings which suggest that parents rarely

use the term 'education' when discussing nursery and do not recognise the distinct nature of early childhood learning. As both of these studies were conducted prior to the launch of the EYFS (DfES, 2007), and there has been increased focus on parental collaboration within nursery due to initiatives such as the learning journey's and the keyworker system, I had anticipated that parents in this study would have a greater understanding of the Early Years developmental matters. But these findings do not indicate a greater understanding or interest in learning and development, as some parents, once again reinforcing the findings of Penn (2000) from ten years ago, felt they had little choice in choosing their nursery as their need for a service that provided the right hours was paramount and the educational ethos of the setting was incidental.

Furthermore, the nursery based stakeholders acknowledge this situation and the phrasing used in their responses could give an impression of negativity towards parents. They imply that parents are disinterested in Ofsted nursery reporting and quality matter because they are merely looking for "a childminding service". Although Ofsted's Early Years current inspection framework (OFSTED, 2009a) does include childminders, they were only mentioned in response to this research question. These nurseries perceived themselves as being distinct from childminders because of their educational provision and trained staff. However, the findings indicate that it is uncertain that these parents have a sufficient understanding of the different forms of Early Years provision and the variety of education offered. Indeed, Penn (2000, p50), contests that 'the rhetoric of the importance of learning' is embraced by parents, yet they remain vague about what that entails.

Moreover, the literature sources (Penn, 2000; Draper and Duffy, 2006; Athey, 2007; Allen and Whalley, 2010) and the stakeholders concede that this could be a sector wide problem. Currently, parental awareness of the different educational approaches

within nurseries is limited and arguably parental understanding of nursery education needs to be developed in order for them to make an informed choice. Indeed, the recent Daycare Trust (2010c) research suggests that Ofsted as a body have a key role to play in improving parental understanding, but more work needs to be done in raising awareness about its role as an information provider as currently its reports are 'inaccessible and superficial' (p1) and not relevant to all social and cultural groups. Furthermore, Hines (2008) asserts that the families from low incomes may not share the 'vision of quality' (p116) that Ofsted reporting presents as the aspirational goals may not seem applicable to them. This assertion may be connected to the previous inspection framework (OFSTED, 2003a) which used the *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003a) outcomes as its focus, thus phrases such as 'economic wellbeing' may have alienated some parents. Additionally, it may provide some explanation for the nursery based stakeholders' hypothesis regarding parental occupation and accessing Ofsted reporting, they contested that "professional" parents are more likely to scrutinise the report and it may influence their eventual choice of nursery. Moreover, as discussed in chapter five, the parental questionnaires when analysed using the standard occupational classification (NoS, 2010) indicated that a higher proportion of parents with a professional or managerial position were more likely to strongly agree that Ofsted had influenced their choice of nursery.

However, there is still a feeling conveyed by the findings and the literature sources connected to parental involvement (Penn, 2000; Duffy and Draper; 2006; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2006; Athey; 2007; Moss and Dahlberg, 2008; Allen and Whalley, 2010) that the reason parents do not access nursery Ofsted reports to inform their choice of nursery is more complex than the issues outlined above. It appears to be connected to their construction of childhood (Woodhead, 2006) and the dilemma outlined by Moss:

Who do we understand the young child to be? What sort of early childhood worker do we want? What are the purposes of Early Years services and pedagogical work? What do we want for our children, here and now and in the future? What kind of world are we living in and how should early childhood relate to that world? (1999, p234).

Yet, it is difficult to do more than speculate as this study and as the recent Daycare trust (2010c) report indicates there has been no empirical academic research into this area. Although Ofsted canvas parental opinion of a setting, they do not ask parents to evaluate their service; this would seem to be a missed opportunity, as arguably, greater involvement of parents in the inspection process could lead to better parental understanding of nursery education and care. Furthermore, the Daycare Trust (2010c) contests that effort to involve a greater number of parents in inspections would also contribute to greater accountability.

6.5.4 Theme three: quality is a feeling

In a similar manner to the parents in Tanner *et al's* (2006) study, these parental explanations of their nursery preference 'express a different emphasis… compared to official requirements' (p9). Although they do not use the word 'quality' their examples contained many of the quality factors discussed by the other stakeholders in question two but used non-specialist terminology in their descriptions. They appear to find it difficult to convey their reasons for choice using definite terms, they refer to "ambience", "gut instinct", seeming to rate the "feel" of the nursery more highly than any specific feature of service such as the training of staff or adherence to the EYFS (DfES, 2007).This seems to indicate a lack of understanding about what makes an effective setting, which Sylva and Taylor (2006) contest is essential to helping parents make an informed choice of a nursery for their child.

Indeed the parents' awareness of recent research projects and initiatives such as EPPE (Sylva *et al*, 2004, 2010) and the drive for a graduate workforce (HMT, 2004)

seems low. As when referring to staff, unlike the parents in Bryson *et al's* (DfES, 2006) government sponsored report who considered 'properly trained staff' (p204) to be important, the parents in this study emphasise the personal characteristics of staff. Their descriptions of staff as "lovely", "friendly" and "dedicated", resonate with the desirable 'romanticised' qualities of an nursery worker established by Froebel (Wiebe, 1896, p43) over one hundred years ago, rather than the contemporary view that qualified workforce (Miller, 2008; Garrick and Morgan, 2009; Alexander, 2010; Osgood, 2010; Sylva *et al,* 2010a) is necessary to meet a child's developmental needs. The parents' references to personal qualities may reinforce the non-graduate practitioners' previously discussed assertion that "kindness is more important than a degree" (nursery nurse, 2 years sector experience, *Umbrella*) or they could be linked to an underlying problem with the unilateral approach to parental involvement in the sector highlighted by the literature sources (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2006; Athey, 2007; Nutbrown *et al,* 2008).

As these parents filled in their questionnaires at the beginning of a nursery year, it may seem illogical to connect their lack of knowledge of the sector to unsuccessful parental involvement strategies. Nonetheless, the practitioners at *Cherrytree* in particular, did indicate that they wished more parents attended induction events to enable them to acquire a deeper understanding of nursery education and care. This is significant as this setting is part of the SureStart initiative, and liaison with parents is seen as central to improving the outcomes for children (Clark and Waller, 2007). Yet, Draper and Duffy (2006) suggest that the reason for lack of parental understanding about the sector is not merely connected to government initiatives, as they highlight that practitioners themselves can be to blame as presenting irrelevant and ineffective materials full of jargon can be as much of a barrier to accessing information. However, Osgood (2010) would contest that the development of activities and strategies used by nurseries to engage with parents has been

influenced by the need to meet national standards. Whatever the underpinning reason for the low level of this group of parent's nursery sector knowledge, it is evident that more needs to be done to inform parents about the national strategies and approaches to learning that shape provision as this would allow them to make the most appropriate choice to meet their child needs.

6.5.5 Summary of the Discussion of the Findings Relating to Research Question Four: Is Parental Choice Influenced by Ofsted Reporting?

> We know that you want the best for your child and that when it comes to choosing childcare or a school it is important to have as much information as possible. That's where we come in. Ofsted inspection reports present a comprehensive and impartial picture and are published on our website (OFSTED, 2010b).

As clearly indicated by the above statement, part of Ofsted's role is to provide objective information to enable parents to make the best choice of nursery for their child. Although from the questionnaire it would seem that there is an awareness of Ofsted as a body and in agreement with other stakeholders there is an acceptance of the need for inspection. However, this study and the Daycare Trust research (2010c) indicate not all parents are using this form of information, and prefer to use subjective sources such as family and friends to inform their decision. In common with the nursery based stakeholders relationships appear to be important to this group of parents, and personal recommendations are more influential than official 'sanitized' reports.

Moreover, in spite of 'burgeoning of initiatives, interest and resources' (Nutbrown *et al,* 2008, p16) in the last ten years aimed at providing parents with information and increasing the range of nursery options to meet the needs of the working family, some parents still chose a nursery because it had places available and offered suitable opening hours, suggesting that full time provision remains 'patchy' (Clark

and Waller, 2007; Hines, 2008; Daycare Trust, 2010a). There is little evidence in the literature sources or the findings to suggest that parents' understanding of the nursery sector has increased since Penn's study in 2000. Yet, there are indications in the nursery based stakeholders' accounts and the settings' Ofsted reports that all the nurseries value their partnership with parents and their opinions are sought in the evaluation process.

Therefore, it would seem that these nurseries fulfil the official requirements (OFSTED, 2009a) by making their inspection report available and involving parents in the quality assurance process. Yet, it would seem, as Athey (2007) suggests, that parents have partial information about the nursery sector and consequently, parental reflection may be superficial. Although there are a few successful case studies regarding parental involvement cited in literature, such as the Pen Green Centre for under- fives which adopts a dialogic model (Allen and Whalley, 2010), there are not enough to suggest that all parents of nursery children are involved in a reflective and analytic relationship with their child's setting. Some stakeholders in this study would suggest that this is because some parents are disinterested in exploring the nature and quality of their children's learning experience. However, I consider the problem may be more sector based, literature sources such as Dahlberg *et al* (2007) and Nutbrown *et al* (2008) aver that parental participation should be a democratic process developing mutual understanding. The examples given by the stakeholders, their settings Ofsted report and prospectus' suggest that parent involvement constitutes a unilateral transfer of knowledge, with practitioners informing parents about the service element of provision. It would seem more needs to be done by policymakers, the research community and practitioners prior to a child joining nursery to raise awareness of the aims of Early Years education and care and enable parents to make an informed choice. As the Daycare trust (2010c) suggests Ofsted reporting could play an important role in providing parents with knowledge about the sector

and increase their involvement in discussions about 'quality'. Indeed the discussion linked to this research question and the others indicates that parental participation in relation to quality matters remains an area with unexplored potential. Consequently, there will be further discussion regarding this topic in the concluding chapter.

6.6 Summary of the discussion relating to the research questions

In this chapter there has been an attempt to come to a greater understanding of the questions which were originally posed with the benefit of examining the introduction of an integrated inspection across the nursery sector. For instance, in relation to the first question about how inspection develops education and care, it has been possible to look across the five nurseries and see both similar and contrasting stakeholder perspectives regarding this. Again in relation to the second question about differing perceptions of quality, the diverse range of stakeholders provided by the sample have provided a wide range of examples and ideologies. The third question regarding the current Ofsted framework has been extensively developed inviting explanations focusing on the interplay of inspection and improvement, which have generated a possible new approach to regulation based on informed relationships and documented professional dialogue.

The fourth question explores the final aspect of inspection, the role of Ofsted as an information provider for parents, the five nurseries provided access to these important stakeholders. The questionnaire responses indicate that this an area rich in potential, indeed in this study the literature sources and other stakeholder responses have continually referred to the importance of informed parental participation as key to developing a reflective culture which engages with the child's total environment. At the beginning of this chapter, literature regarding quality in the Early Years emphasised that a feeling that 'the quality of relationships' between stakeholders (Abbot and Rodger, 1995, p8) will influence provision more powerfully than anything

else. The discussion relating to each research question suggests that a sector based and informed inspection could be an essential part of the relationship. Furthermore, Dahlberg *et al* (2007) strongly contest that the development of nursery care and education cannot be separated from these stakeholder relationships within the cultural construction of childhood and this view has been influential in shaping the discussions in this chapter. In the final chapter conclusions will be drawn about the analysis which has been presented here.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In this final chapter the opportunity will be taken to reflect upon the findings from the study and the experience of the researcher in carrying it out, with reference to literature which has been discussed in previous chapters. Initially, a section relating to the research questions will draw conclusions in relation to these from the findings and analysis. These four questions, as set out in chapter one, aimed to examine how the introduction of an integrated Early Years inspection framework has impacted upon the nursery sector. In the final section concluding remarks will be shared in relation to the methods and the methodological stance which influenced the execution of the study, in addition the contribution to knowledge and the potential for future research will be discussed.

The Daycare Trust (2010c) suggests that the purposes of the current integrated inspections of Early Years' settings are three-fold:

- To ensure that young children receive high quality and safe early childhood education and care, by inspecting against the criteria outlined in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) guidance.
- To drive up standards
- To ensure that early years settings are accountable to parents and to provide information to enable them to choose the most appropriate setting for them

    (p1, bullet points as in original).

This study aimed to examine the sector response to this new integrated inspection system within five distinct nursery settings and to explore notions of quality by considering how different aspects of quality are defined, expressed and evaluated from a diverse stakeholder perspective.

My four research questions asked:

- Does the inspection framework support the development of care and education across the nursery sector?

- Do inspectors/headteachers/managers share the same perceptions of quality factors within nursery education as practitioners?

- Do headteachers/managers/practitioners consider Ofsted to be a 'change agent'?

- Is parental choice influenced by Ofsted reporting?

In a similar manner to the previous two chapters, in order to ensure continuity and coherence, each research question will provide the central structure of the following section.

7.2 Inspection and the development of care and education

The extensive literature connected to contestation of 'quality' and the distinct nature of nursery provision, highlights that an understanding of the sector and the establishment of a reflective relationship culture are essential for the development of education and care (Pascal and Bertram, 2002; Woodhead, 2006; Dahlberg *et al,* 2007; Siraj-Blatchford *et al,* 2009; Allen and Whalley, 2010). Although there is widespread acknowledgement amongst these stakeholders and the literature sources (Tanner *et al,* 2006; Miller, 2008; Garrick and Morgan, 2009; Alexander, 2010; Osgood, 2010) that the sector needs an external body to maintain and monitor standards; what emerges from this small scale study is that the inspection framework has not fully embraced the context and construction of Early Childhood Education and Care.

In this study the Early Years trained leaders and practitioners in their explanations do describe the need for an inspection system, yet desire an inspectorate that

recognises the 'complexity, values, subjectivity, interdeterminacy and multiple perspectives' (Moss *et al,* 2000, p108) of the nursery sector. Their articulated requirements for a distinctive inspection system utilising the relationship approach of Early Years education (Osgood, 2006; Alexander, 2010) were not voiced by the remaining stakeholders. Dahlberg *et al* (2007) suggests that the reason for this are connected to the differing perceptions of the construction of childhood, additionally Athey (2007) would contest this may be linked to the remaining participants having partial information about the sector. The latter view was consistently applied to the inspectorate by the Early Years trained participants. The lack of sector knowledge dominated discussions and the characteristics of the inspectorate and the frequency of inspection were seen as barriers to the development of care and education.

Yet, it is clear from this study that all stakeholders including parents consider inspection to be necessary in both the private and state sector. Dahlberg *et al* (2007) and Osgood (2006, 2010) would suggest that this lack of challenge regarding the existence of regulations from the stakeholders is due to an unquestioned acceptance of inspection. However, the findings from this study suggest that these stakeholders had thoroughly considered the implications of inspection and, unlike their colleagues described in the school based literature of Brimblecombe *et al* (1996) and Perryman (2007),believed that inspection was beneficial. This is a significant finding, as they did not view inspection as punitively connected to measuring standards, the leaders and their workforce placed value on being part of a process and feel empowered by the recent changes that have given the nursery sector a distinct curriculum and inspection approach.

Indeed, although all the nursery respondents, the inspectors, and literature sources considered the principles and working practice promoted by the EYFS (DfES, 2007) to be the most influential factor in the development of care and education across the

nursery sector, it is important to remember the inspection process (OFSTED, 2009a) is part of this framework. Furthermore, the recent findings of the Daycare Trust study (2010c, p1) confirm this view:

> …We feel that the Ofsted inspection process (and EYFS) contribute to children's welfare and learning and has driven up standards.

Therefore, it could be concluded that the inspection framework is seen by these stakeholders as contributing to the development of care and education across the nursery sector. However, due to the cited reasons of lack of sector expertise and understanding demonstrated by the inspectorate, the duration of inspection and the failure to capitalise on the established reflective relationship culture, I would argue that the integrated inspection approach has the potential to play a greater role.

7.3 Perceptions of Quality

There is range of argument present in literature about the understanding of the term 'quality', central to this debate has been the extent to which quality is recognised as objective and static or subjective and dynamic (Tanner *et al,* 2006). For example, Dahlberg *et al* (2007) and Osgood (2010) contest the former is utilized by all government policy documents and the inspection process, whilst the social, unpredictable, nursery environment may need a flexible approach to 'quality' allowing for contextual vagaries. Indeed Dahlberg, Moss and Pence have been exploring the problem of'quality' for twenty years, they aver its current conceptual construction makes it difficult to develop care and education as 'quality' cannot accommodate the diverse nature of nursery provision and its accompanying philosophical debates. Thus to move care and education forward it is necessary to look 'beyond quality' and create an 'inclusionary paradigm' (Moss and Pence, 1994, p172, 173), where 'meaning making' (Dahlberg *et al,* p76) an informed documented dialogue approach

involving all stakeholders would replace formal mechanistic measures of 'quality' and facilitate improvement.

However, this small scale study suggests that Dahlberg *et al's* (2007) vision may be too far removed from current practice. The word 'quality' was used freely by all participants in this study; they did not 'problematise' or ponder its construction as suggested by the academic sources (Alexander, 2010; Moss and Dahlberg, 2008; Siraj-Blatchford *et al,* 2002; Bertram and Pascal, 2000). They were able to give detailed descriptions of their definitions of 'quality' supported by explanations of the component factors without prompting from myself. Yet, they did not provide responses that connected with the measurable auditing aspects of 'quality' as discussed by Earley (1998); they referred to the dimensions of quality which focus on the overall experience of the child (Sheridan, 2001, 2007) and placed relationships and interactions at the heart of their explanations.

There were variations in the responses, less connected with context more related to role and position. The most significant difference was between the female nursery based leaders and practitioners and the male experienced inspector and primary headteacher, the former placed strong emphasis on the 'happy child' which Alexander (2010) contends is a common image used by Early Years practitioners, the latter vehemently disregarded this image. As stated in chapter six there is insufficient evidence in this study, particularly given the small number of male participants, to link this with a gender. It could be argued as proposed by Osgood (2006) that it is their masculine fear of the ultra feminine world of Early Years which makes them counter its central beliefs. Yet, it would not be realistic to apply this argument to this small sample. Their negativity is more likely to be linked to their lack

of Early Years training ,as suggested by the discussion linked to research question one, this is more likely to be problematic.

Although, as outlined briefly above and in more detail in chapter six there were some differences between the official understanding of 'quality' and the practitioners' views but these were less pronounced than in previous studies (Penn, 2002; Osgood, 2006; Tanner *et al,* 2006; Osgood, 2010). This could be attributed to increased affinity with Early Years policy as both the literature sources (Clark and Waller, 2007; Pugh and Duffy, 2006; Riley, 2007) and the stakeholders praise the EYFS (DfES, 2007). Moreover, throughout the findings practice and the accompanying terminology from the EYFS (DfES, 2007) was used with unforced confidence. More significantly, the smaller division between prescribed quality factors and those expressed in this study could be ascribed to greater acceptance of the Ofsted framework or as Osgood (2006; 2010) would argue respondents have become conditioned by the inspection process and now unconsciously use official rather than personal descriptors of 'quality'. These commonalities are summarised in *Table 9*, the dimensions and the descriptions were generated by all the stakeholders' perceptions of quality factors.

Table 9 Dimensions of Quality (extended to include parental perceptions of quality factors).

Dimensions of quality	Inspector	Practitioner	Leader	Parent
Interactions/Relationships	Evaluation process involves all stakeholders	Positive and informed relationships between staff, children and parents	Responsive and informed relationships between staff children and parents	Children happy with one another
Progress of the Learner	Children are able to apply their skills to EYFS	Creative and experiential learning empowering the child	Planned learning equals engaged child	Preparation for school
Staff Recruitment and Training	Optimise staff development and training	Qualified keyworker with an approachable manner	Qualified workforce with the ability to understand child development.	Supportive staff with caring approach
Nursery Environment	Maintain Safety Standards and meet individual children's need's	Fully utilise indoor and outdoor. Maintain equipment and building. Stimulating.	Effective management of resources and buildings	Comfortable child friendly atmosphere

7.4 Ofsted and 'change'

As stated in chapter six, this question was the most difficult to answer as the nursery based stakeholders were reluctant to credit any provision changes or improvements they had made to the Ofsted framework. I had anticipated a wealth of answers containing details of changes to practice and policy made to satisfy the recommendations of the previous Ofsted report. Instead this particular set of interview questions provoked more narratives relating to inspector misconceptions and disputes over awarded grades. Yet, this set of questions did provide the respondents with the opportunity for further reflection upon inspection and their own

systems of evaluation, and subsequently their responses shaped a possible

framework for collegiate evaluation entitled 'relationship quality' (*figure17*).

In this study reflecting upon 'change' enabled the nursery stakeholders to further

explore their personal response to inspection. Interestingly, despite their explanations

containing distinct examples relating to individual practice or the setting's

philosophical approach, a shared vision emerged. By sharing their explanations with

me, a form of professional dialogue enabling a reflective culture, in conditions ideal

for facilitating change (Fullan,2001; Muijs, 2004) the stakeholders produced their own

vision of a collegiate approach to evaluation and inspection across the nursery

sector. By the end of each interview the overwhelming majority of the leaders and

practitioners began to construct their desired sector based strategy, which appears to

be strongly advocating a peer dialogue informed private and state partnership. Figure
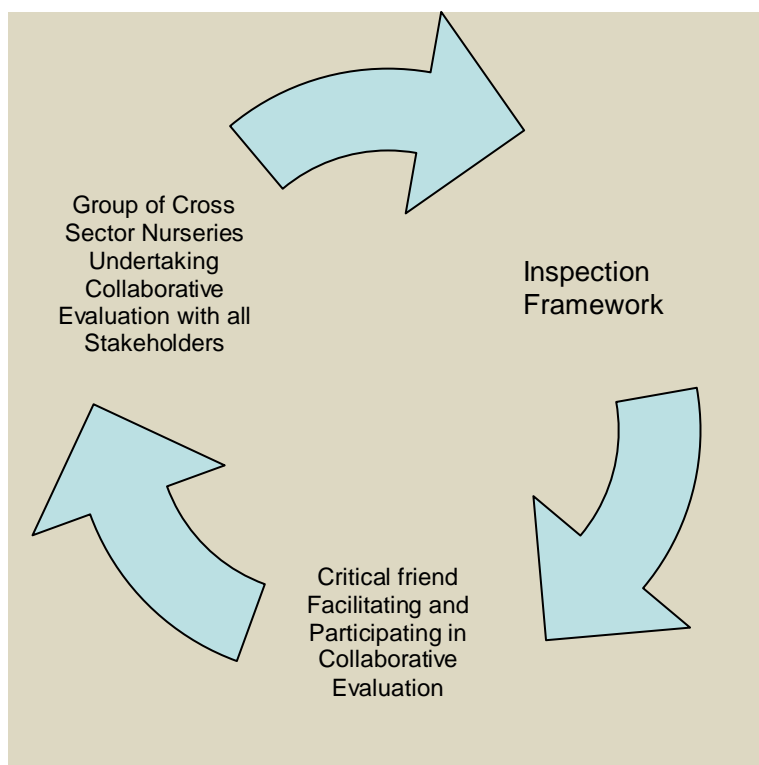
18 captures the central action of the model:

Figure 18. The Nucleus of 'Relationship Quality': a collaborative documented

approach to evaluation.

This relationship approach to 'quality' moves beyond the official Ofsted remit, which endorses the view from literature sources (Waller, 2005; Mathers *et al,* 2007; Mooney, 2007; Hall *et al,* 2009; Allen and Whalley, 2010) and a number of English local authorities (Sylva *et al*, 2010a) that the nursery sector need to do more than meet the official requirements to develop care and education. I would argue if the self evaluation exercise was facilitated by a 'critical friend' and nurseries were organised into cross sector partnerships as discussed in chapter six, then this would produce the optimum conditions for a reflective culture to develop. To this end, I have developed a new model (*Figure 17, Relationship Quality*) to be used as a starting point for such partnerships. By making the most of all the people surrounding nurseries and the methods which appear to suit their professional style, evaluation can become more planned, meaningful, appropriate and, most importantly, more acceptable to those working in the nursery sector. This model may enable Early Years inspection to fulfil its potential as a 'change agent'.

 A literature review on inter-schools partnerships (Atkinson *et al,* 2007) has identified that collaboration between settings can become hierarchal and that contrasting philosophies can prevent optimal benefits of partnership. These are important factors to consider, as this study has highlighted the significance of a distinct philosophical approach and there is a contrasting range in qualifications in the two sectors, which could be considered a hierarchal issue. Therefore testing of this model on a small scale would be necessary to ensure that these aspects do not hinder collaboration. To facilitate this, I am intending, with the already gained co-operation of four nurseries, two state and two private in the same geographical location, to carry out a trial of this model taking on the role of critical friend.

7.5 Parental choice and Ofsted

 The discussion linked to this research question and the literature sources (Tanner *et al,* 2006; Brundrett and Rhodes, 2010) indicate that parental participation in relation to quality matters remains an area with unexplored potential. Indeed, the whole area of parental involvement in nursery inspection and Ofsted as a parental information source has been previously overlooked by academic literature and empirically based sources. Yet it is clearly part of Ofsted's role to provide objective information to enable parents to make the best choice of nursery for their child and communicate with parents regarding inspection judgements. All of the settings gave parents access to their Ofsted report and referred to it in their information materials. In addition, all the settings described their evaluation systems which involved parents and all spoke of their desire to work further with this important stakeholder group.

The parents involved in this small scale study used subjective information sources such as family and friends to select their child's nursery, this reinforces the strong emphasis placed on relationships by all the nursery based stakeholders in this study and also recalls Abbot and Rodger's (1995) prophetic statement that the 'quality of relationships' (p8) will influence provision more than anything else. It would seem from these findings and the Daycare trust research (2010c) that more work may need to be done to raise parental awareness of the different types of nursery provision by Ofsted and by the sector. Only half the overall questionnaire respondents had accessed their settings Ofsted report, indeed at *Cherrytree* and *Whitehouse* only 25% the parents had read their nursery's report. As discussed in chapter six, access to computer facilities and English as an additional language may be a factor causing this situation. Significantly, 54% of parents at *Greenleaf* accessed their settings report which provides no information specifically relating to the nursery at all. Both the advisers in this study highlighted this anomaly in their explanations, if a parent accesses the report of a state primary school which has a nursery unit, the report

only contains information about Foundation Stage provision in general. Despite the new separate framework (OFSTED, 2009a) which details separate standards for nursery and reception classes within primary schools, one report is produced. This makes it difficult for parents to make an informed choice based on Ofsted reporting, for example in this study the report on *Umbrella* is the same length as *Greenleaf,* but as to be expected the former is all about the quality of the provision in that nursery whereas it would be difficult for parents to obtain specific information about the nursery from *Greenleaf's* report. It could be argued that school deemed 'good' by Ofsted should have a good nursery, however as highlighted in the literature throughout chapter two, nursery provision has a distinct approach to childhood care and education and the quality factors in a school may be very different to a nursery.

Certainly, the evidence from the questionnaires and the recent Daycare Trust study (2010c) suggests that most parents are not utilising Ofsted data to inform their selection of their child's nursery. Yet, it is difficult to do more than speculate as to why they are not accessing this source, it could be to do with computer skills, it may be connected to the professional language used by the reports alienating parents, it may to do with disinterest in nursery provision. Indeed, both the experienced inspector and the Daycare Trust (2010c) findings hypothesize that as children get older parents are more likely to access Ofsted reporting. However, this lack of interest in Ofsted reporting would seem to be a missed opportunity, as arguably, greater involvement of parents in the inspection process could lead to better parental understanding of nursery education and care. Subsequently, this would lead to more informed parental contribution to the nursery's evaluation process, indeed informed dialogue is at the heart of the proposed 'relationship quality' model (*Figure 17*). As indicated by the paucity of the literature sources and the responses of the stakeholders the role of parents in the inspection and quality process remains one to be developed.

7.6 Reflecting on the study

The decision to engage in a small scale qualitative multi-level embedded case study to illuminate an area of interest has been fruitful, as has been the case for other researchers engaged in investigating nursery schools (Roberts-Holmes, 2005). In the transcription of the interviews and the collating of questionnaires notes there were many opportunities to reflect upon what had been heard and seen. Indeed, the interviews with the agency inspectors and Early Years advisers provided valuable information as they gave official sources a 'voice' and illustrated government policy with their pertinent examples. However, it would have been useful to interview some Ofsted officials; this may have provided some answers to certain concerns raised by this group of leaders and practitioners regarding the level of sector knowledge and expertise held by the current inspectorate. Moreover, as raised in chapter four, I decided not to interview the children at the five nursery sites regarding their notions of 'quality'. Although I recognise, as Dahlberg *et al* (2007) and Malaguzzi (1993) state they are stakeholders in the construction of their own education and care, however this thesis is concerned with exploring the concept of quality and discussing the impact of inspection; rather than investigating children's perceptions of their own nursery experience.

The decision to undertake parental questionnaires provided the opportunity to canvas all the parents' opinions on their use of Ofsted as part of the nursery selection process, an aspect of inspection previously overlooked by academic research. In spite of this, if time had permitted, it might have been interesting to interview individual parents in each setting in order to allow them to explore the notion of 'quality' and further probe their understanding of inspection. This may have yielded data which reinforced the importance of including parents in discussion regarding the

quality of provision (Malaguzzi, 1993; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2006; Tanner *et al,* 2006; Athey, 2007; Dahlberg *et al,* 2007; Nutbrown *et al,* 2008).

The interpretative view of this research, influenced by the humanistic knowledge domain outlined by Ribbins and Gunter (2002), has allowed the practical reality of inspection to be explored through the generated 'thick description' (Geertz 1973 in Cohen *et al* 2007, p254) provided by the respondents. By taking a qualitative approach, I have been able to establish answers to how inspection develops nursery education and care through constructing knowledge with each participant. These contextual personal experiences have created a descriptive study capturing the distinct nature of nursery provision. Moreover, during the period of study I have come to a greater understanding of the theory of practice and in particular the work of Dahlberg, Moss and Pence has influenced the conduct of my research. I hope, in my interviews, I have 'created a space where those directly involved can act and speak on their own behalf' (Dahlberg *et al,* 2007, p141). Their work on the discourse of 'meaning making' (Dahlberg *et al,* 2007, p76) influenced the development and analysis of this study. By moving 'beyond quality' (Dahlberg *et al,* 2000) I was able to interrogate the data which I had collected and come to some reasoned conclusions about what I had been privileged to discuss within the nursery sites.

7.7 The contribution to knowledge

Ribbins and Gunter (2002, p378) suggest that one of the purposes of humanistic research is to 'contribute to enabling and improving'. This small scale study has enabled practitioners and leaders to reflect and explore their own notions of 'quality'. This focused reflection may contribute to collegiate dialogue regarding the quality of their own provision, thus potentially improve the care and education of children in their settings. Moreover their reflection enabled a collective vision of 'quality'

culminating in the 'dimensions of quality' (*Table 9*), demonstrating that unlike previous research into nursery inspection (Osgood, 2006; Tanner *et al,* 2006) there were commonalities between 'insider' and 'outsider' (Stephen and Brown, 2004) perspectives of quality factors. Furthermore, again dissimilar to other studies, (Penn, 2002, Osgood, 2010), these stakeholders found inspection empowering and appeared to associate Ofsted with elevated status. Therefore, the proposed model of 'Relationship Quality' (*Figure 17*) builds on this positive perception of inspection; and enables an understanding of the relationship culture which lies at the heart of Early Years practice. Subsequently, it is hoped that this approach may help improve the inspection experience for all nursery based stakeholders and develop a locally based cross sector collegiate based evaluation system.

Secondly, Ribbins and Gunter (2002, p378) propose that another purpose of humanistic research is to 'theorise from empirical work'. This study has continually highlighted the dearth of academic research into Early Years and the nursery sector. In particular, as the recent Daycare trust (2010c) stated there has been no empirical research into whether Ofsted reporting influences the parental selection of a nursery for their child. This research provides data gathered from a small scale questionnaire data based on 180 parental responses, which has already disseminated useful information to the participating nurseries as it provided specific reasons why parents chose their particular setting. Moreover, this particular data could alert the research community to the possibilities of empirically based projects regarding the role of parents in inspection and the role of Ofsted as an information provider. Indeed as Ribbins and Gunter (2002, p379) assert the aim of communication within the humanistic domain is to report the findings to 'the research community, policy makers and practitioners'. Therefore, in order to further inform the literature and research regarding inspection and quality matters in the nursery sector I intend to disseminate

the knowledge gained by this study in a range of articles suitably pitched for either an academic audience or professional colleagues.

7.8 Suggestions for further research

This research employs a mixed method embedded case study approach across five distinct types of nursery provision located in a relatively narrow, albeit socially and culturally diverse, geographical region. As this approach emphasises subjectivity, interpretation and agency, it is likely that the nature of the region from which the nurseries were chosen would impact on the stakeholders experiences of inspection, their notions of 'quality' and their interpretations of these. Although this is an accepted outcome of this type of research (Bassey, 1999), it does place limitations on the extent to which the knowledge gained is transferable to other locations outside this geographical area. Therefore, a more comprehensive study would examine nurseries situated in a wider range of local authorities and compare the range of support offered to setting regarding preparation for inspection. Similarly, although this study selected five nurseries which had been awarded 'good', a study tracking nursery performance for two or three inspection cycles after a setting had been deemed 'inadequate' or 'satisfactory' could establish the real impact of inspection on an individual setting.

In addition, it would be beneficial to further explore the reasons why parents do not access Ofsted reporting as an information source and to further probe their understanding of nursery education and care. Indeed, as a result of connections made during this study, I am currently engaged in a funded research project aimed at creating parental understanding of child development by using different methods of engaging with parents promoting a multilateral exchange of information. This, and all of the modifications discussed above, would be worthy of consideration in plans for future research in nursery schools.

7.9 Summary

The preceding sections of this chapter have sought to revisit the original research questions and the methods and methodological stance. Subsequently, concluding remarks were drawn in relation to them. It is clear from the literature sources, Ofsted data (*Table 3,* OFSTED, 2010a) and documentary sources and the stakeholders' responses that the integrated inspection framework has made a contribution to the care and education of nursery aged children. Prior to Ofsted taking over the inspection of childcare and education in 2005, the diverse range of nursery settings were inspected by different bodies, using a range of different methods. Moreover, the Daycare Trust (2010c) avers the quality of information made available to parents was much poorer before 2005 and Ofsted's involvement. However, despite these positive affirmations regarding inspection, it is evident from these findings that the concerns raised by the nursery based stakeholders and the literatures sources (Penn, 2000; Edgington, 2004; Andreae and Matthews, 2006; Osgood, 2006, 2010) regarding the inspectorate lack of sector knowledge leading to ill conceived judgements still remain a concern for this group of nurseries.

There is considerable evidence that all of these stakeholders see inspection as an opportunity for improving nursery education and care, and an empowering process for leaders and practitioners contrary to the controlling image presented by Foucault (1979) and explored by contemporary authors. Moreover, unlike the earlier study by Tanner *et al* (2006), these participants explored notions of 'quality' were not markedly different to examples given in official documents such as 'Early Years Leading to Excellence' (OFSTED, 2008). Yet, the nursery based stakeholders did not make the connections between their own practice and the inspection framework; they felt alienated by the objective approach and raised concerns regarding the duration and frequency of inspection and the lack of relationship with their inspector. Their vision for a sector based approach building on an established reflective culture is similar to

Dahlberg *et al's* (2007) 'nursery as a forum' (p70) concept, nevertheless they would still welcome the view of an external 'expert' to validate and affirm practice. Therefore, I conclude that for this group of stakeholders, inspection is a missed opportunity for the children, their parents and the nursery workforce. Consequently, I would suggest that by extending existing practice and working in closer partnership with local authorities, indeed simply by becoming informed participants in an informed dialogue, the inspectorate could optimise the regulatory experience.

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Appendix 1

Early Years Inspection Framework

Ofsted
raising standards
improving lives

Are you ready for your inspection?

A guide to inspections of provision on Ofsted's
Childcare and Early Years Registers

Appendix 2

Statement of Intent

As part of my Ph.D research at the University of Birmingham, I am conducting a series of interviews which investigate the role of inspection within the nursery sector. Results of this study will be made available to the University and selected academic journals. Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified and only group data will be presented. I am grateful for your participation in my study, and any transcript relating to this interview will be made available to you to check for accuracy. If you have any questions about this research please contact me~ c.a.greenway@bham.ac.uk, 0121 415 8218

Thank you for your co-operation and time.

....

Celia Greenway. Lecturer in Early Years Education

Name of participant …………………………………………..

Signature of participant……………………………………………..

Appendix 3

Parental Questionnaire

Dear Parent/Carer

As part of my Ph.D research at the University of Birmingham, I am conducting a survey that investigates the role of inspection within the nursery sector. Results of this study will be made available to the University and selected academic journals. Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified and only group data will be presented. I am grateful for your participation in my study, if you have any questions about this research please contact me ~ Celia Greenway~ c.a.greenway@bham.ac.uk, 0121 415 8218

Thank you very much for your co-operation and time.

For each of the statements below, please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement by placing a tick in the appropriate box.

1.   All state nursery schools should be inspected by OFSTED.

Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	

2.   All private nursery schools should be inspected by OFSTED.

Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	

3.   OFSTED inspection reports influenced my choice of nursery.

Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	

4. A poor OFSTED inspection report would have prevented me choosing this nursery.

Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	

5. A good OFSTED inspection report is an indication of a good nursery school.

Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree

6. Nursery Education should be inspected in the same manner as schools.

Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree

7. Nursery schools should have health and safety inspections.

Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree

9. The provision of care in a nursery school is as important as the provision of education.

Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree

10. Qualified staff are an indicator of good quality provision.

Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree

11. OFSTED provides useful information for parents/carers

Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree

12. Do you know how to access OFSTED reports?

Yes   No

Please circle answer

13. Have you read the most recent OFSTED report of this nursery?

Yes   **No**   **Don't know**

Please circle answer

14. What was your most important reason for choosing this nursery?

Location   Other children in same establishment

Cost   Local reputation

Good OFSTED report   Well qualified staff

Please rank in order of most to least important, 1 is most, 6 being least important

15. If you wish to further explain your reasons for choosing this nursery, please do so below.

……… ……

……… …..

……… …..

……… ……

……… ……

Additional information

Please could you answer the following questions:-

a) What is your gender?

Male   Female   (please circle)

b) What is the occupation of main income provider?

……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions, could you please return your completed questionnaire to the nursery supervisor/headteacher

Interview Questions for Headteachers/Managers

Questions for Headteachers/Managers

1) Should all state nursery provision be inspected by OFSTED? Why?

2) Should all private nursery provision be inspected by OFSTED? Why?

3) Should nursery education be inspected in the same manner as schools? Why?

4) How frequently should nursery settings be inspected? Why?

5) Please could you describe the features/indicators of high quality nursery provision? *Prompts:*

6) Conversely, could you describe factors that indicate poor nursery provision?

7) Do you think that a good OFSTED report is an indicator of good quality nursery provision?

8) Do you consider OFSTED reporting to influence parental choice? Or recruitment of staff? (Is it a marketing tool?)

9) What has had the greatest influence on the quality of provision in the nursery sector in the last 10 years? *Prompt~ expand...Care v Education etc*

10) What are the positive aspects of the inspection process? *Prompt:- Do you consider it a driver for good quality provision across the sector* Negative?

11) Do the recent changes in the OFSTED framework promote high quality provision?

12) Do you involve all your staff team in the writing of your self evaluation document?

13) What changes have you made to your nursery provision because of the OFSTED framework? Would you have made them otherwise?

14) Has the OFSTED framework affected your leadership role/style, relationship with your workforce?

15) If you were to draw up the person specification for an Early Years inspector, what would you be looking for?

16) What changes would you make to the current framework?

17) Any other thoughts connected to OFSTED process you would like to discuss? i.e. notice period?

Appendix 5

Interview Questions for Practitioners

Questions for Practitioners

18) Should all state nursery provision be inspected by OFSTED? Why?

19) Should all private nursery provision be inspected by OFSTED? Why?

20) Should nursery education be inspected in the same manner as schools? Why?

21) How frequently should nursery settings be inspected?

22) Please could you describe the features/indicators of high quality nursery provision? *Prompts:*

23) Conversely, could you describe factors that indicate poor nursery provision?

24) Do you think that a good OFSTED report is an indicator of good quality nursery provision?

25) Do you consider OFSTED reporting to influence parental choice? Or job choice?

26) What has had the greatest influence on the quality of provision in the nursery sector in the last 10 years? Prompts ~ *expand...Care v Education etc* N.B. change this question, depending on age range of audience?

27) What are the positive aspects of the inspection process? *Prompt:- Do you consider it a driver for good quality provision across the sector* Negative?

28) Are you aware of the recent changes in the OFSTED framework?

29) Are you involved in the writing of your nursery's self evaluation document?

30) What changes have you made to your practice because of the OFSTED framework? Did you have them imposed on you? Would you have made them otherwise?

31) Has the OFSTED framework affected your workload? Relationship with your peers? Your manager?

32) If you were to draw up the person specification for an Early Years inspector, what would you be looking for?

33) What changes would you make to the current framework?

34) Any other thoughts connected to OFSTED process you would like to discuss?

Appendix 6

Interview Questions for Inspectors

Questions for Inspectors

1) Should all state nursery provision be inspected by OFSTED? Why?

2) Should all private nursery provision be inspected by OFSTED? Why?

3) Should nursery education be inspected in the same manner as schools? Why?

4) How frequently should nursery settings be inspected?

5) Please could you describe the features/indicators of high quality nursery provision? *Prompts:*

6) Conversely, could you describe factors that indicate poor nursery provision?

7) Does the current inspection framework enable you to evaluate these factors and features?

8) Do you think that a good OFSTED report is an indicator of good quality nursery provision?

9) Do you consider OFSTED reporting to influence parental choice? Or recruitment~ is it a marketing tool?

10) What has had the greatest influence on the quality of provision in the nursery sector in the last 10 years? Prompts :- *Care v Education etc*

11) What are the positive aspects of the inspection process? *Prompt:- Do you consider it a driver for good quality provision across the sector* Negative?

12) If you were to draw up the person specification for your role, what essential characteristics would you include?

13) What changes would you make to the current inspection framework? Do you think it is the most suitable for the nursery sector?

14) Any other thoughts connected to OFSTED process in the nursery sector you would like to discuss?

Parental Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. Are you aware of OFSTED? And what is its role?

2. Do you know how to access OFSTED reports?

3. Did you access the report of this nursery?

4. Did OFSTED reporting influence your choice of nursery?

5. What other factors influenced your choice of nursery?

6. What makes a good nursery?

7. Do you think nurseries should be inspected? Who by?

8. Do you consider care or education to be more important in a nursery setting?

9. Should all Early Years workers be qualified? To what level?

10. Should all state schools have a nursery class?

Appendix 8

Practitioner Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. Do you think nurseries should be inspected by OFSTED?

2. What do you remember about your last inspection?

3. What makes a good nursery?

4. What makes a bad nursery?

5. Do you consider care or education to be more important in a nursery setting?

6. Should all Early Years workers be qualified? To what level?

7. Have you heard of EPPE? ECERS?

Transcript from Owner of a Nursery Chain Interview

Transcript for Owner of a Private Nursery Chain

35) Should all state nursery provision be inspected by OFSTED?

Inspection is necessary to raise standards in the sector, but whether Ofsted is the vehicle. If that is the vehicle from the government, yes, it needs to be consistent whether Ofsted is it. Inspection is necessary to raise standards across the nursery sector; there has been some bad press, like Vanessa George in the West Country.

36) Should all private nursery provision be inspected by OFSTED?

On the same basis, There is same need – the same minimum standards.

37) Should nursery education be inspected in the same manner as schools?

Schools and nurseries are two different environments, 3 to 5 is very different to 5 plus. Government policy now recognises this but want education to be at the centre of inspection. But we learn through play, our children shouldn't be ordered to read or write. It is naturally different, we don't fit into a prescribed system, practice is more fluid. It is not one class with one teacher. The last framework wasn't good for us as there isn't a level playing field, ECM is good but the EYFS works better, everybody from the nursery trainee to me understands how we can be inspected against it. It makes sense. We want education, but learning through play; not reading or writing, developing, growing and learning. Inspection creates a tick-boxes culture and paperwork trail; same for schools in that way. But we are two totally different facilities; the last government pumped lots of money in to Early Years it but it isn't the same nor should it be. For instance, teachers are not involved in care at break; naturally different, they don't eat their lunch with the children, we have to.

38) How frequently should nursery settings be inspected?

Three to four years is too long, realistically we were happy with the previous annual inspection, I knew the registration officer and could talk to her about our intentions and talking through the report, she knew us and we knew her, I don't like the snapshot approach of Ofsted. You can't talk to the inspectors; in fact I don't now I leave it to my managers and their room leaders.

39) Please could you describe the features/indicators of high quality nursery provision?

I have done a lot of work on quality; everybody is involved in our evaluations, everybody, the children, the parents, all the staff. Like you I have asked people what they think 'quality' is, I will see if I can find you those bits of paper.

My own philosophy ties in with aspiration to be high quality. I think quality is

Happy staff = happy children = happy parents. You need stability to create a quality environment, good solid staff team that relates well to the children and each other. Good training leads to better quality, specifically Early Years training, no good having a degree unless it is connected to child development. Physical resources need not be expensive, creativity leads to a high quality experience. Parents and children should feel part of the experience, their views are important .Good employer training leads to better quality, specific to Early Years child development – Foundation degree is good or psychology but a graduate doesn't mean that they are good. I employ graduates but I also train 'on the job', the supervisor at Tophat where you are going did an NNEB, then did the ADCE (Advanced Diploma in Childcare and Education) and then an NVQ in nursery management. The funding was there I used it.

Some owners would say you can have a bad practitioner whether they are qualified or not, but I don't really believe that. 90% of my staff are qualified and I like experienced staff not all young girls; we offer apprenticeships through the government training scheme. That seems to be working well but it wouldn't if we didn't have good systems. I think the location, can have affect my city nursery has more fluctuation in staffing, I have a higher staff turnover there, it seems to be more transient; you need stability to

create a 'quality' environment and a good solid team. You don't need physical resources, not expensive ones you can be creative with home-made things. But obviously you need light, heat, clean rooms for health and safety. And I do think the parents think those things are important, I bet if you asked them that they would say nice building.

40) Conversely, could you describe factors that indicate poor nursery provision?

You can tell the environment is poor when the children flock to you when you walk in, you can tell they are bored. If staff are treated badly, there is high staff turnover, and they uninvolved in their work that can be the worst thing. I know I said that resources didn't need to be expensive but when there are no resources, and the floor is dirty and there are damp patches, this looks like it is not going to be good. So perhaps I do care more about appearances more than I thought. I think poor treatment of staff is a problem more difficult to see straight away, but if there is a high staff turnover and uninvolved practitioners Ofsted should spot that.

41) Do you think that a good OFSTED report is an indicator of good quality nursery provision?

No (said emphatically), we know settings that get outstanding, SEF has made it easier to fudge it! SEF allows you to say what Ofsted want to hear. It becomes a question of being good at Ofsted and that's not always the same thing. I think the instant nature of inspection is wrong, the last Ofsted caught the nursery at CM two (2) months into the new EYES, the staff there weren't really familiar with new system. But what they said was wrong seemed to be mostly about soap. We had some soap on order but it had not arrived on the day of inspection thus we were inadequate; but moved to good very quickly which shows we can't have been inadequate. I did agree with a couple of things they were fair but it seemed to be about policies and certificates, this does not move practice on. It is all about that person's judgement on the day, and you sometimes get somebody who knows nothing about what should be going on so checks the things that they understand like the soap. The SEF is not mandatory, not all my settings do one, I

am working on it but then I think they will change that too you can't keep up. I think instant nature of inspection is wrong. For us there is no level playing field, schools still get 2-3 days notice, we get none. They will get somebody who has been a teacher at some point we don't get somebody who has been a nursery nurse. People spending weekends getting ready is <u>wrong</u>, should be ready and instant.

If you were able to build a relationship with inspector; they could be involved in a conversation, and you could tell them about why there wasn't any soap and they would accept that there usually was and this was a one off.

42) Do you consider OFSTED reporting to influence parental choice? Or job choice?

Sometimes it can, some parents will visit nurseries and access reports. Don't think it influences the final choice but initial selection. When we got inadequate, parents said but this is the best nursery we have been to they don't understand process, for them it can be a feeling, what they see when they look round if the staff smile at them. They might think satisfactory is fine, how do they know? Is it a marketing tool, yes definitely, you want to shout about it, but then again it doesn't influence parent if they don't read the reports; outstanding is very good when you get it. I got one for one of my settings and I put it straight in the website and on a banner outside. I don't think it has anything to do with the recruitment of staff, not at all. It is our reputation as employer more important; we are established totally.

43) What has had the greatest impact on the quality of provision in the nursery sector in the last 10 years? *Prompt~ expand.. change this question, depending on age range of audience?*

Workforce reform definitely my first thought, but also the focus on child development in the EYFS is important. But for me the government's funding for training and apprenticeship schemes up to level3 and foundation degree with small steps to becoming better qualified and Level 4 can be achieved by some of my staff.

ECM is unimportant and has the same philosophy as we have been doing for years. Victoria Climbie – nothing changed. Regulations have come down to Early Years but

they were always here in the private sector but people were obsessed with checking toilets and measuring floor space. Care – education has changed due to inspection policy; we have changed our literature but probably not our practice.

44) What are the positive aspects of the inspection process? *Prompt:- Do you consider it a driver for good quality provision across the sector* Negative?

As a leader I find it useful. Why isn't something happening? Outside evaluation makes us pick up our practice and can help staff development. I still think we need external regulation, I am not sure the workforce is confident enough to do without an inspection. Inspection does not bother me but pressure on staff; they can fall to pieces. And the variations in inspections can cause problems but this is due to people's interpretation of paperwork.

45) Are you aware of the recent changes in the OFSTED framework?

Yes, less frequent inspection is not ideal; and does not increase the aspiration for high quality. I think the leadership and management emphasis good but how can they see that in the time they are here. Internal QA is mostly ignored in my experience.

46) Are you involved in the writing of your nursery's self evaluation document?

We don't have a SEF at each site yet, but yes we do; spider diagrams, and do get everybody, children, parents, staff, managers to evaluate. We don't peer observe or evaluate across the nurseries. One inspector said she didn't agree with SEF; people write anything on SEF.

47) What changes have you made to your practice because of the OFSTED framework? Did you have them imposed on you? Would you have made them otherwise?

Oh yes, when we got inadequate as things weren't in place, but no, things are only recommendations. There is a conflict with County Council's interpretation of regulations, I think there should be only one system of evaluation and Ofsted is it, it gets confusing for the staff and the parent. One of the Early Years development workers complained about the level of qualifications in one of our settings. Ofsted were happy, the conflict

was with the local authority, they have distinct views regarding 'quality'. They dissent against Ofsted and say we need more then suggest something even more regimented like ECERS, how can we improve as a sector if everyone uses different measures?

48) Has the OFSTED framework affected your workload? Relationship with your peers? Your manager?

No, not directly, I haven't really made changes; think leaders are much more aware of their own responsibilities.

49) If you were to draw up the person specification for an Early Years inspector, what would you be looking for?

Understanding of Early Years, children, aware challenges of the sector, staffing; must have understanding of private sector demands. Running a setting is useful; friendly, develop a relationship .Prior to new regime, more of a dialogue; under the old system saw day care officer each year and it was good; knowledge base was built. But Social Services moved from counting toilets to watching children counting rocks; it was a good thing that things were standardised .Show inspector everything; need to show them photos. Understanding of Early Years and children; aware of challenges of the sector, staffing; must have understanding of private sector demands. Happy with Early Years framework aside from goals – yes, framework for inspection should be more collaborative; they are inspecting with us not against us. Sometimes they inspect because of complaint; I see that as an enjoyable part of the quality process, I like to come up with the solution. It shouldn't be a reactionary process. The process needs to more collaborative, currently I can't see how Ofsted contributes to quality, they are inspecting for it. But I can't see how the process contributes to improving quality. The better way would be to involve all the sector, more liaison between private and state, more informed development planning. There should be a better way of involving all in the sector. Running a setting it has been useful to have an annual visit; friendly, we developed a relationship, prior to new regime more of a dialogue. Under old system, we

saw a daycare officer each year; it was good and a knowledge base was built over time

I find the new system totally inefficient in that way, there is no connection with the nursery, no knowledge of sector; and no engagement with sector. I personally now, try to have as little to do with them as possible; as I have no respect for an inspector who is not Early Years trained.

50) What changes would you make to the current framework?

I would like less confusion across the region; Early Years teams are using different approaches, that's if you ever get to see an adviser. I work with 4 different County Councils, Worcester are using ECERS. Warwickshire are supporting the Ofsted process.

51) Any other thoughts connected to OFSTED process you would like to discuss?

I didn't agree with inadequate rating; seemed to be about soap, but I did agree with couple of things re. safeguarding children and that was fair. But it seems to be about policies and certificates. If you get an outstanding, you agree with that!