# "I hadn't realised that whilst the babies and toddlers are sleeping, the other children can't get to the books!" The complexities of 'access' to early reading resources for under-threes

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# "I hadn't realised that whilst the babies and toddlers are sleeping, the other children can't get to the books!" The complexities of 'access' to early reading resources for under-threes

Karen Boardman, Early Years Education, Edge Hill University

Rachael Levy, UCL Institute of Education

This paper outlines the findings of an empirical research study exploring how Early Years Educators (EYEs) support under-threes with their early reading development in England. The data was collected through a mixed methodological approach of an initial survey, five semi-structured interviews and four reflective Zines to explore the experiences of EYEs working with under-threes. The findings highlight that there are significant implications for babies and toddlers, linked to a distinct lack of agency and access to pictures, books and other early reading resources, instigated by the conventional daily routines provided in these early years settings. This paper argues for some fundamental 'reconsidering' of the value of early reading for under-threes, given that access, or indeed the lack of access is a key finding of this study.

Key Words

Early reading; babies and toddlers; books; access; agency.

## Introduction

Historically, most children under the age of three would have been largely cared for in their family home environments, however this has changed substantially in recent years. As the OECD (2012) points out, a significant increase (approximately 60%) in the role of the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) day nurseries, together with provision for under-threes, means that the care of babies and toddlers is now often an amalgamation of home and nursery provision. This is supported by Finnegan (2016, 10) who highlights that currently 'more and more young children are spending at least part of their day in nursery settings'. Likewise, Goouch and Powell (2013) suggest that in England, most young children under-three are now cared for in nursery baby and toddler rooms. Given that more under-threes are spending time in a range of early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings internationally, it is paramount that Early Years Educators (EYEs) provide 'quality' provision. The intricacy of quality ECEC and particularly what constitutes high quality practice is a highly researched and often problematized agenda

(Dalli, White, Rockel and Duhn 2011; Dalli 2014; Goouch and Powell 2013; Moss 2017; Murray 2013). There is some agreement across the breadth of literature that quality ECEC settings usually comprise plentiful staff–child interactions, sustained and mutual conversations based on the children's interests and have a focus on literacy (e.g. sharing picture books, reading stories, rhymes and rhythmic activities) (Fleer and Raban 2005, 2007; OECD 2017; Siraj-Blatchford 2004).

Equally, it is recognised within contemporary literature, that babies and toddlers are adept and accomplished learners from birth (Fox and Rutter 2010; Gros-Louis, West and King 2016; Mandel Morrow and Dougherty 2011). Indeed Kuhl (2011, 128) maintains that 'young children learn more and learn earlier than previously thought'. Betawi (2015) and Conkbayir (2017) suggest that this curiosity and capability requires essential support from consistent, knowledgeable, well-trained EYEs to provide high quality interactions, reciprocity, resources and provision. Notably, a breadth of literature suggests that it is critical for EYEs to create a literacy rich and accessible, enabling environment for under-threes within their everyday pedagogy, given that these reciprocal interactions indisputably shape early reading development (Connor, Morrison and Slominski 2006; Makin 2006; Pan, Rowe, Singer and Snow 2005; Simpson 2013). Equally Wolf (2008) highlights access and interaction with early literacy experiences (such as enjoyment of picture books and story books, during positive interactions and meaningful social experiences) encourages early reading development, particularly cultivating an engagement with and enjoyment of reading. Yet, while there is a substantial body of literature investigating the ways in which parents of under-threes develop literacy practices in the home (Bingham 2007; Brooks-Gunn and Markman 2005; Cline and Edwards 2016), there is surprisingly little research focusing on practitioners within nursery environments. Beginning with an exploration of what is known about early reading for under-threes, the purpose of this paper is to present findings from a study designed to investigate provision and EYEs' attitudes towards supporting reading for under-threes in nursery environments.

**What do we know about early reading for under-threes?**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO 2016) suggest that literacy, as a broad, holistic concept, is a vital human entitlement and is necessary to enable development, education and social interaction. This socio-cultural approach to literacy as a continuum from birth, suggests that very young children's literacy (early reading and writing) skills are acquired and strengthened through mutual conversations, interactions and engagement with multi-media materials. Their development is, therefore, not dependent only on the formal teaching of reading and writing, as is often the focus of policy makers. Research in reading has recognised that the first few years of life are a crucial stage in a child's development, as this is often when young children's engagement with, and enthusiasm for reading activity is defined (Finnegan 2016; Goswami 2015; Knickmeyer, Gouttard, Kang, Evans, Wilber, Smith, Hamer, Lin, Gerig, Gilmore 2008). Similarly, Byrnes and Wasik (2009) argue that EYEs, parents and families should support early reading development in meaningful ways, beginning from birth, to enable infants to continue to respond to this vital social, interactive and environmental input. Yet what exactly is meant by the term 'early

reading'? Part of the difficulty in establishing a definition is that the concept of 'reading' is itself open to various definitions. Many research studies focus principally on the mechanics of reading and define reading as the ability to decode print (Hulme and Snowling 2013; Wyse and Goswami 2008). Consequently, this emphasis on decoding print leads to a heightened intensification of phonics teaching, heavily promoted within an early reading discourse (Johnston and Watson 2005; Rose 2006; Wren 2002). However, much further study views reading as something that includes, but is not limited to, the decoding of print. For example, Levy (2016, 7) asserts that 'reading is not just the decoding of print and image but includes a capacity to extract information, engage with concepts, understand ideas and form opinions'. Many researchers argue that as we move further into a digital age, reading is becoming increasingly multimodal (Bearne 2003; Bearne, Clark, Johnson, Manford, Mottram and Wolstencroft 2007; Carrington 2005; Ehri 2002; Larson and Marsh 2005; Marsh 2008; Whitehead 2010) and they offer more holistic definitions of reading that include and embrace visual and digital modes (Levy 2009; Smith and Arizpe 2016). As such, Sénéchal (2006) argues that it is the engagement, context and comprehension of language, visual images and text that makes reading truly meaningful.

This raises important questions about what support with reading, for children under the age of three, actually looks like. Having conducted research with pre-school children, to understand their perceptions of themselves as readers at the time of entry into the formal education system, Levy (2011) concluded that confidence and enjoyment in handling text is key if children are to develop positive self-perceptions in reading. Similarly, Boardman (2017, 390) also argued that under-threes need to be 'comfortable with print and enjoy the broader experiences of reading, but not to be intimidated by it, or required to engage with the printed letters or words'. This suggests that children need to have opportunities, from birth, to interact with text in ways that are interactive, meaningful and enjoyable. Further study has argued that young children need to interact with objects, texts and pictures and understand that these have meaning and connect to the wider world to support their development in early reading (Evans 2012; Lysaker 2006). Together this indicates that early reading is a broad and holistic concept, not only including access to text, but incorporating 'involvement' and engagement as a minimum prerequisite (Laevers 1997). This paper is focused specifically on accessibility and provision for reading with children under the age of three.

This shines a light firmly on the notion of promoting an environment that encourages all children, including those under the age of three, to engage with reading. Accordingly, Evans (2012) argues that the early reading environment for under-threes should always encompass:

> *Exposure and access to stimulating texts, which make children want to read, exposure to positive role models who will read and re-read the same texts, adults reading to children, children sharing reading with adults, lots of encouragement and the chance to develop positive self-images and a positive sense of self – children need to know that they can read, and they are readers.*

> *(Evans, 2012, 318)*

There is no shortage of literature to support the view that picture books are themselves a valuable multimodal resource in promoting young children's engagement with reading (Evans 2009; Haynes and Morris 2012; Nikolajeva and Scott 2006). However, this literature suggests that a positive reading environment not only includes exposure to a rich, diverse variety of books, texts and images but also includes access to the conversations and interactions that surround these texts (Byrnes and Wasik 2009). Similarly, Razfar and Gutierrez (2003, 38) contend that early literacy learning ought to be a 'multidimensional and mutually engaging process between adults and children'. This indicates that a positive early reading environment for children under the age of three can include a wide variety of features, depending very much on the age and interest of the individual child. It can include numerous elements, such as enjoying a story, reading pictures, handling paper and screen texts, understanding and reframing new information, having fun with language and sharing information in a play-based environment (Boardman 2017). Yet, further research has suggested that this may not always be apparent within nursery provision for under-threes (Goouch and Lambirth 2013; McDowall Clark and Baylis 2012). Given that very little research has attempted to explore how the concept of early reading is understood and addressed within nursery provision for children under the age of three, this paper presents findings from a study that tackled this very issue.

## Outline of the study

This paper presents the findings from a study designed to answer the question 'How do Early Years Educators (EYEs) support early reading for under-threes in their daily provision?' This original empirical, mixed-methods study involved a survey questionnaire (50/65 respondents), 5 semi-structured interviews and reflective Zine data. It is useful to clarify here that Zines are considered to be a contemporary resource (Desyllas and Sinclair 2013) to explore and collect experiences and reflections in the form of personal accounts (Radway 2011), which can then be self-published (Ramdarshan Bold 2017). Zines are used to communicate, celebrate and share key information, which then becomes part of the interpretative, naturalistic research paradigm. The four volunteer EYEs were provided with a small blank booklet to document their support for early reading with under-threes in their setting, and to record their personal thoughts and reflections on this topic. The Zines were completed by four experienced graduate EYEs working with under-threes, from September 2016 to December 2017.

The survey was designed as a hard copy, self-completion questionnaire with a range of multiple choice and open response style questions to explore the experiences of graduate EYEs working with under-threes regarding their provision and pedagogy for early reading. For example; 'how do you currently support very young children with early reading? Please list your strategies/activities/experiences/teaching for babies, toddlers, 2-year-olds and 3-5-year-olds' and 'what has informed these strategies/activities? How do you decide how to teach and what to teach?'. The 5 semi-structured interviews arose from the initial survey responses, with the intention of exploring provision in detail. The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and assigned a number to support ethical

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values, anonymity and confidentiality. Figure 1 offers a sample of some of the interview questions posed to the EYEs taking part in this study.


**(Figure 1 'Sample interview questions' about here)**


The participants all volunteered to take part in this research study via completion of the initial survey. Participants were female, graduate EYEs, working in a range of ECEC settings across England with under-threes. All participants were educated to degree level, having already achieved an Honours Degree in an Early Childhood/Early Years related subject and their breadth of experience ranged from 3 to 24 years in ECEC settings. Ethical principles were continuously adhered to and respected for the settings and individual participants (BERA 2011; EECERA 2014). All participants were advised to share the aims of the study with their settings and all stakeholders to enhance practice and to be fully informed. Table 1 contains a brief overview of the interview and Zine participants. Interview and Zine participants were also participants in the survey. The survey asked participants if they wished to take part in further research opportunities.


**(Table 1 'Interview and Zine participants' about here)**


The data were initially analysed by employing Schreier's (2012) Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) coding methodology, then later also with NVivo Pro 11 (QSR International) to enable a consistent and organised method of reducing the breadth of data. One of the principal themes to emerge from the holistic data set was 'access to early reading resources', which will be explored and analysed in the findings and discussion section of this paper. While the study provided a number of insights into how EYEs support the early reading development of under-threes, analysis revealed that substantial complexities existed around the concept of practitioners providing an accessible early reading environment. This is discussed in the next section of the paper.


**Findings and discussion**

The findings revealed the complexities that existed in settings in providing an accessible early reading environment, encompassing access to books, pictures, and printed or digital material for under-threes. EYEs reported that they provided under-threes with a variety of daily activities, including 'singing songs', 'nursery rhymes', 'sensory experiences', 'story sacks' and 'story props', as noted in the survey responses, and there are many individual Zine entries citing 'reading stories to children' and/or 'story time activities'. However, the data also revealed that many babies and toddlers do not have independent regular daily access to images, books or picture books. When asked to focus on the exposure under-threes had to a variety of books, many EYEs  (4/5 interview participants and 3/4 Zine participants) reporting when and how under-threes encounter and handle books within the confines of their daily routines, noted that this was usually at the end of the day or middle of the day, as a story time activity. For many under-threes, books are not

continuously available or accessible to them. This is disconcerting, given that Parvin (2014) argues that sharing books as a regular activity supports the conversational interactions and social and emotional reciprocity required for under-threes. The data indicated that these EYEs did not place importance on sharing books with children under three, despite decades of previous research showing that the benefits of reading books, looking at pictures and enjoying stories is crucial to the holistic development of young children, including those under the age of three. Moreover, the benefits of early introduction to books, images and print from birth have been previously emphasised by researchers and educationalists, such as Butler (1995), Wade and Moore (2000), *National Association for the Education of Young Children, Book Trust* (Bookstart), *Zero to Three* (2016) and OECD (2012).  The fact that these EYEs were largely reporting that the under-threes in their care had little contact with books was surprising, given that access to books is considered to be a key component in quality provision (Evans 2012; Meek 1987, 1998).

### *Accessibility, availability and opportunity*

Overall the study revealed that these EYEs lacked awareness of the central importance of frequent early reading activities with under-threes. This could potentially have an adverse influence on the children's interests, motivation and further engagement with early reading activities. For example, research has shown that children who do not regularly engage with books or pictures, or have stories read to them, are missing out on the opportunity for language extension within the context of picture books and stories (Arizpe and Smith 2016; Roche 2015). To illustrate, Gilkerson, Richards and Topping's (2015) study proposes that the language applied by adults is more intense during book sharing activities, compared to other daily interactions. Significantly, Gilkerson et al. suggest that the quality of conversational engagement is also considerably advanced during book sharing activities. Equally, Hepburn, Egan and Flynn (2010, 61) maintain that sharing books frequently with very young children 'offers parents and care-givers a quantity of language that may not otherwise have been available to them or may not have been otherwise shared with their child'.

It was especially evident from the data that the EYEs, in this study did not recognise the vital cues that the babies in their settings were showing in relation to their interest in 'reading' activity. For example, one practitioner noted in her Zine entry:

> *Today we decided to just put a few books out. One of the babies (aged*
> *10 months) kept turning the pages of a book and every time I picked up*
> *the book, he put it back down on the floor to carry on turning the pages*
> *– that's all he wanted to do. He wasn't interested in the story.*
>
> *(Zine 4)*

This is such a revealing Zine entry in many ways. Firstly, there is the issue of 'access', given that - this EYE appears to be suggesting that the books were not necessarily 'for' the babies. Secondly, this baby's interaction with the book was not valued by the EYE.

We have no way of knowing what exactly the baby was doing with this book, but to dismiss the interaction on the grounds of the baby 'not being interested in the story' is worrying. This representative quote demonstrates that the EYEs in this study need to be assisted and encouraged to learn about and to act on the many ways that babies and toddlers react to images and books. To illustrate, Whitehead (1996) highlights that:

> *Babies and older toddlers respond to pictures and to print in books in a variety of ways; first with eye – gaze, smiles, gurgles and squeals, scratching at the paper, pointing and bouncing with enthusiasm. Eventually this develops into naming, joining in with the words, turning the pages and initiating real discussions about character, motives and plots as well as linguistic talk about letters, sounds and the conventions of print.*
>
> *(Whitehead, 1996, 66)*

Fundamentally, none of Whitehead's observations, noted above can be enacted without access to early reading resources. Yet, the data in this study disclosed that for many babies and toddlers, books are generally not accessible as they are 'in a cupboard' or 'on the shelf, out of reach'. Four out of the five interview transcripts revealed a lack of access to picture books, images and story books for babies and toddlers. The following excerpts from the data demonstrate this finding:

> ***Q: Do you have picture books and tactile, fabric books etc accessible for your babies at all times?***
>
> *Erm no, not all the time, they are put out I suppose. We have picture cards out a lot, wooden materials. We share stories a lot and have 1-1 time with babies looking at picture books as part of the routine, lift the flap books and so on. Not accessible all the time though – I will act on that aspect.*
>
> *(Interview Transcript 3)*

> ***Q: Are books available and accessible to babies at all times?***
>
> *No, they are in the cupboard and staff get them out at various times. I need to review this don't I? This is an area to sort out, so thanks for that time to reflect.*
>
> *(Interview Transcript 4)*

> *We have story time twice a day in small groups - so there is always access to at least one story and one book daily.*

*(Zine 1)*

This data show that while these EYEs included reading activity in their day, these babies were rarely offered regular and independent access to books. While some EYEs appeared to accept that access to early reading resources for under-threes was important, this was somehow becoming 'lost' within the busy daily routine. The data also highlights that seemingly, having a group or 1-1 story, perhaps once or twice during the day, was deemed sufficient provision for early reading. Yet it is important to recognise that as many young children may not have access to books in their home environment (Pahl, Lewis and Ritchie 2010; Pahl and Allen 2011) regular, independent access to books within the nursery environment becomes particularly important. Given that Seland, Hansen Sandseter and Bratterud (2015) propose that under-threes may spend progressively more time in ECEC settings than in their home environments, this is troubling for early reading provision. What is more, if books, pictures or other texts are not readily available for under-threes to access independently, it is conceivable that reading becomes seen as an adult focused and an adult-led activity from children's earliest years. Consequently, this may have a detrimental impact on children's wider early reading experiences and their 'agency', given that many researchers contend that under-threes require sensory, physical, purposeful and significant engagement with the comprehensive range of experiences needed to become readers (Kucirkova 2016; Lysaker, 2006). Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De Bie (2006) argue that quite often in ECEC very young children's agency is habitually incorporated within adult agendas, which seems to be evident in this study.

### *Agency and daily routine*

As the previous section showed, it appears that many children under the age of three may not have regular and independent access to books when spending time in their pre-school setting. However, the data further revealed that the daily routines in settings may inhibit these children from accessing reading resources. This was evident in the Zine entries, particularly in relation to how book areas were being used throughout the daily routines in these settings:

> *I hadn't realised that whilst the babies and toddlers are sleeping, the*
> *other children can't get to the books! Unless they actually climb over the*
> *sleeping children, they can't get to the books. I will review this. But also*
> *this means that for most of the afternoon, we don't use the book area.*
> *Actually, for some of the babies it would be all day as they sleep in the*
> *mornings!!!*

*(Zine 3)*

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*We use the book area for our sleep and rest area. We do have books in*
*some of the other continuous provision areas, but not in the baby room -*
*bit of an oversight!*

*(Zine 2)*

What is really interesting here is that when asked to consider the ways in which reading resources are used, these EYEs immediately recognised that their practice included an 'oversight', which meant that the children in their care, and the under-threes in particular, were being denied access to books. Of course, it is easy to see why this is the case. The incomprehensible web of practice and theory, education contrasted with care and notions of professionalism for hardworking EYEs evidently manipulate the pedagogy and provision for under-threes (Bertram and Pascal 2016; Moss 2014; Taggart 2011). Moyles (2001, 82) argues that often 'children receive care which negates or rejects education'. Moyles refers to this as 'restricting practice to a low-level operation'. Seemingly, this may also be dependent upon 'process quality', which is the 'pedagogical interactions' occurring between EYEs, under-threes and the 'wider environment' (Wall, Litjens and Taguma 2015, 4). The physiological needs of under-threes – care, sleep, rest, healthy diet and exercise - are not discrete from 'education' and are interwoven within pedagogical process quality approaches. Equally, pedagogy for under-threes - how young children learn and develop, is not simply dependent on education or teaching, as it is the act of teaching combined with vision, theories, beliefs, policies and encounters which underpin this. As such, pedagogy is what EYEs think, rationalise and do on a daily basis with under-threes.

The evidence from this research demonstrates that the EYEs in this study were unaware that the demands of the daily routine are creating a barrier to the experiences of the under-threes and their early reading associations. Moreover, several of these settings appeared to be sending the message that reading is a quiet and passive activity, as they used the reading area for sleeping. The EYEs appeared to recognise that early reading is important, yet in the context of daily practice, access, availability and interaction with reading material was being routinely denied to the children in their settings. Previous research suggests that interaction, engagement, prominence and availability of reading resources are vital factors in facilitating young children's learning and development in reading (Clark 2013; Evans 2012; Levy 2009; Papadimitriou and Vlachos 2014). Furthermore, the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS, DfE 2017, 8) emphasises that 'children must be given access to a wide range of reading materials (books, poems, and other written materials) to ignite their interest'. Yet, the early reading provision for under-threes in this study was somewhat deficient and in some cases it was largely overlooked. This is important because these under-threes would be unable to explore and discover their world through the medium of picture books (Arizpe and Styles 2016), story books (Clark 2013), and also digital literacies (Marsh 2004; Marsh, Plowman, Yamada-Rice, Bishop and Scott 2016; Kucirkova 2016). It should also be noted that there was a distinct absence of reference to digital literacies (Marsh, 2004) across the data, which is an interesting theme requiring further investigation. This may relate to the overall

perception and confusion surrounding early reading for under-threes and contributes to the lack of access to reading resources for under-threes identified in this study.

A critical finding in this study is that the book areas in the settings were frequently inaccessible for many babies and toddlers because they were being used as sleeping areas for a significant part of the day. The EYEs in this study were clearly trying their utmost to meet the physiological individual needs of the children in their setting within the confines of the pre-school environment. It is easy to see why the comfortable book areas were chosen as places where children would be settled for sleeping. It is also worth remembering that EYEs work long hours and have many mandatory demands to address within the EYFS (DfE, 2017), alongside individual settings' vision and values. There are also recognised complexities surrounding leadership, management, quality, qualifications, professionalism and financial hindrances attached to all of these for the ECEC workforce (Ang 2014; Chalke 2013; Fairchild 2017; Goouch and Powell 2012; Manning-Morton 2006; Osgood 2010). It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the complex and often conflicting demands on EYEs, however, the findings from this paper highlights one area in which important educational activity may be severely compromised within the confines of caring daily routines. Given that some pedagogical approaches encourage EYEs to include the educational aspects of reading within their care routines - for example, reading children's' names on their belongings, this study strongly indicates that there needs to be some essential re-evaluating of provision for early reading for under-threes. This is particularly salient given that international policy makers have linked early reading with social mobility as documented within the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) and OECD (2017).

This research has highlighted that the conventional daily routines of the early years settings in this study are a key factor in many under-threes lacking 'access' and 'agency' in their use of pictures, books and other early reading resources. It is important to recognise that the lack of access to early reading resources often appeared to be directly related to the routines within the setting, rather than a lack of interest from the practitioners themselves. However, this study does suggest that EYEs need to be encouraged to ensure that the everyday routines in their settings provide opportunities for under-threes to engage with and have independent access to a range of early reading resources.

**Implications: some fundamental 'reconsidering' of provision for under-threes**

Crucially, the babies and toddlers in this study were unable to access the early reading resources required to support their development in becoming readers (Arizpe and Styles 2016; Goswami 2015; Makin 2006). Agency, routine, environment and accessibility were identified as being considerable barriers to early reading pedagogy for under-threes. This paper asserts that EYEs need to be supported with their early reading provision for under-threes. In the first instance, EYEs would benefit from being reminded of the significance of frequent sharing of picture books and reading stories with babies in their settings, given the strengthened links to language development and associations with becoming a 'reader,' advocated by many researchers (Bingham 2017; Evans 2012).

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Secondly, this paper hopes to support EYEs by encouraging them to review the impact of their daily routines and practices on the provision of vital reading resources for children under the age of three. If reading activity is not embedded within the everyday routines of under-threes, as an integral component for life-long learning (OECD 2017), it is possible that valuable opportunities for engagement and enthusiasm for reading will be lost (Haynes and Morris 2012). These young children may have already positioned themselves as unconnected with early reading, given that they have not had the opportunity to become interested, motivated and immersed as part of their daily routine and environment. This is important, given that Levy (2011) found that young children developed strong perceptions of themselves as readers, and indeed non-readers, from their earliest years. This can be especially important for those young children who have little access to reading activity in their own homes. This study reinforces previous research that suggests EYEs working with under-threes, and babies in particular, prioritise 'care' above educational learning activities (Goouch and Powell 2013); however, it is deeply concerning to find that reading activity may be compromised or even absent from the daily routines of under-threes in nurseries. This study suggests that there is an urgent need to consider how EYEs and the ECEC workforce in general, can ensure that provision for early reading features in their everyday routines. This research advocates an additional review of the early reading environment, accessibility of resources and agency for under-threes in ECEC, as some crucial aspects of involvement, motivation and reciprocity were largely overlooked by EYEs in this study. Findings from this research indicate that EYEs who work with young children require immediate and vital support including (at the very least) some guidelines for early reading provision for under-threes. However, this study has also suggested that there is a need to reconsider the debate surrounding what is involved in the 'care' and 'education' of under-threes in settings. There is no doubt that if children are going to learn, they need to be immersed and supported within safe, secure and loving environments – experiencing both the 'professional love and positive interactions' highlighted by Page (2018, 125). However, this study suggests that EYEs may be neglecting to include important educational provision within their daily routines and this appears to be happening more with regard to reading. Perhaps it is time to open the debate again and ensure that EYEs and relevant policy makers understand the importance and positive implications of embedding appropriate reading provision for under-threes within the daily routines and pedagogy of early years settings. Particularly, given the context of reading attainment across many contemporary national and international educational agendas (UNESCO 2016).

Significantly, the EYEs in this study are already negotiating the cumulative, conflicting demands of early years education and the EYFS curriculum frameworks on a daily basis (Hill 2016; Moss 2017; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury 2016; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury 2017), which is one of the reasons why the EYEs in this study have overlooked this focus and may not be providing reading resources to under-threes. Equally, the cost of providing a variety and range of books (including fabric books) and replenishing reading resources is also a key factor to consider for provision.

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**Figure 1**

**Sample Interview Questions:**

Can you tell me about your work with very young children to support early reading?
Can you tell me a little bit more about your work with babies and toddlers?
What does a typical day look like?
How do you choose/decide on these activities?
Could you describe the environment you provide for babies and toddlers to support early reading specifically please?
Are books, picture books, images available to the babies at all times?
Are there other resources provided and accessible?

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**Table 1**

**Interview and Zine Participants**

| Participants | Setting | Age Range | Experience working with under-fives |
|---|---|---|---|
| Interview 1 | PVI, Room Leader | 26 - 40 | 16 years |
| Interview 2 | PVI, Nursery Manager | 41 - 55 | 17 years |
| Interview 3 | Children's Centre | 26 - 40 | 10 years |
| Interview 4 | PDN, Deputy Manager | 26 - 40 | 17 years |
| Interview 5 | Childminder | 26 - 40 | 14 years |

| Participants | Setting | Age Range | Experience working with under-fives |
|---|---|---|---|
| Zine 1 | Pre-school nursery, Lead Early Years Teacher (under-threes) | 41 – 55 | 24 years |
| Zine 2 | PDN, Senior Manager | 18 - 25 | 6 years |
| Zine 3 | Children's Centre | 26 - 40 | 14 years |
| Zine 5 | PDN, Deputy Manager | 41 - 55 | 11 years |

**\***All the EYEs were based in settings that have been judged to be 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

PVI – private, voluntary or independent setting

PDN – private day nursery